

Academic Introduction and Popular Science Works Gain Attention

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According to data from OpenBook, the books sales by the list price of China's book retail market in 2024 decreased by 1.52% year-on-year, while the market excluding educational and textbook materials experienced a year-on-year decline of 4.83%. The sales percentage of academic and cultural books decreased year-on-year to 7.82%. Academic and cultural books cover a relatively diverse range of categories, as readers tended to focus more on "bridge books" as gateways to the academic and cultural fields, as well as popular works. Books that cater to the needs of the general public have garnered higher attention.

The Overall Market Share of Professional Academic Publishing is Relatively Small.

Although academic publishing is characterized by content that is both leading and forward-thinking, its sales figures lag significantly behind those of general cultural books. For example, *Modern Chinese History* (《中国近代史》) by Zhonghua Book Company, the best-selling professional academic title, sold only one-seventeenth of the top-selling book on the same list. In the philosophy category, the top 20 best-selling new books mostly featured traditional cultural classics, with only two professional academic titles, including *Cynicism* (《犬儒主义》) by The Commercial Press, which sold fewer than 10,000 copies—well below the other popular general books on the list.

In OpenBook's academic culture classification, a search for "local chronicles" revealed that only 409 titles were sold in 2023, with the highest-selling book reaching over 1,000 copies. How to make these professional academic books stand out, lead academic reading trends, and shape cultural narratives remain a significant challenge.

Serialization and Popularization Drive Revenue Growth.

The growth in the retail value of academic and cultural books was largely driven by backlist titles. Books published before 2020 accounted for over 50% of total sales revenue, while new ones published in 2024 contributed less than 10%. China Publishing Group ranked first in terms of sales revenue in this category, primarily boosted by Zhonghua Book Company's *Complete Annotated and Translated Series of Chinese Classics* (中华经典名著全本全注全译丛书). The best-selling title, *The Art of War* (《中华经典名著全本全注全译丛书·孙子兵法》), was fueled by the popularity of the TV drama *The Knockout* (《狂飙》). Other high-priced books, such as the 18-volume *Zizhi Tongjian* (Deluxe Annotated and Translated Edition) (《资治通鉴》) and *The Rejuvenation Library* (Third Series: 1949 - 1978) (《复兴文库》) by Zhonghua Book Company, also contributed significantly to revenue growth.



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History Books Dominate; Comics Become Annual Bestsellers.

History books captured a dominant share of the market across physical stores, e-commerce platforms, and short-video e-commerce channels. The popularity of academic knowledge dissemination through comics also played a major role. For instance, the series *When History Meows* (如果历史是一群喵) by Guangdong Tourism Publishing House became an annual blockbuster hit. In fact, the trend of interpreting academic knowledge through comics has been around for some time, with series like *The 30 Minutes In Cartoon Series*



When History Meows

(半小时漫画), *Three-Minute Comics* by Sai Lei (赛雷三分钟漫画), and *The Emperor Comics* (吾皇巴扎黑漫画) covering topics beyond history, such as philosophy, psychology and economics, attracting a wide range of age groups with impressive sales.

In 2024, China's professional publishing institutions not only continued to deepen their efforts in traditional business areas, but also leveraged their strengths to seek new breakthroughs and growth, showcasing numerous highlights. As a leading professional publishing house in China, Zhonghua Book Company has developed dozens of related products since publishing the first punctuated edition of *Zizhi Tongjian* in 1956. It has introduced versions tailored for different readerships, including traditional vertical classical Chinese editions, simplified horizontal classical Chinese editions, vernacular editions, annotated editions, youth editions, deluxe editions, and collector's editions. Additionally, the company has published specialized academic works focusing on research into *Zizhi Tongjian*, forming a comprehensive and high-quality "Tongjian Family" product line around this classic work.

Shanghai People's Publishing House also performed impressively. It had published influential academic titles, including *Logic of Politics* (《政治的逻辑》), *On People's Democratic Rule* (《论人民民主》), *Civilized Country* (《文明型国家》), and the *Contemporary International Politics Series* (当代国际政治丛书). This series of books, published for over 20 years, has become one of the most academically prestigious collections in China's field of international politics.

Beijing Science and Technology Press has had a long-standing focus on the academic publication of traditional Chinese medicine (TCM) for years. It developed *The Red Book of Chinese Medicinal Plants* (《中国药用植物红皮书》), a project funded by the National Science and Technology Academic Works Fund, which took six years to complete. The press also undertook several national and provincial digital publishing projects, exploring the foundational model for digitalizing TCM publications.

In recent years, numerous successful cases have emerged in the cultivation and development of academic book brands by various publishing institutions. Guangxi Normal University Press released its *Great Learning* series ("大学问") which features works by leading scholars. It also actively showcased China's unique academic insights by releasing the three-volume *Practical Social Science and Chinese Studies* ("实践社会科学与中国研究") by Professor Huang Zongzhi. Law Press · China's *Tianxia* imprint ("天下") has reprinted some popular titles five times, with leading titles like *West Window Law Talks* (《西窗法雨》) selling nearly 200,000 copies and several other

bestsellers reaching tens of thousands of sales. Many of its titles have won the Wenjin Book Award, China Publishing Government Award, and the Chinese Law Excellent Achievements Award. Ren You Pu Hua, a publishing brand affiliated to Post & Telecom Press, has published over 150 psychology titles since

2018, including classic textbooks like the *Zimbaro's Psychology* (8th edition) (《津巴多普通心理学》) and popular titles such as *The Soft Hedgehog* (《柔软的刺猬》) and *Emotional Immunity* (《情绪钝感力》). In 2022, the sales revenue for its psychology books exceeded ¥60 million.

With the rise of social media, professional publishing institutions are actively leveraging new media and digital platforms to explore markets. Currently, academic and cultural publishers such as Zhonghua Book Company, Tsinghua University Press, and Shanghai Ancient Books Publishing House have opened accounts on Xiaohongshu and gained a considerable number of followers. People's Daily Publishing House has amassed 288,000 followers and 362,000 likes. Sales through livestreams for publishers have steadily increased. From January to May 2024, Yue Lu Publishing House's sales of its Douyin e-commerce livestream business alone matched its total sales for the previous year. Sales on Douyin e-commerce increased by over 72% year-on-year, boosting the sales of classic books such as *Guwen Guanzhi* (Annotated Complete Edition) (《古文观止》), *The Analects* (《论语》), and *Tao Te Ching* (《道德经》).



Zhejiang People's Publishing House Live Broadcast Event

The China Press of Traditional Chinese Medicine's "Joyful Reading Traditional Chinese Medicine Knowledge Service Platform" showcases the potential for digital cross-platform integration. Developed under the company's "Joyful Reading Traditional Chinese Medicine" brand, this comprehensive digital platform not only offers traditional Chinese medicine knowledge but also incorporates various new media formats, serving a broad range of users.

In the future, with the integration of artificial intelligence, big data and metaverse technologies, the publishing industry is expected to experience more innovations. For example, Sichuan People's Publishing House uses AI-powered data collection and intelligent analysis to mine vast amounts of data and conduct multidimensional content analyses. This enables them to extract key insights for topic selection and generate analytical reports to provide comprehensive decision-making support for editors.

Moreover, the combination of AI with AR, VR and metaverse technologies can present academic and cultural books to readers in more diverse formats. The Commercial Press, for instance, uses AI technology to convert book content into audio, video and other multimedia forms. Leveraging its all-media production and distribution platform, it disseminates its content widely, offering users book materials in multiple formats, transforming academic books from visual to auditory and multimedia experiences.