

(Continued from F05)

The *Bad Kids* brings more attention to local original suspense fictions 《隐秘的角落》带动本土悬疑剧作“出圈”



The huge popularity of the web drama series *The Bad Kids* boosts the sales figures of the book it was adapted from, which went top to the best-selling chart of the suspense genre long dominated by foreign writers. The positive market response of *The Bad Kids* is undoubtedly a highlight for Chinese suspense fictions.

The silent plougher of the original book market

Even though works by super-best-selling authors such as *Medical Examiner Dr. Qin* have sold more than 3.5 million copies, local suspense and reasoning novels seem to have been left out of the picture as a whole, compared with those by overseas writers. In the view of Wang Jiaojiao, deputy editor-in-chief of the publisher 99 Readers, original reasoning novels started only in the last few decades, and the readers were used to reading Japanese reasoning and European/American detective novels, and those foreign novels usually have quite good quality, which made it more difficult for original works to succeed in the market. In addition, many Chinese writers including Zijin Chen have frankly confessed their influence from foreign masters such as Keigo Higashino. Therefore, given the current

supply on the book market, original Chinese suspense novels are not the first choice of many readers. Despite the difficulties, there are still many writers and publishers who did what they believe should be done. Examples include the *Midnight Collection*, founded in 2006, which aims to build China's most professional detective novel publishing platform. It started to publish original Chinese novels since 2010, and at present has a collection of works written by Lu Qiuhui, Lu Yehua, Shichen, Jiding, Hu Yanyun and so on. *The Ark series* by Douban is a collection of suspense and reasoning fictions that Douban Read created after years of content accumulation. It aims to discover more unique and freshly new local suspense fictions and pays particular attentions to the creation of a mixture of both suspense and daily life atmosphere. 99 Readers launched its own suspense imprint *Black Cat Library*, and signed a number of hardcore reasoning readers including Lu Yehua, Shi Chen. Zijin Chen, after being famous, had generously shared the experience of being inspired by reading Keigo Higashino, but he also emphasized the importance of find one's own style. He believes that compared to the irksome storied set in a foreign land, plots that are drawn from contemporary Chinese life that surrounds every reader have a power that can touch the inner-world of people.

The underestimation of writers and their

fightback by innovation

Under the siege of Japanese reasoning novels, how can original Chinese reasoning works fight back? Firstly, textual innovation and interdisciplinary cooperation are needed to expand the fan base. Many local authors are already thinking ahead of their time, and the form of reasoning in their works is unique. Therefore, finding ways to expand the reading community is something that responsible publishers should be considering. Secondly, it is important to set up awards to encourage original novels. There are few awards for suspense and reasoning novels in China, and currently the award set up for novella and short stories by book reviewer Hua Sibi is the only famous one. Thus, the Black Cat Library and culture brand QED jointly founded an award for new suspense novelists. Thirdly, the overall level of original reasoning is actually greatly underestimated. In the novelist Hu Yanyun's view, many Chinese works are in fact better than some frontlist novels in the West and Japan, in terms of the quantity and quality. Their visibility, however, is much weaker. Zijin Chen believes that, no matter what you write and what you read, "the only criterion to judge the quality of a suspense novel is whether it is enjoyable to read. The book is nothing as long as it is not enjoyable, despite the deep thoughts and brilliant logics".

Self-help books: traditional Chicken Soup for the Soul no longer trending 心理励志类图书：“鸡汤”已过时

In the age of social media, readers are prone to be trapped in all kinds of anxieties. With the help of new distribution channels such as Tik Tok and new online retailers such as Pinduoduo, the ways of promoting books are vastly expanded. As a result, the sales figure of self-help books (e.g. those tell you how to manage your emotion or be successful) is showing a clear trend of turning up, and more and more publishers join the publication of self-help books.

As more publishers enter the market, self-help books are becoming more professional

In addition to trade publishers, some professional publishers also enter the market. For example, the Huazhang imprint of Machinery Industry Press built a "Huazhang psychology" brand combines together the publishing, training and consulting of psychology.

In the relatively easy-to-enter self-help book market, the phenomenon of copying successful predecessors is quite common. Interestingly, along

with the popularity of multimedia channels such as Tik Tok and Pinduoduo, *The Way of Wolf* (wolves are seen as enterprising and to some degree aggressive in China) published in 2017 sold more than a million copies in the first half of 2019. Books such as *The Way of Wolf* become the regular subject in short videos on Tik Tok. The price and cost of these books are usually low but the conversion rate is extremely high. In addition to the self-help book targeted at people with relatively low income and thus sold at a lower price, imported and translated works still have the advantage in the rest of the self-help book market. It is worth mentioning that currently readers' need for self-help books has gone beyond the rhetorical "Chicken Soup for the Soul" or physiological works that are too academic to read. The market needs more titles closely integrated with life examples, and those can provide practical solutions to the type of problems that readers face in their lives.

Self-help books move towards being professional psychological books

The hardback edition of *Murphy's Law* published by Beijing Wentong World Books in May 2019 has sold more than 200,000 copies by now, and the paperback edition, which came out in July 2019 sold more than 500,000 copies. In the view of the company's general manager Yu Chenghao, the number of publishers in the market of psychological self-help books has been increasing in the last two years, and the import and translation of foreign titles in this genre on market has gradually become saturated. He also mentioned that there are two routes for the topic selection of psychology-related books. The first one is to draw closer to professional psychology books, and the second is to more rhetorical and inspirational ones. Because of the relatively high price of professional books, more and more publishing companies began to extend to the field of psychology.

Areas for publishers to explore: life and health education 生命健康教育类科普童书趋热

The sudden outbreak of the coronavirus pandemic highlighted the importance of health and safety education at all levels and in all kinds of forms. Even before the breakout, life and health education has been one of the popular topics in children's book publishing, but the scale and attention it received was limited. Children's books on the topic of life and health education can be divided into the following three categories. First, literary or picture books that use stories to convey the view of life. The second is popular science picture books that focus on building a healthy habit or lifestyle. Lastly, there are popular science children's books that have the content of more professional medical science to it.

Quickly after the breakout, publishers of children's books began to respond by planning on books that tell children the story of fight against the coronavirus and pandemic-control related knowledge. The publication of life and health education books began to heat up. For example, China Children's Press & Publishing Group launched picture books entitled *The Coronavirus is Gone! And the Hugging the Earth and Lighting up Life series*. *10 Ways to Fight Monsters*, published by Beijing

Science and Technology Press, helps children learn protective knowledge in a gentle and childlike language. At the same time, the original anti-epidemic children's books also show responsibility on the international stage. For example, the rights to *Fighting Epidemic with A Child's Heart & Big Eye Heartwarming Picture Books series* by Jiangsu Phoenix Children's Publishing House has been exported to Nepal, Lebanon, Vietnam and other countries.

In the post-epidemic period, children's books on life education and health education, as well as medical science and disease-related topics, received more attention. For example, China Publishing Association organized the selection of "2020 China Publishing Association Good Books for Children on Life Education Theme", and held the release and award event during the 2020 Beijing Book Fair.

Children's books such as life education and health education also need to balance professionalism with readability. Xiao Xiao, editor of Dolphin Media, said parents had begun to pay attention to the topic



of children's health before the outbreak. This has evidence in the huge amount of children's health content on social media and the rise of children's health KOLs. However, there is a delay in the publishing of children's book on the same topic. The outbreak of the virus has accelerated the trend to focus on health issues. As far as

the planning of such books is concerned, professional works will be more difficult to read while popular science books that are easy to read may be more superficial. It is difficult to balance between the two. According to Wang Zhinan, editor of the *Mysterious Island* imprint from Guangxi Normal University Press, children's books on health education have always been there, and publishers should have a more rational view on the heat brought by the epidemic. It's right to seize the opportunity to publish what the market needs, but publishers should not follow it blindly. Only when publishers pay attention to the work and topic itself and never lose the principles can valuable and high-quality books be produced.

(translated by Xiao Jianpeng)