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Book Pricing Update: Publishing Trends in Religion

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rally around that flag. I think if there are complaints in the industry, if book sales are down, well, make them cost less. In my ten-year publishing life ... my first book when it came out was something like \$16.95 and my next one is going to be \$23 — that's a \$5-6 increase — like 30-40% increase in cost. The publishing industry can rationalize all those costs but you know the old story about conglomerates buying. The thing is there was a time when publishers still saw themselves as purveyors of our culture. They were advancing our culture. Very few publishers still see it that way. It's because they're owned by conglomerates by and large. There are certainly publishers that are exceptions to that rule and there certainly are editors within large publishing houses that are exceptions to that rule, but the time when an editor would swear allegiance to an author, no matter the sales, because they believed the author had something to say, have pretty much gone. 🐾

Book Pricing Update — Publishing Trends in Religion

by Tracy Thornton (Blackwell's)

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For most public and secular private university libraries, collecting in religion is a particular problem because budgets for these titles are small and publishing activity is high. Between 1980 and 1989, Blackwell's treated an average of 1,222 titles per year in religion on its North American Approval Plan. In the 1990s, that average rose by 20% to 1,522 per year. Non-Christian and non-Jewish religious works accounted for 11% of the titles treated in religion by 1997. But that 11% covers many different religions, and shows us some interesting trends in publishing.

In the last five years, university presses published between 20% and 24% of academic titles (in all subjects). For **non-Judeo-Christian religious works**, that percentage has been notably higher; however, university presses appear to be losing ground to trade publishers, particularly in certain areas of non-Judeo-Christian religious study. For example, in 1996, university presses were responsible for 46% of non-Judeo-Christian religious works. In 1997, that number fell to 36%. Areas of non-Judeo-Christian religious study that significantly contributed to the slide from 1996 to 1997 include coverage in **Islam** which dropped from 41% to 30%; coverage in **Buddhism**, which dropped from 31% to 26%; coverage in **African religions**, which dropped from 50% to 21%; and coverage in Asian philosophy generally (including **Taoism** and **Confucianism**), which dropped from 51% to 26%. Only coverage in **Hinduism** bucked this trend, with only a slight decrease from 55% to 52%.

Average list prices in religion in 1997 were held down by a larger number of introductory academic works, new translations of classic works, or comparative rather than intensely focused studies, often available only as lower-priced paperbacks. **Hinduism** other than yoga, **Confucianism**, and **African religions** have been somewhat insulated from this move to the mainstream, either due to the complexity of the philosophy or, in the case of African religion, general unfamiliarity.

Titles in **African religion**, comprising only 7% of the total non-Judeo-Christian titles, were the most expensive in 1997 with

an average list price of \$54.66. This is also a newer facet of religious studies scholarship, growing from only eight titles in 1996 to 19 last year, and including both indigenous and imported religions in its emphasis. Ten years ago, only five titles in African religion were treated, and all dealt only with native religions. **Taoism**, one of the most popularized religions in recent years, showed the least expensive titles with an average \$19.72 price tag for the 13 total titles. But titles in **Taoism's** counterpart in **Chinese religion** (the yang to the Tao's yin, so to speak), the decidedly non-popular **Confucianism**, had a higher average list price (\$31.98) and only one-third as many titles (4).

Islam was the subject of considerable interdisciplinary interest, with titles relating to everything from international relations to women's studies to science. It also accounted for the largest number of non-Judeo-Christian titles treated last year with 29%. Titles pertaining to **Sufism** accounted for 6% of the total titles in Islam, and tended to be less interdisciplinary (and less academic). The average list price for titles pertaining to Islam was \$46.72, a one-percent decrease from 1996.

Studies of **Hinduism** fell almost in the middle with a \$35.18 average list price. Titles relating to **Buddhism** saw a decrease in the average list price for titles about **Zen** (\$23.82 in 1996 to \$20.38 in 1997), constituting 24% of Buddhism; 71% of these titles were paperbacks. **Buddhism** was also a popular topic for comparative works (10%), particularly with **Christianity**.

Non-Judeo-Christian works are still a value for academic libraries, with consistently lower than average list prices. The total number of these kinds of titles has been growing steadily, and at a faster rate than other disciplines. This area of religious studies seems to have been influenced by the trend toward interdisciplinary approaches to education; university press plans may not provide the comprehensive coverage some libraries are accustomed to receiving in these areas as trade publishers are gaining ground, particularly in the area of **non-western religions**. 🐾