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Reading in China



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Fashion China

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Introduction

As with the rest of the world, Chinese people have come to view TV and the Internet as the primary method of getting information, spending their leisure time and seeking entertainment. For a long time, however, books, newspapers and periodicals fulfilled those functions. Today, the powerful media of TV and the Internet are diminishing the allure of the print media so that the practice of reading seems to require protection. The Chinese Institute of Publishing Science (CIPS) recently conducted its fourth *Sample Survey on Reading and Buying of People Across China*, which found that the national reading rate had fallen below 50% for the first time and had been on the decline for six consecutive years. Regular readers compose about 5% of the total population. Instead of enjoying to read, most students hate reading from a young age. To reverse this, Zhu Yongxin, vice mayor of Suzhou, tabled a proposal for the fifth time at the annual session of the National Committee of Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC), by calling for a National Reading Festival. Echoing his proposal, Nie Zhenning, vice president of China Publishing Group Corporation (CPGC), recommended that April 22 be National Reading Day, which will occur before World Reading Day on April 23 and should encourage people to read more.

However, from another perspective, reading is actually on the rise

when online reading is taken into consideration. The following scenario may be more accurate. While intensive reading of classical works is dwindling, "fast-food" reading in being entertained, passing the time and acquiring information is increasing. As reading is no longer seen as a serious pursuit, reading for plain content and pleasure has become more popular. While TV, online reading and conventional reading cannot substitute each other, they need not be mutually exclusive and, in fact, could complement and reinforce one other. One case is the recent reading trend for traditional culture. CCTV-10, a channel under China's Central Television (CCTV) that is dedicated to science and education, runs Lecture Room, a program whose forum disseminates Chinese fine traditional culture. Invited experts and academics discuss China's famous ancient books and history. When the transcripts were published in book form, they achieved significant circulation. Among the books was a staggering number of millions of copies of *Yu Dan's Thoughts on the Analects of Confucius*. Conversely, the content of electronic books that are currently popular on the Internet is still derived from print form.

In fact, recent years have witnessed a boom in China's publishing sector. This industry has introduced reforms and expanded markets. On balance, compared with the end of last century, today's books have

made huge strides in advancing variety, cover design, content and reader demographics. According to statistics by the General Administration of Press and Publication (GAPP), the number of titles that were published in China annually increased from 143,000 to 234,000 between 2000 and 2006. The annual print run of books grew from 6.27 billion to 6.41 billion. The rise in titles was accompanied by a drop in the average print run per copy. Contrasted with the book situation, the variety of newspapers fell from 2,000-plus to 1,938, while their print run rose from 32.9 billion to 42.4 billion between 2000 and 2006. Meanwhile, the variety of periodicals increased from 8,725 to 9,468. In addition, while the country's digital publishing industry takes form, there are now nationwide 300-plus varieties of newspapers on cellphones, over 1,000 online newspapers, more than 20,000 online periodicals and around 10 firms operating online databases.

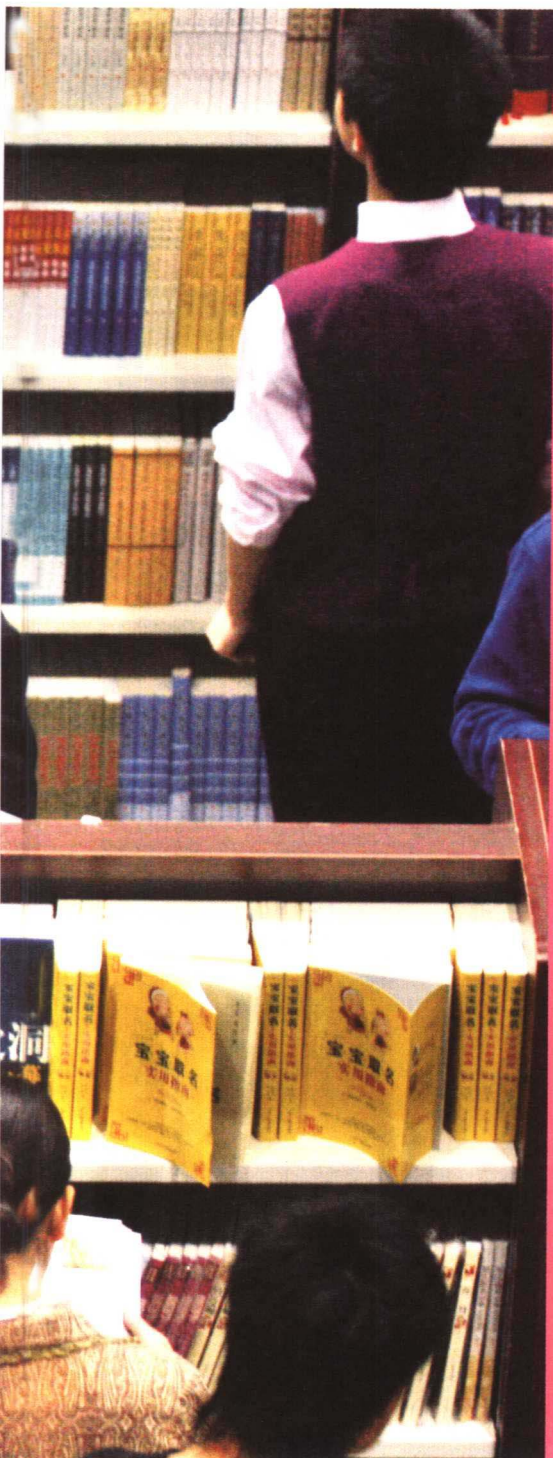
By the end of 2006, China's publishing industry had taken form, as the country was home to 573 book publishers, 11,406 newspapers and periodicals offices, 339 audiovisual publishing houses and 159,000 entities engaged in the operation of publications; the added value of China's press and publication industry accounted for roughly 1.7% of the country's GDP and 5% of the added value of the tertiary industry that year, the

industry has emerged as a significant sector in the economy. Under the Eleventh Five-Year Program for the industry, China's press and publication industry will continue to evolve in line with the following vision.

First, the industry will focus on increasing domestic demand with an emphasis on expanding the rural publication market by addressing the cultural needs of rural communities. Second, the industry will shift from the extensive mode of relying on numeric growth and expansion of size towards an intensive mode of higher quality and profitability. Third, upgrading will take place by restructuring the industry, the product mix and the geographical distribution. Fourth, the industry will expand digital publishing by increasing independent innovation.

The projections for 2010 are that China will produce 192 book titles per million people per year, annual book consumption of 5.3 copies and periodical of 2.4 copies per person, 90 copies of daily newspapers per thousand people, 180,000 distribution outlets nationwide, 100-plus enterprises with the right of general distribution over publications, 9,000 enterprises with the wholesaling right of publications, and a printing industry valued at 440 billion yuan. This scenario offers amazing opportunities for both producers and consumers of books, newspapers and periodicals.





**People Have
Everything They
Need in a Vast
Ocean of Books**



In China today, more than 200,000 book titles are published annually. The shelves at book malls and bookstores are abundantly stocked with a huge variety of books. Readers find themselves surrounded by an endless array of book subjects, including economic management, travel, foreign classics, traditional Chinese culture, popular science and books for children.

A Craze for Traditional Culture Driven by Modern Media

At the end of 2006 one day, thousands lined up outside Zhongguancun Book Building in Beijing. Passersby who had no idea about what was happening might have mistakenly thought that a celebrity was appearing in person. Yet a closer look revealed that many of those standing in line were middle-aged and older; some were in wheelchairs. In fact, what was occurring was a sale of autographed books. The crowd was waiting for an autograph from Professor Yu Dan, author of *Yu Dan's Thoughts on the Analects of Confucius* and chair of the Department of Movie, TV and Media at Beijing Normal University. The event lasted around nine hours. Reportedly, a record number of 12,600 copies were sold. However, that record was broken by the professor herself several months later. Zhongguancun Book Building held an inaugural sale of her autographed copies of *Yu Dan's Thoughts on the Book of Changes by Master Zhuang*. Up to 15,060 cop-

ies were sold during the 10-hour event, which did not end until around 9 that evening.

In just six months, Yu Dan had become a household name across China. *Yu Dan's Thoughts on the Analects of Confucius* has sold over 3 million copies. As many as one million copies of her other book, *Yu Dan's Thoughts on the Book of Changes* by Master Zhuang, were sold as well. China's best-selling author credits her popularity to the combination of classical works and mass media. She is not alone in becoming popular by writing books on traditional

culture. Other academics who share her experience include Yi Zhongtian, a professor at Xiamen University, and Yan Chongnian, a research fellow at Beijing Academy of Social Sciences. Those who witnessed the scene at the release of Yan Chongnian's new book, *A Fact-Based Interpretation of the Mysteries Inside the Palace of the Qing Dynasty*, could easily think that a celebrity was in attendance. In addition to those who offered flowers to the author, a woman painter had traveled especially from Henan Province to



Yu Dan gives autographs to buyers of her books on the spot at the release of *Yu Dan's Thoughts on the Analects of Confucius*.



Copies of the best-selling Yu Dan's *Thoughts on the Book of Master Zhuang* are placed on an exclusive bookshelf at a bookstore.

present him with a traditional Chinese painting.

Before Yu Dan rose to fame, Yi Zhongtian had been the most popular celebrity author. Even before his book, *Yi Zhongtian's Appreciation of the Romance of Three Kingdoms*, based on his TV lectures, was released, the author had secured a huge number of print runs and copyright royalties. For awhile, Yi Zhongtian was a pop culture icon.

Yi Zhongtian has an impressive record with his autograph and sales sessions. At the sale of his autographed book, *Yi Zhongtian's Appreciation of the Romance of Three Kingdoms (The Second Half)*, some began waiting

outside Zhongguancun Book Building as early as 4 in the morning. Among these arrivals was a university student who had missed meeting the author at a previous autograph and sales session at Beijing Xidan Book Building the previous year. The second time around, however, he joined two of his friends in arriving as early as he could so that he would not miss another autograph signing. After signing 7,280 copies, Yi Zhongtian had to leave because he was exhausted. In other words, he autographed an average of one copy per 3.21 seconds.

What Yi Zhongtian, Yu Dan and Yan Chongnian have in common is that they once gave talks on Lecture Room, a program on CCTV-10. As a result, they earned tremendous publicity. Five years earlier, the program had a viewership rating of almost zero. When he was invited to have his lectures recorded in March 2004, Yan Chongnian had never even heard of the program. However, due to its success in lectures on traditional culture, the program's viewership has climbed to second place among CCTV's programs, making it one of the most well-known. Now, many academics and professors want to appear on the program. In the December 2006 issue of the pictorial *Contemporary China*, Lecture Room was rated among the top 10 news events in China in 2006. As the verdict of the judges on the program goes: "Increased cultural needs from the public are an inevitable result of steadily growing socioeconomic prosperity. Academics can contribute to cultural harmony by disseminating culture on TV."

Before stepping into Lecture Room, people such as Yi Zhongtian had profiles so low that regular readers had little idea of who they were. Yet they instantly became cultural celebrities after appearing on TV. While Yi Zhongtian and Yu Dan both emphasize that their success should be attributed