

The Hon. David Spooner
Assistant Secretary for Import Administration
U.S. Department of Commerce
14th Street & Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20230

Re: *Antidumping Methodologies in Proceedings Involving Certain Non-Market Economies: Market-Oriented Enterprise*

Dear Assistant Secretary Spooner:

On behalf of Top Flight, Inc. ("Top Flight"), a U.S. manufacturer of lined paper school supplies, I would like to take this opportunity to respond to the Department's request for comments on extending market-economy treatment to individual respondents in antidumping cases involving China.¹ In its request for comments, the Department asked commenters to address three specific issues. First, the Department asked for comments on the legal authority for extending market economy treatment to individual Chinese respondents. Second, the Department asked for comments on whether such a test would be administratively feasible. Finally, the Department asked commenters to consider whether the Department could use the actual costs of Chinese producers to calculate accurate dumping margins.

Top Flight is a member of the Association of American School Paper Suppliers, the group that recently brought a successful antidumping duty petition against certain lined paper products from China. Despite the duties being collected on Chinese paper products, Top Flight must continue to compete head-to-head with rock-bottom Chinese pricing. In Top Flight's experience, Chinese producers of lined paper products benefit from the tremendous market distortions wrought by the Chinese government's control over the Chinese economy. These include a variety of subsidies, access to inputs that do not reflect market pricing, and an unfairly

¹ *Antidumping Methodologies in Proceedings Involving Certain Non-Market Economies: Market-Oriented Enterprise*, 72 Fed. Reg. 60,649 (Dep't Commerce Oct. 25, 2007) (request for comments).

valued currency. A number of former U.S. manufacturers of lined paper products have closed shop in recent years, taking their business and the jobs associated with them to China. Were the Department to begin to offer market-economy status to such companies, it would not only unfairly punish producers who have remained committed to American manufacturing, it would reward companies that have abandoned our market and our workers.

Top Flight strongly opposes any plan to grant market-economy status to individual Chinese companies. During the antidumping duty investigation into Chinese lined paper products, the market-orientation of the Chinese economy was a significant issue in that case, and the Department devoted a detailed and persuasive memorandum to the topic.² As reflected in that memorandum, economic realities in China are such that any plan to offer market status to individual producers would be irrational. No Chinese enterprise can operate without being influenced by the Chinese economy as a whole, which is pronouncedly non-market in nature. Given the Chinese government's ownership and control over land, labor, finance and capital, as well as over many individual companies, it is simply not possible for a Chinese company to be market-oriented.

Further, three issues raised by the Department in its request for comments underscore the inadvisability of granting market economy treatment to individual Chinese companies. The Tariff Act of 1930 does not permit the Department to extend such status to individual companies. Even if it did, the Department could not administer such a test without using time and resources that the Department does not currently have. Third, even if the Department could and did

² Memorandum from Shauna Lee-Alaia et al., Office of Policy, Import Administration, to David M. Spooner, Assistant Sec'y, Import Administration, re: *Anti-Dumping Investigation of Certain Lined Paper Products from the People's Republic of China ("China") – China's status as a non-market economy ("NME")* (Aug. 30, 2006) ("Lined Paper NME Memo").

administer a market oriented enterprise test to individual Chinese companies, the Department would be unable to use these companies' own costs in determining margins, because of the companies' necessary reliance on non-market inputs. Consequently, consideration of the three issues stressed in the Department's request for comments demonstrates that the market-oriented enterprise proposal is fatally flawed.

I. ECONOMIC CONDITIONS IN CHINA DO NOT PERMIT THE RATIONAL APPLICATION OF A TEST FOR MARKET ORIENTED ENTERPRISES

China's economy does not permit the application of market-based methodologies to companies based there. The economy is overwhelmingly subject to state ownership and control, and even companies that are privately owned must do business on the basis of non-market inputs and prices. As the Department itself has recognized, "the {Chinese government} still reserves for itself considerable levers of control over the economy and its direction."³ This renders all Chinese company costs unsuitable for calculating accurate dumping margins. Unless and until China auctions off its state-controlled means of production, and frees land, labor, and capital from government control, will there be no market-oriented enterprises in that country.

Finally, China is not likely to resolve these issues quickly. While the country has made some limited market reforms, it is not accelerating its market liberalization program. In fact, the U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission has concluded that China's efforts to liberalize its economy are slackening.⁴ Thus, not only would a market-oriented economy test not be suitable for Chinese companies in their present condition, it appears unlikely that such a test could be rationally applied any time in the foreseeable future.

³ Lined paper NME Memo at 5.

⁴ U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission, 2007 Annual Report to Congress , Introduction at 2 (November 19, 2007) ("USCESRV Report").

A. The Chinese Government Owns the Country's Key Enterprises

Government ownership of companies and even entire industries is pervasive throughout China. In fact, dozens of industries are under direct government ownership and control, including most of China's "core" industries.⁵ The fact that the Chinese government, at the central, provincial, and local levels, can direct companies and industries to act in ways that maximize tax revenue or employment, rather than further market aims, provides an almost insurmountable hurdle to the application of a market oriented enterprise test.

B. The Chinese Government Exercises Control Over Domestic Enterprises

The Chinese government exerts significant control over those companies in which it has an ownership stake. But governmental control over Chinese companies does not stop there. Even with regard to industries and companies that lack significant government ownership, the government exercises over control through (1) national, provincial, and local industrial planning, (2) placement of government and party officials in positions of power within companies, and (3) and widespread subsidy programs. This pervasive control precludes the rational application of a market-oriented enterprise test to individual Chinese companies.

1. The Chinese Government Controls Industrial Development Through Five-Year Plans

Industrial policy in China is governed by "Five-Year Plans," issued by the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China. These plans set forth which industries, enterprises, and products should be targeted for preferential government support. According to the Chinese government, Five-Year Plans aim to "arrange national key construction projects, manage the distribution of productive forces and individual sector's contributions to the national economy,

⁵ Lined Paper NME Memo at 38; USCESRV Report (Executive Summary) at 2.

map the direction of future development, and set targets.”⁶ In December of 2006, the Chinese government explicitly identified seven strategic industries designated for absolute state control and five heavyweight industries targeted for extensive state involvement.⁷ These types of plans are replicated at the provincial and local levels, and involve whatever industries and companies are most lucrative and important to those economies. As a result of this web of government direction, China’s domestic producers operate in an environment where basic market forces—supply, demand, and comparative advantage—do not exist or apply.

2. Chinese Government Officials Often Act as Senior Officers and Directors of Chinese Companies

The Chinese government also exercises influence and control over domestic companies and industries by installing party members or other government officials as senior officers and directors of Chinese companies. For state-owned enterprises in particular, the Communist Party appoints the majority of the managers,⁸ and the State-owned Asset Supervision and Administration Committee (“SASAC”) appoints the chairman and vice-chairman from among the state-owned enterprises’ boards.⁹ This ensures that the Chinese government will have effective control over the individual companies through direct participation in company management.

3. The Chinese Government Influences Company Decision-Making Through an Extraordinary Range of Subsidies

Further, application of an extraordinary range of subsidies essentially eliminates an individual company’s ability to make decisions regarding price, output, sales, and investment in

⁶ See What is the Five Year Plan, available at <http://www.china.org.cn/english/MATERIAL/157595.htm>.

⁷ USCESRV Report (Executive Summary) at 3.

⁸ Lined Paper NME Memo at 38-39.

⁹ *Id.* at 37.

response to market signals. These subsidies are used as (1) vehicles to carry out government policy, (2) equity infusion and/or debt-to-equity swaps, (3) land-use discounts, (4) incentives for government-mandated mergers and transfers of ownership, (5) tax incentives, and (6) direct cash grants. The Chinese government has lavished subsidies on numerous domestic industries, including textiles, petrochemical, high technologies, forestry and paper products, steel, auto parts, machinery, and copper and other non-ferrous metals.¹⁰ The world trading system is based on the principle that trade must be governed by market forces, not government fiat. The Chinese government, however, has spurned this notion by consciously funneling resources to particular industries and enmeshing itself in the economy as a whole.

C. Chinese Government Control Over Capital, Land, and Labor Distorts the Entire Economy

The distortions in the Chinese economy do not stem entirely from the government's ownership and control over individual manufacturers, or even from governmental ownership and control over entire manufacturing industries. Above and beyond such distortions, the Chinese government maintains control of certain inputs that must be used by all enterprises, whether government-owned/controlled or not. These include capital, land, and labor. With regard to capital, the government's control over banking and finance permit it to offer subsidized loans and loan forgiveness to favored companies in a manner that does not reflect market principles. Similarly, the government is able to enforce currency controls that distort monetary transactions throughout the entire economy. With respect to land, the government's ownership of all land throughout the country permits it to offer land and buildings at no cost to favored businesses and industries, while simultaneously restricting the free and efficient movement of business. Finally,

¹⁰ United States Trade Representative, *2006 National Trade Estimate Report on Foreign Trade Barriers* 120 (Mar. 2006).

all labor in China is subject to government control, leaving China with no real labor market, and severely restricting the rights of both workers and employers to freely and efficiently enter into labor contracts. This permits the government to further subsidize favored industries and businesses while depriving others of access to needed resources.

As a result of significant economy-wide distortions in the Chinese markets for capital, land, and labor, there cannot be a “market-oriented” enterprise in China. The Department’s own recent analysis of China’s economy confirms this.¹¹ As the Department has found, the Chinese government has control over (1) currency rates, (2) resource allocation, and (3) labor costs, along with the means of production. China also faces institutional weaknesses regarding property rights, bankruptcy, and the rule of law that further distort costs and prices for all businesses participating in the Chinese economy.

D. China is Not Accelerating Market Reforms

The Chinese economy presently lacks indicia of market pressures. Large sectors of the economy are owned and controlled by the government, and government ownership and control over capital, land, and labor affect every company operating in China. Nor is this changing. While China has made limited attempts at market reform, it has not done so quickly, and appears to be retrenching from even those limited reforms that it has made. Rather, as the U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission has concluded, “China is unwilling to embrace market-oriented mechanisms, because it maintains a preference for authoritarian controls over its economy.”¹² Further, the Chinese government has expressed great hesitancy over those reforms

¹¹ See generally Lined Paper NME Memo.

¹² USCESRV Report (Executive Summary) at 2.

that it had enacted, and has only made reforms under pressure from other players in the global economy.¹³

In fact, the central government has recently recommitted itself to continued ownership and control over “pillar” industries.¹⁴ Over 150 of China’s largest companies, including nearly all large banking institutions, remain squarely under the control of the government.¹⁵ China continues to grant extensive subsidies to such countries, as well as granting export rebates, tax holidays, and lax enforcement of environmental regulations for favorite industries and enterprises.¹⁶ Finally, the government continues to refuse to permit its currency to fluctuate in accordance with market principles.¹⁷

The Department has found that the government of China controls the course of the entire Chinese economic environment.¹⁸ No company in China is free of the effects of this control. Until China engages in significant and meaningful economic reforms – including auctioning of state assets, floating its currency, ending pervasive subsidization, and establishing free and open markets for labor and land– no “market-oriented” enterprise test can be worth the Department’s time and attention.

China appears unlikely to engage in meaningful market liberalization any time in the foreseeable future. Until it does so, the government’s stringent control of China’s economy will render the Department unable to find a “market-oriented” Chinese enterprise, just as the

¹³ *Id.*

¹⁴ *Id.* (Introduction) at 2.

¹⁵ *Id.*

¹⁶ *Id.* at 1-2.

¹⁷ *Id.* at 3.

¹⁸ Lined Paper NME Memo at 4.

Department has been unable to find a “market-oriented” Chinese industry at any time in the past. Further, as explained below, such a “market-oriented” enterprise test would be contrary to the Tariff Act, would be administratively unworkable, and would be of dubious utility, given the non-market nature of China’s economy.

II. THERE IS NO AUTHORITY FOR A MARKET-ORIENTED ENTERPRISE TEST, SUCH A TEST WOULD BE UNWORKABLE, AND SUCH A TEST WOULD BE OF DUBIOUS USEFULNESS GIVEN CHINA’S ECONOMY

In its October 25, 2007 request for comments, the Department asked commenters to focus on three issues. First, the Department asked for comments on its legal authority to institute a market-oriented enterprise test. Second, the Department asked for comments on the administrative feasibility of such a test. Third and finally, the Department asked commenters to discuss the extent to which the Department can rely on non-market economy costs and prices in calculating the dumping margin for individual entities in non-market economies. Top Flight comments in detail on these issues below, and submits that careful consideration of each issue demonstrates that a market-oriented enterprise test is ill-advised.

A. U.S. Law Does Not Permit a “Market-Oriented” Analysis of Individual Chinese Companies

The Department’s proposal to grant market status to individual Chinese companies is contradicted by the plain language of the 19 U.S.C. § 1677b, as well as by Tariff Act of 1930’s overarching command that the Department calculate the most accurate dumping margins possible. First, 19 U.S.C. § 1677b clearly lays out the methodologies that the Department must use to calculate individual margins in a non-market economy, and does not permit the use of market economy methodologies for individual non-market economy respondents. Second, given the economy-wide cost and price distortions present in China, the Department cannot hope to

calculate accurate dumping margins based on the costs and prices incurred by individual Chinese producers.

1. Title 19 U.S.C. § 1677b Does Not Permit a Market-Oriented Enterprise Analysis

Title 19 U.S.C. § 1677b sets forth the permissible methods of calculating normal value in antidumping investigations. Subsection (c) of the provision discusses, in particular, the calculation methods appropriate with respect to respondents in non-market economy countries. The law, as written, focuses on a methodology that changes only with the market or non-market nature of each country, and not on the nature of a company or individual respondent. There is nothing in the statute to suggest that the Department is permitted to indulge in a respondent-by-respondent analysis of market orientation.

In fact, Congress, in drafting the Tariff Act, recognized that such a course of action would be futile. The statute's very definition of "non-market economy country" reflects the fact that all sales within such a country are tainted, such that an accurate normal value cannot be calculated on the same basis as in a market economy country:

The term "non-market economy country" means any foreign country that the administering authority determines does not operate on market principles of cost or pricing structure, so that sales of merchandise in such country do not reflect the fair value of the merchandise.¹⁹

As the language indicates, once the Department has determined that a country is a non-market economy country, then all sales of merchandise in that country are tainted. A respondent-specific market-oriented enterprise analysis would therefore be useless; all sales in a non-market economy are tainted by the general character of the economy, and no individual purchaser/seller in such an economy can operate in such a way as to change this.

¹⁹ 19 U.S.C. § 1677(18) (emphasis added).

2. A Market-Oriented Enterprise Analysis Would Not Comport with the Department's Mandate to Calculate the Most Accurate Margins Possible

As both the courts and the Department itself have explained on numerous occasions, the overarching purpose of the Tariff Act requires the Department to calculate antidumping margins as accurately as possible.²⁰ Such accuracy cannot possibly be achieved by application of a market-oriented enterprise test. As the statutory definition of "non-market economy country" makes clear, in such a country, the costs and prices of individual producers are affected by the entire economy's general lack of market values. Even if a producer in a non-market economy purchased all its raw materials from a market economy, and only sold its production in export sales to market economies, the lack of market forces with respect to labor, land, financial institutions, and capital in general would render that company's costs and prices unusable. Simply put, there is no way to accurately calculate dumping margins for a non-market economy producer using market-economy methodologies. The only rational and consistent way to ensure accuracy in the calculation is by resort to the statutorily mandated procedures for non-market economy dumping calculations.

B. A Market-Oriented Enterprise Test is Not Administratively Feasible

In response to its May request for comments on a market-oriented enterprise analysis, the Department received a number of comments from entities in favor of such a test. To the extent that such commenters furnished proposals for such a test, these proposals fell into two camps. First, a number of commenters proposed that the Department create a rebuttable presumption that all enterprises in China are market-oriented, and require U.S. industry participants to furnish the

²⁰ See, e.g., *Lasko Metal Products v. United States*, 43 F.3d 1442, 1446 ("The Act sets forth procedures in an effort to determine margins 'as accurately as possible.'"); Issues and Decision Memorandum accompanying *Glycine from the People's Republic of China*, 72 Fed. Reg. 58,809 (Dep't Commerce Oct 17, 2007) (final results of antidumping duty administrative review and rescission, in part) at cmt 3.

Department with information rebutting that presumption. Such a “test,” if it can even be designated as such, would be completely indistinguishable from granting China market economy status as a whole. The Department has already clearly stated that it does not intend to do this; indeed, China’s protocols of accession to the WTO do not envision even the possibility of market-economy status until 2014. It is clear, therefore, that a “test” based on a rebuttal presumption of market orientation is out of the question.

Other commenters in favor of a market-oriented enterprise analysis provided frameworks for tests based on modified versions of the Department’s market-oriented industry and/or separate rates tests. However, each of these multi-factor tests would require the Department to invest significant resources in investigating factors of production, indicia of government control, and accuracy and independence of financial reports for what are likely to be multitudes of applicants in every antidumping duty proceeding. The International Trade Administration simply cannot, with the budget, staff, and other resources currently at its disposal, handle such an enormous additional burden. In fact, budgetary considerations have already forced the ITA to significantly narrow the number of respondents in administrative reviews and to decline to conduct verifications.

In short, it would be nearly impossible to fashion a market-oriented enterprise test that was streamlined enough so as not to consume significant Departmental resources, and yet expansive and encompassing enough to represent a test that was politically viable and would pass judicial scrutiny. Any market-oriented enterprise test that represented a real attempt to come to grips with the degree to which a particular Chinese company was affected by market, rather than non-market forces, would necessarily be complex and difficult to administer. Compound

this by the sheer number of Chinese companies likely to apply for such treatment, and you have all the makings of an administrative nightmare.

C. A Market-Oriented Enterprise Test Would Be of Dubious Utility

Since instituting the “market oriented industry” concept at the time of China’s accession to the WTO, the Department has been unable to find a Chinese industry that meets the test’s criteria. Given that no market-oriented industries exist within China, it is highly unlikely that any individual company operating within the industry could operate on market principles. Simply stated, no individual producer can function as an island. It must obtain inputs, and it must sell its product. If neither its suppliers nor its home-market purchasers are operating under market forces, the producer’s costs and prices will fail to reflect fair value. Even if such a producer purchased all raw materials from a foreign, market economy source, and only sold for export to market economy purchasers, that company would be too enmeshed in the overall Chinese economy to be validly considered market-oriented. The company’s access to and use of labor, land, electricity, water, and capital and financial services would all be controlled by the government.

In its October 25, 2007 request for comments, the Department asked specifically that commenters discuss the Department’s ability to use individual company information for those inputs that are not “inextricably linked to the broader operating economic environment, *i.e.*, labor, land and capital.” In essence, it appears that the Department is suggesting a hybrid approach in which a respondent’s own inputs are used for those inputs that are market-based, while surrogates are retained for all non-market inputs. Such an approach is not permitted by the statute, would be administratively unworkable, and is of doubtful utility given the Chinese government’s control over finance and capital in China.

First, as described above, the Tariff Act provides a methodology for calculating margins in a market economy, and a methodology for calculating margins in a non-market economy. It does not condone or permit the Department to either adopt a company-by-company analysis, or to use the market-economy methodology with regard to enterprises located in non-market economies. It certainly does not provide the Department with discretion to “mix-and-match” market and non-market methodologies. Any attempt to do so would violate the scheme laid out by the statute.

Second, the Department could not use such a “mix-and-match” strategy without analyzing, on a producer-by-producer basis, which inputs were market based and which were not. It is insufficient to simply declare certain inputs to be “inextricably linked to the broader operating environment,” while declaring all other inputs to *not* be so inextricably linked. The Department would, in fact, have to analyze all factors of an individual producer’s production, and determine which inputs were market based and which were not. Given the number of Chinese companies who would likely attempt to take advantage of any market-oriented enterprise test, this would quickly swamp the Department’s resources. It would be impossible, given the International Trade Administration’s personnel and budget, to fairly, thoroughly, and consistently engage in this kind of investigation and analysis.

Third, and perhaps most importantly, *all factors* in a non-market economy are distorted due to government influence and control over capital and finance. This is particularly true in the case of China. The central government retains tight controls over foreign exchange and over the banking and financial sectors in China. As a result, no transactions involving the change of currency in China – and thus no transactions whatsoever – are free of the distorting influence of a governmentally controlled economy. Even if a Chinese company were to purchase certain

inputs from a market economy source, the prices for these goods would be distorted by the Chinese government's control over the flow of capital. Even were the Department to attempt to determine exactly which inputs of every applicant were "market-based" and which were not, it would not be possible to entirely remove the distortions caused by an applicant's mere presence in a non-market economy.

III. CONCLUSION

The Department should abandon the proposal to institute a "market-oriented enterprise" analysis of individual companies in non-market economies. With respect to Chinese producers, there are sufficient indicia of high levels of governmental control over the entire industry to demonstrate that no "market-oriented" enterprise can exist in China. Further, with respect to the three issues that the Department flagged in its request for comments, the Tariff Act of 1930 does not permit the Department to analyze individual companies in a non-market economy using either a market methodology or a hybrid methodology that pulls from elements of both the market economy and non-market economy dumping methodologies. Any realistic or politically valid attempt to introduce a "market-oriented enterprise" test would subject the Department to heavy administrative burdens, requiring phenomenal resources that the Department simply does not have. Even were the Department to have such resources, a "market-oriented enterprise test would be of limited utility, given the Chinese government's control over important factors of production, including land, labor, and capital. No participant in the Chinese economy can ever be free of all of this distorting influence, rendering all Chinese costs and prices unsuitable for use in calculating accurate dumping margins.

On behalf of Top Flight, I therefore respectfully request that the Department decline to institute and administer a "market-oriented enterprise" analysis for non-market economy producers.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "George M.", with a horizontal flourish extending to the right.