



LIVRES CANADA BOOKS®

Selling Canadian Books Into Japan

A Guide For Canadian Publishers, 2014

Selling Canadian Books Into Japan: A Guide For Canadian Publishers, 2014

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Canada

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About This Update

In 2004, Livres Canada Books (then called the Association for the Export of Canadian Books) commissioned and published *Selling Canadian Books in Japan: A Guide for Canadian Publishers*. This document updates that original report, revising information that is now outdated and including new sections on licensing translation rights and opportunities in digital publishing. Although this update can be read as a standalone document, those interested in the Japanese market are encouraged to read the original report in addition to this one. In particular, the 2004 report is more comprehensive in discussing terms of trade than are other commentaries on the Japanese publishing market.

In compiling this report, we contacted 44 companies in Japan and Canada and drew upon publicly available reports and our own research and analysis. Of the 11 Canadian companies that we contacted, 8 responded via telephone interview or questionnaire. In Japan, we researched 23 companies, including some not in the original report. Several Japanese companies in the original report are no longer trading, but of the rest only one bookseller did not respond (details in [Appendix I](#)). We held face-to-face interviews with wholesaler UPS, bookseller Ehon House, and literary agency The English Agency.

The Japanese Book Market

The Japanese publishing industry's revenue peaked in 1996 and steadily declined through to 2004, the time of the original report. That decline has continued and, as of 2011 (the last year for which figures are available), Japan's retail book sales accounted for around ¥800 billion (CAD 8.4 billion), down from around ¥900 billion in 2004. Imports of foreign books have similarly declined in the intervening period. In 2008, Yohan, one of the largest importers of English language books and magazines, went bankrupt, leaving something of a void for non-academic imports. In 2011, total imports were CAD 221 million; imports from Canada alone were around CAD 358,000. About 80% of these imports are academic and scientific books.

Despite the malaise in some industries, Japan remains a large and important economy. By any macro-economic measure, Japan is either the second largest country behind the U.S., or the third largest behind the U.S. and China. On 10 November 2013, the Wall Street Journal reported that Japan is Apple's fastest-growing region, outpacing even China. In Japan, consumers are spending, but increasingly turning away from books.

However, even in books, Japan remains the second largest market in the world; Japanese publishers produced around 75,000 new books in 2011. Translated works typically represent 8–10% of Japanese publications (though not necessarily of new books, since many classic books in translation remain popular for decades). We estimate that the translation rights for around 4,000 books in English are sold into Japan each year.

Publishers arguably have more influence in Japan than in other markets for three reasons:

- There is no agent system in Japan; authors contract directly with publishers. With no independent third party to offer guidance, authors tend to support their publishers' position on industry related matters.
- The two main distributors of physical books in Japan (Nippan and Tohan) are partly owned by some of Japan's major publishers.
- A consortium of the largest publishers created and currently manage Pubridge, an organization that provides digital infrastructure services. Pubridge recently consolidated its position in the market by acquiring Bitway, Japan's largest ebook distributor.

Leading figures from Japan's publishing establishment have expressed concern about the impact of ebooks on the industry, and it is still commonplace for new books not to be digitized. Only *manga* comics are widely distributed in digital form, and Japan now lags in ebook adoption compared to other developed countries.