

## Some Publication Tendencies in China

By SUNG I-CHUNG (宋以忠)

*An Apology*:—An expert has been defined as one who knows more and more about something less and less. A bookseller is just on the contrary—he is one who knows less and less about something more and more. Ever since books were treated as commodities, booksellers in China have been jocularly described as *shu-ku* (書賈), belonging to a caste not dissimilar to oil-, salt-, fuel-, or rice-pedlars. This is perhaps why I, true to the tradition in my profession, am always in such an apologetic state. While I do not claim to be very conversant on the subject which I am assigned to write, I wish to make it clear now and here that, although I am in the publishing business, I work only in the accounting office.

*The Business*:—Publishing business in China, as elsewhere, is a very profitable business if one knows how to manage it and is lucky enough to have a constant supply of "hits" or "best-sellers" and if one knows how to sell them like hot cakes while they are really hot. Perhaps it is not generally known that America does not produce the largest number of new publications. In 1935, there were 8,766 new numbers, 1/4 of that of Russia, 1/3 of Japan, and Germany, 1/2 of Britain and France and quite a lot less than Italy. The reason is not far to seek. Standardization and mass production. There are always about a dozen "best-sellers" every year and everywhere one goes one sees the same dozen. Not so in other countries where individualism is still preserved. A special feature in this business is that it is semi-monopolistic. It has the protection of the copyright law, except in cases of old books which were published before the copyright law was promulgated, not very many years before the republican régime.

*Publication of Old Books*:—This is distinctively the most important feature of publications in China during the past few years (For more detailed information, the reader can find much valuable material in the *Chinese Year Book*, from an article written by Mr. Y. W. Wong, General Manager and Editor-in-Chief of the Commercial Press, Ltd.). As an irresponsible and free agent, I'll describe how and why we have this queer phenomenon.

One of the most important reasons for this which has been usually overlooked is that "dead men tell no tales." Reproduction of books published any time before the promulgation of the copyright law is not likely to be subject to censorship. Perhaps outsiders do not realize how ironic the fate of the publishers has been during the past two years in China. Pile after pile of books already published or types already set after hundreds and thousands of dollars have been sunk into the process, have to be sealed and locked-up in the warehouse. Sometimes even on account of a few pages of "wrong" ideas which may be interpreted as detrimental to "friendly relations" with foreign states, the publishers have to bear the damage all the same. On top of that, no publisher knows what will be censored next. He often gets surprises. No wonder that they prefer publication of old books.

Another reason of course, as I said, is the absence of copyright and royalty and economy in proof-reading.

Formerly publication or reproduction of old books was undertaken by a few "wise guys" in the publishing world, by one publishing house who defied the traditional idea of being "book-pedlars" and who thus was able to engage the services of very eminent scholars. They published the *Twenty-Four Histories* (二十四史), *Szu Pu Tsung Kan* (四部叢刊), *Hsu-Tsang Ching* (續藏經), *Tao-Tsang Ching* (道藏經), and many other ambitious reproductions which enabled them to make enough money to build the largest publishing house in this country. But now, Heaven bless them, there are too many such "wise guys" who have since learned the trick. Any publisher who can make money these years must be a good strong mixture of both a super-eminent scholar and a very keen business man.

The Back-to-Ancient Movement, Classic-Reading Movement and to a certain extent even the New-Life Movement, have all contributed to the popularity of old books. This, however, is most emphatically not a sign of decadence. It is a sign that the Chinese are awakening in their intellectual curiosity. Except science, we have everything to learn from the wisdom of our ancients. But the publishers have now come to a stage where the reproduction of old books has ceased to be a commercially successful venture. Unless someone can popularize and revive the dead such as Yuan Chung-Lang (袁中郎) or discover a Chinese *Pepys' Diary*, we can safely say that the reproduction of old books will not be as popular in the next few years to come as it has been lately, especially if the bigger publishers were given less onerous burdens of censorship. The chief reason is that there are too many such "wise guys" who undersell each other and cut each other's throats until they have to sell "way below their costs." Such books are technically called "90%+20% Discount Books", (一折八扣) a term only freshly coined within the last two or three years. Lately I've actually seen this cynical remark on the back covers of a few of such books: "No copyright; welcome reproduction." (並無版權; 歡迎翻印). This is the last straw! We have never seen anything like this since the copyright law was promulgated, save in propaganda and religious books.

"90%+20% Discount Books":—This is a 20th-century wonder which probably exists only in China. Any book belonging to this category can be bought at 92% discount. Thus, if the list price is \$1.00, one can get it for 8 cents. Recently the book trade was so depressed that we received reports that one can still get a further 20% discount after the "90%+20% discount." (If you don't know how to figure, it is 93.6% discount on list price). The Shanghai Book Trade Association has tried to do a lot to stop such nonsense, but without avail. Like any other trade association, this is just another public and friendly meeting place for members' free exchange of lies.

With a \$5.00 bill one can literally buy a rickshaw-load of books which even the most diligent book-worms could not digest in months. And it is doubly difficult for any one to read and digest these books, for cheap as they are, they

are just full of misprints. Oftentimes those what an economist would call "marginal producers" or rather "marginal printers" who undertake publications of such books are usually very poorly equipped. They don't get the better workmen to do the type-setting and often don't have enough types. They hardly employ any proof-reader. Under such circumstances, how can we expect anything better than what they offer? There are exceptions, of course, but they are only exceptions to prove the rule.

Such publications are nevertheless good. They make books more attainable to the thinner purses. But besides the above-mentioned few points of their weaknesses, we have to recognize the importance of new knowledge and new literature. We can not forever bury ourselves in old books and forget about the changing world. Now, how about new books?

*New Publications:*—A study of the statistics of new publications in various countries gives China a very discouraging show. Publication per capita in China in 1934 was 219,230 persons for each new title published, only a little higher than in Switzerland. China ranked the 16th among the civilized nations. And don't forget that the population in those countries which rank below us, Switzerland for instance, reads books of foreign publications such as English, French, German and Italian. And besides, in this country the usual run of new titles is only between 1000-1500 copies. This year the tendency is toward a still less amount for a new title. What have we to compare with American best-sellers which run to hundreds of thousands of copies! (Anne Morrow Lindberg's *North to the Orient* sold 185,000 copies in 4½ months last year.)

The burden of this tremendous task naturally falls on those publishers who are financially and "scholastically" strong enough to undertake it. We don't lack new manuscripts. They just pour in. On the average, the Commercial Press takes one out of 12 manuscripts submitted. These manuscripts are all most carefully and thoroughly examined by experts and well-known scholars. They go through four stages of examination and elimination. The Commercial Press, one of the largest and most influential publishing houses in China turned out 4,321 new volumes (675 new titles, comparing with 540 by MacMillan, producer of largest new numbers in America) in 1935, taking more than half of the total number of new volumes published in the country. It is not sure if it can make any profit at all on many of the new titles, but it seems to hold it to be its duty as a leading publisher in China to introduce new books of true merits in any event.

*School Text Books:*—Where, then, do the publishers make their money if not from new books? Of course, they do make money from new books, but the profit is not sufficient to meet the general expenses and stockholders' dividends. In the good old days, school text-books used to be the source of profits. But of late years with the constant change of new systems due to new educational theories or political and diplomatic reasons, this has ceased to be a source of income. Sometimes it is a source of curses and painful losses. Henry Ford says that the change in new models is a curse to the automobile industry. But he doesn't nearly realise what the change in educational theories means

to the publishers in China! A big publisher in Shanghai nearly went bankrupt in 1934 chiefly due to this.

The government once threatened to take over the publication of text-books from the private publishers a couple of years ago, but due to diplomatic reasons as well as to the advantage of competitions in preparing text-books by private companies, the idea was reluctantly given up, although the Ministry of Education is still preparing and editing its text-books. Anyway, a comparison of the text-books used today with those used, say, ten years ago immediately shows a great improvement even at a very casual glance. For one thing, they are at least twice thicker than before and the materials used are much more interesting and instructive. For another, the printing is definitely shades better.

This is especially noticeable in the children's and primary schools' books. There are more pictures with colors and the materials used are more suitable for primary education. The children of China today are to be congratulated. The response to a good series of children's books published by the Commercial Press last year was most satisfying. However, this market is also loosening up. There are too many followers and too few leaders. From 1936 on there won't be any appreciable improvement over last year. There will be a pause until the leaders can think out some new methods in developing this line. Knowing the importance in other fields, the keener publishers are directing their attentions to the new trends and developments in the publishing and reading public.

*New Trends:*—The distribution of new publications of all publishers in 1934, as far as statistics are available, is as follows: Social sciences 29%, literature 22%, useful arts 12%, history and geography 10.2%, fine arts 7%, general works, 6.1%, philology 4.9%, natural science, 4.8%, philosophy 3.1% and religion .9%. (It is interesting to compare this with Japan in the same year: Social science 32%, useful arts, 19% literature 10%, general works, fine arts, and history & geography 8% each; religion 6%; philology 4%; philosophy 3%; natural science 2%.)

When one understands the various social, political and economic problems so threatening to the country, it should be no wonder to him that the social sciences take the lead. Literature taking the second place is also natural, as we are known to be a country of scholars. There is hardly any college graduate who has not written and published a few poems and perhaps one or two short stories. It is interesting to note that lots of translations of foreign novels are daily sent to publishers by those "unemployed literary men."

But what is most striking is that of useful arts jumping into the third rank of importance, although still well below the second. In a country where manual labor and mercantilism have been traditionally classed as "low-brow", it is gratifying to see such new developments. There is every reason to expect that this year will witness a still better showing. The advance subscription to the *Encyclopaedia of Industrial Chemistry* (化學工業大全) published by the Commercial Press and perhaps the most important big work on that field yet published was well beyond anticipation. Other important books on useful arts are



also receiving greater attention. They have what William James would call, "cash values,"

Here I wish to make a little digression. There has been a strong tendency towards quick-learning. Titles like "*Japanese Mastered in 100 Days*," "*Electrical Engineering Made Easy*," etc., etc., are flooding the market. But now people begin to realize that knowledge, which Francis Bacon used as a synonym of power, cannot be so quickly and easily mastered. Some years ago a publisher put out a book (which is now out of print) called "*English Grammar Made Clear*." People are still writing to the publisher asking for a book called "English Grammar Made Easy." We know darn well that the English grammar is not easy and cannot be made easy, but we can reasonably expect a book to make it clear. However, there are certain fields in useful arts which can be made both easy and clear, and they shall continue to enjoy their popularity. Such books as "*How to Repair Automobiles*," "*How to Grow Oranges*," and many other useful and profitable arts will no doubt continue to receive very favorable attention.

Religion occupied the last seat, not quite 1% of the total publications, comparing with 6% in Japan. The Chinese people are beginning to lose faith in theological speculation which has no "cash value"!

*From Translation to Creation*:—This is another feature. Formerly foreign methods, statistics, and materials were used (not infrequently undigested) in Chinese publications. A comparison of recent publications on social sciences with those published ten years ago gives one a very striking impression that more creative work is being done now than before. While the principles and theories are still foreign, in fact they are international, the materials used are Chinese. For instance, books on bookkeeping and accounting theories were hardly available in Chinese 10 years ago, but now the book trade offers many good texts and reference books in great abundance, except, of course, those dealing with highly technical, industrial and manufacturing accounting which have no immediate use in this country yet. Such works are facilitated also by the standardization of terms by government and private organizations. That by itself is a distinctive feature in publication in recent years.

*Government Publications*:—It is very gratifying to note that the government has energetically undertaken many publications directly or indirectly, such as the "China Economic Year Book" and Industrial Handbooks of various provinces, compiled by the Ministry of Industries; the "China Finance Year Book," compiled by the Finance Ministry; the "Waichiaopu Year Book" by the Foreign Ministry; the "China Education Year Book," and many other official government publications. Besides these, the government subsidizes many private research organizations in their various research work and various important publications of the Academia Sinica, Bureau of Translation (國立編譯館) and many other institutions directly or indirectly sponsored by the government. All such government interest has definitely made possible advancements during the past few years.

*Magazines and Periodicals*:—The rapid growth in magazines and periodicals in recent years is truly amazing.

The number of titles registered with the Ministry of Interior in 1935 was 450, while during the preceding year from April to December was only 309. From September 11, 1928, to December, 1932, it was barely 136. Undoubtedly this is a sign of our eagerness to learn new knowledge. Almost every month the street-car commuters find a few new faces propping out at the news-stands as they wait for cars to carry them home or to their office.

Here I wish to call the reader's attention that we don't have, as far as I know, any periodical which is chiefly devoted to book reviews, such as *The Book Review Digest*, *The New York Times Book Review Weekly* and scores of others in America, for instance. *The Book Review Monthly's* (圖書評論) closing was a great loss to the reading public. The Commercial Press publishes a very admirable periodical chiefly devoted to book reviews called *Publication Weekly* 出版週刊, but it is hardly necessary to mention that it deals only with its own publications, although contributions are freely and chiefly solicited from independent outside critics. Other magazines and newspapers, of course, also have book review sections but not nearly as well-developed as they might be.

*Newspapers*:—There are 1,008 different newspapers in China and Kiangsu by far leads all the other provinces with 237 newspapers. The number of tabloid newspapers in Shanghai alone beats the total number of newspapers in many other provinces. The story of these tabloid newspapers is a romance by itself. Ten years ago there were about 40-50 numbers of these daily taloid papers in this metropolis and now while the amount has considerable reduced to less than twenty, their contents have very much improved. There is probably not much appreciable increase in the number of "big dailies", but we can hardly flatter them on any great improvement in editing or on their editorial policies, if they have any strong and consistent domestic and foreign policies at all. The best edited daily and also perhaps having the best editorials is still *The Ta Kung Pao* (*L'Impartiale*) of Tientsin, although its circulation may not be as large as *The Shun Pao* or *The Sin Wen Pao*.

Many colleges have now recognized the importance of journalism and during the past ten years courses on journalism and even schools of journalism (the most important of which is the Yenching School of Journalism) have been established. Let us be patient for a while and "rub our eyes to wait" and see the coming daring feats of great strides in this field in China.

*Conclusion*:—This article is written without the benefit of consultation with my eminent colleagues who undoubtedly know the subject better than I do. The opinions are my own and even the facts and figures are not to be taken as absolutely accurate. It is superfluous for me to mention that ours is a country without accurate statistics. However, except for the opinions, the facts and figures can be taken as fairly representative or at least indicative. I'll now make a few brief remarks to conclude this survey.

1. The publishing business in China has suffered and is still suffering immensely from the business depression in general and cut-throat competition and old books publication in particular. There are many smaller publishers who have

great "nuisance values" to the big ones. A big change and readjustment is bound to take place. There will be the usual eliminations and the old story of the survival of the fittest.

2. Notwithstanding the above, the publishing world in China has made a tremendous stride in introducing new knowledge, reducing financial burdens of the reading public and, in most cases, did a good job unselfishly and honorably. The few that will survive the coming trial will no doubt continue to render their best services.

3. Mass education and government compulsory education (which I have no time to treat in the present article) will be a very strong impetus directly or indirectly helping the general publication to make still more rapid progress and the "Three-character Sutra" (三字經) and "Hundred Family Names" (百家姓) are no longer fashionable in child and primary education.

4. The simplified characters (簡字) (another subject deserving a separate treatment) which was promulgated by the Ministry of Education, are temporarily withheld. No doubt the question will turn up again, some time. We must recognize the difficulty in accepting new ideas. There will be a revolution in Chinese publication when that resistance is removed. The recent invention a few months ago, by the Commercial Press, Ltd. on new type-moulders which has reduced the type cost to less than 1/5 of the present cost will also have a decided influence in the future.

5. The Book-Reading Movement sponsored by many scholars last year will be continued. We must not forget that knowledge is power. The potential reading capacity in Shanghai alone is enormous. But night-life, cabarets, gambling and "going to the dogs" have been the leading activities.

## Chinese Periodicals

By LIN YU (林幽)

AS Mr. Sung I-chung points out, the rapid growth of Chinese magazines and periodicals in the last few years is most amazing. I shall not repeat here the figures of periodicals registered with the Ministry of Interior during the past six or seven years. Suffice it to say that 1934 was commonly dubbed the year of magazines, but this tendency was visible even during the previous year, and has become even more pronounced since then. Mr. Sung regards this as a "sign of our eagerness to learn", and no doubt it is. However, there are other factors which have to be noted.

The eagerness to learn is coupled with an economic force in contributing to the popularity of the magazines. Because of economic depression many students were obliged to stop their education, but their appetite for learning must be satisfied by reading. To them one copy of a magazine offers more variety than a book, and is cheaper, too.

There is yet another cause for the popularity of periodicals and it may be summarized in two words: national emergency. People's attention has been centered in political events since the fall of 1931, and many people have found magazine articles more intelligible and comprehensive than reports in the daily papers. This accounts for the great number of topical weeklies, semi-monthlies and monthlies. The national emergency has also directed the attention of both readers and writers to our past in search for light to guide the present, which is why in magazines of this nature we find numerous studies of different historical epochs, events or problems.

The popularity of another class of periodicals must be accounted for differently. With more stable government finances most of the professors in government universities are finding it possible to devote time to research and writing, and so we have numerous periodicals, mostly quarterlies, devoted to learned discussions of all sorts of subjects, some highly technical and purely academic, others with a very direct bearing on practical problems. In the pre-Kuomintang days few government

officials saw the importance of good publicity, but today the situation is completely reversed. Kuomintang owes its victory almost as much to its propaganda as to its revolutionary armies. Nowadays each of the more up-to-date provincial governments has at least three or four publications to its credit.

Having considered the more important causes of the popularity of periodicals, we may now turn to the periodicals themselves. Of magazines which have names in foreign languages, the foreign names only are given below, otherwise, their Chinese names are retained after the English equivalents given by the writer.

By far the most popular and numerous is the group which may be termed "topical" periodicals, that is magazines which deal with current events and topics of current interest. *The Current Events*, Nanking, is a monthly modelled after *The Current History*, with certain modifications to suit the need of Chinese readers. Nanking has yet another topical monthly *The New China Review* (中國新論), which pays special attention to international relations and reconstructive efforts in China. *The Domestic and Foreign News Weekly* (中外時事週報), which is true to its name, is published by *The Central Daily News* (中央日報), Nanking, and has 50 issues a year. *The Current Review* (時論) is a topical semi-monthly with special emphasis on international relations and cultural reconstruction.

Peiping has two well-known weekly reviews mildly critical of the Kuomintang government: *The Independent Review* (獨立評論) edited by Dr. Hu Shih, and the newly founded *Free Critic* (自由評論). *The New North Star* (新北辰), a monthly published in Peiping, deals specially with cultural problems. *The Ta Kung Pao* of Tientsin also publishes a topical *National News Weekly* (國聞週刊). *The Sheng Sheng* (生生) of Taiyuan has 20 issues a year and contains, in the few pages between its two covers, news of a wide variety, from international relations to rural movements, from science to culture. Faraway Sian has a *Ten-Day Poli-*