

Academic Publishing Rides the Highway of Digital Technology

A: Gu Qing (Executive Director of The Commercial Press) Q: Jin Yixin (China Publishing & Media Journal)

In January 2021, China Publishing & Media Journal conducted an exclusive interview with Gu Qing, the Executive Director of the Commercial Press. In terms of the creation of multi-format digital products and the application of new technologies, Gu Qing introduced that the Commercial Press was still in the experimental phase of digital transformation and was accumulating experience. He emphasized the need to move beyond the mindset of print publishing and collaborate with external partners to establish an industrial chain for digital publishing.

Despite the publishing industry's three-year turmoil caused by the pandemic, the Commercial Press has maintained consistent growth in revenue, thanks to its digital products. More than two years later, CPMJ once again interviewed Gu Qing to discuss the changing trends in Chinese academic publishing market, the impact of new technological approaches on the publishing industry, and the development plans for the Commercial Press's digital products.

Q: Since the outbreak of the pandemic, what changes have occurred in the overall business of the Commercial Press? Has the revenue and profit returned to pre-pandemic levels?

A: Influenced by book piracy and China's Double Reduction policies (referring to the policies that aim at easing the burden of excessive homework and off-campus tutoring for students undergoing compulsory education), the Commercial Press faced significant challenges in 2022, particularly with a decline in the sales of core reference books. However, since 2023, we have implemented a series of targeted measures hoping to turn things around.

Generally speaking, in recent years, the Commercial Press has steadily improved in both content construction and operational revenue. Compared to the pre-pandemic levels in 2019, there has been conspicuous growth. It's worth mentioning that the revenue from the Commercial Press's digital products has shown consistent growth.

Q: In your opinion, what is the biggest challenge for academic publishing nowadays? Has the abundance of open-access knowledge and advancements of AI technology affected the Commercial Press's business?

A: Academic publishing has always been a focal point for our press. Our publishing scope spans across times and borders, with a strict emphasis on publishing high-quality content. In humanities and social sciences, the Commercial Press's academic publishing has comprehensively covered all disciplines.

Right now, the greatest challenge for academic publishing at the Commercial Press does not principally come from the internet but rather from the vitality and influence of Chinese academic publishing market. If the market maintains a healthy order and has robust demand, our academic publishing can continue to develop at a high level. However, if the overall market is less vibrant, it could have an adverse impact. And in recent years, academic book market is not optimistic.

There have been continuous technological innovations internationally in recent years, which have had an ongoing impact on the market. The Commercial Press will continue to pay attention to these new forms of technology and hopes to master these new media technologies for our use. We shall actively explore the possibilities for the integration of technologies with our core business.

Q: What practical experiences has the Commercial Press gained in promoting integrated development and developing different formats of products? How does the press meet the changing reading and learning needs of readers?

A: In the arena of integrated development (referring to the profound integration of traditional publishing and digital publishing in the processes of content creation, distribution, and consumption through digital and intelligent technologies), the Commercial



Press has actively experimented with various forms of products such as audiobooks, databases, and apps. However, it is important to recognize that in recent years, the profit models and development prospects of different formats of products are always changing. The Commercial Press has taken corresponding measures according to the characteristics of different channels and products. In terms of app development and operation, the Commercial Press has made significant investments. For example, the *JUZI Chinese Language Learning* app is an online platform for learning Chinese, aiming at providing assistance and convenience to students who are interested in learning Chinese. The app is mainly for addressing the needs of individual customers and overseas sales, and it is continually updated and expanded with new product content.

The integrated development of data networks is highly flexible, and changes in product formats can lead to differences in profit models. For example, databases are mostly oriented towards corporate institutions or universities rather than individual customers, whereas e-books and audiobooks are oriented towards personal users. In the future, the Commercial Press will continue to develop through suitable channels and platforms that align with the characteristics of its products. This is a key aspect of promoting the integrated development of publishers.

Q: The Commercial Press has created a rich array of digital platforms with different content and functions. What are the differences among these digital platforms in terms of user needs, user groups, and application scenarios? Do you have plans to develop

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In juvenile and children's sections, interactive books, picture books, and graded readings related to history, geography, mathematics, and Chinese language learning

new digital products or even specific plans for digital transformation in the future?

A: The Commercial Press has always relied on the characteristics of its own products to carry out media integration and digital transformation through certain platforms and channels, and to develop new integrated publishing products.

Over the years, the Commercial Press has accumulated experience in the development of traditional and mature digital publishing products such as Chinese reference books and related databases, as well as e-books, with both quality and quantity guaranteed. However, in fact, there is still room for improvement in our exploration of digital content and product formats for English learning. As digital product users and content providers continue to evolve, in the future, the Commercial Press will increase research and efforts in the development of digital content and product related to English learning. This may include, but is not limited to, the form of apps, aiming at serving English learners and users in China.

Q: Which digital businesses will the Commercial Press franchise to its subsidiary technology company? Do you have any plan for future cooperation?

A: Currently, the cooperation between the Commercial Press and its subsidiary, Wanyouzhidian Digital Media Technology (Beijing) Co., Ltd., mainly focuses on Chinese reference books. It involves quite a rich range of content, including the development of the *Xin Hua Dictionary* and *Modern Chinese Dictionary* apps. Next, Wanyouzhidian's primary focus will be on the development of the China Publishing Group's project—a digital platform for one hundred quality reference books. Since the users of the Commercial Press's language and dictionary digital platforms are mostly students, their parents, and teachers, these digital platforms fall under the category of educational products. In the subsequent development, especially in the fields of humanities and Chinese language learning, the Commercial Press will collaborate with Wanyouzhidian to develop more high-quality products to better serve primary and secondary school students as well as teachers.

are most popular. Creative products developed around intellectual property (IP) are also selling well on e-commerce platforms and in physical bookstores.

Children's Book Bestseller List			
Number	Title	Author	Publisher
1	<i>Chinese History for Children</i> (《写给儿童的中国历史》)	Chen Weiping	New World Press
2	<i>Treasure Hunt of Great China Series (1~29)</i> (《大中华寻宝系列(1~29)》)	Jing Ding Dong Man	21st Century Publishing Group
3	<i>Pete the Cat: Good Character Development for Kids of 3~6 (Volumes 1~4)</i> (《皮特猫·3~6岁好性格养成书(1~4辑)》)	[USA] James Dean	Wen Hui Publishing Co. Ltd., Reader Culture
4	<i>Chick Qiu Qiu's Touch and Feel Toy Book</i> (《小鸡球球触感玩具书:全5册》)	[Japan] Iriyama Satoshi	New Star Press Dolphin Media
5	<i>Woongjin Math Picture Book Series (50-Book Set)</i> (《熊津数学图画书(全50册)》)	Woongjin Publishing House	Guizhou Science and Technology Press, Sunshine Blog