

GIM INTERNATIONAL INTERVIEWS BAI BO, PRESIDENT, SINOMAPS PRESS

Fifty Years of Map Publishing in China

Based in Beijing, China, SinoMaps Press, the largest and oldest map publisher in the country, this year in December celebrates its fiftieth anniversary. The press produces 90% of China's total map publications: over 3.6 billion copies and 12,000 titles in 2003. GIM International interviewed Sinomaps Press president Mr Bai Bo at the 2004 Beijing International Book Fair.

Could you sketch for us the history of SinoMaps Press?

SinoMaps Press, formerly known as China Cartographic Publishing House, is the largest and the oldest map publisher in China. Founded in 1954 with the merger of several private enterprises, the Press is an institution under the direct jurisdiction of the State Bureau of Surveying and Mapping, the administration responsible for surveying and mapping in China. As the only national-level map publisher in the country, SinoMaps Press has specialised in making various maps, atlases and related products and it boasts the most diversified titles, the largest market share and the widest distribution of publications in China. In 1997, Surveying and Mapping Press merged with China Cartographic Publishing House, forming one of the largest publishing houses in China, SinoMaps Press, with a staff of nearly five hundred, headquarters in Beijing and three agencies in Shanghai, Xi'an and Wuhan.

How has business developed over time?

Over the years, SinoMaps Press has established a product range featuring series of publications, reference maps, school maps and textbooks, journals, books, electronic maps and special maps. These publications cater for China's market for various maps, atlases and related products.

Could you elaborate further on the range of products published by SinoMaps?

As far as reference maps are concerned, we generally refer to small-scale maps and atlases covering China and the World. The subjects covered are administrative divisions, geographical conditions, travel and tourism, leisure, and scientific themes, notably the 1:4M Administrative Divisions Map of the People's Republic of China, Relief Map of the PR China, and the National Atlas of China series. In respect of school maps and atlases and textbooks, SinoMaps has since 1950 undertaken the compilation and publishing of textbooks, school atlases, wall maps and educational atlases for primary and secondary-school course content covering geography, history, sociology, information technology, biology, and reference materials. As far as periodicals go, SinoMaps has acted as the national publisher on surveying and mapping sciences. The Press issues three periodical titles: the academic Periodical on Geodesy and Cartography, the technical Journal on Surveying and Mapping, and the popular magazine Maps. These journals reflect from different aspects, trends and achievements in surveying and mapping in China.

What more can you tell us about SinoMaps products?

In addition to the periodicals, the Press also publishes many academic works, textbooks for higher education, and popular scientific readings on surveying and mapping. In recent years various kinds of electronic maps, multimedia publications and vehicle navigation system products have been produced, embodying new technologies and ideas in mapmaking. The GPS-compatible Electronic Map of Beijing has been revised annually for several years and is one of the most popular multimedia products in China. SinoMaps Press also publishes special maps, globes, 3D-relief models, and maps printed on various non-paper materials such as silk cloth and metal plates, long a highlight in the product window of the Press.

What are the strengths of SinoMaps Press?

With decades of experience, SinoMaps Press has nurtured a team consisting of experts in cartography, geography, surveying, computer science, economic management, etc. Having invested heavily in technological upgrades, the Press is currently equipped with advanced technology and facilities: a high-speed Ethernet LAN connects web servers, workstations, Macs, PCs, scanners, printers, plotters and image-setters in every corner of the Press. To support the huge demand for intensive cartographic production the Press has established the country's largest database for small-scale mapping. In addition, there is a library collection of 130,000 copies and sheets of maps, atlases and books published in China and abroad. This includes over three thousand fragments of precious historical maps, 2,700 copies of historical books and 12,000 titles of foreign language publications, many of which are of great academic and documentary importance.

You have made and are still realising many innovations at SinoMaps?

Yes, indeed. To keep track of the latest trends in map publishing in the world and to better serve users from various circles SinoMaps Press has laid stress upon technical innovation and product development. A policy has been adopted to promote the product line by improving organisational structure, while technical innovation and management reform have been introduced to bring along new products. Supported by advanced technologies of GIS, RS and GPS, the Press has made a big transitional step from conventional map production to computerised mapping. Various software and hardware for cartographic publishing has been purchased, developed and upgraded on a regular basis. The level of computer- assisted mapping and office automation has been improved remarkably, and construction of the database for digital mapping is well underway. The Press is the first publisher in China to adopt an electronic publishing system in map production and to develop dozens of electronic map products, like a multimedia map and vehicle navigation system, etc.

A number of impressive SinoMaps Press products are on show here at the Beijing Book Fair. Can you give some indication of the extent of your range?

Since its founding in 1954, SinoMaps Press has published nearly 12,000 titles of various maps and atlases, textbooks, books and periodicals in a total of 3.6 billion copies, accounting for over 90% of China's total map production. It ranks among the best publishers of China in terms of publication quantity, economic efficiency and social popularity.

Can you describe the SinoMaps Press distribution network?

SinoMaps Press has established good relations with local educational, publishing and distributing departments all over the country and has set up more than

380 establishments covering the whole country via the main channel of Xinhua Bookstore, forming a complete nation-wide distribution network that keeps track of market demand. SinoMaps acquires user feedback. It acquires user feedback from readers' clubs, provides convenient and satisfactory services for end consumers and distribution channels, and maintains close ties with the mass of readers.

You have established many links with internationally known counterparts in language domains other than Mandarin: which publishers in particular?

The success of SinoMaps Press is partly attributable to its co-operation with domestic and international counterparts. Many of its projects have been completed through joint efforts with scientific institutions and government ministries. Since reform and opening up of China to the outside world, SinoMaps Press has been extending global and regional communication and co-operation. It has been actively participating in international academic exchanges on cartography and attending international book-fairs. It has also established business relations with more than twenty publishers in Australia, Denmark, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, Switzerland, the United Kingdom, and the United States, and has sought ways to promote international copyright trade. The Press organised a large delegation to the twentieth International Cartographic Conference in Beijing in August 2001, and successfully organised a large international map exhibition. SinoMaps Press is confident of reaching its goal of becoming a top-level publisher in the world and providing more quality maps for readers.