

Drawing a new blueprint for Children's publishing

描绘中国少儿出版的新蓝图

■ Interviewee: Bai Bing (Editor in Chief of Jieli Publishing House)

□ Interviewer: Qu Jingfan

□ Children's publishing in China has had double-digit growth continuously over the past decades. Like many other countries, children's books have already become a major engine that pulls forward growth in Chinese book market. Currently, children's books account for 26% of the Chinese book market, with the biggest category among them being Children's Literature. However, looking at the 2017 children's book statistics, Children's Literature experienced negative growth, Children's English language and Psychological Self-Help books for Teens experienced rapid growth. What are the reasons behind this?

Bai Bing: The Chinese Children's Literature market is composing less of the total, and the ratio of their list price of books to the total is also dropping. The growth in the Children's Literature market is clearly slowing. There are a few reasons for this. First, the new titles that are influential are few in number. Second, there are too many re-prints. Third, in the past few years the education departments have recommended relatively few works of Children's Literature, with most recommended works being classical works aimed at children. Fourth, there are too many lists of recommended books, which results in confusion for readers. Organizations promoting reading, libraries are all issuing their own lists, as well as many influential mothers post articles and lists on social media. However, in another aspect, we've also seen that the area of Children's Literature has its ups and downs; it's possible that this year we'll see a decline and next year an increase, and then another reversal the next year. This is normal.

Currently first grade students in China start English classes. Relevant study-aid Picture Books are definitely seeing an increase in sales; we can also clearly see that bilingual Picture Books are quite popular. Additionally, simple English-language books from abroad in their original versions also sell incredibly well. From these three areas we can see that Children's English Picture Books are experiencing quick growth. This is a very good thing, because it shows that children's English-language proficiency is on the rise. The parents born in the '70s, '80s and '90s are all very good at English, and they all select high-quality Picture Books for their children. If we don't import these high-quality English-language books, many parents will go to foreign-language bookstores, or order them directly online. For this reason a strong market need requires us publishers to publish more books like this.

Additionally, in terms of bilingual books, such as the *Spot* books, written and illustrated by Eric Hill and we published in a bilingual version, with each volume having both Chinese and English text, which makes it convenient for their children to study English, and is very suitable for parents and children to read together.

In the past parents emphasized the acquisition of knowledge through reading, nowadays they give more respect to the creation of a healthy world of feelings and shaping the character through reading books. From this angle, Psychological Self-Help books for Teens can help children improve their self-awareness, societal knowledge, and help learn to share and solve interpersonal and other problems.

Currently, Chinese parents are more mature, and give more focus to the creation of the child's inner world. This is one of the reasons for the growth of this kind of books sold in the market. Additionally, all school children now have relatively heavy course



Bai Bing

Bai Bing: "Establishing three subsidiaries, servicing three groups, using two major resources, and working well in two markets — we are building a new landscape for children's publishing."

loads. These children need these Psychological Self-Help books to help them learn how to de-stress, and solve the worries or problems they face. Jieli Publishing House has published many of this kind of books, such as *Liu Yong's Book for Growing Children*, *Wu Ganlin's Youth Self-management Book*, and *It Feels Safe in the Corner*, all of which have been well-received by children.

□ What different trends do you think we'll see in the future for different categories such as Children's Literature, Popular Science Encyclopedia, and Comics?

Bai Bing: Although growth in Children's Literature is slowing down, it is still a large part of the market. Popular Science Encyclopedia will also continue to grow, because in China we're putting more emphasis on children's core literacy and key competency. For example with STEAM, the Popular Science Picture Book market has a large space to grow.

Books that involve pictures in the future will have a large space for growth, especially original Picture Books. Currently, all publishing houses are putting a lot of effort into making their own new Picture Books, and most classic Picture Books from abroad have already been imported to China. Thus, the creation of original Picture Books will have big developments in China in the next few years.

Jieli has done a lot of exploratory work into cooperation with foreign publishers on these books. Jieli is currently working with Cao Wenxian and the winner of this year's Hans Christian Andersen Award, Igor Onikov. We've invited them to work together to create a Picture Book; we've also invited Chinese authors to work with Korean illustrators. Previously China Children's Press & Publication Group (CCPPG) also published *Feathers*, written by Cao and illustrated by Brazil's Roger Milo, which was extremely well-received.

Aside from Sino-foreign cooperation, we're also working hard to develop domestic author and illustrator resources. Currently, there are many excellent illustrators in China. We use the strategy of inviting both domestic and foreign authors and illustrators in order to develop more products that are stable of excellent quality. At this year's BIBF, which just ended in August, we participated in the illustrator's awarding event at the Ananas Illustration Exhibition, and through the activity we discovered many Chinese illustrators; Jieli invited them to co-publish works in the future, and had got good response.

The space for expansion in the comic market in China in the future may be limited, as China hasn't gone through a true age of comic reading, and hasn't seen the formation of a core of die-hard fans as in the USA or the UK. Although there are some young people in China who love comic books and anime, the extent to which they rely on these art forms is different from other countries. Additionally, China's cartoons aren't very strong, and developing relevant derivative products will be very hard. The derivative exploration of cartoon is a very big business and has a large influence on related areas, however China lacks this kind of IP.

□ In the future for Jieli, which areas of children's books will Jieli see great development? What are your core advantages, and what kind of strategies do you have?

Bai Bing: Jieli is currently rebuilding its entire publishing framework; last year we established a branch for baby's books, this year we are launching a Children's Publishing branch and a Teen&YA Publishing branch. The three branches are aimed at the age of 0-6 years, 7-17 years, and 18-25 years (and even a bit older; possibly suitable for young parents). We will create products according to the needs of these three different aged readers, adjusting the structure of our own products; as for the youngest age brackets, we focus on knowledge and literature for very young children. As for the second age brackets, we mainly emphasize children's literature, children's encyclopedia, cartoons and manga, children's Chinese studies, and survival education. For the third age brackets, we focus on Teen&YA literature, and youth knowledge, which include social science, natural science and psychological self-help information.

Jieli's strengths are in creative planning. Jieli has many editorial teams made up of young talents. They dare to innovate, and work hard on creating high quality bestsellers. They put a lot of effort into incubating a classic brand. Jieli has published 10 series with sales exceeding 80 million yuan for each series. As of October 2017, the Chinese editions of the series *Bear Grylls*, and *Monster Master*, both sold for more than 200 million yuan; the Chinese editions of *Goosebumps*, *Twilight*, *First Discoveries*, *Barbapapa* and *Liu Yong's Encouragement Series*, each made more than 100 million yuan. The Chinese editions of the *I SPY* series, *A Short History of Nearly Everything* each made over 80 million yuan.

We work to serve three groups of readers well. We use domestic and foreign writers and illustrators to make products for the domestic and foreign markets; for example, we established a subsidiary in Egypt which is operating well. We just jointly established with the Moscow State Comprehensive Library the Bianchi International Literary Prize, which selects excellent Russian and Chinese works of natural literature. Next year we will publish the winning works of the prize; we're now closely cooperating on this project and both of us are very excited on this and we will release news soon.

This year Jieli is estimated to post a better result: an increase of 10 percent in total sales of books; profits should increase by 7%-8% compared to last year. Although the moving of our warehouse from Beijing to Tianjin had some negative impacts, we pulled it off.

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