

The Changing Roles Played by China Books and Periodicals

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Henry Noyes tells the story of the creation of China Books and Periodicals in the extract from his autobiography, *China Born*, this volume, page 37.

When Henry and Gertrude Noyes established China Books and Periodicals 中國書刊社 in Chicago in 1960, the U.S.-imposed embargo on the People's Republic of China (PRC) had been in effect for a decade and U.S.-PRC relations were close to their nadir. It had taken some time for the embargo to be effective, but after the government prosecuted and fined a few Chinese merchants for violating the ban and conducted massive investigations into Chinese immigration fraud, the Chinese community was cowed. In 1957 the Oasis Bookstore, the only bookstore in San Francisco Chinatown selling books published in China, had to shut down when U.S. Customs made it impossible for the store to import PRC publications from the PRC or from Hong Kong/Macau firms with ties to the PRC. The Chinese community was thus cut off from the flow of information from China except for accounts, often biased, that were published in the Chinese media dominated by the Kuomintang or the English-language U.S. media obsessed with the Cold War. China Books and Periodicals became a major U.S. bookseller importing publications exclusively from the PRC under a license granted by the U.S. Treasury Department.

China Books and Periodicals moved to San Francisco sometime in 1963.¹ At first it was located in a rented storefront on Gough Street near Market Street; not long afterward the Noyeses acquired and moved into the premises on Twenty-fourth Street that became its home for the next few decades.

When the store had opened in Chicago, I had ordered a subscription to *People's Daily* 人民日報. There probably were not too many Chinese names on its *People's Daily* subscribers list, and when I visited the Gough Street store just after it opened, Henry Noyes recognized my name immediately. He soon told me that he ordered his publications from Guoji Shudian in China and was interested in building up an inventory of books on all subjects not only in English but also in Chinese. However, he was stymied by his rather rudimentary knowledge of Chinese. With the anti-Communist hysteria

and federal prosecution of Chinese immigration fraud in full swing, many Chinese fluent in the language were understandably leery of association with a business connected with the left. However, I volunteered my services, and during the next few years I spent some time in the store, sitting beside Henry Noyes to translate each title and tell him the gist of its contents, so that he could place orders. As remuneration I could take any of the books for my own collection.

China Books and Periodicals gradually built up an inventory of Chinese-language books, and as the news spread in the community, Chinese customers began visiting the store despite the possibility of FBI surveillance.² I continued to help with translation for several years until the start of the Cultural Revolution around 1966, when the number of titles China exported decreased to a few items that were "politically correct." During this period business at China Books and Periodicals actually picked up as there was a great demand, especially among progressives, for publications on China's new revolution to ostensibly achieve an egalitarian society. The bookstore is said to have sold over a million copies of the Little Red Book (*Quotations from Chairman Mao* 毛主席語錄) since 1969.³ By the 1970s the tension between the United States and the PRC was relaxing and it was not as difficult to find someone to translate Chinese-language catalogues. In the meantime I had become busy researching, writing, and teaching Chinese American history. However, I kept up my friendship with the Noyeses and still visited the store on occasion.

During the 1960s the Civil Rights movement, followed by the anti-Vietnam War movement, led to a reawakening of liberal and progressive forces in American society, including many in the Chinese community. There were increasing calls for Washington to end its ever more ineffective policy of isolating the PRC. By the end of the decade there were definite signs that this policy was poised for a change. China Books and Periodicals actively encouraged the change. In spring 1971 Henry and Gertrude Noyes, together with John Ong 翁紹裘 and Maurice Chuck 黃運基 of the Chinese-language newspaper *Chinese Voice* 華聲報 and activist Ann Tompkins, met to found U.S.-China Peoples Friendship Association, which was intended to further better understanding between the people of the two nations. This group's successor, the

national U.S.-China People's Friendship Association, was founded in 1974 and has over fifty chapters.⁴ China Books and Periodicals introduced many in the community, including a number of Chinese Americans, to the activities of this organization.

By the late 1960s many of the Chinese-speaking people in America thirsted for more information from China. China Books and Periodicals assisted in the reappearance of Chinatown establishments marketing publications from the PRC. In early 1970 Chinese Americans from Asian Community Center, mostly English-speaking progressive youth, opened Everybody's Bookstore 大眾書店 in a storefront at the International Hotel at 840 Kearny Street, selling PRC publications provided by China Books and Periodicals.⁵ The Chinese-speaking community was not far behind. Around 1971 a group headed by Roger Wong 余朝捷 established New China Book Store 新華書店 on a modest scale in Room B of 523 Grant Avenue in the southern part of Chinatown, targeting the Chinese-speaking community. Jimmy Lee (Lee Kam Wah 李錦華), the store manager, soon moved it to more spacious quarters in the heart of Chinatown.⁶ At first China Books and Periodicals supplied publications for these pro-PRC booksellers, but relaxation of the U.S. embargo during the early 1970s soon allowed them to deal directly with suppliers in Hong Kong and the PRC.

With the relaxation of U.S.-PRC tensions and normalization of relations China Books and Periodicals soon lost its exclusive rights as a distributor of PRC publications. At the same time, with the launching of economic changes in the PRC after 1979, Chinese corporations began to look to expand abroad. Particularly important was the ideological sector, which included publications, and moves in this sector further affected the position of China Books and Periodicals.

In 1988, Joint Publishing 三聯書店, Commercial Press 商務印書館, and Chung Hwa Book Company 中華書局, three major Hong Kong publishers with strong connections to the PRC, established Sino United Publishing (Holdings) Limited (SUP) 聯合出版集團,⁷ which spearheaded the thrust of the Chinese publishing sector abroad. In 1989 the group tested the market by establishing a bookstore in Vancouver, B.C.⁸ Its next major move targeted the three major centers of the Chinese population in the United States: New York, San Francisco, and Los Angeles. In 1993 SUP purchased Oriental Culture Enterprises 東方文化事業公司⁹ and Eastwind Books and Arts 東風書店,¹⁰ major Chinese booksellers in New York and San Francisco, respectively. However, negotiations with Evergreen Bookstore 長青書局, the major Chinese bookseller in Southern California, fell through. Instead in 1994 Joint Publishing opened what it claimed to be the largest bookstore on the West Coast across the road from Evergreen Bookstore.¹¹ The same year a Joint Publishing bookstore also opened in Toronto, to be followed in 1998 by two additional stores.¹² Thus SUP established its presence in all five major centers of the Chinese population in North America.

In 1985 China International Book Trading Company (CIBTC) 中國國際圖書貿易總公司 of Beijing founded Cypress Book Company 常青圖書 (美國) 有限公司 in New Jersey and headquartered it in San Francisco, where it became a competitor of China Books and Periodicals.¹³ But with the continuing interest in China, China Books and Periodicals managed to thrive. However, a slump occurred after the 1989 Tiananmen incident. Although the Noyes family held on tenaciously through the 1990s, they finally sold the business to SUP and China International Publishing Group (CIPG) 中國國際出版集團 of Beijing in 2003.¹⁴ One function undertaken by the new owners was distribution for Long River Press, a joint venture established by CIPG and SUP in San Francisco in 2002.¹⁵ Thus China Books and Periodicals closed one chapter and opened a new chapter in its history.

NOTES

1. China Books and Periodicals was first listed in *Polk's San Francisco Business Directory* in 1964, which meant that it was in San Francisco sometime in 1963, when data for the 1964 directory were being compiled.
2. For example, the FBI noted the following: "On April 18, 1964, an Agent of the FBI observed a Chinese male with dark hair and wearing glasses in China Books and Periodicals. The Agent observed a 1962 Buick registered to MARK LAI parked in front of the book store." Document SF 105-1494 (January 4, 1965), p. 4, covering investigative period November 30, 1964, to December 4, 1964, on Lai, Him Mark. Obtained through Freedom of Information Act.
3. Sally Taylor, "China Takes over China Books: The Longer Story," *Publishers' Weekly*, November 10, 2003.
4. Xiong Guohua, *Meiguo meng* [American dream] (Guangzhou: Huacheng Chubanshe, 2002), 159-60; U.S.-China Peoples Friendship Association website, www.uscpfa.org (accessed July 19, 2008).
5. See Harvey Dong, "A Bookstore for Everybody," this volume, page 95.
6. New China Book Store was first listed in *Polk's San Francisco Business Directory* in 1972, which meant that it was established sometime in 1971, when data for the directory were being compiled. Soon after its founding the store moved to 1260 Stockton Street at the corner of Stockton and Broadway, and then to 642 Pacific Avenue.
7. "Fazhan lishi" [Historical development (of SUP)], <http://www.sup.com.hk/web/supsituation1.asp> (accessed July 21, 2008).
8. "Lianhe Chuban (Jianada) Youxian Gongsi" [Sino United Publishing (Canada), Ltd.], <http://www.sup.com.hk/web/suporg087.asp> (accessed July 21, 2008). The SUP Bookstore is located at 78 East Pender Street.
9. "Dongfang Wenhua Shiye Gongsi" [Oriental Cultural Enterprises], <http://www.sup.com.hk/web/suporg084.asp> (accessed July 21, 2008); "Dongfeng Shudian" [Eastwind Books and Arts], <http://www.sup.com.hk/web/suporg081.asp> (accessed July 21, 2008). Oriental Cultural Enterprises at 13-17 Elizabeth Street was founded by Liu Zhenyi 劉振翼 in 1976. It was one of the first major Chinese bookstores founded after the relaxation of the U.S. embargo against China.
10. Kathy Nguyen, "Food for the Mind, Body and Soul," <http://www.coastnews.com/sf/eastwind.htm> (accessed July 21, 2008). In 1979 thirty Chinese in the community pooled resources

- to found Eastwind Books and Arts. Doroteo Ng 王達 became the manager. Later he bought out the other shareholders and became the owner. The current bookstore manager told the writer on August 4, 2008, that planning for the store took place in 1977–78. It opened for business at 1435a Stockton Street in March 1979. At its peak in the 1990s Eastwind had a branch at 633 Vallejo Street handling English-language publications (later this was closed and its inventory consolidated with that of the main store) and another at 1986 Shattuck Avenue in Berkeley (this was sold to Harvey Dong in 1996, per e-mail from Harvey Dong to author, July 21, 2008).
11. Liu Bing, *Wo de chuban yinshua ban shiji* [My half a century of publishing and printing] (Los Angeles: Evergreen Publishing Wenhua Gongsi, 2000), 124–29, 183–88; “Lianhe Chuban (Luoshanji) Youxian Gongsi” [Sino United Publishing (Los Angeles), Ltd.], <http://www.sup.com.hk/web/suporg068.asp> (accessed July 21, 2008). Evergreen Bookstore was founded by Bing Liu 劉冰 in 1978. By 2000 it had ten stores, mostly in Southern California. The main store, managed by Bing Liu, was located at 760 West Garvey Avenue in Monterey Park. The SUP Bookstore was located at 111 North Atlantic Blvd., #228, Monterey Park.
 12. “Lianhe Chuban (Duolunduo) Youxian Gongsi” [Sino United Publishing (Toronto), Ltd.], <http://www.sup.com.hk/web/suporg090.asp> (accessed July 21, 2008). The SUP bookstores in Toronto were located in the suburban areas, one in Scarborough at 1571 Sandhurst Circle, Unit 127–29, and two in Markham.
 13. “Cypress Books (US) Co.,” <http://www.cypressbooks.com> (accessed July 23, 2008). The bookstore was at first located at 3450 Third Street, #48.
 14. Taylor, “China Takes over China Books”; “China Books and Periodicals,” http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/China_Books_and_Periodicals (accessed July 20, 2008). CIPG was formed in 2002 by People’s Press, People’s Literature Press, Commercial Press, Chung Hwa Book Company, China Encyclopedia Press, China Fine Arts Press, the People’s Music Press, DSX Book Company, China Translation and Publishing Corporation, Xinhua Bookstore, China International Publishing Trade Corporation, and China Book Import and Export (Group) Corporation. <http://www.china.org.cn/english/2002/Apr/30344.htm>.
 15. “Long River Press,” <http://www.longriverpress.com/aboutlrp.html> (accessed July 23, 2008). Cypress Book Company, Long River Press, and China Books and Periodicals are all located at 360 Swift Avenue, South San Francisco, #42, #48.