

NOTES ON EAST ASIAN ACQUISITIONS

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Price and service are major considerations when selecting suppliers of library materials in Japan and China, as in any other country. Here follow some reflections on the acquisition of library materials from those countries.

JAPAN

Of the twelve Japanese book vendors servicing North American libraries mentioned in Katsuko T. Hotelling's article "A Study of Japanese Vendor Services in North America" (*CEAL Bulletin* no. 102 (1994), pp. 1-12), eight are located in Tokyo, and among these eight, seven are familiar to the present writer. The University of Adelaide Library has been acquiring Japanese periodicals, both current subscriptions and backsets, from Japan Publications Trading (JPT), a big importer and exporter of books and journals. We order occasionally from Isseido, the leading antiquarian bookseller in Kanda Jimbocho. Gannando Overseas was once our supplier of reference titles while Maruzen, a well-known bookseller and publisher in Nihonbashi, has been servicing us for some years. During my previous term of employment from 1985-1992 at the Australian National University, two academic staff regularly selected titles for ordering from book catalogues issued by Kobayashi Shobo, a vendor specialising in books on Buddhism, and Geibundo, a dealer expert in supplying art exhibition catalogues. And since the mid 1980s, I have been buying film books and journals personally at Yaguchi Shoten, a bookstore in Jimbocho whose unsorted stocks are often piling up like mountains.

Although Japanese book vendors offer little or no discount and keep correspondence to a minimum, they do professionally provide a satisfactory mail order service. The choice of vendors depends largely on the type of material one is acquiring. For recent or new publications, JPT and Maruzen are good suppliers. For scholarly monographs and local histories, Isseido and Gannando are more reliable. Quite a number of booksellers specialise on certain subjects, for example, architecture, Asian studies, drama, or music, and they are more likely to meet your demands if your *desiderata* fall in these areas. For microfilms, Japan Microfilm Service and Yushodo are logical choices. For out of print items, Isseido and other antiquarian dealers, who normally issue their own sales catalogues, are worth trying. Japan, the Empire of Printed Matter, has the most flourishing and fascinating antiquarian book trade among all developed nations, and I have written on this before, both in *EALRGA Newsletter* (no. 10, 1986, pp. 46-47, and no. 17 1990, pp. 21-23) and in *Antiquarian Book Monthly Review* (August 1990, pp. 330-332).

Japan has more than 2,000 antiquarian and second-hand booksellers whose names, addresses and subject specialisations are detailed in the annual edition of *Zenkoku furuhonya chizu* (Tokyo: Nihon Kosho Tsushin) or the latest

edition of *Koshoten chizucho* (Tokyo: Tosho shinbun). Another very useful guide is *Tokyo Book Map 1993-1994* (Tokyo: Shoseki Johosha, 1993) which includes information on many Tokyo bookstores, big or small, as well as national, public and institutional libraries.

An ideal vendor is one who processes your orders promptly, fulfils nearly all your orders, invoices you clearly and correctly (foreign mail order clients need not pay the 3 percent sales tax), imposes no packing or bank charges, advises you immediately if an item is unavailable, despatches the parcels to the right addresses without delay, and offers a good follow-up service. The last point is particularly important for standing orders and orders for multi-volume sets whose publication spans over a number of years. One example will shed light on this issue. In 1980, Chikuma Shobo launched the publication of *Nenpyo Nihon rekishi* in six volumes. While volumes 1 and 2 appeared in 1980 and volume 3 followed closely in 1981, the remaining three volumes were published in the next twelve years: volume 4 in 1984, volume 5 in 1988, and volume 6 as late as 1993. Whether your vendor did invoice you for the complete set in 1980 or just for the volumes supplied, you wish to be informed of the progress of this publication. If the whole set was already paid for in 1980, you have a valid claim for the supply of the remaining volumes. If not, you may also like to order, or be supplied with, the subsequent volumes of this standard reference work as soon as they are published.

One vendor that excels in follow-up service is Oriental Books in Osaka (Fax 81-6-357-8470), who specialises in mail orders. Oriental's other strengths are prompt, efficient response and personal attention through English correspondence. It sometimes adds a bank handling charge of 1,500 yen to an invoice when the transaction is small, but advises its client to subtract this sum if two or more of their invoices can be paid together at the same time. Another excellent vendor is the Sydney subscription agent OCS Australia who are well-known for their efficient delivery of Japanese newspapers. OCS Australia can supply some Japanese journals by airmail at a cost less than the normal sea mail rates charged by Japanese vendors. Thus, money can be saved with a vast improvement of service to our journal readers.

Lastly, it is worth noting that Kodansha International, Charles E. Tuttle and several other Japanese publishers of English titles have an Australian distributor, Bookwise International, in Adelaide. Ordering their books from Bookwise (Fax (08) 268-8704) may be cheaper and faster than getting them from Japan or the United States through one's established vendors.

CHINA

Since the 1980s, dramatic changes have continued to occur in Chinese publishing. The quantity of books increased every year from 1980 to 1993, but there was also a general decline in quality. As China moves towards a market economy, inflation has become a major problem. The cost of paper has risen manyfold while state subsidies for publishing have largely disappeared. This

has resulted in a steady increase in book prices. When the four-volume set *Guantang jilin* by Wang Guowei (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1959) was reprinted in 1984, the price was RMB Y7.50. When the book was reprinted again in 1991, its price became RMB Y32.30. The inflation rate was 330 percent. The price of serial publications has also risen significantly. Taking *Quanguo xinshumu* (Beijing: Zhongguo banben tushuguan) as an example, the price per issue of this bibliographical monthly in the last fifteen years can be tabulated below:

Year	Price	Year	Price	Year	Price
1980	Y0.22	1985	Y0.36	1990	Y1.80
1981	Y0.22	1986	Y0.60	1991	Y1.80
1982	Y0.22	1987	Y0.60	1992	Y1.80
1983	Y0.30	1988	Y0.80	1993	Y2.50
1984	Y0.30	1989	Y1.20	1994	Y3.00

In 1983, China published 35,700 titles including 25,826 new titles. In 1988, there were 65,962 titles including 46,774 new titles. In 1992, the figures were 92,148 and 58,169 respectively. This is an alarming rate of increase which presents quite a few problems for overseas research libraries collecting Chinese language materials.

Firstly, bibliographical control of these publications is inadequate. The listing of titles in the monthly *Quanguo xinshumu* is far from complete while the two annuals, *Quanguo zongshumu* (Beijing: Zhongguo banben tushuguan) and *Zhongguo guojia shumu* (Beijing: Huayi chubanshe), come out a year or two behind time. One has difficulty knowing what have been published. The existence of publications for "internal circulation" (*neibu faxing*), which are generally not recorded, adds a new dimension to one's frustration.

Secondly, since many never-ending series have been published and a lot of hitherto prohibited subjects have been written on, one is understandably confused as to what to collect. After the *wenshi ziliao* flooding and the *nianjian* avalanche of the 1980s, there is now the *fangzhi* publication boom. Following the "nude photography" shock of 1988/89 when publishers made some handsome profit, manuals and other publications on sex are in vogue in the 1990s. There are, of course, countless volumes on China's current economic development.

Thirdly, as so many titles are being published, one finds it hard to distinguish the worthy products from the trashy items, particularly in the absence of good reviewing journals. There are hundreds of topical dictionaries in print; for example, both *Hongloumeng* and *Jinpingmei* have generated at least half a dozen dictionaries in recent years, all bearing the imprint of respectable publishers.

Fourthly, although one is kept informed about forthcoming titles by publications such as *Sheke xinshumu* (Beijing: Xinhua shudian; a weekly),

Shanghai xinshumu (Shanghai: Xinhua shudian; published three times a month), *Beijing tushu xinxi* (Beijing: Xinhua shudian; a semi-monthly), and *Xinshu yugao* (Beijing: Zhongguo guoji tushu; a semi-monthly), few Chinese book vendors can be relied upon to supply the titles selected from these catalogues. It is common experience to have about one third of one's book orders outstanding or cancelled, and even the items supplied take more than six months to arrive.

Lastly, there is the issue of book prices. Chinese books usually have a marked price. A few non-commercial titles do not carry any price, or just carry a note on production cost. Some titles, targeted for export, have a price in US dollars. Some titles have a cloth edition which is normally 15 to 30 percent more expensive than the paperback edition. For many years, the pricing policy for exporting books is to double the domestic price. Since July 1994, however, China International Book Trading Corporation (CIBTC) has begun to introduce a new policy, decided by China National Publishing Industry Trading Corporation (CNPITC), which fixes a minimum exchange rate of RMB Y1 to US \$0.30 for the export of general titles excluding annuals and local histories which usually fetch higher prices. In practice, this means that instead of the former price-increase multiple of 2, the new multiple is around 2.6 which varies as the international monetary exchange rates fluctuate. This caused an uproar in North American East Asian library community, resulting in a formal protest by the Committee on East Asian Libraries (CEAL). After some exchange of letters, CNPITC relented and agreed to reconsider their policy besides suspending all invoices issued after 1 July 1994 until further notice. CNPITC hopes to work out an agreeable policy by mid November.

This recent "book pricing controversy" will undoubtedly be resolved soon, to the satisfaction of both parties, and to the benefit of Australian East Asian libraries. The larger concern of improvement of service, however, may still remain for some years. For Chinese book vendors, earning a higher profit does not necessarily relate to an improvement of service which involves modernising the book distribution system, restructuring the management, better staff training, and a number of other factors. By comparison, Hong Kong book vendors are charging more, but they are offering a better service. One is expected and willing to pay a higher price if the service is of excellent quality.