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ACQUIRING HIGH QUALITY CHINESE RESEARCH MATERIALS:  
A CASE STUDY OF IRREGULARITIES IN CURRENT CHINESE PUBLISHING\*

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**Introduction**

Throughout the last decade, experienced librarians for Chinese studies in the United States have made great efforts to provide historical overviews of Chinese book publishing and exporting practices. They have introduced different methods of acquisition, identifying and evaluating print and online resources, and discussed problems commonly faced by academic libraries. Representative studies include W.S. Wong's "Acquiring Library Materials from the People's Republic of China,"<sup>1</sup> H.Z. Tao & C. Cole's "How to Acquire Chinese Materials from the People's Republic of China: An Easy way to Solve the Mystery,"<sup>2</sup> C.R. Chan's "Acquisition of Chinese Language Materials,"<sup>3</sup> and K.T. Wei's "Selecting and acquiring library materials for Chinese studies in academic libraries."<sup>4</sup>

With China's rapid economic growth and its now active role on the international stage, Chinese studies programs have been expanding to meet the increasing research needs of US universities. However, Chinese publishing is undergoing great changes that challenge the acquisitions efforts of research libraries. In particular, electronic publishing and related copyright issues have caught the attention of librarians and other researchers. Representative studies include Frank Cheng's "Copyright in the US and China: Differences in Policy and in Practice,"<sup>5</sup> Richard Kuslan's "Pirated Editions and American Copyright Law: Implications for Libraries Building a Chinese Language Collection,"<sup>6</sup> and Chuanfu Chen & Kuei Chiu's "Copyright Issues Regarding China Publications Used in U.S. Libraries."<sup>7</sup> Since print resources still play a critical role in library collections, this study focuses on print materials, trying to identify the prominent problem of irregularities in current Chinese publishing and discuss its implication for research library acquisitions.

**Irregularities in current Chinese publishing**

With the flourishing of the Chinese publishing industry, the major challenge facing overseas Chinese librarians is the shift from the difficulties in obtaining Chinese material of any kind to selecting high quality material from a huge and chaotic market. According to *China Industry Development Report*, the total number of Chinese publications has been increasing rapidly in recent years.<sup>8</sup> Since 2004, over 200,000 volumes of books have been published annually by about 570 publishers.<sup>9</sup> At the same time, the Chinese publishing industry is undergoing major institutional reforms. On March 25, 2004, the State Department of China announced the founding of the first publishing enterprise: The Chinese Publishing Group Co. (中国出版集团).<sup>10</sup> Since then, many publishers have joined in this institutional transition. This transition has brought more energy and competition to the publishing industry, and has affected publishers' marketing strategies and planning. This is especially true since the profits from the publishing industry are considerable.

Overseas librarians for Chinese collections now find it more challenging to select high quality Chinese research materials. This is due to the irregularities in current Chinese publishing practices: pirated and fabricated research materials, repeating or overlapping publishing, and publishers' misleading sale strategies, to name just three.

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\* This article is a revision of a talk originally presented at the annual meeting of the East Asian Academic Librarians of California, held Sept. 21, 2006, at the University of California Santa Cruz.

### **Pirated and fabricated research materials**

Popular best sellers and materials of general interest used to be the target of pirated editions. In recent years, pirates have also moved into limited distribution research materials and scholastic works targeted to specific audiences because of the growing demand for these resources and their relatively high price. Even those strictly protected “gray materials” can be the victims of piracy as well. One example is the newly published series of “*Xian dai xi jian shi liao shu xi*” (现代稀见史料书系/东方出版社, 2004). The works authored in this rare historical series are by eight politically controversial figures in Chinese modern history; some of the works have never been released to the public. This set was marked for limited distribution and for research only. Although the publisher requested designated book stores “not to publicize” (不公开), “not to shelf” (不上架), “not to advertise” (不宣传), pirated editions were still being sold publicly in other bookstores. The General Administration of Press and Publication has to issue an urgent confiscation notice to protect the publisher’s interest<sup>11</sup>.

Publication of the Chinese Communist Party or the Chinese government used to be regarded as the most authoritative materials, but surprisingly, even these cannot avoid duplication by pirates. In a recent counterattack in Beijing, 48 titles (over 10,000 volumes) of pirated editions were exposed and confiscated, including *Dang de shi liu jie wu zhong quan hui (jian yi) xue xi fu dao bai wen* (党的十六届五中全会(建议)学习辅导百问), *Zhong gong zhong yang guan yu zhi ding guo min jing ji he she hui fa zhan di shi yi ge wu nian gui hua de jian yi fu dao du ben* (中共中央关于制定国民经济和社会发展第十一个五年规划的建议辅导读本).<sup>12</sup>

Because of the considerable profits in reference works, this type of material is often the victim of pirating. It was reported that more than 3,000 sets of pirated editions of the 1991 edition *Cihai* (辞海, 上海辞书出版社) were confiscated in 2002 in Beijing, Hebei, Shandong, and Shanxi provinces.<sup>13</sup> The Commercial Press (商务印书馆)’s “*Xian dai han yu ci dian*” (现代汉语词典) had over 100 pirated editions being marketed.<sup>14</sup>

With the rapid spread of digital resources, more lawsuits and disputes about pirating e-resources have arisen. In 2001-2002, one such debate took place between two designers of online Chinese classic texts database: *Han ji quan wen jian suo xi tong* (汉籍全文检索系统) and *Guo xue bao dian* (国学宝典). Because of the complexity of these kinds of disputes, and the weakness of relevant legislation, no resolution has yet been achieved.<sup>15</sup>

The other conspicuous pirating phenomenon involves some conventional publishers and printers. In the aforementioned *Cihai* case, the 4 printers from Beijing, Hebei, Shanxi, Shandong are all licensed regular printers. Recently, Xi’an chu ban she (西安出版社) was also sued by Shangwu chu ban she (商务出版社) for copying the design of its award winning reference work “*Gu han yu chang yong zi zi dian*”(古汉语常用字字典); they were convicted by the Beijing Intermediate Court on June 1, 2006.<sup>16</sup>

In 2004 alone more than 85,050,000 pirated items were confiscated, of which nearly 1/4 (18,690,000 volumes) were books.<sup>17</sup> Considering the quantity, complexity, and influence, we can foresee the struggle with literary pirates in China will require a long-term commitment. On the other hand, in recent years there have been increasing efforts by the Chinese government to reinforce legislation and implementation.

In addition to pirated editions, fabricated (or forged) books also disarrange the Chinese publishing market. Book forgery has a long history in China, and verifying the authenticity of early works has long been a part of Chinese intellectual history. Representative scholastic works were Hu Yinglin (胡应麟 1551-1602)’s *Si bu zheng e* (四部正讹), Yao Jiheng (姚际恒 1647-1715)’s *Gu jin wei shu kao* (古今伪书考), Zhang Xincheng (张心澂)’s *Wei shu tong kao* (伪书通考), Liang Qichao (梁启超 1873-1929)’s *Gu shu zhen wei ji qi nian dai* (古书真伪及其年代), and Zheng Liangshue (郑良树 1940-)’s *Xu wei shu tong kao* (续伪书通考) etc. Most ancient fabricated books took advantage of the real author’s fame by adding to or bowdlerizing the original work

for personal or political reasons. These tactics can still be found in current fabrications. For example, the forged book, *Zheng shuo Yuan Ming Qing di wang* (正说元明清帝王) used the name of the famous scholar of Qing studies, Yan Chongnian(阎崇年).<sup>18</sup> Another title, *Shi jie wen ming shi* (世界文明史, 3 volumes, 学苑出版社, 1998), was criticized for plagiarizing similar works.<sup>19</sup>

Forgery methods are getting more complicated. The forger cannot only claim fake authorship, but also fabricate book reviews to advertise the product. One example is *Wang Shan* (王山), the real author of one best seller, *Di san zhi yan jing kan Zhongguo* (第三只眼睛看中国, 山西人民出版社, 1994). He hid his authorship by claiming to be the translator of an original work by a German author *Luoyiningge'er* (洛伊宁格尔) that never existed. In the Hong Kong and Taiwan editions, there were also fabricated book reviews claimed to be by Chinese leaders.<sup>20</sup>

With more western works being introduced into China and becoming best sellers, some publishers also claim their books are imported, or written by famous scholars. These books are now the most popular form of forgery. One example is the best seller on economic management *Zhi xing li* (执行力, 长安出版社 2003).<sup>21</sup> In January 2005 alone, more than 106 such fabricated books were found in one city of China, and about 20 publishers were involved.<sup>22</sup>

It is probably more confusing for both librarians and scholars that proven fakes or questionable works are still being reprinted today. An example is *Jingshan ri ji* (景善日记), the unreliability of which was addressed by Professor Hugh Trevor-Roper (1914-2003) of Oxford University in his book *A Hidden Life: The Enigma of Sir Edmund Backhouse*.<sup>23</sup> This diary was first published by *Shen zhou guo guang she* (神州国光社, 1950s), and it was again included in the recent series *Zhongguo jin dai shi zi liao cong kan* (中国近代史资料丛刊, 上海人民出版社, 2000, vol.1).

Sometimes more textual research is necessary to detect the authenticity of disputed works. When the published manuscript of the Italian Jew, Jacob D'Ancona (b. 1221), *The city of light* (translated and edited by David Selbourne) was introduced to Chinese scholars (Chinese version: 光明之城：一个犹太人在刺桐的见闻录. 上海：上海人民出版社, 2000), it triggered much debate. It was the travel notes of Jacob about his journey to China (especially the city in the south *Quanzhou*) in the late 13<sup>th</sup> century, just prior to Marco Polo. Based on textual studies and historical facts, many scholars reached the conclusion that the authentication of the source was questionable. At the very least some descriptions of the customs and social life of 13<sup>th</sup> century *Quanzhou* have proven unreliable.<sup>24</sup> Because of the scarcity and complexity of this type of material, it is rarely found in current Chinese publishing.

Unlike pirated editions, over 90% of the forged popular books had ISBN and CIP data on the verso of the title page, and were printed by regular publishers. 30 out of the approximately 570 Chinese publishers were involved in producing these books.<sup>25</sup> Because of the deceptiveness of forged books, they are likely to end up in libraries. It is reported that, among 32 Chinese academic libraries that were surveyed, 29 have found forged books in their collections.<sup>26</sup>

It is encouraging to see that corporations and individuals involved in book piracy or forgery are being brought to justice through the legal system. Several laws and regulations can be used to protect publishers or consumers' interest, such as "Copyright Law" (著作权法), "Advertisement Law" (广告法), and "Publishing Administration Regulations" (出版管理条例), etc.

### **Repeating and overlapping publishing**

Another prominent irregularity in current Chinese publishing is repeating or overlapping materials. Because of their lasting value and the public's sustained interest, reprinting classic works is one of the strategies that publishers often use to guarantee profits. This results in overproduction. For example, the

“four literary masterpieces” (四大名著) were reprinted more than once every year over the last decade. *The Dream of the Red Chamber* (红楼梦) alone had 53 editions.<sup>27</sup>

Another phenomenon is the ‘follow-up’ publication. Publishers tend to target topics that are of potential general interest. In recent years, there has been an increase in publications that reflect large changes in contemporary Chinese economic, political and social life. These publications are heavily duplicated because of the intense competition among publishers. One example is the frequent publication of works on Chinese rural problems (known as “*Sannong*” 三农 publications). About 3,000 titles of this type are published annually now.<sup>28</sup> Another incentive for follow-up publications is the involvement of public media in China. The televised popular drama or talk show on history or literature also results in best sellers, such as the series on the *Qing* emperors.

Compared to duplicated monographs, overlapping of large sets is more problematic and more challenging for librarians in terms of budget management. One example is the *Quan Song wen* (全宋文) set. In 2006, this 360 volume set was finally published by *Shanghai ci shu chu ban she* (上海辞书出版社) and *Anhui jiao yu chu ban she* (安徽教育出版社). For libraries that already owned 50 volumes of the unfinished 1988 edition (by *Sichuan University Press*), it is not an easy decision to buy the new edition. Another example is the two editions of collected *Dunhuang* scripts held by the National Library of China. One is *Dunhuang bao zang* (敦煌宝藏, 140 volumes, 台湾新文丰出版社, 1981-1986), the other is the new series *Guo jia tu shu guan cang Dunhuang yi shu* (国家图书馆藏敦煌遗书, 150 volumes as planned, 北京图书馆出版社, 2005-), there is much overlap in the core collection part of the two editions. It is even more confusing that *Jiangsu gu ji chu ban she* (江苏古籍出版社) also started this publication in 1999 but ended up with only 7 volumes.

### **Publishers’ misleading sale strategies**

In addition to pirated and fake books, overlapping publications, one more irregularity in current Chinese publishing has much to do with publishers’ misleading sale strategies. This is confusing to library acquisition staff, and likely to result in library duplicates.

Here are some examples of publishers’ sale strategies:

- Reprints, with title changes:

Luo Zhitian. *Zai zao wen ming zhi meng: Hu Shi zhuan*. Chengdu : Sichuan ren min chu ban she, 1995.

罗志田. 再造文明之梦: 胡适传. 成都: 四川人民出版社, 1995.

Luo Zhitian. *Zai zao wen ming de chang shi: Hu Shi zhuan*. Beijing : Zhonghua shu ju, 2006.

罗志田. 再造文明的尝试: 胡适传. 北京: 中华书局, 2006.

Wang Hongbin. *Zhang Zuolin he fen xi jun fa*. Zhengzhou shi : Henan ren min chu ban she, 1989.

王鸿宾. 张作霖和奉系军阀. 郑州市: 河南人民出版社, 1989.

Wang Hongbin. *Zhang zuolin yu feng xi jun fa*. Zhengzhou shi : Henan ren min chu ban she, 2006.

王鸿宾. 张作霖与奉系军阀. 郑州市: 河南人民出版社, 2006.

- One ISBN corresponds to several books

The 8 books below were all published by *Zhongguo wen shi chu ban she* (中国文史出版社) in 2006, with the same ISBN number—7503417714.

Chen Hui. “Xing yu tian tao”: Dai Dongyuan zhe xue yan jiu.

陈徽. “性与天道”: 戴东原哲学研究.

Luo Xiongfei. Yu Yue de jing xue yan jiu ji qi si xiang.

罗雄飞. 俞樾的经学研究及其思想.

Zhou Quanhua. Ru jia dao de zhe xue.

周全华. 儒家道德哲学

Qu Qunzhen. Qu hua qi yu feng xian tou zi rong he lun.

瞿群臻. 孵化器与风险投资融合论.

Xie Li. Hengshan lu you yan jiu.

谢莉. 衡山旅游研究.

Ke Shoukun. Ke chi xu fa zhan: yi ren wei ben de xing wei fen xi yu zhi du an pai.

葛守昆. 可持续发展: 以人为本的行为分析与制度安排.

Cai Zhiliang. Zhi ye lun li xin lun.

蔡志良. 职业伦理新论.

Liu Guihua. Gu dai ci xue li lun de jian gou.

刘贵华. 古代词学理论的建构.

- Same title, different author and publishers

Xu Guangyuan. Zheng shuo Qing chao shi er hou fei. Beijing : Zhonghua shu ju, 2005.

徐广源. 正说清朝十二后妃. 北京: 中华书局, 2005.

Li Jingping & Gu Min. Zheng shuo Qing chao shi er hou fei. Beijing : Nong cun du wu chu ban she, 2005.

李景屏, 谷敏. 正说清朝十二后妃. 北京: 农村读物出版社, 2005.

Boerjijite. Zhuolike et al. Zheng shuo Qing chao shi er hou fei. Beijing : Jin cheng chu ban she, 2005.

博尔济吉特·卓力克等. 正说清朝十二后妃. 北京: 金城出版社, 2005.

Zhang Kai. Zheng shuo Qing chao shi er hou fei. Beijing : Xin shi jie chu ban she, 2005.

章凯. 正说清朝十二后妃. 北京: 新世界出版社, 2005.

Xu Yan. Sulian chu bing Zhongguo dong bei ji shi. Xianggang : Xianggang tian di tu shu you xian gong si, 1993.

徐焰. 苏联出兵中国东北纪实. 香港: 香港天地图书有限公司, 1993.

Jin Dongji ed.& trans. Sulian chu bing Zhongguo dong bei ji shi. Chengdu shi : Sichuan ren min chu ban she, 2005.

金东吉编译. 苏联出兵中国东北纪实. 成都市: 四川人民出版社, 2005.

- Republishing monograph(s) in new series

Zhan Chengxu et al. Yongning Naxi zu de a zhu hun yin he mu xi jia ting. Shanghai : Shanghai ren min chu ban she, 1980.

詹承绪等. 永宁纳宁族的阿注婚姻和母系家庭. 上海: 上海人民出版社, 1980.

This title was included in the new series of "Shi ji ren wen xi lie cong shu" (世纪人文系列丛书), 上海人民出版社, 2006.

- Recompilation of previous publications

Gu dai zhuan ming wen hua kao zheng ji cheng (古代砖铭文化考证集成, 北京缩微中心, 2005) was based on Lu Xinyuan (陆心源)'s *Qian pi ting gu zhuan tu shi* (千甃亭古砖图释), also with addition of Li Xuanbo (李玄伯)'s *Han Jin shi qi zhen xi gu zhuan ta pian tu* (汉晋时期珍稀古砖拓片图).

Another newly published collected administrative law of five *Qing* Dynasties (大清五朝会典, 北京线装书局, 2006) is also an example of recompilation of 5 collections of administrative laws and civil service institutions from *Kangxi* to *Guangxu*. More than half of the sources in this set already existed.

- Inverted publishing

*Fangshan shi jing* (房山石经) is the print version of the well known Buddhist stone inscriptions in *Fangshan* County, Beijing. In 1986, the publisher *Zhongguo fo jiao tu shu wen wu guan* (中国佛教图书文物馆) published the *Liao Jin* part of the inscriptions (23 volumes) as planned, and later *Huaxia chu ban she* (华夏出版社) joined in the publication of the rest parts of *Ming*, *Sui*, *Tang* Dynasties. It was not until 1999-2000 that the whole set was finished.

- Irregular monographic sets

Because in China ISBN numbers are allocated to publishers proportionally to their size and number of editors, publishers tend to publish more books with limited ISBN numbers, which results in many irregular monographic sets, such as monographic serials without fixed frequency (such as publications bearing the words“集刊”, “丛刊”,“论丛” or “论集”), series that are published over many years with changed plan (such as “司马迁与华夏文化丛书”, 1995- ). Sometimes publishers deliberately separate one item into two parts to protect it from being pirated, such as *Yu Hua* 余华's *Brothers* 兄弟, v.1 published in 2005, v.2 published in 2006.

Some irregular continual monograph's publishing pattern is even harder to predict, such as *Zhongguo zhi du bian qian de an li yan jiu* 中国制度变迁的案例研究 (北京则天经济研究所编. No.1 published by *Shanghai ren min chu ban she*, No.2 published by *Zhongguo cai zheng jing ji chu ban she*). The recently appeared many types of “color books” (皮书) and reports are also very confusing to overseas librarians in terms of the scope, frequency and authority.

### Implications and summary

There are many factors that contribute to the irregularities in the Chinese publishing market: ISBN allocation system and the trade of ISBNs, the academic review system and intermingled scholastic publications, popularizing trends in scholastic publications, lack of standard book review institutions, etc. These problems are already well recognized by Chinese scholars.<sup>29</sup> The aforementioned examples may help overseas librarians become aware of the problems and challenges for library acquisition.

As overseas librarians for Chinese collections, it is important to see through the chaos and consider the implications for library collections.

1. We must read widely to acquire the knowledge and skills to detect pirated or forged books, and to prevent them from flowing to the library or to weed them out in time. For disputed or forged books, try to acquire sufficient background information to warn users to be cautious when using the resource.
2. We should become familiar with our library collections thoroughly, especially those important large sets of materials. For expensive new sets of resources, we should ask for more information than the “table of contents”, or detailed descriptions so as to check against existing library holdings. We should consult with faculty or specialists in relevant fields for in-depth investigations, when seeking to avoid duplication or overlap in library collections.
3. It is important to improve bibliographic control in pre-screen searches and ordering procedures so as to avoid possible duplication at the outset of acquisition. Select reliable vendors that provide accurate

and specific catalogs and strengthen communication with them. Try to set up files with vendors in order to trace irregular monograph publications. It is also important to keep updating knowledge and information on Chinese publishing and current research trends in Chinese studies. All this requires strategic planning for building up strong Chinese collections in the future.

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