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Restricted Circulation

GILBERT ROZMAN

Freedom of access to information is a cherished right with which libraries are closely identified. The fact that some governments go to great lengths to conceal information can be frustrating not only to their own citizens but also to users of libraries throughout the world. Sometimes the restrictions are particularly designed to deny foreigners access. It is well known that under Mao Zedong information on contemporary conditions in China was kept secret. What is not well known is that the gap between published information and sources normally available to foreigners has been growing in the post-Mao era; it may never have been greater than it is today in China.

Through the tumultuous years of the Cultural Revolution there was no doubt about the dismal state of information concerning contemporary China. Our libraries could offer us little from the People's Republic of China apart from a tiny number of official newspapers and journals. Local newspapers and Red Guard documents were occasionally smuggled out of the country, but in this period specialized scholarship and investigative journalism were so rare inside China that foreign libraries were scarcely at a disadvantage to those which had been permitted to remain open there. In the absence of much data, debates swirled about such fundamental questions as what was the population of China rounded to the nearest hundred million! The extreme was reached about 1969 when quotations from Chairman Mao usurped the pages of newspapers and journals; although that gave way to gradual improvement over the next eight years, careful scholars turned to oral history in the form of interviews with émigrés in Hong Kong to compensate, as best they could, for what our libraries could not provide.

There has been an information explosion in China since 1979. Foreign scholars have responded enthusiastically to the increased sources of information. Our libraries are now inundated with hundreds of new journals.

While book publishing has tended to trail behind journals, increasing numbers of Chinese books are also appearing on our library shelves. Today China is much less a mystery than it was in the second half of the 1960s and almost the entire decade of the 1970s. Nevertheless, the problems of foreign research on China remain serious. For no other major country are our libraries acquiring such a small percentage of the important publications. What we acquire is generally inferior to what we cannot acquire due to restrictions imposed in China.

When I was engaged in research concerning the changing Chinese attitudes toward the Soviet Union, I encountered an extreme situation of restricted access. Between 1979 and 1984 approximately twenty new journals on the Soviet Union had been launched in China. (I wrote about this in "China's Soviet Watchers in the 1980s: A New Era in Scholarship," *World Politics*, 37.4, July 1985, pp. 439-41.) When I searched American libraries for Chinese articles on the Soviet Union, I learned almost nothing about these journals. In 1984 only one journal in the arts was received at the six major libraries that were checked. In the several hundred articles on the Soviet Union that I examined in available Chinese journals, these twenty publications were not mentioned. If I had attempted to write about Chinese views on the basis of what I could read in our libraries, my findings would have been incomplete, peripheral to the major questions I was asking, and probably misleading. (See Illustration 1.)

In the winter of 1984-1985 I went to China for research on this topic. There I was fortunate to be able to read the monthly *National Periodical Index (Quanguo baokan suoyin)*. I say fortunate because this is a *neibu* (internal) source that my host institute and the dozens of scholars who knew of my search for sources did not mention to me. From this source and the card catalogues of Chinese libraries I learned of the existence of more than three hundred *neibu* journals in the social sciences and humanities. It has long been known that *neibu* newspapers are the basic source of world news for millions of educated Chinese. With the citations in the *National Periodical Index* one can map out the subjects covered in a vast network of internal publications about both international and national topics. Many provinces issue their own *neibu* journals on such subjects as finances and crime. Academic institutions are represented by specialized journals on the United States, Japan, and other countries or regions as well as those on the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe. With a lag of a few years, and at a considerable markup,

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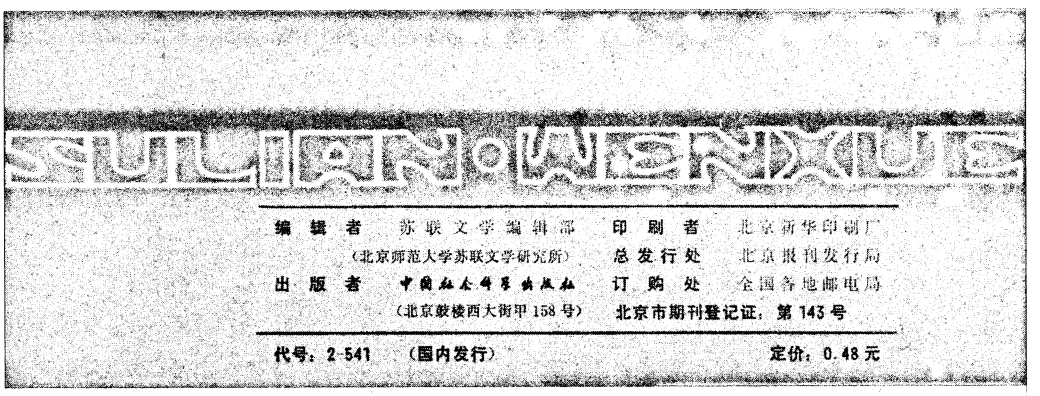

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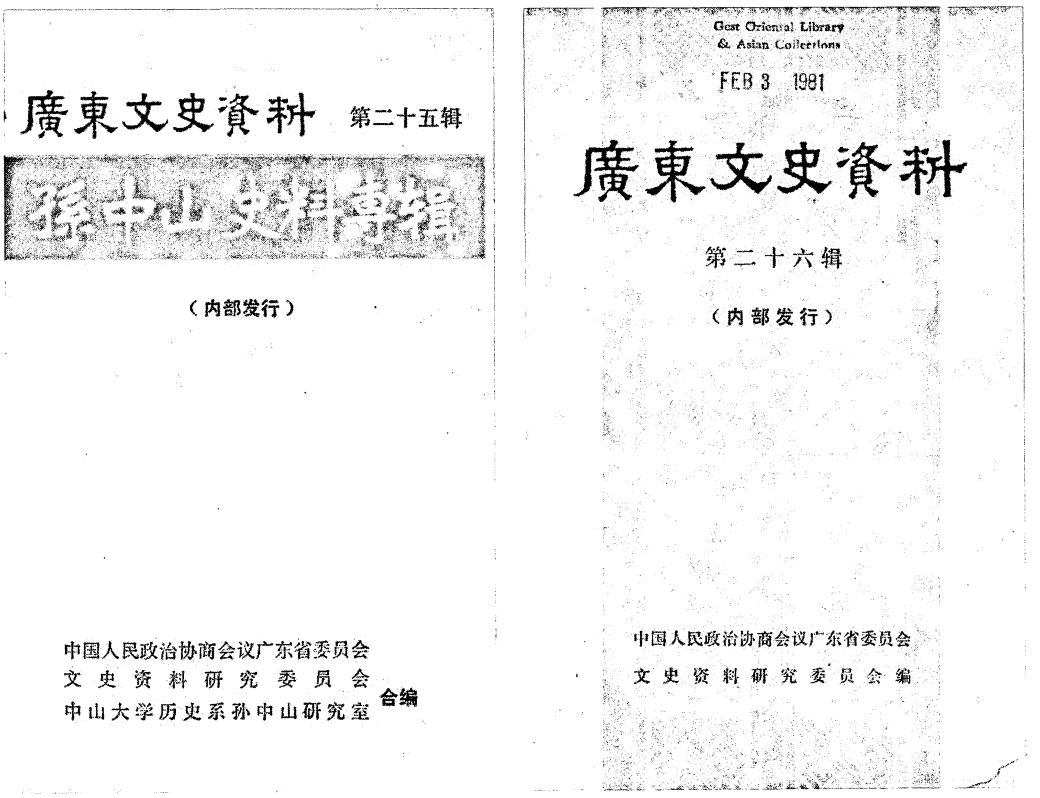
1. Publication data-blocks from three books and serials in the fields of Soviet Studies and World Socialism, dating from 1976 to 1984. The wording of the restriction varies: "Zhi xian guonei faxing" ("limited exclusively to domestic circulation"); "Guonei faxing" ("domestic circulation"); and "Neibu faxing" ("internal circulation").

Hong Kong dealers are now making the *National Periodical Index* available to libraries outside of China. Future researchers will at least have the advantage of knowing what is missing from their libraries.

The *neibu* barrier is more than a ban on taking sources out of China. It is a barrier that the specialist on contemporary affairs encounters at every turn. Most institutes deny visiting scholars access to their libraries because of the many *neibu* publications there. The central libraries to which foreigners can gain access routinely reject requests because the publications are listed as *neibu*. After furtively glancing for a minute or two at a volume in a bookstore, the foreigner will be approached by a clerk who admonishes him that this source is only for Chinese. At meetings arranged with groups of Chinese scholars in one's field, conversations are guided away from citations and contents of *neibu* writings. Since reports of conferences and activities in the field are widely presented in the *neibu* literature, this barrier to open conversation is difficult to overestimate. The *neibu* label is the bane of our research efforts both inside and outside China.

It would be a mistake to conclude that the *neibu* classification is always firm. China is not the closed society it was barely a decade ago. There is ambiguity about which *neibu* writings should be denied to foreigners. After all, these are not secret (*baomi*) publications that are clearly off limits. Some internal sources—both journals and books—are translations of writings freely available outside of China. Disregard for copyright regulations explains this type of distribution. The curious result is that a foreigner may find his own book for sale in Chinese translation, only to discover that he is not permitted to buy a copy. The response when this happened to me was the decision at the publisher's office to give me a copy. Millions of Chinese have access to *neibu* sources. Naturally, foreigners manage to see some of the sources, and some make their way out of the People's Republic particularly to Hong Kong and Taiwan where foreigners can read them. (See Illustration 2.)

For several years rumors have spread that the *neibu* system will soon be ended. When two journals on Soviet literature and Russian language were made openly available in 1985, some suggested that it was a step toward abolition. To some Chinese intellectuals the system is an embarrassment. Applying for graduate study or fellowships outside of China, they are prevented from showing many of their principal publications. Conversing with overseas colleagues, they are not free to report in detail on academic



2. Parts of covers of Number Twenty-five and Number Twenty-six in a series called "Materials on the Literature and History of Guangdong Province." Both bear the restriction "Internal Circulation" (*Neibu faxing*). Number Twenty-five, on the left, is a photo-facsimile received from a Hong Kong dealer. Number Twenty-six, on the right, is the original from inside Mainland China. The library happened to receive both kinds of issue, but received neither a restricted original nor a pirated duplicate of others in the series.

developments in their field. The system endures, while Chinese are asked to justify it and to discount its impact on the flow of information.

My research turned out relatively well. I managed to read many of the Chinese journals on the Soviet Union. I even made use of perhaps the most important journal on international affairs, *Internal Reference on World Economies and Politics (Shijie jingji yu zhengzhi neican)*. This is a *neibu* publication with the added warning that it should be carefully protected. (See Illustration 3.) In diverse journals I located reports on conferences, for example one on Soviet collectivization where opinions differed sharply on how to evaluate this socialist transformation under Stalin. I read about the founding in

RESTRICTED CIRCULATION

世界经济与政治内参

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尼赫鲁——印度民族解放运动的先驱

2
1985

内部刊物　注意保存

3. Detail of the cover of a serial dated February, 1985, called: "Internal Reference on World Economies and Politics." The restriction at bottom says: "Internal publication—take care to preserve."

September 1982 of a new association for Soviet and East European studies and its objectives, when public confirmation was delayed until mid-1985 and appeared without details about the goals for the field. In my book, *The Chinese Debate About Soviet Socialism, 1978-1985* (Princeton University Press, 1987), I fully acknowledge the *neibu* sources I used, consistent with the openness expected of an academic publication.

As long as the *neibu* system persists, research problems on contemporary China will be difficult to resolve. As a referee for a journal, how do I evaluate a manuscript which is based on diligent use of available sources but omits potentially crucial *neibu* sources? How can we be reasonably confident about the conclusions we present in classrooms and our publications about China's reform of socialism and its international relations if we are not reading many of the up-to-date analyses that are available to many Chinese and perhaps to other foreign scholars? Chinese colleagues sometimes try to reassure us that there is no contradiction between the views expressed in internal publications and those openly available, and, on the whole, I think they are right. What should not be ignored, however, is that good scholarship often requires an appreciation for the range of viewpoints and for the depth of analysis that is most often found in the *neibu* literature. If direct contradictions between the two types of source are rare, this does not prevent the added vulnerability to misunderstanding by those with access only to the open writings.

The *neibu* system in the 1980s makes it impossible for libraries outside of China to collect systematically on many aspects of contemporary policies. Odd volumes of certain *neibu* journals may appear on a library shelf, but that is no way to develop a good collection. Perhaps a clearing house should be set up to indicate where *neibu* writings can be located outside of China. This step would help; yet the only true solution to the confusion produced by the existing restrictions is for China to abolish them. If Chinese officials want world understanding for their policies at home and abroad, then they should replace an extraordinary system of restrictions on information with open access to scholarship.