

Marketing Japan's Literature in its 1930s Colonies

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Introduction: Bandô Kyôgo in Seoul

In the early summer of 1933, a Japanese businessman named Bandô Kyôgo spent three days selling books in Seoul, Korea.¹ Bookselling in the Japanese colony was new to Bandô, who was on only his second trip to the mainland. According to Bandô's personal account of the event, less than two years earlier in September 1931, he had been in Tokyo selling remaindered books when representatives of the South Manchuria Railway Company approached him. The South Manchuria Railway Company was the semi-official organisation that developed and administered the major rail lines that reached from Port Arthur, in the Guandong-leased territory, to Changchun, nearly 500 miles to the north. The company was central to Japan's imperial effort: in addition to providing the means for developing the colonies economically, the lines became the medium by which Japan extended its imperial reach into the continent.²

The representatives who approached Bandô asked him if he would be willing to take his books—including discounted copies of the famous *enpon* (one-yen books) that had years earlier revolutionised the book publishing industry within Japan—into Manchuria.³ As the representatives pointed out, there were some 200,000 Japanese employed in conjunction with the company, all of who would leap at the chance to buy the heavily discounted books. In fact, the South Manchuria Railway Company offered to cover all of Bandô's shipping expenses. Bandô leapt at the opportunity, founding the Imperial Book Dissemination Association (Teikoku Tosho Fukyû-kai). On his return from this first successful foray to Dalian in late 1931, he decided to stop in Seoul and attempt to sell books there as well. The success of that trip, and a subsequent trip to Taiwan, prompted Bandô to set off on a second, longer sales excursion on the continent, loading a boxcar with remaindered books and moving along the main rail line through Korea. Beginning in Pusan, Bandô stopped in Taegu before he reached Seoul.

In Seoul, however, he ran into some trouble. He could not find anyone willing to rent him an appropriate space for the three days the sale would take. Fortunately, he remembered Umezu Kanbei. Umezu was the head of the eastern (Kantô) branch of the Greater Japan National Essence Society (Dai Nihon Kokusui-kai),

an ultra-nationalist organisation founded in 1919 and exploited by the Seiyûkai political party to confront a growing Socialist movement within Japan. The Society, whose membership included a large number of petty criminals, quickly became the party's muscle, breaking up strikes and intimidating opponents. Umezu was also the boss of a nationwide crime ring.⁴

It is not clear what Umezu's relationship with Bandô was; Bandô refers to him as a "supporter" of his efforts to take books overseas. Bandô had originally been a "boss" of book peddlers active in temple fairs throughout Tokyo; it is very likely that he would have been subordinate to the crime figures that ran most commercial ventures at such fairs. Bandô's accounts of his career, in fact, are filled with references to organised crime in Japan: one example is his company's involvement with the flight of Yamada Haruo from a governmental round-up of crime figures that occurred in the spring of 1934. Whatever the nature of his contacts in the Japanese underworld, we do know that through Umezu, Bandô was able to make contact with the head of the Korea branch of the Greater Japan National Essence Society, Wakejima Shûjirô.

Wakejima, aside from being the head of this right-wing association in Seoul and a movie producer, was also most likely an organised crime boss in the city. This helps to explain the subtext in a request such as the one Bandô made upon his arrival in Seoul: "The Railway employees and many others here love to read; I have gone to great lengths to bring them books. There's no point in trying to work with Seoul booksellers. Could you lend me your wisdom and your strength?"⁵ Through Wakejima's efforts, Bandô was able to use an open lot in the centre of the city, behind the Mitsukoshi department store. The centrally located lot had traditionally been used as the site of sumo matches when the wrestlers came to the city. The lot, in fact, was owned by the Government-General of Korea, which loaned it to Bandô free of charge. Signs were made, advertisements were inserted in the *Keijô nippô* Japanese-language newspaper, and—most interestingly of all—300 children were enlisted by Wakejima to march through the city with banners.

Bandô soon encountered new troubles, however: no one was willing to insure his tents filled with books against fire. This is no surprise, given both the specific animosity his competitors must have felt and also any general resentment non-Japanese residents may have felt toward this celebration of imperial culture. Again, Bandô turned to Wakejima. Instead of insuring him, however, Wakejima suggested that they set up two "fire watch stands": one at the front, and one at the back. Instead of buckets of water, around each stand were placed twenty lanterns bearing the name "Wakejima" and a group of youths—armed with steel bars—were employed to guard the site. Though youths with steel bars might be less successful warding off accidental fires than youths armed with water, the sale

went off (not surprisingly) without any conflagration. Perhaps in another display of the effectiveness of the Wakejima name, many local bookstores closed during Bandô's stay in Seoul.

Bandô's success was extraordinary; as with earlier stops in Korea, sales far exceeded his expectations. Although the majority of books sold by Bandô were the inexpensive one-yen editions—apparently the *Complete Works of Contemporary Popular Fiction* (*Gendai taishû bungaku zenshû*) was the star attraction of the sale—the single best selling book was Nakayama Kyûshirô's *New Chinese-Japanese (Chinese Character) Dictionary* (*Shinshiki Kan'wa jiten*, 1930), which had a list price of around three yen, but which Bandô sold for thirty-two sen (90 percent off the original price). Though the consumers originally targeted by the sale were the Japanese employees throughout the colonies, it is likely that the radically reduced prices attracted an even broader readership; this might explain some of the demand for a dictionary.

Background: Developments in Domestic Japanese Reading

In the same way that the South Manchuria Railway Company unexpectedly brought Bandô to Seoul, Bandô unexpectedly brought me to the Japanese colonies as well. One of the main subjects of my research—in which I have examined mechanisms of cultural authority in the context of the commercialisation of the literary marketplace in Japan—was the one-yen books Bandô took to Seoul.⁶ The creation of these *enpon*, I discovered, marked not only the beginning of the mass production of books in Japan (following newspapers in the 1880s and magazines from the turn of the century) but also, I argue, the establishment of both a canon of modern Japanese literature and the concept of that canon as part of the basis of a national culture.⁷

The so-called one-yen book boom began in 1926 with the publication of a thirty-seven-volume *Complete Works of Contemporary Japanese Literature*.⁸ Even by today's standards, the sales figures for this series were startling. At the time, most of the works contained in the series, had they been published independently in book form, would have sold perhaps from 500 to 2,000 copies, with the most popular titles selling ten thousand.⁹ In the first decades of the century, a handful of runaway bestsellers sold as many as 100,000 copies. Given these figures it is understandable, then, why the industry was shocked when the series attracted 230,000 subscribers by its first deadline and half a million subscribers when the series was expanded to sixty-three volumes. The success of this series led to "one-yen book wars," during which some 200 different collected works of all kinds were published, monopolising the industry from 1927 to 1932.

One of the major attractions of the one-yen book was its price: the contents of a single volume, had the works been published separately, might have been priced four or five times higher. Thus, books, which had been affordable only to the urban upper classes and to provincial landowners, suddenly came within the reach of urban, salaried workers. This expansion of the retail market for books is the focus of most histories of the phenomenon. I, however, have been interested in a subsidiary industry that arose as a result of this boom, when the urban marketplace became saturated with these inexpensive volumes: the remaindered book market. Many of the volumes produced during the boom quickly found their way back into circulation: not only were books resold to used bookstores by their original retail purchasers, the unprecedented scale of these publishing ventures produced two new categories of books, returns (*benpin*) and remainders (*zanpon*).¹⁰

Bandô Kyôgo was one of the forerunners of this new approach to book sales.¹¹ While used book salesmen existed in Japan well before this time, books had never been produced in such quantity as to warrant remaindering; in fact, in the early years of book and magazine mass production, remainders were pulped in the belief that there was no market for them. Bandô realized, however, that other strata of potential reader-consumers existed in Japan. When Bandô began selling the already relatively inexpensive one-yen books for 10–15 sen (10–15 percent of their original price), he made them available to a much wider segment of the domestic population than has previously been recognised. At one yen, a book remained out of reach even to middle-class urban homes, whose monthly incomes were commonly in the range of sixty to eighty yen; a single book would have cost 1.5–2 percent of their total income. As it was, statistics show that most middle-class families spent less than three yen per month on printed matter, usually choosing to subscribe to newspapers or buy magazines.¹²

Mandatory education in Japan had long since begun to pay off: though exact statistics are debated, the fact that Japan had widespread literacy in the 1920s is not in dispute.¹³ People wanted to read; in many cases they had access to fiction through newspapers, magazines, and borrowed books.¹⁴ They also wanted to own books, however, for their value as symbols of education and cultivation. In the last years of the 1920s, then, Bandô began selling the excess one-yen book production that the urban, salaried market could not absorb to *new* markets: lower- and middle-class salaried workers, urban wage labourers, and provincial readers. By making massive quantities of the same books available to communities throughout Japan, Bandô contributed to the unification of the nation's literary culture. It was at this moment, I contend, that books like the *Complete Works of Contemporary Japanese Literature* became "mass" cultural products: available to nearly everyone in Japan, and thus allowing modern Japanese literature to become a shared

culture comprising part of the foundation for a national identity.¹⁵ At this moment modern literature joined other cultural mechanisms—the Imperial Rescript on Education and the growing newspaper industry, to name two—in a process of interpellation (to use a dated term) that worked to create a modern national citizenry.¹⁶

Part of the Imperial Project

On that day in September 1931, however, when the two representatives of the South Manchuria Railway Company approached Bandô, modern literature began to perform a similar but larger function: now this shared print culture (and the language in which it was written) interpellated readers not into the modern nation of Japan, but into the modern *empire* of Japan. After traveling to Seoul, Bandô continued on, visiting P'yongyang, Sinuiju, and Andong; there his team split into two parties, some of his men going to Inch'on, while he went directly to Mukden (Shenyang). From there he went to Taiwan, Qingdao, Shanghai, and Changchun (then capital of Manchukuo). In his attempt to tap all potential markets for his books, Bandô travelled the length and width of the Japanese empire as it existed in the early 1930s. That potential market, he found, was larger than he had imagined.

The *Collected Works of Contemporary Japanese Literature* had been tailored to be accessible to as large an audience as possible, without compromising the quality of the works it included. To that end, it incorporated a printing convention that was uncommon for the so-called high literature it contained, but was very common for newspapers and other publications that hoped to reach a broad audience: namely, the inclusion of pronunciation glosses for every Chinese character in the text.¹⁷ By adding a syllabic gloss to the Chinese characters the text became comprehensible to a much larger group of readers. The adoption of this convention substantially reduced the literacy barrier for comprehension of the texts.

At the same time, the price of the remaindered volumes—as low as 10 sen for an originally one-yen book—radically reduced the economic barrier, making them available to a broader domestic and colonial readership. The demand for the books is also attested to in a marketing campaign by the publisher of the *Complete Works of Contemporary Japanese Literature*, Kaizô-sha, in May 1932. For a brief time—a matter of weeks—Kaizô-sha ran an enormous sales campaign in Korea, slashing the prices of all its books in half. As newspaper articles heralding the event explained, over 100,000 volumes had been distributed to sixty stores throughout Korea.¹⁸ The demand for books in Japanese was extremely high in many economic strata, and it is likely that the consumers were not solely Japanese employees of the Railway Company.

A cornerstone of Japanese colonial policy was Japanese-language education. Korea, for example, had become a Japanese protectorate in 1905; it became an official colony in 1910. According to the Education Law of Korea (*Chosen Kyôiku-rei*), promulgated in August 1911, Japanese became the primary language of Korean schools. Similar policies had been enacted in the other major colonies of Taiwan and Manchuria. Thus by 1931, when Bandô arrived in Seoul, all Koreans under the age of twenty-five had experienced formal schooling in the Japanese language; many over the age of twenty-five had received some schooling in Japanese as well. These readers, while not part of Bandô's initial target audience, were also part of the potential market Bandô's inexpensive books tapped. Though a politically sensitive issue today, learning the language of the colonial rulers provided many political and economic benefits—many people must have seen it as necessary (if not desirable) to participate in the process of cultural assimilation I argue these books performed.

The books that Bandô brought to Seoul, then, would have been attractive to more than just the Japanese workers affiliated with the South Manchuria Railway.¹⁹ As a result, the same publishing phenomenon that helped produce a unified literary culture within Japan contained the potential to initiate a unified literary culture within its colonies.²⁰ Be that as it may, just as the flood of inexpensive books had implicitly absorbed new strata of readers into the imagined community of the modern Japanese nation, that same flood was now (perhaps explicitly) absorbing (and perhaps helping willing actors be absorbed) into the imagined (and real) community of the modern Japanese empire.

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End notes

[The use of circumflexes, rather than the linguistically correct macron, over the letters "o" and "u" in this article is a typographical anomaly. As with the historic Caslon metal types, Adobe Caslon does not have macrons in its font set. The replacement of these letters with their macronised equivalent in Times New Roman was too much of an aesthetic compromise. - ed.]

¹ Bandô Kyôgo (born 1 June 1893 in Niigata Prefecture; died 16 January 1973) migrated with his family to Hokkaidô soon after his birth. When his father died, his mother moved to Tokyo, where Kyôgo was adopted into a family that operated the paper pulp company Ueda-ya. "Bandô Kyôgo" entry in Shimonaka Kunihiko, ed., *Nihon jinmei daijiten: gendai* (Tokyo: Heibonsha, 1979), 641. Information on his trips to the colonies comes primarily from the following firsthand accounts: Bandô Kyôgo, "Kazumono-ya no rekishi to genzai shuppan-kai ni suite: zoku," *Nihon kosho tsûshin* 19 (November 1934): 1-2; and Bandô Kyôgo, "Sansatsu de jû sen! Ponpon jôki no naka de hon o uru," in Munetaka Asako and Ozaki Hotsuki, eds., *Nihon no shoten hyakunen* (Tokyo: Seieisha, 1991), 489-510. Further information can be found in Yagi Toshio, (ed.), *Zenkoku shuppanbutsu*

orosshi shōgyō kyōdō kumiai sanjūnen no ayumi, (Tokyo: Zenkoku Shuppanbutsu Orosshi Shōgyō Kyōdō Kumiai, 1981); and within the “Bandō Kyōgo” entry above and the “Bandō Kyōgo” entry in Suzuki Tetsuzō, *Shuppanjinbutsujiten: Meiji-Heisei bukko shuppanjin*, (Tokyo: Shuppan Nyūshusha, 1996), 249. Although Bandō’s article of 1934 states explicitly that these events took place in May 1932, the account in *Nihon no shoten* suggests that this trip happened earlier, perhaps even at the close of 1931; the date above comes from Yagi.

² Founded in 1906, the South Manchuria Railway Company (Mantetsu) operated until 1945. For more information, see Ramon H. Myers, “Japanese Imperialism in Manchuria: the South Manchuria Railway Company, 1906–1933” in Peter Duus, Ramon Myers, and Mark Peattie, (eds.), *The Japanese Informal Empire in China, 1895–1937* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989), 101–132. This visit coincided with the Manchurian Incident, the takeover of Manchuria by the Japanese Guandong army, beginning in September 1931. By 1933 the Guandong army had installed a puppet state (Manchukuo) in Manchuria and had taken complete control of the South Manchurian Railway Company.

³ By the end of World War I, the Japanese Empire included Taiwan, Korea, the Nan’yō Islands, Karafuto (the southern half of Sakhalin), and exerted some control over small portions of China through the unequal treaty system. By 1932, the empire had expanded formally to include Manchuria, though Japan had been deeply involved in Manchuria since the turn of the century. By 1937, Japan had also occupied a large portion of northeast China, including the cities of Beijing, Qingdao, Nanjing, and Shanghai. For more information, particularly on imperial expansion between 1931 and 1945, see Louise Young, *Japan’s Total Empire: Manchuria and the Culture of Wartime Imperialism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998). For information about the entire Japanese imperial project, see Ramon H. Myers and Mark R. Peattie, (eds.), *The Japanese Colonial Empire, 1895–1945* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984).

⁴ See “Dai Nihon Kokusui-kai” and “Kantō Kokusui-kai” entries in the *Kokusui daijiten* (Tokyo: Yoshikawa Kōbunkan, 1979).

⁵ As recounted by Bandō in Munetaka, *Nihon no shoten*, 502.

⁶ See Edward Mack, *The Value of Literature: Cultural Authority in Interwar Japan* (Ph.D. dissertation, Harvard University, 2002).

⁷ This argument, which focuses on the role of modern Japanese literary production, is meant to augment, not replace, existing scholarship on the role of a larger discursive space created by the publishing industry as a whole, and its contribution to the creation of an “imagined community” comprising the modern nation. The prime original example of such scholarship is Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1983). For an example of a similar study on the development of the Japanese *kokumin* (national citizenry), see Nakagawa Shigemi, “Ritoru magajin no ikioi: 19 seiki media to kokumin kokka no seisei,” *Kokubungaku: kaishaku to kyōzai no kenkyū*, 40 (11), (September 1995): 100–4.

⁸ At this point the distinction between “modern” and “contemporary” with regard to Japanese literature was still in flux. Although today the modern period is usually thought to have begun in 1885, with the publication of Tsubouchi Shōyō’s *The Essence of the Novel* (Shōsetsu shinzui), readers and critics had not uniformly adopted that particular convention in the 1920s. For many readers at that time, the modern period began with the Meiji Restoration of 1868 (or perhaps even somewhat earlier), and the contemporary period began around 1912, the year that marked the end of the Meiji period. In this case, however, “contemporary” referred to the period we now think of as “modern.”

⁹ See Oda Mitsuo, *Shuppansha to shoten wa ika ni sbite kiete iku ka* (Tokyo: Paru Shuppan, 1999), 140.

¹⁰ Although book returns and remainders existed prior to 1926, it was with the *enpon* that they finally appeared in numbers significant enough to warrant the development of networks to resell them. The *enpon* boom produced massive numbers of returns. According to Yagi Toshio, the discount book industry absorbed 20,000,000 *enpon* volumes, after which it took 7–8 years to sell. Yagi, *Zenkoku shuppanbutsu*, 45.

¹¹ Bandō was also a forerunner of magazine remaindering, selling back issues at discounted prices. For first-hand accounts of Bandō’s experience with magazine remainders, see: Bandō Kyōgo, “Zanpon-ya kara mita ima no zenshū to zasshi (jō)” *Yomiuri Shinbun*, (10 September 1927); Bandō Kyōgo, “Zanpon-ya kara mita ima no zenshū to zasshi (chū)” *Yomiuri Shinbun*, (11 September 1927); Bandō Kyōgo, “Zanpon-ya kara mita ima no zenshū to zasshi (ge)” *Yomiuri Shinbun*, (13 September 1927); Bandō Kyōgo, “Kazumono-ya no rekishi to genzai shuppan-kai ni tsuite” *Nihon kosho tsūshin* 18 (October 1934): 2–3; as well as the preceding Bandō references.

¹² For information on the patterns of print consumption among middle-class families, see Maeda Ai, *Kindai dokusha no seiritsu*, reprinted in the *Maeda Ai chosakushū* (Tokyo: Chikuma Shobō, 1989); for information on those patterns among working-class families, see Ariyama Teruo, “1920, 30 nendai no media fukyū jōtai: kyūryō seikatsu-sha, rōdō-sha o chūshin ni,” *Shuppan kenkyū* 15 (1984): 30–58. Nagamine Shigetoshi draws conclusions similar to mine in *Modan toshi no dokusho kukan* (Tokyo: Nihon Editā Sukūru Shuppanbu, 2001).

¹³ See Richard Rubinger, “Who Can’t Read and Write? Illiteracy in Meiji Japan,” *Monumenta Nipponica* 55 (2) (2000): 163–198; and P. F. Kornicki, “Literacy Revisited: Some Reflections on Richard Rubinger’s Findings,” *Monumenta Nipponica* 56 (3) (2001): 381–395.

¹⁴ For information about the availability of borrowed books in Japan, see the work of Peter Kornicki, particularly *The Book in Japan: A Cultural History from the Beginnings to the Nineteenth Century* (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2001).

¹⁵ It is also at this moment that literature takes its biggest step toward being a form of “mass culture” in the contemporary sense. The term “mass culture” tends to be used with great confidence but little precision in Japanese studies; thus the historian Marius Jansen can claim that mass culture appeared at the end of the seventeenth century even as anthropologist Marilyn Ivy claims that mass culture did not appear until 1955. See Marius Jansen, *The Making of Modern Japan* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000); and Marilyn Ivy, “Formations of Mass Culture” in Andrew Gordon, ed., *Postwar Japan as History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993). Obviously they are both right, though they mean two different things: Jansen is referring to a non-elite (and particularly non-court) culture; Ivy is referring to a culture industry with near-universal reach. I am referring to a situation closer to Ivy’s mass culture, though without the negative implications of a culture industry: cultural products that are accessible (economically or educationally) to nearly all of a nation’s population.

¹⁶ For the newspaper industry’s role, see Nakagawa, “Ritoru magajin no ikioi”; for the role of the Imperial Rescript, see T. Fujitani, *Splendid Monarchy: Power and Pageantry in Modern Japan* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996); and for an overall examination of the process, see Carol Gluck, *Japan’s Modern Myths* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985).

¹⁷ The Japanese written language is made up of three different scripts: two are syllabic scripts (*katakana* and *hiragana*) and one is an ideographic script (*kanji*, or Chinese characters). The two syllabic scripts contain fewer than 100 characters, comprising fewer than 50 sounds, and can be read by anyone with even a modicum of education. There are literally thousands of Chinese characters, however, and their pronunciation is not obvious; thus they require a much higher level of education to read.

¹⁸ “Kaizō-sha no tokka: teikyō kōhyō o hakusu” *Keijō Nippō*, (1 May 1932).

¹⁹ This attraction existed throughout the colonies. The poet Kaneko Mitsuharu writes that Japanese-language books and Japanese-language translations of texts from other countries acted as the “teat from which Chinese received their intellectual nourishment.” See Oda Mitsuo, *Shoten no kindai: hon ga kagayaite ita jidai* (Tokyo: Heibonsha, 2003), 148.

²⁰ Although my focus here is on the motivations of Bandō, as a businessman, and (to a lesser extent) on colonial readers, the readiness of the South Manchuria Railway Company and an ultra-nationalist organisation intimately tied to organised crime—both of which were closely connected to the Japanese government—to help Bandō also raises the question of whether the government was aware of the political potential of this commercial enterprise.