

Children's Book Writers Who Understand the Hearts of Children

■ Zhao Yixue

Children's book authors are a diverse and talented group, but they all share one common trait, that is, they maintain a childlike heart and dedicate their lives to creating outstanding works for children. The words and illustrations they craft seem to possess a magical power, deeply engraving themselves into the minds of readers and providing them with unique reading experience during their fleeting childhood.

Zhu Chengliang

Born in 1948 in Shanghai, Zhu Chengliang is renowned for his works such as *The Sparkling Rabbit-Shaped Lamp* (《一闪一闪的兔子灯》), *The Story of the Kitchen God* (《灶王爷的故事》), and *Don't Let the Sun Fall Down* (《别让太阳掉下来》). He has received



numerous national and international awards, including the Noma Concours Prize from the Asian Cultural Centre of UNESCO, the Bologna Children's Book Fair Illustration Award, and the Golden Apple Award at the Biennial of Illustrations Bratislava (BIB).

Zhu Chengliang has earned international recognition for his distinctive writing skills, attracting increasing attention from the global publishing industry. Many of his works have been published abroad, having a wide-reaching impact. As early as 1984, he represented China in the collaborative picture book *All in a Day* (《地球的同一天》), which was organized by Japanese artist Mitsumasa Anno. Artists from eight different countries illustrated the story of a young boy named Jiu Mingya who asks children from eight countries for help after being stranded on an uninhabited island. Additionally, his work *A New Year's Reunion* (《团圆》), which is considered a milestone in Chinese original picture books, has been translated into six languages and has eight editions with over 700,000 copies sold. The book, based on writer Yu Liqiong's childhood experience, tells a story that took place around the Chinese New Year. Zhu Chengliang believes that creating picture books should "touch the heart, with emotion leading the way".

In January of this year, Zhu Chengliang and illustrator Guo Zhenyuan co-created *Where Did My Tooth Go?* (《我的牙去哪儿了》), published by Anhui Children's Publishing House. The story follows a little rabbit named Pipi on a quest to find his lost tooth, meeting various animals like Uncle Wild Boar, Grandpa Elephant, and Auntie Hen along the way, each explaining the characteristics and uses of their teeth. Zhu Chengliang stated, "When creating this book, I came up with many interesting details, and hope young readers will discover these little treasures as they read."

Mei Zihan

Born in 1949 in Shanghai, Mei Zihan began publishing literary works in 1971. His notable works, such as *Daughter's Story* (《女儿的故事》) and *Dai Xiaoqiao and His Buddies* (《戴小桥和他的哥们儿》), are immensely popular among readers. His theoretical work, *Reading Children's Literature* (《阅读儿童文学》), serves as an introductory guide to understanding children's literature. Mei Zihan is known as a romantic who writes with finesse, a fairy-tale idealist, an elegant "wandering poet" who tells stories to children, and a captain of a "ferryboat" full of literary dreams.



Mei Zihan believes that writing, publishing, and promoting literature for children is a sincere, pure, and

meaningful endeavor. Children are individuals who have not yet grown up. Everything done for them is not only to help them live through their present days but also to ensure they grow up with enriched lives, develop good character, professional competence, and happiness, as well as lead hardworking, honest and energetic lives. Children need literature. Recognizing its need for literature, humanity has created it for itself. A childhood filled with literature is one enriched with fairy tales, and a childhood with fairy tales is one full of vibrant imagination.

Mei Zihan's *Yellow Wheat Field* (《黄麦地》), published by Nanjing University Press in March of last year, contains 28 of his works, covering themes of literature, family, friendship, learning, and art. He said, "Reading is liberal. Reading transcends the text, and the life insights you gain from reading are like the meaning of a single ear of wheat."

Xiong Liang

Born in 1975 in Zhejiang, Xiong Liang is the author of *The Peking Opera Cats* (《京剧猫》), *Kitchen God* (《灶王爷》), and *A Little Stone Lion* (《小石狮》). He was the first person to propose and promote the concept of "Theater on the Paper" in picture books in China and



also the first Chinese illustrator to be shortlisted for the Hans Christian Andersen Award in 2018.

Xiong Liang initially created picture books for adults. But after having a daughter, he began creating children's picture books while maintaining some of his core creative principles. Thus, his picture books can be enjoyed by both young and old, with adults often finding them particularly enjoyable. He believes that picture books should convey the artist's inner perspective, and present the best of the artist's thoughts to children in a simple and vivid way.

Oriental Nursery Rhymes (《东方童谣》), edited by Xiong Liang, was published by Citic Press in July this year. The book features 66 traditional Chinese nursery rhymes, offering children an introduction to language and aesthetics. Xiong Liang stated, "When we were young, nursery rhymes were not just words. They were the familiar voices of our loved ones, sounds that evoked vivid images in our minds. When creating this book, we sought to capture that feeling, a world filled with imagination."

Peng Yi

Born in 1958 in Shenyang, Liaoning, Peng Yi is the author of *Brushing Shoulders with Ghosts* (《与幽灵擦肩而过》), *Don't Open the Window at Midnight* (《半夜别开窗》), and *Monsters Are Crazy Too* (《怪物也疯狂》). He has won several domestic and international awards, including the Chen Bochui International Children's Literature Award, Little Hakka International Picture Book Award, and the Bing Xin Children's Literature Award.



In a lecture, Peng Yi mentioned that his life has been a series of "Let's go!" moments. He used to study painting, write scientific fairy tales, work in grain storage and pest control, and direct films. Since becoming a children's literature author, he has continuously explored new fields and possibilities. When being asked which of his many professions he preferred, he always smiled and said, "My favorite profession is being a children's literature author. Writing has always been a central part of my life."

Known as China's original book dream team, Peng Yi and Tian Yu created *The Twelve Little Tiger Cats Grandmother Found* (《老奶奶捡到了十二只小老虎猫》), which was published by Jieli Publishing House in December of last year. This book represents another bold innovation in text type and illustration style, telling a story about home and love. Peng Yi said, "After writing many picture books, I wanted to create something new with Tian Yu, a book that is both a picture book and a comic. It offers a reading experience similar to an early chapter book, yet distinct from traditional text-image independent early chapter books. I wrote a fairy tale featuring only adults, with no children appearing at all. But the adults in the story are as pure and innocent as children, and even their whimsical behavior mirrors that of children. Both children and adults can find a broad and rich life reflected in this book."

Bao Dongni

Born in 1961 in Beijing, Bao Dongni is the author of *A Deer of Nine Colors* (《九色鹿》), *Ink Visual Enlightenment Picture Books* (《水墨视觉启蒙绘本》), and *The Little Blue and White Porcelain Cat (Beautiful China)* (《小青花》). Her works have been published in countries such as the United States, France, the United Kingdom, and Germany.



When discussing her creative inspiration, Bao Dongni said, "All my works are inspired by my life experiences. Whether it's a major event or a trivial matter, as long as I like it, it can become my writing material. My interests are very diverse, including sports, food, handicrafts, and so on. All of them can inspire my creation. I want to share my observations and experiences with children."

Bao Dongni's *Childhood Tree* (《童年树》), published by the 21st Century Publishing Group in February of this year, is a realistic children's novel based on the real-life experiences of the "Six Girls Going to the Saihanba". It tells the childhood stories of the first generation of children growing up in the Saihanba. Before writing this book, Bao Dongni visited Saihanba, a northern artificial forest brimming with idealism and romanticism, where she heard the stories of the children who grew up alongside the trees planted by their parents. She said, "It was a childhood full of dedication, joy and sorrow, and vibrant life, and I wrote that childhood into the book." In the book *Afterword* (《创作谈》), she wrote, "The similarity between human life and the life of trees is that the experiences carefully nurtured during childhood can lead to an upward journey in both life and trees."