

ДИСКУССИЯ • DISCUSSION

Статья • Article



Ya. Yang

Changing the Role of Chinese Public Libraries in the History of Children's Book Publishing

Abstract. In recent years, there has been strong growth in the Chinese children's book market, particularly during the pandemic thus solidifying its leading position in the segmented book market. This trend reflects the increasing demand for children's reading in society, providing extra requirement for the development of public libraries in the area of children's reading services. The depth of study of these changes and its role in the Chinese public libraries through the history of children's book publishing paved the way for this article, which explores the role and movements of public libraries in the children's book market. The research finds that public libraries have gradually evolved from the initial roles of collector and disseminator to promoter, collaborator and guide, playing an increasingly important role in children's book publishing and reading promotion. The innovative cooperation, resource sharing and mutual benefit between public libraries and children's book publishers have injected new vitality into the sustainable development of the children's book market. In the future, public libraries will continue to deepen cooperation, to drive innovation, to achieve sustainable growth and to provide more quality and efficient services for children's reading, meeting the high requirements of the times.

Keywords: Children's Book Publishing House, Cooperation, Wuhan Children's Library, Role Transformation, Reading Promotion

Citation: Yang Ya. Changing the Role of Chinese Public Libraries in the History of Children's Book Publishing // Book. Reading. Media. 2025. Vol. 3, No. 1. P. 54–62. <https://doi.org/10.20913/BRM-3-1-6>.

Received 18.11.2024

Revised 15.02.2025

Accepted 17.03.2025



Yang Yan

Using the Example of Wuhan Children's Library
Wuhan Children's Library,
64 Nanjing Road, Jiangnan District, Wuhan, Hubei Province, 430014, China,
Director of Activities Department
e-mail: 496870297@qq.com

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Я. Янг

Роль публичных библиотек Китая в издании литературы для детей

Янг Ян

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директор отдела мероприятий
e-mail: 496870297@qq.com

Аннотация. В последние годы, особенно в период пандемии, китайский рынок детской литературы продемонстрировал значительный рост, что позволило ему занять лидирующие позиции на сегментированном книжном рынке. Эта тенденция отражает растущий в обществе спрос на детское чтение и создает дополнительные условия для развития публичных библиотек. В статье исследуется роль публичных библиотек Китая через историю книгоиздания детской литературы, а также их влияние на рынок. Анализ показал, что публичные библиотеки постепенно переходят от первоначальной роли хранителя и распространителя к роли промоутера, сотрудника и медиатора. Они приобретают все более важное значение в издании детских книг и продвижении чтения. Инновационное сотрудничество, обмен ресурсами и общие интересы публичных библиотек и издателей детских книг обеспечивают устойчивое развитие рынка литературы для детей. Библиотеки будут углублять такое сотрудничество, внедрять инновации, предоставлять современные качественные и эффективные услуги в сфере детского чтения.

Ключевые слова: книгоиздание детской литературы в Китае, литература для детей, детская литература в Китае, сотрудничество библиотек и издательств, Уханьская детская библиотека, продвижение чтения

Для цитирования: Янг Я. Роль публичных библиотек Китая в издании литературы для детей // Книга. Чтение. Медиасреда. 2025. Т. 3, № 1. С. 54–62. <https://doi.org/10.20913/BRM-3-1-6>.

Статья поступила в редакцию 18.11.2024

Получена после доработки 15.02.2025

Принята для публикации 17.03.2025

The Chinese children's book market has demonstrated impressive growth in recent years. According to relevant data, the retail market value of children's books was 5 billion yuan (approximately 700 million USD) in 2010, accounting for only about 13% of the entire book market. However, despite the severe challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic to the book market in 2020, the children's book market experienced a remarkable upturn, with its retail market value soaring to nearly 30 billion yuan (approximately 4.3 billion USD), representing more than 30% of the market share. This has solidified its leading position within the book market segmentation (什么值得买消费洞察: 童书篇发布, 2021). In 2022, the number of new book titles published nationwide reached over 170,000, among which sales revenue from children's books continued to dominate, accounting for 25.25% of the total new book market revenue despite a slight decline compared to the pandemic period (2024–2029 少儿读物行业市场深度调研及发展策略分析报告, 2024). This growth trend profoundly reflects the increasingly vigorous demand for children's reading. As society's emphasis on education and reading continues to escalate, parents and educators' aspirations

for children's reading also grow steadily. This demand, like the gentle rain in spring, nourishes the thriving expansion of the children's book market, driving the continuous increase in the sales share of children's books. Meanwhile, with the improvement of family economic conditions and the popularization of reading culture, more and more families are willing to invest more funds in their children's reading, undoubtedly injecting new vitality into the prosperity of the children's book market.

In this era, it is urgent to explore the progress of public libraries in promoting children's reading in order to meet the needs of the times. The research team at Wuhan Children's Library has been dedicated to the field of children's reading promotion for many years, accumulating substantial research achievements and practical experience (匡红鹰, 2020; Lin, 2024). Building upon this established research foundation, this paper attempts to analyze the development trends of public libraries by deeply investigating their role evolution in the history of children's book publishing in China, providing valuable references for public libraries to further promote children's reading.

Historical Transformation of China's Children's Book Publishing Industry

The history of Chinese children's book publishing can be traced back to the period of modern social transformation in the late 19th and early 20th centuries (王玮, 2005). With the popularization of education and the growth of cultural demands, children's books began to attract attention as an essential component of children's education. At that time, some forward-thinking cultural figures and educators devoted themselves to the endeavor of writing and publishing children's books, aiming to stimulate children's learning interest and thinking ability through inspiring content.

The founding of the People's Republic of China injected new vitality into the research of the children's book publishing industry. In 1949, the Party and the state attached great importance to the development of the publishing industry, particularly giving significant attention and support to publishing work targeting children and adolescents. In this context, children's book publishing, as an important part of the publishing industry in the new socialist China, experienced a rapid rise. The state established specialized publishing institutions, such as Children's Publishing Houses, specifically responsible for the publication of children's books (郭义强, 2019). These institutions actively organized the compilation and publication of various types of children's books, including storybooks, popular science readings, comic strips, and more, to cater to the needs of children of different age groups.

Before the reform and opening up, China's children's book publishing industry was still in its infancy, with relatively few publications and subject to certain restrictions. However, with the deepening of reform and opening up, the children's book publishing industry ushered in unprecedented development opportunities. Especially after the Third Plenary Session of the Eleventh Central Committee of the Communist Party of China in 1978, when the state prioritized economic construction as its central task, the children's book publishing industry also embraced a spring of changes.

From reform and opening up to the present, China's children's book publishing industry has gone through four main advancement periods: the reform opportunity period, the boom period, the diversified period, the integrated period, and the individualized period. Each period has witnessed the growth and transformation of the children's book publishing industry, shifting gradually from a purely production model in the planned economy era to a market-driven production and operation model; from blindly pursuing quantitative growth to enhancing quality and increasing efficiency; from deep cultivation of the domestic market to expansion and cooperation in the international market; from a single product form to innovation featuring digitization, diversification, cross-border cooperation, and brand collaboration.

In recent years, with the rapid increase of the social economy, China's children's book publishing industry has achieved a splendid transformation from a "small-scale" industry to a "significant" force, becoming a shining star in the publishing industry.

The Role of Chinese Public Libraries in the History of Children's Book Publishing

The role played by Chinese public libraries in the history of children's book publishing has continuously evolved and deepened with the changes of the times and societal development.

In the early stages, public libraries primarily undertook the tasks of book collection and lending services, providing children with spaces and opportunities for reading. However, their direct influence on children's book publishing was relatively limited, functioning more as a platform for cultural dissemination and knowledge popularization.

As society progressed and the functions of public libraries expanded, their role in the history of children's book publishing gradually became prominent. Public libraries began to establish close cooperative relationships with children's book publishers, jointly promoting the development of children's book publishing.

Leveraging their extensive reader data and analysis of reading behaviors, public libraries provided valuable market information and feedback on reader demands to children's book publishers. This information holds significant reference value for publishers, aiding them in more accurately grasping market needs and planning and publishing children's books that cater to children's reading preferences.

Furthermore, public libraries actively participate in the promotion of children's books and reading activities, organizing various forms such as reader salons, author sharing sessions, and children's book exhibitions. These activities serve as bridges between readers and publishers, allowing publishers to directly gather readers' feedback and preferences, thereby influencing the formulation of their children's book publishing content and promoting the prosperity and growth of the children's book market.

It can be said that Chinese public libraries have played an increasingly important role in the history of children's book publishing, becoming one of the crucial forces driving the progression of children's book publishing. Looking ahead, as the service functions of public libraries continue to improve and innovate, their role in the field of children's book publishing will become even more prominent, contributing further to children's reading growth and cultural inheritance.

The Changing Role of Wuhan Children's Library in the History of Children's Book Publishing

A. Collector

Public libraries systematically collect, screen, and organize children's book resources, including paper books, e-books, and multimedia materials. Wuhan

Children's Library boasts a collection of over 1.3 million children's books and 0.6 TB of digital resources, particularly rich in comic strip collections, making it the library with the most comprehensive comic strip collection in China.

B. Disseminator

As a disseminator of children's books, public libraries were previously constrained by fees and inconvenient borrowing practices. After 2011, libraries nationwide opened their doors for free, and Wuhan Children's Library took the lead by offering free borrowing and digital services, equipped with 11 digital resource databases, thereby accelerating the dissemination of children's books. Through cooperation and interlibrary loan, the library further expanded the scope of children's book borrowing.

C. Promoter

In the 21st century, public libraries in China began to promote reading activities. Since 2010, Wuhan Children's Library has launched brand activities such as the "Little Footprints Storytime" (an event where volunteers tell children's stories to kids) (Fig. 1), dedicated to promoting early childhood reading and providing scientific guidance. Subsequently, the library has also created multiple reading promotion brands, including the "TUSENORD" Imagination Experience Space (an immersive imagination space experience activity originates from Sweden that utilizes spatial function design and theme content based on children's books to encourage children to use their imagination to create stories) (Fig. 2), "Little Seed" (an activity that shares the content of children's books in schools and communities) (Fig. 3), "Cloud Reading Club" (an event where reading promoters, writers, and editors share children's books with kids online) (Fig. 4), and "Music & Reading" (an activity that integrates music and reading elements, allowing children to experience the content of reading in a musical atmosphere and receive music knowledge enlightenment during the reading process) (Fig. 5), comprehensively carrying out reading promotion activities (肖静, 郭志勇, 2017).



Fig. 1. The Little Footprints Story Corner Activity
Рис. 1. Занятия «Уголка рассказа маленьких следов»



Fig. 2. The TUSENORD Imagination Experience Space
Рис. 2. Пространство для развития воображения «TUSENORD»



Fig. 3. Little Seed Mobile Reading Promotion Activity
Рис. 3. Занятия по продвижению мобильного чтения «Маленькое семечко»



Fig. 4. The Cloud Reading Club Activity
Рис. 4. Занятия читательского клуба «Облако»



Fig. 5. The Music & Reading Activity
Рис. 5. Занятия «Музыка и чтение»

D. Collaborator

Around 2018, children's book publishers gradually joined forces with Chinese public libraries in reading promotion activities, transforming public libraries into key partners for children's book publishers. Taking Wuhan Children's Library as an example, the library has collaborated with children's book publishers on activity resources, spatial resources, and technical resources. Using their respective professional and resource advantages to the fullest, they have joined forces in promoting children's books, achieving more authoritative, scientific, and easily understandable results in their promotional efforts.

1. Collaboration on Activity Resources

Activities such as the "Little Seed" Mobile Reading Promotion have penetrated schools and communities, allowing children to personally experience the joy of reading and thereby cultivating their interest in it. Publishing houses have also participated in the "Little Seed" initiative by launching events where authors and editors visit schools and communities. Especially during the COVID-19 pandemic, libraries innovatively introduced the "Cloud Reading Club", an activity that, through collaboration between libraries and publishing houses, utilized online platforms to share good books with children, earning widespread acclaim.

These activities have not only benefited children but also had a positive impact on publishing houses. By collaborating with libraries and engaging in face-to-face interactions with young readers, publishing houses can more directly understand market demands and adjust their publishing strategies, thus releasing more children's books that are loved by kids. This cooperative model achieves a win-win situation and promotes the prosperous development of the children's book market.

2. Collaboration on Spatial Resources

Wuhan Children's Library has continuously expanded its service scope by establishing urban reading rooms, library branches, mobile book service points, and red book rooms, extending its services to

every corner of the city. As Chinese children's book publishers have grown, they have also accumulated resources for reading promotion activities but face challenges in delivering these resources to broader audiences. Starting in 2023, the library began incorporating resources from children's book publishers to conduct activities within its service spaces. Offline salon activities for the "Cloud Reading Club" have been held at various locations, including Wuhan Children's Library, Xinhua Bookstore, district-level public libraries, women's and children's activity centers, school branches, and public service areas in malls (Fig. 6). These activities invite signed writers from children's book publishers to participate in offline reading sharing, engaging in face-to-face exchanges with children to stimulate their interest in reading.



Fig. 6. Offline Salon Activity of The Cloud Reading Club
Held at Xinhua Bookstore

Рис. 6. Занятие читательского клуба «Облако»
в книжном магазине «Синьхуа»

3. Collaboration on Technical Resources

Since 2011, Wuhan Children's Library has comprehensively built its digital library, forming a service framework with its website and WeChat official account as the main access points, supported by a vast array of digital resources (Fig. 7). Over the years, many families have established the habit of letting their children listen to children's books online. Many children's book publishers have also produced video and digital versions of their content. However, due to the lack of a unified access platform, these resources were difficult for readers to effectively utilize. Starting in 2019, Wuhan Children's Library leveraged the digital resources provided by publishers, integrating them into its WeChat official account for dissemination, significantly increasing the access rate of digital resources produced by children's book publishers (Fig. 8).

E. Guider

Since 2012, the development of Chinese public libraries has entered the era of big data. With years of data accumulation, the reading data of public library



Fig. 7. Digital Resource Platform of Wuhan Children's Library (Browser Version)

Рис. 7. Платформа цифровых ресурсов Уханьской детской библиотеки (браузерная версия)



Fig. 8. Digital Resource Platform of Wuhan Children's Library (WeChat Version)

Рис. 8. Платформа цифровых ресурсов Уханьской детской библиотеки (версия WeChat)

users has become increasingly valuable. Concurrently, as the service quality of Chinese public libraries continues to improve, their reader base grows, and their social influence strengthens. In their collaboration with children's book publishers, public libraries are gradually taking on the role of guiders. Taking Wuhan

Children's Library as an example, the library guides publishers' children's book publishing strategies through feedback from its vast reader data and the announcement of children's book award results.

1. Guidance from the Library's Extensive Reader Data on Children's Book Publishing

Since the early 21st century, Wuhan Children's Library has continuously enlarged its library business information management system. From the initial ILAS Library Automation Integrated System (The ILAS Library Automation Integrated System is a software system tailored for library management, which highly integrated processes including book acquisition, cataloging, circulation and retrieval, significantly enhancing the library operational efficiency and service quality) to the later Interlib Library Cluster Management System (The Interlib Library Cluster Management System represents a new generation of library automation systems. Employing a B/S (Browser/Server) architecture, it facilitates the collaborative construction and sharing of library resources, supports multi-tiered structures and cross-platform operation. It provides libraries with a more flexible and efficient management solution.) (Fig. 9), The business system's data has become increasingly comprehensive, particularly in collecting readers' borrowing data. Since 2009, the number of individuals borrowing books annually from the library has exceeded 300,000. By 2022, the annual number of book borrowers had reached 680,000. Starting in 2017, Wuhan Public Library regularly analyzed readers' reading habits using Interlib system data and published the results to the public (鲁月, 张秀兰, 2017). This data provides valuable guidance for the publishing direction of children's book publishers.

2. Guidance from the Library's Children's Book Award Results on Children's Book Publishing

Public libraries have a large reader base for children's book services, primarily consisting of school

The screenshot displays the Interlib Library Cluster Management System interface. It features a top navigation bar with various icons and a sidebar on the left with a tree structure for navigation. The main area shows a table of book orders with columns for order number, ISBN, title, classification, price, publisher, order date, book number, and various status indicators. The table contains 15 rows of data, including titles like '我与狗的生活' and '我与狗的生活'. The bottom of the interface shows pagination information and a copyright notice for 2018.

Fig. 9. Interlib Library Cluster Management System

Рис. 9. Система управления библиотечными кластерами Interlib

pupils. Since 2014, some Chinese public libraries have attempted to conduct children's book award activities to evaluate the quality of children's books through collective reading by school pupils to select the most popular ones each year. Since 2017, the Shenzhen Children's Library has initiated a collaborative endeavor, joining forces with Wuhan Children's Library and 27 other public libraries throughout China, to establish the highly acclaimed "My Favorite Children's Book Award". This event skillfully combines children's independent voting with rigorous expert evaluations, with the aim of stimulating children's reading enthusiasm, fostering the thrive of the children's book industry, and pooling vast resources to inject powerful impetus into the promotion of children's reading. As a result, it has exerted a profound and positive impact on the children's reading ecosystem. By 2023, the event had successfully attracted the enthusiastic participation of 117 institutions (including 68 publishers) and 113 individuals, who eagerly nominated a total of 3,500 outstanding children's books (鲁月, 张秀兰, 2017) (Fig. 10). The number of participating publishers and books has surged since 2017, with children's book publishers transitioning from initial skepticism and observation to eagerly strengthening cooperation with libraries, demonstrating the strong guiding role of public libraries in children's book publishing.

Analysis of Development Factors for Public Libraries

Wuhan Children's Library is one of the first public libraries in China specifically established to serve the children's population. Over the long time, it has become highly representative in the field of children's libraries. By examining the transformative role of this library in the historical development of the children's book publishing industry, we can analyze the progressing factors of public libraries in recent decades.

A. Diversified Cooperation Models and Resource Sharing: Public libraries actively engage in diversified collaborations with various institutions such as children's book publishers, schools, communities and tech companies. The assessment of such cooperation models not only broadens service channels and content but also promotes resource sharing. By sharing excellent children's book resources, introducing professional service teams and adopting advanced technologies, libraries not only enrich their collections but also enhance service quality. At the same time, this resource sharing achieves mutual benefit and win-win solutions for all parties involved, bringing more growth opportunities.

B. Collaborative Innovation to Improve Service Quality: Various cooperating activities help public libraries to enhance service innovation. Through collaboration with different institutions, libraries can introduce new service concepts, methods and content thus increasingly aligning their services with readers' needs. For example, cooperating with children's book publishers to conduct reading promotion activities can attract more readers. Collaborating with tech companies helps to improve more convenient and efficient digital services. This collaborative innovation not only improves the service quality of libraries but also enhances their influence in society.

C. Cooperation for Sustainable Library Development: Cooperation is not only a crucial part of the current spread of libraries but also an important path for achieving sustainability. Through cooperation with other institutions, libraries can continuously expand their business areas and service scopes, enhancing their competitiveness and adaptability. At the same time, cooperation helps libraries address various challenges and risks, such as digital transformation and changes in reading methods, ensuring their long-term stability.



Fig. 10. Awards Ceremony for My Favorite Children's Books in 2023
Рис. 10. Церемония вручения премии «Мои любимые детские книги» в 2023 году

Outlook on Public Libraries Future Developmental Trends

Analyzing public libraries' transformative role in the history of progress of the children's book publishing industry helped us to identify three developmental factors, associated with cooperation and highlighted further future trends.

From the cooperation perspective, the future trend of public libraries exhibits characteristics of diversification, further collaboration, resource sharing and mutual-beneficial, innovation-driven development and sustainability. Libraries will actively engage in deep cooperation with various institutions such as children's book publishers, schools, communities and tech companies to enrich their collections, broaden service areas and more precisely meet the diversified needs of readers. Through cooperation, libraries will achieve resource sharing, optimize resource allocation and realize mutual beneficial and win-win solutions with partners, jointly promoting of cultural endeavors. Furthermore, cooperation will become an important driving force for library service innovation, introducing new service concepts, technologies and methods to improve service quality and efficiency. Ultimately, cooperation will contribute to the sustainable evolution

of libraries, enabling them to address various challenges and risks, ensuring stable progress in a changing social environment, and providing readers with higher-quality and more efficient services.

Conclusion

The historical evolution of China's children's book publishing industry is closely linked to the advancement of public libraries. Public libraries play multiple roles in the children's book publishing industry, including collectors, disseminators, promoters, collaborators and guides. Through cooperation and innovation, they drive their own growth and lead the direction of the children's book publishing industry. In the future, public libraries will continue to deepen cooperation, pursue innovation-driven development, and aim for sustainability, making greater contributions to the cause of children's reading.

The author has read and approved the final manuscript.

Conflict of interest

The author declares that the article has no conflicts of interest.

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