

Gift merchandise sourcing and what public records can tell us

Findings from public Barnes & Noble gift-import records, following our conversation about gift baskets and rising costs.

In a March conversation with Brookline Booksmith, I learned how important gift baskets were to the store and that the items going into them were getting more expensive. That led me to look through public ocean-import records for Barnes & Noble’s gift merchandise to see what I could learn. This report summarizes what I found and where the evidence stops.

What I looked at

I assembled 30 public 2025–26 records linked to Barnes & Noble gift or gift-adjacent merchandise. Twenty-eight included usable shipment weights, totaling 243,017 kilograms. I kept source links for each record, cleaned inconsistent supplier names, and checked whether unusually large shipments changed the main patterns.

Finding	What it means in this sample
85.8% China-linked weight	Most observed weight had China as the recorded source country. That field does not prove where each item was manufactured.
45.8% with FORM + PAC	One normalized supplier group accounted for nearly half of the observed weight. Its share fell to 32.5% after I removed the largest shipment.
21 of 30 mixed-product records	Descriptions often listed several kinds of goods together. Their median shipment weight was 8.2 tons, compared with 3.1 tons for single-product records.

The country pattern remained high even after the largest record was removed: 82.4% of the remaining observed weight was China-linked. The supplier result was more affected by that record. That distinction matters more to me than a single headline percentage.

What the sample shows

The strongest pattern in these records is concentration by recorded source country. China-linked shipments account for 85.8% of known sample weight. After I removed the largest shipment, that share was still 82.4%. That check suggests the geographic result is not caused by one unusually large record, although it remains a finding about this limited sample.

The supplier finding needs more caution

FORM + PAC accounts for 45.8% of observed weight, and the three largest supplier groups together account for 63.9%. The largest shipment alone represents 19.8% of all known weight. Removing it lowers FORM + PAC's share to 32.5%. In other words, one large record has a meaningful effect on the supplier result. The data show a concentrated set of observed shipments, but do not establish how dependent Barnes & Noble is on that supplier overall.

Different products in the same shipment

Twenty-one of the 30 descriptions mention more than one type of merchandise. These mixed-product records represent 67.8% of the known weight, with a median shipment weight of 8.2 metric tons versus 3.1 metric tons for single-product records. This is consistent with goods being combined into larger inbound moves. The records do not say whether that lowered freight costs, where the goods went after arrival, or whether any item appeared in a gift basket.

What I can conclude

Public data gave me a partial view of a larger bookstore's gift-merchandise imports. In that view, recorded source-country weight was heavily China-linked, supplier weight was concentrated but sensitive to a large shipment, and mixed-product manifests were common. The analysis answers part of the sourcing question that came out of our conversation. It cannot measure the financial difference between Barnes & Noble and Booksmith.

Where the evidence stops

This is a hand-selected public ocean-import sample, not Barnes & Noble's complete supply chain. The 243,017 kilograms are observed manifest shipment weight, not product units or store purchases. The records do not show purchase prices, margins, tariffs paid, inventory decisions, or where merchandise was ultimately sold. I have no access to Booksmith's confidential sourcing or financial data, so the figures above are not a numerical comparison between the two stores.

The full case study, row-level source links, methods, and analysis code are available at brooklinebusiness.com/research.