

# What kind of Chinese books "traveled" overseas?

## 什么样的中国图书能漂洋过海?

By Qu Jingfan, Dong Qi

China Publishing & Media Journal recently collected key titles which were popular among overseas counterparts for the first half of the year from Chinese publishers, and then selected a number of them to compile a booklist of 100 titles. The main criteria for choosing these titles were their concise and beautiful language and their lively and interesting plots. By analyzing them in 3 categories, we will see some of the specific characteristics of these good books that "traveled".

Simple and authentic writing has been most successful at touching readers, and there are a number of such works that made it onto the list: *Meishun and Changsheng*, which tells of the lives of an ordinary couple; Mao Dun Literature Prize laureate Xu Zechen's newest oeuvre *Tales of Western Suburb in Beijing*; and *The Life of Miss Zhu San*, which lead us enter the lives of Shanghai's lower rung of society, are three such examples. History as a subject matter can be found in works such as *Northward*, *Rest in the Cloud* and *Three Lanes and Seven Alleys*, all of which provide for a strong sense of empathy and veracity. Innovative writing technique can be found in the surrealist novel *The Messenger* as well as in the Inception-style experimental novel *Snow White's Résumé* with its structure of multiple parallel narratives. The documentary literature *The Silk Road: From Penglai to Rome*, concerned with the question of whether the Silk Road of the Sea is overrated, is based on a multitude of historical material and academic research, elaborating on the historical impact of aspects such as the rise and fall of cities along the Silk Road, trade links, ideological connections, the contact between different civilizations and cultural integration, which altogether makes for an authoritative backing of this work.

In the Children's book category, books displaying regional culture have made for an especially interesting appearance. Examples include *The Ancient City of Liangzhu* about the Neolithic culture of the Changjiang Delta; renowned Beijing author Ye Guangqin's first children's book *Uncle Mouse Work up Late and Round House*, which centers around Hakka culture in the Jiangxi and Fujian area, allowing readers to appreciate authentic regional culture while enjoying the sheer pleasure of reading at the same time. Touching and sincere is what maybe best describes children's literature such as the animal novel *Little Wolf Fenrir and I* by Mongolian author Hei he; *Xiaosu and I*, depicting the experience of girls in Wuhan during the epidemic; and the tender story of *My Dearest Nanny* about a young girl and her wet nurse. Furthermore, there are many books in the category of self-growth that deserve of attention, such as *A Summer with Pigeons* by renowned publisher and author Liu Haixi, *Milly, Molly and Lily* series, *Cherry Village* and *Wandering in the City*. They not only provide a narrative for children of different ethnicities, regions and family backgrounds, but also help readers develop self-awareness and a positive and optimistic attitude, allowing for an inclusive integration into society.

On the non-fiction category, traditional arts and culture display a unique charm in books such as *A National Beauty*, which is a selection of 77 representative scroll paintings of Ancient China; *My Heart Belongs to Dunhuang* tells the story of Fan Jinshi, especially her work as an anthropologist in Dunhuang; *Great National Craftsmen* tells touching stories of the front-line representatives of technicians from several industries; *The Charm and Fashion of Peking Opera* is a well-rounded introduction to basic knowledge of

Beijing Opera; while *Pure Light in Hand: A Journey to Chinese Folk Art* delves deep into the history of thousands of years of exquisite handicraft in the regions south of the Yangtze river and Western China. There are also several cookbooks, including *Chinese Recipes* and *The Feast in Imperial Palace*. The former infuses the writer's private banquet menu with traditional Chinese table etiquette, while the latter depicts 80 little-known imperial cuisines.

Many titles in this category focus on the social development of contemporary China. *Becoming Shenzhen: 40 Years of Financial Reform and Opening-up* gives an insight into 40 years of the "Shenzhen experience" and "Shenzhen wisdom"; while *Made in China 2025* series looks into technological achievements of China's manufacturing industry and *Note of Poverty alleviation Cadres* depicts personal experience of poverty alleviation Cadres in China.

As a direct effect of the COVID-19 epidemic, books focusing on epidemic prevention and control have made a notable appearance too. *Fighting the Epidemic: Heroes as You Are* is a collection of touching stories and experiences during the epidemic of 39 people from all walks of life. *Prevention and Control of Covid-19* is aimed at dealing with the present situation and developments of infection with the novel coronavirus and targeted measures of prevention. *Breaking out of the Trend - Advice from 56 Management Scientists in the Outbreak* provides advice and suggestions for Chinese enterprises to help themselves through the epidemic by means of innovation. **(Please refer to the page F14 through F24 on the TOP 100 popular Chinese books in 2020)**

(Translated by Leonie Weidel)

(Continued on F14)

# Wang Wei: Pop-up books – the next leap

## 王伟: 期待立体书材质的下一次飞跃

By Sun Jue

Before 2016, pop-up books were more of a niche art market in China. 2016 was the first year of a new era, with the public's interest in pop-up books rising consistently, and pop-up books becoming an important point of growth in the children's book market. Wang Wei is a visiting professor of the Central Academy of Fine Arts and a famous master of paper art design in China. In March this year, a crowdfunding project *Opening the Forbidden City* pop-up book in honor of the 600th anniversary of the Forbidden City was launched by the Publishing House of Electronics Industry on the Chinese crowdfunding platform Modian. Within a 15-day period, it successfully crowdfunded 3.42 million RMB for 15000 sets of the book. The pop-up book was designed by Wang Wei, who has been dubbed the "No.1 pop-up book person in China". Our reporter interviewed with him recently.

### An accidental start

Wang Wei said that from 1997 to 2016, he was interested in pop-up books, but as he was not familiar with the marketing side of it, he shied away from it. When later he became a professional designer, working with paper art and spatial design, he still followed the developments of this field, acquiring books from outside of China as well. Even when *Opening the Forbidden City* has turned out to be one of 2020's "hot cakes", a balance between commercial aspects and art has yet to be reached.

He said what he wanted to do originally was books in the genre of cognitive development, books that



were slightly different. At that time, the craftsmanship of most printing factories in Mainland China was not up to his expectations. There were no other machines except those for printing and binding. "Later, we found a factory that did maintain special craftsmanship, they specialized in the production of pop-up books for the overseas market. They tested and produced some pop-up books, however in order to reduce the cost, we produced books in small format. These books didn't sell very well." He summarized there were two reasons: first, book sales at that time were done in a very traditional way. Producers would not face consumers directly and there existed a problem of the rate of wear and tear of the pop-up books in the distribution process. The second reason is that pop-up books consist of only a few pages of paper, but the cost is comparatively high.

### Looking at a "bright future"

In 2016, three books about the subject of the *Journey to the West* suddenly appeared on the market, all of which sold well. At this time, the market for pop-up books in China really opened up. Analyzing the

reasons, Wang Wei thinks that designers had matured; sales channels had done so as well, and readers began to accept this format.

Ever since 2016, the market has been in good condition. "Both designers and publishers are excited, and thought they can invest in pop-up books." His *Silk Road* and *Three Kingdoms* found a publisher and he continued to work on both of them. On terms of subject matter, the possibilities for content are ever expanding. Currently there are a number of books about traditional culture on the market, such as the 24 solar terms and the *Forbidden City*. According to Wang Wei, conceivable subjects include traditional culture, world classics and science fiction. "After all, only four years have passed since 2016. We have the world's largest group of readers here; we are looking at a bright future."

Wang Wei acknowledges that we are lagging behind overseas markets in terms of the free balance between business and art. Pop-up books in developed countries have reached a certain level, but current progress is slow. Some artists aim at the market and try it as an experiment, but don't care about sales volumes. Talking about the bottleneck that needs to be overcome in the domestic pop-up book market, Wang Wei says: "I always think that if pop-up books are waiting for the next leap, it may be connected to the improvement of material. In order to overcome the limitations of paper-based pop-up books in terms of preservation and curvature, while retaining the unique texture of paper, perhaps we need to wait for the arrival."

(Translated by Leonie Weidel)