

What kind of Children's books are hot in China?

中国童书市场需要哪三类作品?

Questions: Qu Jingfan

When did you found the company and start working with important German children's literature?

Beijing Star Media was founded in 2005. Strictly speaking, we saw importation of children's literature really begin in the late nineties; at that time I was still working at the Beijing Information Centre, a branch office of Frankfurt Book Fair. Adding it all together, I've been in the industry for almost twenty years.

During these years, how did German children's books sell in China?

German children's books have continually seen growth in sales in China. Through us about 3000 titles have been introduced to China (excluding copyright extensions and transfers), here I must note that we count a series as a single title. A number of the German children's picture books that we've brought into China have become bestsellers in China. Titles such as *Tales from Tooth Street* and *New Tales from the Station Belly*, both written by Anna Russelmann and illustrated by Stefan Schulz, each sold more than 1.5 million copies. *The grandma in the Apple Tree* written by Mire Lobe and illustrated by Susi Weigel broke the million mark, with *Something is Not Quite Right* series by Ralf Butschkow and two others in the series reaching almost a million in annual sales.

How has the cooperation with Chinese publishers been?

With Chinese publishers' copyright awareness growing by the year, as well as a continuous increase in international cooperation, especially in the past 20 years, with closer and more harmonious collaboration with Chinese publisher, we've seen a clear decrease in the communication cost involved in cross-cultural communication.

Germany is one of the main countries from which China imports children's books;

"I hope to write profound and amusing stories"

"我希望写出深刻而有趣的作品"

Questions: Qu Jingfan

You have been written and drawn illustrations for children's books since 1999, till now it's been 20 years, however your major in university is design, how did you embark on writing for children?

I'd loved to write since I was able to do so. When I finished school, I primarily wanted to study German and arts to become a teacher. But things unfolded differently. I did not get a study position for that combination of subjects, so I decided to start my studies of Illustration at a university of applied sciences. It did not take long since I discovered that my general preference for storytelling is the perfect requirement to become a good illustrator. And moreover, the short form of storytelling in Children's books was an interesting opportunity not only to draw but to write little stories as well. In Germany, there are some illustrators doing both. Besides the passion of storytelling in general, that might be also related to the small fees which are paid for the story and the illustrations.

How did you write so many popular and awarded children's books? What's the challenge of writing for children?

I think, if you write for children you should do that, because you want to write for children not because you are not able to write for adults. For me it's challenging to try to explain complex interpersonal subjects and transform it into children's literature. Not to simplify things, but to show that, the problems you might have as

Wang Xing believes Chinese publishers nowadays focus more on the following three factors when acquiring foreign rights: the writer's fame, whether he has won a big prize, and whether the book has interesting science-related content. Jingfan reports.

compared with the previous few years, has the number of copyright transactions and royalty fees increased greatly? What do you consider when you re considering acquiring the Chinese rights for a German children's book and choosing a Chinese partner?

In terms of acquiring German titles, the golden period was 2015 to 2016. After 2017, we saw a levelling off and even a bit of a drop-off. According to our own analysis and the information that we gained from querying Chinese clients, currently the competition in the Chinese children's book market is quite fierce. During the past few years, people's needs for excellent titles have been relatively concentrated, in areas such as famous authors, winners of big prizes, and interesting science-related content; this has led to price competition and higher fees for acquiring titles. When we're selecting German books, we first consider the demand in the Chinese market; when we're selecting a publisher to work with on the Chinese side, we're not looking at estimated costs as much as the quality of the Chinese publisher's products, and whether or not the book suits them.

How big are children's books in the German book market? What modern children's writers deserve attention in Germany? What are the major prizes for children's literature in Germany, and when are they handed out?

The largest portion of the German literary market is literature, which includes youth literature. Currently there are a large number of influential, excellent children's authors and illustrators in German-speaking countries, such as Michael Ende, Otfried Preussler and other classical writers, there are also Christine Nöstlinger and Mirjam Pressler and others who came in the next

round of authors and illustrators. The German Juvenile Literature Award is the biggest of its kind in the area, and is given out every October at the Frankfurter Book Fair.

China is promoting parent-child reading. What experiences do the German authors have with this concept?

As I understand it, most German parents, publishers, children's book institutions and libraries all place great emphasis on parent-child reading, which is the activity of parents sitting by their children and accompanying them as they read, or reading together and discussing with them, which strengthens comprehension and love. Reading with and accompanying children as they grow is a core component of raising one's offspring. For this reason, hardback books are the main medium for the activity of parent-child reading. I've been very happy

to see that in recent years Chinese parents are starting to pay attention to the activity of parent-child reading, and accompanying their children in doing so.

What advice do you have for publishers, in areas such as copyright discussions, understanding industry trends, and forming relationships with new partners?

I hope that with our Chinese colleagues we can have more discoveries at the book fair, and I recommend that they make sure to have deeper and broader understanding of titles they're looking at before they make decisions. At the same time, I also hope that German-language publishers can get to know more actively about Chinese publishers and the Chinese book market at the book fair.

(Translated by Moy Hau)



Wang Xing, General manager, Beijing Star Media Company, China

Franziska Biermann, Children's literary writer, Germany

a child, are the same problems adults have. There may be more nuances in an adult's life, but in the end it's all about friendship, joy, fear, anger and grief.

What elements should a good children's writer possess?

It's just like using a watercolor box. You take the primary colors. You learn the names of them. You find out that every color has a special temperature, a character and meaning and then you discover the mixed colors. Therefore I try to write stories for children and their parents as well. A profound but also amusing story for children and with a hidden but also humorous level for the adults. I love humor.

Can you share some interesting stories during the course of writing or drawing these books?

The beginning of all the Fox-Stories who have been with me for almost 20 years was a little picture, which I drew for the Rowohlt Verlag. It showed a fox, who was something like a mascot for the series for young readers, eating a book. The publisher wanted my picture for a summary of the children's book-novelties. I was so inspired by my idea of what might happen to somebody who eats books, then I wrote the story of Mr. Fox who loves books that much, and eats them after reading seasoned with salt and pepper. It was a fairytale of becoming an author and for me somehow also the beginning of my career as an illustrator and author.

Could you please tell us your family life with your children? How do you spend time reading with your children?



The Fox who Ate Books has been sold over one million copies so far, and been translated into 10 languages.

I have two children, a daughter and a son. They both like stories. My daughter is nearly adult. She liked to read from the beginning. Although she loved it very much when something was read to her, she was ambitious to read as many and as thick books as possible. My son is younger. Although he can read very good, he prefers reading aloud. If my husband and I don't have the time to read for him, he will hear radio plays. Maybe that has a little bit of something to do with laziness...;-)

You are nominated this year for the German Juvenile Literature Award, can you talk about it? Will you participate some book awarding and tour events?

I was very happy about the nomination for the literary prize. It's great when a jury appreciates the book you thought of. It is a very important literary prize in Germany. Being on the selection list is a great honor for me. During the Frankfurt Book Fair I will be reading a lecture at the "Junges Museum" as part of OPEN