

Chinese publishers went online on rights deals amid epidemic

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By Qu Jingfan

With the coronavirus epidemic raging through the world, many cultural events and book fairs including the Frankfurt Book Fair have been held online, bringing huge challenges to publishers around the globe. In order to continue rights trade, Chinese and foreign publishers kept in touch through Zoom, email, video calls, WeChat, and other online communications to promote exchanges of idea and cooperation.

Although ways of communication have shifted from face-to-face to online, the industry standard practices of preparing materials for the author and the book, translating demos and contacting the foreign publishers and rights agents have been moving forward as usual. In addition to their long-term partners, publishers were also trying to reach out to new overseas publishers through rights agents and cultural institutions. Some publishers have adjusted their publishing mechanism to better adapt to the digital new normal, for example, Sichuan Xinhua Wenxuan Publishing and Media Company incorporated the export of digital copyrights into the assessment system, and by doing so promoted the rights licensing of original books.

The brand-new digital Frankfurt Book Fair has sparked the enthusiasm of Chinese publishers. Sichuan People's Publishing House introduced and published *100 Small Scientific Experiments* more than 20 years ago from the Ravensburg Publishing House in Germany, which has been selling well for 20 years. The publishing house hopes to find new potential bestsellers in the Fair. It also bought the rights to *Face the Ice: Merkel's Decade of Germany* in 2013, and the Chinese edition reprinted four times since 2015, bringing good profit to the publisher. Therefore, the publisher also hopes to find suitable political books at FBF.

The various imprints of Zhejiang Publishing Group hope to use the book fair to find rights to children's, popular science, literature, design and photography books that meet the needs of domestic readers. In terms of the rights export, the company has also made considerable progress. The global English rights to three books from the *China Big Scientific Facilities Publishing Project* series have been sold to the Springer Nature Publishing Group from Germany. The English rights of other seven titles from the same series and the German rights to four other titles have been sold to De Gruyter Publishing Group. These titles were due for publication in the first half of 2021. Zhejiang Science and Technology Publishing House sold the rights to medical books such as *Plastic Surgery* to Springer, and then sold the English rights to *Multidisciplinary Design Optimization Theory and Its Application in Large Depth Manned Submersibles*, which was launched on SpringerLink in August and included in Springer's *Marine Engineering and Oceanography* series.

In the category of social science, literature and art, the Commercial Press sold the global English rights to *The Toilet Revolution in Contemporary China* to Springer in April. It also hopes to find classic and new quality titles in humanities and social sciences. Shanghai Yiwen Press hopes to find works in the field of literature and social science, paying special attention to famous masterpieces and classics. Beijing Century Culture Company hopes to find some social science classics and picture books for adult readers. Shanghai People's Fine Arts Publishing House hopes to discover more German art books. Shanghai Calligraphy and Painting Publishing House wants to learn about titles on the history of Chinese art by foreign scholars.

Children's books have always been the popular genre in Chinese and German rights trade. 21st Century Publishing House, and the Children's publishing imprint of Shanghai Century Group hope to find high-quality children's books at the book fair. In addition to the import, 21st Century Publishing House also hopes to use the export of the German rights to Cao Wenxuan's picture book *Summer* as an opportunity to carry out a project of picture book publication, with story written by Cao Wenxuan and illustrated by German artist. Currently Cao Wenxuan has finished his new story and the work was translated to German and awaits for a talented German artist. When the rest of the work is done, the new picture book will be published in China and Germany simultaneously, and publishers from the two countries will start a joint effort in promoting the rights licensing to more countries.

Matthese & Seitz Publishing House in Germany has launched the *Asian Publishing Project* in the last two years. It publishes six titles translated from Chinese or about China each year to help more German readers understand Chinese culture, to get rid of doubts and worries about Chinese culture, and to fight against the skepticism and prejudice of China. In addition to publishing high-quality academic content from China, De Gruyter Publishing Group also shares mutual market insights and analyses with Chinese partners and establishes market connections to achieve better cooperation and a win-win result.

Despite the various convenience of online communications, both Chinese and foreign publishers expressed their preference in offline face-to-face contacts because they are more efficient and accurate. "If you only attend video conferences, you will lose the fun of going to the book fair and the excitement of meeting a good book by chance." Other publishers say that if this (online book fair) continues, there is a risk that inter-state contacts will be disrupted, which will bring the worst result with de-globalization.

(translated by Xiao Jianpeng)

Pictures in News



East China Normal University Press' newly set-up "Daxia steamer group" was launched in April this year. Their over 50 livestreaming events on Taobao, JD.com, Bilibili and other platforms in the past three months have given them great popularity. Each of their livestreaming event receives around ten thousand thumbs-up on Taobao alone. Under the background of influencer economy, this has become an innovative way for many Chinese publishing houses to explore "online + content", enhancing the publishing brand's long-term user gaining and content operation capability.

(By Sun Jue)



Since March, brick-and-mortar bookstores across China have been experimenting the home delivery of books. Before March, China's life service platform Meituan has a list of nearly a thousand bookstores in 150 cities across the country. The figure rose about 204% in the two months since the launch of "physical bookstores into Meituan" project. In June, a number of publishing houses also started to sell books on vendors. Picture showing Jiangxi Fine Arts Publishing House selling books at the 699 Cultural and Creative Park in Nanchang City.

(By Wen Peiyang)



On August 12, the Shanghai Book Fair held the 2019 "The Most Beautiful Book" Award Ceremony, in which 25 titles stand out and represented China in this year's "World's Most Beautiful Book Award" held in Leipzig, Germany. In the end, *Viewing - Philosophy of Habitat* designed by Nanjing designer Pan Yanrong and published by Shanghai Ancient Book Publishing House, won the bronze medal. This is the 21st award won by Chinese books in the arena of the "World's Most Beautiful Book" competition.

(By Mu Hongzhi)