How American Books Reach Readers Abroad

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Seldom has the essentiality of books in terms of the needs of individuals been more clearly expressed than by the demonstrated demand abroad for books from the United States. The area surveys which follow illuminate both the needs, in a broad sense, and the extraordinary and varied obstacles to the fulfillment of these needs, in the major geographical areas of the world outside Great Britain and the Commonwealth.

As the report of the Princeton Conference¹ emphasizes, the far from negligible cost of disseminating abroad the ideas and information contained in American books is borne by the consumers in the foreign countries concerned:

"When to the wholesale prices paid directly to American exporters are added transportation charges, the costs of editions produced abroad, and the internal costs of distribution through libraries and the book trade," the report states, "we shall not be very far wrong if we estimate the total foreign expenditure incurred for disseminating the content of American books among their peoples at nearly $100,000,000 a year. Slightly less than half this sum must be paid in dollars, and much of it is paid by countries of Asia and the Near East whose dollar credits are reserved for essentials."

It was the sense of the conference that the reasons for this swiftly increasing expenditure on American books—an amount exceeding the annual total appropriations in recent years for the United States Information Agency for all media—had their roots deep in the burgeoning national demands in Asia, especially in the former colonial areas, for complete independence and for mastery of the industrial skills of the West. In Western Europe and Latin America, the use of American books of technology and scholarship has also increased as a result of

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the economic and technical prestige of the United States manifested during the second World War.

The reports that follow refer to specific governmental and private book programs that affect the distribution and use of American books in the areas concerned. Summarizing these major efforts will, perhaps, serve to bring their specific application into focus.

In Continental Europe and Scandinavia, and in Latin America, the economic barrier of import restrictions is gradually easing, as the following studies will show, but the price factor remains a major impediment, particularly in the "open markets" where American editions of trade books must compete with British editions at prices often fifty per cent lower.

The major impediments, insofar as American books in the Near and Far East are concerned, are: (1) the almost universal shortage of dollar credits that obliges other governments to impose import quota restrictions on book importers in order to conserve their dollar reserves and earnings for more immediate necessities; (2) the high price of American books when translated into foreign currencies, at rates of exchange that tend to appreciate the value of the dollar, and reflecting the transportation and handling costs and duties; (3) the long-standing trade arrangements reserving to British publishers the rights to most American trade books in the British Commonwealth, except Canada, which have the effect of barring from strategic areas (India, Pakistan, Burma, and Ceylon, for instance) inexpensive reprints of American books for which no corresponding British edition exists; (4) the absence of international copyright protection in some areas of the Middle East and Asia; (5) illiteracy and the fact that English comprehension, while increasing, is in many countries a facility of a minority of the population; (6) the scarcity of books suitable for local utilization, without special adaptation, in many Near and Far Eastern countries; and (7) inadequate retail trade outlets and public library facilities in these countries.

Large-scale foreign trade in American books through ordinary commercial channels is of relatively recent origin. In the nineteenth century the United States was a book importing nation; between the first and second world wars the U.S. exported and imported books at the rate of about $5 million a year. Since 1945 U.S. exports have trebled, from at least $12.5 million to some $40 million in 1954. While British publishers export more than thirty per cent of their total turnover, the average of U.S. production exported is around seven per cent, although some individual text, technical, scientific, and medical book
publishers and university presses ship out as much as thirty per cent
of their output.

Several of the largest and most diversified publishing firms operate
export divisions with resident or traveling sales representatives, over-
seas branches and/or exclusive sales agencies abroad, serving whole-
sale import distributors, retailers, and institutions directly. The majority
of trade publishers are represented in Europe by one of the European
book sales organizations and throughout the rest of the world by others.
At least one export agency is equipped to provide world-wide coverage.
Several book wholesalers in the United States fill unsolicited orders
received from booksellers, libraries, and educational institutions
abroad, and another has set up an export depository plan. In most
countries channels of book distribution are similar to those in the
United States, except that the foreign bookseller seldom has an oppor-
tunity to see an American book before he buys it, and once bought it
is not returnable. But in other countries the American exporter must
deal with highly inadequate methods of distribution and face unusual
credit problems.

At the same time the absence of a productive and integrated book
industry in these less developed countries means a wider demand for
imported books of all kinds and offers the American publisher, es-
pecially the textbook publisher, an opportunity to assist in the develop-
ment of that country by producing elementary and secondary texts
and essential reference works, in the local language. The export of
college level textbooks has increased as the incidence of adoption of
English as the second language has risen. This has not been as true
of elementary and secondary texts, and for many reasons, straight
translations of them do not fulfill local educational requirements as
well as texts specially created or modified. Collaboration between
American textbook publishers and ministries of education has de-
veloped significantly in the post-war years; such programs have been
undertaken in the Philippines, Japan, Pakistan, Thailand, Ethiopia,
and Latin America.

The sale of translation rights, commonly reserved by the author or
his agent, is complex and subject to many of the same economic
barriers as affect the export of original editions, with some countries
prohibiting the use of dollar exchange for the payment of advances
and royalties. Many works of an advanced technical or reference
nature defy translation, and the value of the property may be such
that U.S. publishers feel obligated to set a high price for the rights.
Commercial sales of translation and publication rights in the major
languages proceed at a generally satisfactory rate and there are several public and private programs in operation designed to expedite or increase the publication of American works in foreign languages not usually covered in private commercial negotiations among publishers. The mutual ignorance, in the main, of American publishers about the capabilities of foreign publishers and the potentialities of foreign markets for American works in translation, and of foreign publishers about how to find good American books and contract for them, is a major impediment to increased commerce in this area.

Bibliographic and other information of assistance to the overseas importer of American books or to the foreign publisher interested in the acquisition of rights reside in a variety of publications and services. In addition to individual publishers' catalogs and export trade promotion materials, the commercial or institutional buyer abroad can refer to: the *Trade List Annual* and its index, *Books in Print*, published by the R. R. Bowker Company; H. W. Wilson's *Cumulative Book Index; Scientific, Medical, and Technical Books*, a comprehensive bibliography edited by R. R. Hawkins for a joint committee of publishers and a bibliographical committee of the National Research Council; and to *Publishers' Weekly*, the trade journal, and, until June, 1956, to *United States Quarterly Book Review*, issued under the supervision of the Library of Congress. Only those importers and institutions with substantial resources can afford the expensive reference tools, and *Publishers' Weekly* has not yet achieved its optimum foreign circulation, partly because it is by necessity tailored to the requirements of the domestic book trade, partly because of its $10 foreign subscription rate. A special overseas edition of *Publishers' Weekly, U. S. A. Book News*, was published in 1945-46 in conjunction with the United States International Book Association. *Publishers' Weekly* has been making a special effort to make the announcement issues serve as effective export promotion and reference numbers. Agents and foreign publishers have indicated the need for a periodical containing current information as to the availability and residence of translation rights. Publication of the export periodical recommended at the Princeton Conference is in progress.

Following World War II, when the United States actively entered the field of overseas information, programs were lodged within the Department of State and conducted on a relatively modest scale until 1948. The Fulbright Act of 1946 financed the exchange of students and teachers, and the Smith-Mundt Act of 1948 (Public Law 402, 80th Congress) assigned permanent legislative authority for the infor-
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formation program to the Department of State, to be conducted with this objective: "To promote a better understanding of the United States in other countries and to increase mutual understanding between the people of the United States and other countries." The scope of this activity was enlarged in 1950 by President Truman, who added the "Campaign of Truth" concept to the "full and fair" picture of the United States that the Fulbright and Smith-Mundt Acts implemented. The "Campaign of Truth" was supported by a $121 million appropriation, the largest to date, most of which was for "Voice of America" equipment. On August 1, 1953, by Executive Order, all overseas informational activities except the educational exchange programs were separated from the Department of State and consolidated in the United States Information Agency, whose basic mission, President Eisenhower declared, is "to submit evidence to peoples of other nations by means of communication techniques that the objectives and policies of the United States are in harmony with and will advance their legitimate aspirations for freedom, progress and peace." The fundamental directive developed by the National Security Council to achieve this objective includes: (1) "explaining and interpreting to foreign peoples the objectives and policies of the United States Government; (2) depicting imaginatively the correlation between U.S. policies and the legitimate aspirations of other peoples of the world; (3) unmasking and countering hostile attempts to distort or to frustrate the objectives and policies of the United States; (4) delineating those important aspects of the life and culture of the people of the United States which facilitate understanding of the policies and objectives of the government of the United States." 2 USIA has requested a budget of $135 million for fiscal 1957; in April, 1956, the House Appropriations Subcommittee recommended this be cut to $110 million, $22 million more than the 1956 fiscal appropriation.

The Information Center Service of the USIA operates the overseas book and library programs, as distinct from the press, film and radio divisions and programs. In brief, there are 160 information center libraries in the capitals and principal cities of sixty-seven countries. Book collections total about 2.6 million volumes, with yearly circulations of more than 11,000,000. The libraries are used by some 46,000,000 people annually. ICS also contributes to the support of about thirty-four bi-national cultural institutes in Latin America and the Near and Far East; presents about 1,000,000 books and periodicals a year to institutions and individuals abroad; fosters the translation and publication of about 700 American books a year in forty-four different...
languages in 3,000,000 copies; and administers the Informational Media Guaranty Program.

The selection and maintenance of publications in the overseas library collections and the selection of materials for other program uses, is based on specific criteria. Materials are selected with reference to the following primary purposes:

“(1) Providing useful information about the United States, its people, culture, institutions, policies, problems, achievements, and diverse views on national and international issues, including materials suitable to counteract hostile propaganda campaigns directed against the United States; (2) Demonstrating the interest of the United States in other nations, including provision of needed scientific and technical information; or (3) Furnishing evidence of the American intellectual, artistic and spiritual heritage, and combatting the charge that our people are lacking in cultural background and tradition.”

No materials are selected “which, as judged by their content, advocate destruction of free institutions, promote or reinforce communist propaganda, or are of inferior literary quality, as evidenced by salacious, pornographic, sensational, cheap or shoddy treatment, or matter inherently offensive.”

The July 15, 1953, directive establishing these criteria also provides that “works of avowed communists, persons convicted of crimes involving a threat to the security of the United States, or persons who publicly refuse to answer questions of Congressional committees regarding their connections with the communist movement, shall not be used, even if their content is unobjectionable, unless it is determined that a particular item is clearly useful for the special purposes of the program. Application of this rule to authors who refuse to testify does not mean that they are presumed to be communists or communist sympathizers but simply reflects the fact that such action by an author normally gives him a public reputation which raises serious questions as to the usefulness of his books in the program.” Certain measures of a security nature have been adopted to insure application of this provision.

Books selected in Washington and sent to most information centers include those either exposing communism or asserting the democratic doctrine. Lists of other books of an informational nature are approved in Washington and circulated to librarians overseas for ordering.

Information centers overseas also receive about 100,000 government publications annually dealing with anti-communism, atomic energy,
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and copies of special reports by the President and certain commissions.

In addition to the presentation of special editions of certain books to individual "opinion makers" abroad and of collections to institutions, ICS supplies missions in India and elsewhere in Southeast Asia with "Expendable Libraries," self-contained units of 100 paper-bound books which are set up for the use of readers in libraries, reading rooms, colleges, YMCA's and hostels. More than 3,500 of these sets are now in use.

The publications branch of ICS is also working with publishers in support of a low-cost export edition program. ICS arranges with U.S. publishers for the production and purchase of paper-bound export editions of ICS-approved titles for sale abroad through normal trade channels.

Administration of the India Wheat (Public Law 48, 82nd Congress) and the Finnish War Debt (Public Law 265, 81st Congress) Programs has also been assigned to the presentations branch of ICS. Under the first, institutions of higher education in India can purchase American technical, scientific, and scholarly books at the rate of an estimated $475,000 a year for five years. A fund of approximately $60,000 a year is available for similar purchases by Finnish institutions. With ICS retaining approval-control over the publications selected, procurement, shipment and delivery of the books are administered by CARE.

Under the book translation program, ICS acquires foreign language, condensation and serialization rights from proprietors in the United States (often for a token sum) and makes arrangements with local publishers for publication, agreeing to purchase copies of the translated edition for information center library and presentation use. Recently, the "Expendable library" project has been adapted to include translated titles produced under this program: sets of twenty-six books in Chinese originating in Hong Kong and Taipei are being distributed by posts in Southeast Asian Chinese communities.

ICS also prepares and circulates exhibits of books, art, and special displays dealing with the President's proposal for the peaceful utilization of atomic power, important American anniversaries and holidays, etc.

The Informational Media Guaranty Program, originally authorized under the Economic Cooperation Act of 1948, has been transferred to the USIA. This program has been the chief instrumentality for overcoming the economic barriers to the importation of American books in countries with severe dollar reserve and credit shortages. With an IMG contract the U.S. publisher-investor is able to convert into dollars
the foreign currencies earned by the sale of his books. Operations rest on agreements negotiated through the Department of State with foreign governments. Applications for contracts must be approved by both governments before contracts are issued, thus insuring that the books, periodicals and films shipped abroad will be both "consistent with the national interests of the United States" and acceptable to the foreign government.

The IMG guarantee does not cover conversion of currency received for: "(a) materials advocating or supporting an unlawful purpose; (b) materials prepared or distributed in order to convey, disseminate or reinforce communist propaganda; (c) materials of salacious or pornographic intent, although the inclusion of questionable language, episodes or scenes in a work of bona fide literary or artistic intent shall not automatically be construed to bring it within this category; (d) materials devoted to the sensational exploitation as opposed to the factual reporting of crime, vice or similar conditions; (e) any other materials of so cheap, shoddy, or sensational a character as to bring discredit upon the United States in the eyes of other nations."

More than $6 million in foreign currencies have been converted annually for investors under this program.

The program is currently in effect in Austria, Chile, Formosa, France, Indonesia, Israel, Norway, Pakistan, the Philippines, Turkey, Vietnam, and Yugoslavia. Under the Mutual Security Act of 1953, the United States can conclude an IMG agreement with any country in the world. Some countries have been reluctant to accept the IMG program because it might mean a net loss of dollar income owing to the fact that the local currencies purchased by the U.S. Treasury from contractors are in turn utilized to defray the local expenses of U.S. Missions. This obstacle can be overcome if USIA can secure authorization to earmark the local currency for expenditures on educational and cultural programs, for which Congressional appropriations are provided. The USIA and Department of State are reluctant to negotiate an IMG agreement with a country where the differential between the official rate of exchange at which currency conversions are effected and the open market rate at which the U.S. Mission is able to acquire local currency is so great as to result in a substantial loss to the U.S. Government, and therefore to the U.S. taxpayers, that cannot be justified by strategic considerations such as those surrounding the conclusion of an agreement with Israel. (Drastic measures had to be taken to supplant Russian books with American books, the importation of which was virtually barred by virtue of a critical dollar shortage.) Similarly,
book publishers in the U.S. prefer not to have the program extended to countries unless it means a significant net gain in over-all book imports from the United States; an agreement that in effect freezes imports at the prevailing level, or one that results in the reduction of import quotas by the amount imported under IMG, are not favored.

The selection and procurement in conjunction with such other federal agencies as the Office of Technical Services of the Department of Commerce and the Department of Agriculture of books required in mutual aid projects overseas and by technical study groups and individual trainees brought to the United States are carried out by the International Cooperation Administration. Books are also procured for the agricultural, engineering, public health, public administration, and other educational projects being conducted in conjunction with institutions overseas by U.S. institutions of higher education presently receiving grants from the ICA. The ICA has also made a grant to the United States Book Exchange to enable libraries in countries where technical aid programs are in effect to obtain exchange items from the USBE.

The Division of International Education of the Department of Health, Education and Welfare maintains an Educational Materials Laboratory in Washington with a stock of several thousand textbooks contributed by publishers for the use of trainees and study teams from abroad.

A non-profit membership corporation governed by a board of directors composed both of publishers and public-interest representatives, Franklin Publications works in association with universities, foundations, government agencies, research institutes, and other cultural groups in this country on a program designed to increase publication and distribution abroad by assisting publishers in other countries in bringing out translations of American books selected or developed to meet specific local needs. It has offices in Cairo, Teheran, Lahore, Dacca and Djakarta, and publishes in collaboration with local publishers books in Arabic, Turkish, Persian, Urdu, Bengali and Indonesian. Franklin has sponsored the publication of about 100 titles, and has 300 in process.

Efforts by foundations and other private, voluntary agencies to increase the availability of American books abroad have in general been limited to filling war-bred gaps, replacing devastated library collections, and supporting the development of schools of library science. Foundations have not, in general, undertaken long-range book use programs, with the exception of the Asia Foundation, whose operations
are described in considerable detail in the relevant area studies. The Ford Foundation, in addition to making a grant for the establishment of a library school at the University of Ankara, has, through its East European Fund, supported until this year the work of the Chekhov Publishing House, which has produced and exported Russian-language works by contemporary émigré authors, new editions of Russian works banned in the U.S.S.R., and translations into Russian of important books of American authorship. Ford has also supported the publication in several languages of the quarterly review Perspectives U.S.A. by Intercultural Publications; and has made a $500,000 grant to support the establishment of the South India Book Trust. The Carnegie Corporation is making presentations of special "American shelf" collections to small libraries in the British colonies and the Commonwealth. Rockefeller Foundation grants have been made chiefly in the library services field, notably in support of the United States Book Exchange.

In addition to the procurement of books for institutions in Finland and India, CARE, a non-profit organization composed of twenty-six American member agencies, and supported by voluntary public contributions, operates three book programs. More than 1,750 institutions in forty-six countries have since the war received deliveries of books through CARE. New technical and scientific books are supplied to universities, medical schools, and research centers abroad. CARE also supplies English language instruction packages designed primarily for high school and university students and teachers abroad, containing fifteen books, and pamphlets, including a dictionary and books of instruction as well as readers. It may be obtained by individuals as well as schools and libraries. The third CARE program involves the distribution of children's picture books for younger children and sets of story books for older boys and girls learning English as a second language. CARE is stressing now its "American Bookshelf," paper-bound book presentation program.

Among other private programs, supported by voluntary contribution, are the American Library in Paris; the English-Speaking Union's "Books Across the Sea" program; the "Darien Book Aid Plan," which sends books abroad, obtained from publishers and with contributed funds and some assistance from the USIA; "Books for Freedom," the project sponsored by the National Conference of Christians and Jews
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to send books to the library of the Free University in Berlin; and a campaign announced by the Catholic Students Mission Crusade to have each of its 3,100 affiliated schools purchase selected paper-bound books for circulation by lending libraries and mission centers in Asia and Africa.

For a little more than a century, libraries abroad have been aided in their acquisitions of materials from the United States by the Library of Congress, through a constantly expanding system of inter-governmental agreements and improved exchange techniques. This pattern of inter-library exchange on an international plane has, of course, been essential to the collections of foreign documents assembled by the Library of Congress. The system has evolved to the extent that the Printing Office at the request of the Library of Congress supplies the International Exchange Service of the Smithsonian Institution in Washington with 104 copies of every public document. The Smithsonian sorts these and ships them to libraries abroad. Libraries in forty-two countries, not requiring full sets of government documents, receive only partial collections. The remaining sixty-two receive full sets. Requests for missing issues and extra copies are received by the Exchange and Gifts Division of the Library of Congress, and are filled and shipped in the next regular lot by the Smithsonian. Receipts under this program of reciprocal exchange of government publications come to the Library of Congress either through the International Exchange Service of the Smithsonian or by direct mail.

More than 500 libraries in the United States and abroad cooperate in the United States Book Exchange, a largely self-sustaining, cooperative clearinghouse for the domestic and international exchange of publications established in 1948 and sponsored by leading national learned societies and library organizations in the United States. Member institutions may send in for exchange credit any publications in research fields; monographs in science and technology published during the last ten years, or those in the humanities and arts published in the last fifteen years, as well as recognized older classics. Publications of any date are acceptable. Members here and abroad may send in lists of available publications for USBE to check, but unsorted shipments are accepted and exchange credit assigned. Members receive unit credit according to the number of books, periodicals, etc., which are sent in, one non-monetary unit being assigned per item. All libraries pay shipping charges on publications sent to USBE; only U.S. and Canadian libraries also pay shipping charges on materials received from USBE.

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USBE sorts, shelves, and lists publications it receives and sends foreign members lists of available U.S. publications arranged in general subject categories. All member libraries pay a handling fee for each item received, from ten cents in the U.S. to fifty cents for foreign libraries. USBE also handles a gift program for foreign libraries, under which, in 1953, almost 85,000 items were either sent in bulk by USBE or negotiated for and partially handled by USBE. Currently, the foreign program is being rapidly expanded in conjunction with foundation-supported projects and the ICA grant involving exchanges rather than gifts. USBE now has available for exchange more than two and a half million items, the majority of which are professional journals and scientific, technical, and medical periodicals.

On the basis of the facts set forth in the area reports, the discussions and conclusions of the round-tables, Douglas W. Bryant, who served as general rapporteur of the conference, saw two primary reasons for the desirability of increasing the flow of American books throughout the world. One was the need to correct the distorted image of Communist propaganda by projecting as clear a picture as possible of the United States in the actuality of its life and thought. The other, and—in Bryant’s words—the “ultimately much more important one,” is the “humane interest in broadening the scope of men’s lives throughout the world.”

References