

# Cultural Ambassador: Books as Medium of Understanding China

By Jin Yixin

Since 2022, Chinese publishers have kept in touch with overseas counterparts through the internet, and many books with copyright export have been published overseas, despite the obstacles caused by epidemic to face to face talks and supply chain issues. In 2023, the international book fairs resumed physical existence, and many Chinese publishers have indicated that they would actively participate in the book fair and resume close cooperation with their overseas partners.

In terms of **political reading**, publications such as *Xi Jinping: The Governance of China* (Volumes 1-4) (《习近平谈治国理政》), *Zhejiang, China: A New Vision for Development* (《之江新语》), and *Narrating China's Governance: Stories in Xi Jinping's Speeches* (《习近平讲故事》), which deeply explain the spirit of General Secretary Xi Jinping's series of important speeches and new concepts, ideas and strategies about governance, have been widely distributed overseas. By the end of August 2022, *Xi Jinping: The Governance of China* has been translated and published in 36 languages, continuously displayed and sold in more than 40 international book fairs, more than 500 overseas mainstream bookstores and more than 20 global online marketing platforms, and entered more than 500 universities and public libraries in 130 countries and regions. It has covered more than 170 countries and regions, becoming the most popular publication and the most translated and published work of leaders with the largest circulation and the widest coverage since China's Reform and Opening-up in 1978. It has become a window of thought for the international community to read and understand China in the new era and the CPC.

In **humanities and social sciences**, since the beginning of the 21st century, China's economy, society, science and technology have been developing at a fast pace, and readers all over the world have a strong curiosity about the "Far East". The book series *Recognizing and Understanding China* from China Renmin University Press (CRUP) has published more than 30 Chinese books and signed more than 100 foreign language editions, of which almost 100 books have been published, involving more than 20 languages. In 2023, CRUP will realize the multilingual export of key books in this series, and will launch the Spanish versions of *Rural Development in Contemporary China* (《当代中国农村》), *Poverty Alleviation in Contemporary China* (《当代中国扶贫》), *Contemporary Chinese Society* (《当代中国社会》) and *Education in Contemporary China* (《当代中国教育》). CRUP also integrates the resources of English version of this series and promotes the digital versions to go online in HeinOnline database, which is available for more than 150 countries and regions around the world, with nearly 4,000 institutional users and tens of millions of individual users.

**Contemporary literature** is still the main force

in overseas market. Shanghai Translation Publishing House (STPH) also has new plans this year. STPH has launched China's post-1980s writer Shuang Xuetao's work *Rouge Street* (《艳粉街》), including three representative works: *Moses on the Plain: A Short Novel* (《平原上的摩西》), *Bright Hall* (《光明堂》) and *The Aviator* (《飞行家》). STPH's president Han Weidong said that at this year's London Book Fair, Frankfurt Book Fair, and other important international book fairs, STPH and Archipelago Books will participate in a joint booth composed of publishers from different countries and promote Chinese writers in a professional way. Their next step will focus on the promotion of Lin Bai's masterpiece *One Woman's War* (《一个人的战争》), *Northward Bound I Go* (《北去来辞》) and the post-1980s writer Zheng Zhi's novel *Victim in Me* (《生吞》). According to the 2022 Research Report on Chinese Books Influence in Overseas Collection, among the 17 books published in China and collected by more than 30 overseas libraries in 2022, 16 belong to China's contemporary literature. The works of famous contemporary writers in China, such as Yu Hua, Wang Anyi, Liang Xiaosheng and Liu Zhenyun, are still popular in overseas collections, and Chinese feminist writers are also popular in overseas libraries. The *The Three-Body Problem* ("三体"三部曲) trilogy, written by science fiction writer Liu Cixin, has been translated into more than 30 languages, with sales volume exceeding 3.3 million copies, and its English translation contract has been extended and earned additional 1.25 million US dollars, setting a record for overseas royalties of China's contemporary literary works. In addition, as early as 2014, *The Wall Street Journal* published three articles in succession, saying that Mai Jia, as a Chinese novelist, was going to the world. So far, Mai Jia's works, such as *Decode* (《解密》), *In the Dark* (《暗算》), and *The Message* (《风声》), have been translated into more than 30 languages and published in more than 100 countries and regions. In terms of the reasons why Mai Jia's works are recognized by overseas markets, *The New York Times* commented: "What Mai Jia wrote is not only about China, but also about the world."

**New translated versions of classic literary novels and historical books** also received welcome from overseas publishers and readers. At the end of 2021, the first complete Dutch translation of China's classic *A Dream of Red Mansions* (《红楼梦》) was published, which was translated by three sinologists in 13 years' time. Previously, there was only an abridged version translated from German in the 1940s. Mark Leenhouts, one of the translators of the book, said that *A Dream of Red Mansions* is a multi-dimensional and multi-level novel, including philosophy, poetry, social customs, painting, architecture and traditional Chinese medicine. The new and complete Dutch translation can make readers realize the true literary flavor of the novel and China's unique traditional narrative style. In addition, *Fifteen Lectures on Chinese History* (《中国历史十五讲》), published by Peking University Press, used simple and plain

language to lead readers to visit the tortuous course of Chinese history from ancient times to the present. So far, the book has been translated into 12 languages, including Korean, Vietnamese, Arabic and Kazakh, and its overseas sales revenue has exceeded 500,000 US dollars.

In recent years, **network literature** has been taking advantage of traditional forms of literature and entered the international market. According to the *2021 Blue Book of China Network Literature* published by the Network Literature Center of the China Writers Association, the overseas market scale of China's network literature had exceeded 3 billion yuan (RMB) in 2021, with 145 million overseas users. In total, more than 10,000 online works were exported overseas. Online literature is exported overseas with the help of film and TV series, games, animation, cartoons and other multimedia forms. The IP adaptation works are also expected to feed back the copyright selling of books. *Zhejiang Literature and Art Publishing House* (ZLAPH) has published a number of popular and well-received online literary works, *Legend of Mi Yue* (《芈月传》) has been exported to Thailand, Vietnam and Indonesia. Film and TV series derivative projects of *Move On and Jie Ai* (《结爱》) have been exported to Thailand.

**China's original children's books** are an important force in China's publishing industry. Take Jieli Publishing House as an example, in 2022, 116 books were published in nine countries, including Russia, Singapore, South Korea and France. Among them, the picture book *The Yulu Linen* (《雨露麻》) has been published in Spanish, Portuguese and French successively since it cooperated with South Korea in 2020, and the English and Italian versions will be published in 2023.

Children's publishers are constantly polishing the literary and artistic appeal and seeking to open the international market through innovation. The works of Cao Wenxuan, winner of the Hans Christian Anderson Award, have been translated into 35 languages so far. His work *Bronze and Sunflower* (《青铜葵花》) can be found on several international bestseller lists such as *The New York Times*, *The Wall Street Journal* and *Publishers Weekly*. In 2023, Bologna Children's Book Fair (BCBF) announced the winners of Bologna Ragazzi Award and China's children's books achieved great success again. Three original works won the awards. *Thump! Thump! Thump!* (《噹噹噹》) published by 21st Century Publishing House won the special nomination award for fiction. *Whose Socks* (《谁的袜子》) published by Tomorrow Publishing House won the comic book award for middle and lower grades. And *Night Night* (《晚安》) published by Studio MARY in Hong Kong won the special nomination award in comic books for teenagers.

