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in the Capital City

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Drawn by Liu Xiaofei

ENHANCING THE LOVE OF READING

FOR THE CITY'S CULTURAL DEVELOPMENT IN A NEW ERA

Translated by Wang Wei Edited by Brad Green, Anne Ruisi Photos by Pu Feng, Wang Zichuan, Deng Wei, Qu Bowei, Xiu Yuchen, Wang Weijia, Wang Jianing, Wang Fei, Beyhan Özdemir (Türkiye), Francois Nadeau (Canada), Hwang SungHo (Republic of Korea)



Beijing is one of the world's best cities for book lovers. Beijing residents love to read. The contents of couplets found on both sides of a doorway entering a home often praise the love of reading. Beijingers are enlightened thanks to their love of reading, and the capital city has also become more interesting because of this growing hobby among Beijingers.

As a great witness to Chinese civilisation, Beijing has a history of more than 3,000 years as a city, during which it has served as a capital for more than 870 years. Since the founding of the People's Republic of China in 1949, serving as a cultural centre has been an important function of Beijing as the nation's capital. In 2006, the Chinese government launched the Nation-

wide Reading campaign. Since it was founded in 2011, the Literary China-Beijing Reading Festival, part of the broader national campaign, has become an icon of the capital city's cultural development. While adhering to innovative promotion models for Nationwide Reading and advancing the integration of reading resources and other industries, Beijing has conducted effective exploration and achieved remarkable results, contributing wisdom and strength to the city's economic and social growth, lending to its development as a world-class harmonious and liveable city. With the holding of the reading festival, the charm of books continues to influence the ancient capital. The event has become one of the city's distinctive cultural symbols in the new era.



时间一到
那扇门,就对我开放
在这里
我可以只和自己做朋友
不必分明有羽翼
却当着人群将它折损,掩
在这里
我与杯盏相交,以沉默回
在一个与世人无关的下午
用我空空的手,寂寂的心
承接人类如潮的秘密
生死与爱重新书写我
我成了文学与梦的孩子。

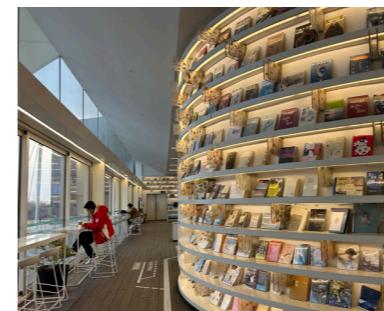
Drawn by Liu Xiaofei



STRONG DEVELOPMENT OF THE READING FESTIVAL

Every year, tens of thousands of reading activities throughout the city of Beijing are attended by tens of millions of people, affecting its millions of households. There are over 2,100 physical bookstores in the city, meaning it has nearly one physical bookstore per 10,000 people, ranking it first nationwide. Over the years, the city's four major indicators regarding reading—its residents' total reading index, adults' comprehensive reading rate, minors' reading rate and digital reading rate—have been first place in the country.

These fruitful achievements come from the reading festival's contribution and the promotion of building Beijing as China's cultural centre. The outstanding results are a remarkable example of the increasingly strong urban reading atmosphere throughout the city, a significant improvement in the efficiency of reading services for the public and a good practice of high-quality development of the reading festival as part of the Nationwide Reading campaign over the past 12 years.



Top-level Design Deeply Influences Grassroots

On April 23, 2022, the First Nationwide Reading Convention kicked off in Beijing. General Secretary of the CPC Central Committee Xi Jinping sent a congratulatory letter, pointing out that the entire society should participate in reading to form a strong atmosphere of loving reading, reading good books and becoming good at reading.

Since the 18th CPC National Congress in 2012, under the leadership of Xi Jinping as the core of the Central Committee, the Nationwide Reading campaign has become a popular topic among the public. According to the *Report on the Work of the Government 2023*, the Central Government will enrich people's intellectual and cultural lives, carry out public initiatives to promote cultural and ethical advancements, launch cultural projects to benefit the public, foster a love of reading among the people and support the development of the cultural sector. This is the 10th consecutive time



that the Nationwide Reading campaign has been included in the *Government Work Report* since 2014. From its advocacy and great promotion to its in-depth advancement, the campaign has seen more than 10 years of smooth development, and the coverage and influence of encouraging reading is becoming wider and deeper.

The top-level design of the campaign from the CPC Central Committee and the Central Government has been completed. *Opinions on Promoting Nationwide Reading*, published by the Publicity Department of the CPC Central Committee, proposes that by 2025, the Nationwide Reading promotion service system covering both urban and rural areas throughout the country will have been basically formed, and the idea of Nationwide Reading will have deeper roots among the public. According to the *14th Five-Year Plan for National Economic and Social Development of the*

People's Republic of China and the Outline of Long-Range Objectives through the Year 2035, Nationwide Reading will be further developed to build a literary China.

At the municipal level, the Beijing Reading Festival Leading Group Office has been established to pool resources from all sectors and jointly build a pattern for Nationwide Reading based on a promotion system through government guidance, industries' support and public participation to benefit all. According to *Implementation of the Opinions on Deepening the Development of the Capital City's Nationwide Reading in a New Era*, Beijing should optimise the supply of reading resources, improve the public service system for Nationwide Reading, and enhance the influence and coverage of the campaign. Centring on the Beijing Reading Festival, the city has held themed activities for Nationwide Reading, formed its distinctive pattern and achieved good results over the years.

The Nationwide Reading Campaign has been included in the Government Work Report for 10 consecutive years since 2014.



Innovative Promotions Brighten the City

At present, the festival has 33 members at the municipal level and over 100 cooperative institutions; covers over 400 public reading spaces and 300 reading clubs; and invites 300 luminaries, gathers more than 500 publishing houses and cultural organisations, 1,000 other social institutions, more than 100 media organisations, and 10,000 professional reading promoters. The event organises more than 30,000 activities per year, covering and affecting the city's more than 20 million residents.

Founded in 2011, the Literary China–Beijing Reading Festival event kicks off in April every year, and lasts until the end of the year. Over the past 12 years, as an event at the national level for the Nationwide Reading campaign, the festival has continued to expand its scale, enrich its contents and roll out its creative ideas, resulting in an increasingly positive influence and impact on other cities. Every time it takes place, the event receives much attention from all walks of life, and it has developed into a model for Nationwide Reading throughout the country. More importantly, through professional promotion and guidance, the value of reading has been highlighted, high-quality reading has been advocated and its leading role in the country's Nationwide Reading campaign has been strengthened. Through a method of

promotion that explores government support and public participation, the festival has achieved significant results.

Over the past 12 years, Beijing has established a reading promotion framework for the city, district, sub-district and community or village levels to advance its Nationwide Reading campaign, effectively pooling resources from all walks of life and creating a strong atmosphere for reading. Nationwide Reading has come to rural areas, communities, families, schools, government organs, enterprises and military camps. New book sharing activities, cultural lectures and reading salons are held throughout the city's libraries, bookstores and public reading spaces. Reading activities for parents and children, office workers and elderly people have realised a full coverage of Nationwide Reading and have become integrated into people's daily lives.

A "15-minute circle for cultural services" has taken shape throughout the city, meaning that a public library, a large bookstore, a theme bookstore or a community bookstore can be found within a 15-minute walk from a given resident's home. During the reading festival, a variety of activities have enhanced the cultural quality of the city, resulting

in reading having a long-term and far-reaching impact on the lives of its residents. The Beijing International Book Fair, Beijing Book Fair, Beijing October Literature Month, Beijing International Book Carnival, Beijing Book Market and Online Literature+ Conference have enriched the city's residents' reading demands over the years.

Beijing has selected its Nationwide Reading Promoters, and Nationwide Reading Representative Families, Communities, Institutions and Enterprises throughout the city, playing an exemplary and leading role in promoting its Nationwide Reading campaign. Nationwide Reading cannot be separated from professional guidance. Under the influence of reading promoters, some communities have grown into dynamic demonstration representatives. The team of the city's reading promoters is constantly expanding and growing. The reading festival fosters 2,000 reading promoters every year and utilises the power of volunteers to develop the Nationwide Reading campaign.

Over the past 12 years, the reading festival has steadily developed. Nationwide Reading has become a bright colour that will never fade in the city.



Organising Colourful Activities

Beijing, as a learning city, has rich cultural resources and a strong reading atmosphere.

Thanks to the city's rich reading resources and comprehensive services, the colourful contents and diverse forms of reading activities to benefit the people have stimulated the public's enthusiasm for reading, allowing more people to experience the charm of reading, and consciously sharing and promoting it. The "Reading Marathon" is exciting, drawing people of different ages to participate. "Read, Sightsee, Talk about and Love Beijing" leads primary and secondary school students to develop a love of reading while sightseeing and experiencing the culture of Old Beijing and the city's revolutionary traditions. "Appreciating Books and Meeting with Famous Experts and Scholars" comes to schools, enterprises, communities and villages to promote reading, achieving a seamless connection between professionals and grassroots reading spaces. Under the guidance of the "Beijing Model," various publishing houses and social organisations have also launched their reading activities with distinctive forms and content to meet the needs of differ-

ent people and to continue to enrich the city's Nationwide Reading campaign.

Under the impetus of Nationwide Reading, each district in Beijing has launched reading activities to meet the cultural development of their respective needs, which are generally recognised by the public, such as Nationwide Reading in Chaoyang, Haidian, Xicheng, Daxing and Fangshan districts. In addition, these districts have combined their regional advantages and cultural characteristics to build their own reading cultural activities, and conducted significant explorations from the organisation of reading activities and infrastructural development to the public participation and demonstrations for Nationwide Reading. In 2022, Beijing launched a series of activities for Nationwide Reading combining online and offline resources to mobilise nearly 800 physical bookstores and reading spaces throughout the city, and nearly 30 online digital reading platforms to organise over 30,000 reading activities, affecting and covering more than 20 million people.

Every year, tens of thousands of reading activities throughout the city of Beijing are attended by tens of millions of people, affecting its millions of households.



THE LOVE OF READING HAS DEEP ROOTS AMONG THE PUBLIC

Beijing has an exceptional advantage in the Nationwide Reading campaign. Improving public cultural services, enriching the 15-minute public reading service circle and meeting the diverse needs of people for reading have become an unremitting pursuit of the city for the campaign.



A Variety of Resources Combine Reading with Daily Life

Today, there are more than 2,100 physical bookstores in Beijing, ranking it number one in the country. In 2023, physical bookstores throughout the city began to recover after the three years of pandemic impact.

Culture is the soul of any ethnic group and any country. Promoting Nationwide Reading enhances not only one of the best soft powers of a city, but also becomes a key part of a city's cultural industry to benefit its people. Bookstores throughout Beijing enable the city to shape its cultural qualities. The love of reading has become one of the qualities and characteristics of the city and its residents. The interactions between people, books and the city create a strong atmosphere for Nationwide Reading. The city's reading festival has accumulated a great power to influence its people.

During the Spring Festival holiday of 2023, its bookstores received nearly 200,000 customers. Book sales in the city's more than 160 physical bookstores exceed 20 million yuan. Among them, the number of sales in two major bookstores—Beijing Books Building and Wangfujing Bookstore—exceeded one million yuan. The number of sales in many physical bookstores, including Cathay Bookshop, branches of Xinhua Bookstore and Light of Youth Children's Bookstore, saw more than 50 percent year-on-year growth.

Located on West Chang'an Avenue, Beijing Books Building welcomes

numerous readers every day; they stop at various bookshelves and desks to browse the reading materials. Its Children's Experience reading centre is filled with parents who take their children to explore books. The Museum Adventure Season on its third floor presents cultural and creative products that have been authorised by world-famous museums, such as the British Museum. These are articles of luxury among cultural and creative products. At a study sharing area on the second floor, customers can enjoy a comfortable and quiet reading environment equipped with cosy illuminations, tables and chairs. In addition, the bookstore has spacious and bright public reading areas for booklovers. Completed in May 1998, the bookstore, with a total floor area of 2,000 square metres (sq.m), was China's largest of this type. In the eyes of locals and visitors from other cities, it holds a fond position in the memories of many people.

Many residents in Beijing feel that the business mode of the city's physical bookstores is becoming increasingly diversified and closer to representing their daily lives. Bookstores featuring new modes, such as Zhongshuge, Page One and More Than Reading, have become ideal places for people to search books or make friends who love reading because of their elegant and distinctive interior design and decorations, as well as the provision of coffee, tea and desserts. In some bookstores, reading and buying books is also gradually evolving into a new way of making friends, enjoying leisure time or entertainment. On one afternoon of a public holiday, one can go to a bookstore to take a look at the binding of books, touch their beautiful covers and smell the special aroma of newly-printed books. Enjoying reading on a bright spring day can bring one great satisfaction.

Bookstores in Beijing have been going beyond their single function of selling books and have begun to serve as cultural spaces with their own features for the public.

Creating distinctive reading spaces is an important part of the Nationwide Reading campaign. Over the past 12 years, for creating a variety of new types of public cultural spaces, the city has embarked on a road of restructuring, upgrading and innovative development.

Located at the hustling and bustling TaiKoo LI in Sanlitun, Chaoyang District, the Spring Breeze Reading Club • Chaoyang City Book Study gives one a feeling of bright sunshine in springtime. The simple yet stylish design of the book study space adds a touch of cultural atmosphere to the fashionable Sanlitun area. A cup of coffee and a book can lead to an entire afternoon there. Unlike other bookstores, this one specialises in selling more than 400 magazines, covering design, lifestyle, aesthetics, fashion, film, architecture and photography, and many of the selections are difficult to find elsewhere. Its large space seems to fill various forms and contents. Its reading environment features an artistic style, which is frequently updated with characteristic elements, allowing readers to feel the harmony of culture and life.

The bookstore is a microcosm of the development of Beijing's public cultural services. In recent years, Beijing has rolled out its physical bookstores' restructuring, upgrading, integration, innovation and high-quality development by advancing the city's infrastructure construction for its cultural services. For example, community reading spaces have opened on streets and alleys for locals who love reading.

Bookstores throughout Beijing enable the city to shape its cultural qualities.

1



Yimin Library Promotes Public Cultural Services in Rural Areas

Located at a village in Gaoliying Town, Shunyi District, Yimin Library has a quiet atmosphere. Books are neatly arranged on bookshelves in the categories of literature, children, agricultural technology and lifestyle. All books are numbered and registered. Villagers shuttle between bookshelves looking for their favourite books, or sit quietly reading in front of windows. The library regularly organises reading seminars, knowledge competitions and sharing of reading experiences to further stimulate villagers' enthusiasm for reading. This small rural library is not only a symbol of local cultural development, but also the most beautiful library on a village doorstep.

Yimin Library is a highlight of Beijing's public cultural services for rolling out the Nationwide Reading campaign. In December 2005, the first Yimin Library, a type of small-sized rural library, opened to the public at Dongsangyuan Village in

3



2



Dayushu Town, Yanqing District. Over the years, the city has continuously strengthened its infrastructure construction to develop such libraries, improved the reading service system to meet the needs of readers in its rural areas and encouraged villagers to apply the knowledge learned from Yimin into practice.

Since 2018, the city has promoted a tiered library service system throughout its districts. Each district focuses on its district-level library as a major one, and establishes the branches of the major library in its sub-districts and towns, as well as small-sized libraries, such as Yimin, in villages. In so doing, resource sharing and extension of resources to grassroots levels will help locals enjoy cultural services in their neighbourhoods and participate in the Nationwide Reading campaign. Today, Yimin has fully covered all the city's villages, realising the goal of making public cultural services most accessible to its residents in both urban and rural areas.

4



Reading on the Cloud

When words break away from the confines of physical paper, they often present ever-changing content with different paths and platforms.

With the rapid development of the Internet, digital reading and audiobooks are a part of peoples' daily lives, becoming an important reading method, and affecting their reading habits and results in recent years. Today, reading no longer means holding a printed book in one's hands. E-books, audiobooks and other means of new media have become a main form of public reading.

In Beijing, buying books online has become increasingly convenient. Through a phone app, one can easily buy books on the cloud. A scene of reading created by digital technology has improved the accessibility and convenience of public cultural services, and online book sales have increased significantly. Buying printed books, audiobooks and e-books online enables the public to enjoy reading without leaving their homes. Thanks to rich and colourful reading resources online, people can be immersed in a diversified digital reading.

Digital reading is constantly upgrading. With the development of new technologies, such as 5G and virtual reality, digital reading sees more changes. Virtual, physical, online and offline resources have been further integrated. Digital reading promotional activities can meet the needs of readers of different ages, enabling them to enjoy online reading at any time.





BOOK EXHIBITIONS ON THE RISE

During the Beijing Reading Festival 2022, more than 200 publishing houses throughout the country recommended over 400 publications. Based on reader feedback and market research, these publishing houses planned nearly 100 books and organised over 2,000 themed activities.



As China's political and cultural centre, Beijing has the most publishing houses in the country. The total demand of the city's publishing market has been the nation's highest, and its trading activities are extreme and active. The vitality of the publishing market in Beijing is a wind vane of the nation's book market. The Beijing Reading Festival has become the focus of the nation's publishing industry. The quality of the city's Nationwide Reading campaign has been greatly improved through the growth of its publishing industry and cultural consumption by promoting a variety of reading activities, cultivating a related market and guiding publication themes.

Publishing enterprises based in the capital city play a major role in the country's market. The number of publishing houses in the capital city accounts for 40 percent of the country's total. Over the years, the variety of books, periodicals, newspapers, audio-visual products and e-publications has remained first in the nation. A few years ago, Beijing Publication Distribution Group Co., Ltd developed a publishing and distribution logistics centre with wholesale, distribution and group purchase functions, which is China's largest of this type.

In recent years, thanks to excellent publication team members, quality works have appeared one after another in Beijing. For example, *The Rise of China*, showing a glorious path of rejuvenation of the Chinese nation, has been printed one million copies since it was published 18 months ago. *A Tale on the Cloud* provides readers with another possibility to understand the world. *Northward* tells a century-old secret history by several families along the Beijing-Hangzhou Grand Canal, demonstrating the spirit of the canal and the rejuvenation of a nation over the past century. *A Hundred Years' Archaeology-Rediscovering China* selects the country's major archaeological discoveries over the past 100 years, depicting the magnificence of the ancient Chinese civilisation. Numerous quality works emerge endlessly, demonstrating the strength of the city's publishing industry. These latest products provide a powerful guide and guarantee for the city's Nationwide Reading campaign.

At the beginning of 2023, a series of the city's publishing industry's exhibitions and forums opened, presenting a lively scene that had not been seen for a long time. On February 24, the 35th Beijing Book Fair kicked off at the China International Exhibition Centre (Chaoyang). Founded in 1987, the Beijing Book Fair is one of China's four major book fairs. With an exhibition area of 50,000 sq.m, the fair contained 2,793 booths, gathered 710 exhibitors and presented nearly 400,000 publications, the highest in recorded history. At the fair, professional visitors shut-

tled through booths to select books and learn about related information to reach cooperation intentions. During the event, scholars, writers and publishers participated in its activities, such as the China Copyright Service Convention, the Forum for China's Libraries and Publishing Houses and the Forum for Children's Publications, stating their new perspectives and ideas on relative industries, which became a highlight of the event. A short video promotion element was added to the event, where anchors worked hard during live broadcasts, setting off a new wave of promotion for the Nationwide Reading campaign online.

On the opening day of the event, the 2023 Beijing Publishing and Distribution

Industries High Quality Development Annual Conference concluded. More than 800 publishers participated in the event, displaying their roughly 100,000 products. Private publishing houses became a highlight of the event. A month later, the Sixth China Online Literature+ Conference took place at the Beijing Yichuang International Convention and Exhibition Centre. The conference outlined the 10-year development plan for online literature and released outstanding works of the year. Holding the event played a role in guiding online literature creation, advancing the healthy development of the industry, and assisting Nationwide Reading and the development of Beijing as China's cultural centre.

Publishing enterprises based in Beijing play a major role in the country's market.





MAGNIFICENT CULTURAL LANDMARKS

If books are the nourishment of humankind, libraries in a city are its cultural granaries. Beijing boasts a number of outstanding libraries. From the National Library of China to community libraries, the city's cultural development is vividly presented. Spring is considered the best time for reading. Following the signs of spring, one can walk through the city's cultural landmarks to explore a wonderful library journey.

Located on Zhongguancun South Street, the National Library of China

is one of Asia's largest. The library was renamed, relocated and rebuilt several times over the years, and has the richest collections of books in the country. Its earliest collection—oracle bones from the Yin Ruins—dates back more than 3,000 years. *Dunhuang Manuscripts*, *Zhaocheng Tripitaka of the Jin Dynasty*, *Yongle Encyclopedia* and the *Complete Library of the Four Branches of Literature* are the library's four major collections.

The National Library of China is a sacred place for book lovers. Its traditional

Chinese architectural style highlights the solemnity and elegance of culture, and its collections are a reflection of the extensive and profound Chinese civilisation. Here, time seems to be frozen: young people are absorbed in their studies, and white-haired senior scholars ponder seriously their subjects.

Located in the south area of the National Library of China, the National Museum of Classic Books is the first of this type in the country. It is also one of the world's largest of this type, with a

spacious display area, rich collections and many representative exhibits. Through literature exhibitions and interactive experience activities, the museum enables Chinese characters from ancient books to live and allows visitors to learn more about traditional Chinese culture.

Located along the Third Ring Road, the Capital Library of China dates back to 1913 and is the combination and evolution of three libraries: the Branch Library of Beijing, the General Library of Beijing and the Reading Room of the Central Park. During the course of a century, the library has collected a large number of books, documents, inscriptions on stones and old maps, newspapers and photos, covering the history, geography, politics, economy, culture and people related to Beijing. These timeless items have been classified and well preserved in the library. When reading these precious documents and books, people seem to be transported to past eras through time, where old streets, alleys and folk customs are displayed in front of them.

If traditional libraries focus on books, other modern libraries put the people first.

Heading east along Chang'an Avenue, one cannot miss a red square building, standing out like a dignified stamp. This is the just-completed Beijing Municipal Administrative Centre Library. This new cultural landmark, facing the office area of the Municipal Administrative Centre across the Grand Canal in Tongzhou District, is an important part of the administrative centre's layout. Because it is surrounded by an 11.2-square-kilometre forest park, the library is also known as the "Forest Library." Ginkgo tree-like columns stand inside the "valley" of the library, with a ginkgo leaf-shaped structure at the top of each column supporting the ceiling. Its huge glass curtain wall seems

to integrate the outdoor forest landscape with the indoor reading area. The ground is paved with red pottery boards, like thick mountain soil. Thanks to its extensive open reading environment of 25,000 sq.m with good natural illumination, library users seem to sit on the hillside as they read. Because of its beautiful artistic atmosphere, the reading area offers a great spatial sense. The application of 5G, artificial intelligence, blockchain, cloud computing and big data technologies provides multiple reading experiences with an ideal atmosphere and integration of a variety of resources. The smart library authentically offers an immersive reading experience and a range of targeted services. With many second-to-none features, the library adds cultural self-confidence, artistic beauty and technological charm to the municipal administrative centre and the capital city.

"This is almost an art museum," exclaimed visitors when they came to the new Fengtai District Library for the first time. Located in Dahongmen, the

library has stylish features throughout. At the entrance, the replica bamboo forest, featuring design elements, such as traditional Chinese slips of bamboo for writing, creates quite the ancient atmosphere. To one's left hand is a 35-metre-high atrium serving as a reading area with glass skylights at the top. A reading area on the first floor is characterised by its green space, with tall trees and low ferns distributed inside. Sitting here and reading, one feels as if he or she is in the forest. The library's reading spaces and environment with unique aesthetics have made it a popular landmark online since it opened last year.

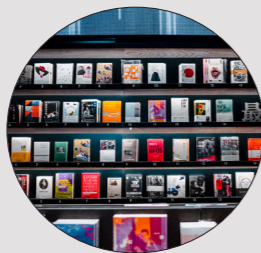
As a new type of library, the Fengtai District Library embodies its people-first principle to meet the needs of different users by integrating its periodicals, special collections, local literature and digital reading resources, as well as by holding lectures and academic exchanges and services to create a comfortable, warm, convenient and diverse atmosphere for its users.



Spring is considered one of the city's best seasons. Following the signs of spring, one can enjoy the pleasure of reading.

EXPLORING

THE WORLD OF BOOKS IN THE CAPITAL CITY



In Beijing, people who have access to books are happy. More than 2,100 distinctive bookstores dot the city, providing plentiful choices for book lovers to read and select books. Reading spaces have taken root and sprouted in every corner of the city, each with a unique and inspiring style, satisfying the wildly imaginative minds of Beijing's readers.

Someone once said, "A city should be evaluated by how many bookstores it has." Beijing's variety

of bookstores makes the city lively and warm. With a good book, people enjoy a period of cosy time in the corner of a bookstore. There are numerous interesting stories and anecdotes about people searching for books, and the pleasant surprise when their beloved book is finally located. By immersing themselves in a quiet and elegant space filled with books, people discover better versions of themselves, and become integrated with the unique cultural atmosphere of the city.





BOOKSTORIES IN HERITAGE SITES

Translated by Wang Wei Edited by Brad Green, Anne Ruisi Photos by Wang Jianing

Beijing boasts the most bookstores of any city in China. There are over 2,100 physical bookstores and 6,000 public libraries throughout the city. In the capital city, one can find book resources in many places, such as shopping malls, campuses, communities and heritage sites.

Some of the city's heritage sites have not been open to the public for some time due to various reasons. Thanks to the efforts of the People's Government of Beijing Municipality, some of them have been reopened and are working together with the Nationwide Reading campaign to introduce bookstores and libraries to provide professional public cultural services, while playing an exemplary role in exploring the possibility of the rational utilisation of heritage sites.

Today, people have an opportunity to learn about the history of Beijing under an ancient pagoda built more than 800 years ago; read or rest in the former residences of luminaries; or feel the charm of ancient books in old wooden structures. The Nationwide Reading campaign has revitalised the city's heritage sites.

The bookstore displays more than 500,000 publications related to Beijing, including old photo albums, maps, documents and ancient books, covering many aspects of the 3,000-year-old city. Like a good platform, the bookstore participates in the protection of heritage, presenting the splendid culture of the capital city.

Reviving Heritage Sites

When walking along Xisi South Street, one cannot miss the solemn Senior Wansong's Pagoda and the small courtyard that encloses it. Founded during the Yuan Dynasty (1271–1368), this heritage site has become a national key cultural relic protection unit.

However, for a long time, the gate to the courtyard was closed, and nearby residents remembered that it had been surrounded by small shops, resulting in only a small part of the pagoda being visible from a distance.

More than 10 years ago, Cui Yong, a native of Beijing, passed by the area often. He had read about the site in many history books. However, every time he walked by, he could only catch a glimpse of the pagoda through the courtyard gate.

"Beijing is one of the world's most famous ancient capitals, and its rich historical and cultural heritage is the city's great highlight. It is the responsibility of the capital city to pass down and protect its historical and cultural heritage." In February 2014, when President Xi Jinping inspected Beijing, he expressed his ardent hope for the protection of its historical and cultural heritage. How its heritage sites can be protected and rationally utilised, and how Chinese stories can be told based on these resources, are a new requirement and task for the capital city in the new era.

In 2017, the People's Government of Beijing Municipality issued relevant guidance to encourage the public to participate in the protection of the city's heritage. In 2018, according to a document jointly published by the CPC Central Committee

and the State Council, rational use of cultural relics would be greatly advanced to provide a variety of related cultural products and services in accordance with laws and regulations.

As early as 2014, the city began exploring the rediscovery and utilisation of heritage by introducing public participation. In the same year, the Beijing Reading Festival proposed to develop reading spaces throughout the city. This not only provides good places for Beijingers to read and learn, but also ensures reading activities can be carried out at the grassroots level. In the same year, the *Work Report of the People's Government of Xicheng District* also proposed to promote the Nationwide Reading campaign in the entire district, which would lay the foundation for developing it into a demonstration district with a public cultural service system.

The first attempt to combine heritage protection with physical bookstores soon kicked off. With its outstanding operation plan, Zhengyang Bookstore, founded in 2009, won the bid to utilise the Senior Wansong's Pagoda project.

The bookstore is dedicated to the protection, development and utilisation of historical documents in Beijing. Its original intention is to create a complete knowledge system of the city, allowing more people to learn about, love and protect the city's heritage.

April 23, 2014, or World Book and Copyright Day, was also the date when Zhengyang Bookstore was established in the courtyard with Senior Wansong's Pagoda. After that, this old courtyard opened

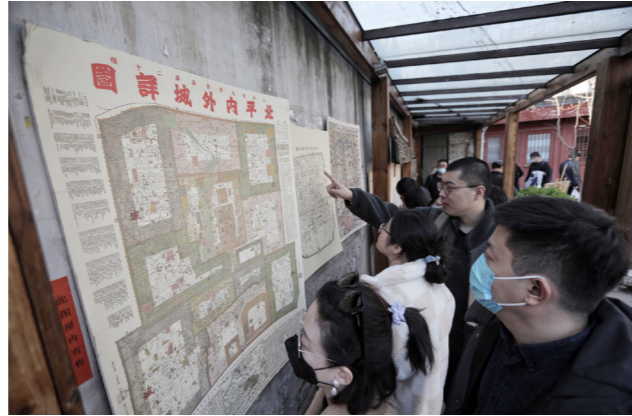
to the public as Xicheng District's first free characteristic reading space. Its founder is Cui Yong.

Cui still remembers the first time he set foot in the courtyard. He said, "For me, this is the landmark building of the ancient city culture that could be seen only in history books before. In the face of the centuries-old heritage site, I must hold in awe and venerate the ancient capital." As the first participant in the utilisation of heritage supported by social forces, Cui hoped that the public would be more aware of Beijing's history and culture through the professional and characteristic services provided by the bookstore, and participate in the city's heritage protection.

At that time, the courtyard was still vacant, covered with weeds. Over 80 square metres of structures in the courtyard were empty. Soon, Cui moved many relics he carefully collected over the years into the courtyard, including inscribed horizontal tablets, gate piers and brick carvings, as well as over 200,000 ancient books and historical documents.

On the premise of ensuring the safety of the heritage site, the weeds were cleared away. Because most old buildings in the courtyard are brick and wood structures, fire safety has become the focus of the bookstore's work. The entire courtyard has been installed with an advanced 24/7 surveillance camera system and fire-fighting facilities with the highest standard. Cui specially designed a fence and buffer green space around the ancient pagoda, which would not affect visitors, but better protect the heritage.





The Former Residence of Lin Baishui Becomes a Public Reading Space

During the bookstore's nine years of operation, some of its customers often discuss whether its result could be better if the courtyard would have been used as a coffee shop or restaurant.

Cui said, "Beijing has a great amount of urban historical literature. Introducing physical bookstores in heritage sites is an organic combination of the public cultural industry and heritage preservation. Ancient buildings can draw more people to step into bookstores to learn about the city through reading. Bookstores can undertake the maintenance and operation of equipment in the heritage sites to reduce government financial expenditures to a certain extent."

Cui's idea was later confirmed. In 2021, *Regulations on the Protection of Beijing as a Historical and Cultural City* was published to encourage cultural services, including libraries, museums, art galleries, physical bookstores and intangible cultural heritage exhibition centres, to be introduced into historical buildings combining their own characteristics and the functions of their surrounding areas. Lü Zhou, director of the National Heritage Centre of Tsinghua University, said that the city should not only protect its ancient buildings, but also explore how to integrate these buildings into people's living environment so that ancient architectural culture can be better passed down.

There are many cases of ancient buildings having been revived through-

out the city. Chunshu Library is one of them. The library is located in the rebuilt former residence of Lin Baishui (1874–1926), which is a cultural relic protection unit in Xicheng District. In 2018, as a public library, characteristic reading space and Martyr Lin Baishui Memorial Hall in Chunshu Sub-District, the heritage site opened to the public. In 2021, Yilian Community Administration Centre took over the library.

On their first visit to the courtyard, staff members from the centre cleared away all its waste and sundries. Its interior was later renovated, and the structures of its old buildings were repaired, including cracked windowsills and beams.

The small courtyard's former owner, revolutionary Lin Baishui, was active during the early Republic of China period (1911–1949). To this end, the management deliberately began to restore its historical scenes, such as finding dark green velvet tablecloths and a desk lamp with a green glass shade. The two long tables in the centre of the library's reading room are surrounded by bookshelves filled with books on literature, history and other topics. When visitors step into the space, they seem to know they should soften their footsteps and lower their voices to fully immerse themselves in the world of books.

In order to help the public learn more about Lin, the management specially visited his birthplace in southeast

China's Fujian Province. Key literature, pictures and manuscripts related to Lin have been collected, and more than 30,000 characters of written materials about him have been edited for the new exhibition about his life.

The original statue of Lin was replaced by a heavy bronze one, with a height of 1.926 metres. The number symbolises the year Lin was murdered by the warlord government. The width is 52 centimetres, representing his age when he died.

Over the past two years, the courtyard has begun to play a significant role in providing public services for Chunshu Sub-District, such as establishing the city's first "Party Building Study." Non-profit activities, including showing films, holding lectures and reading promotional activities, have been regularly carried out in the courtyard. More importantly, it provides a quiet reading place for nearby residents.

It is open until 9 p.m. every day, and many people still find themselves reading when it's time for the doors to close. The daily average customer flow is 30 to 40 people. Some people specially come to enjoy reading after work, while others stay there throughout the day. Its staff members feel that their efforts are meaningful, and they take pride in their responsibilities. A staff member said, "We can provide better services to the public, making them feel more comfortable and love reading in this environment."

Enriching Heritage Protection

Some of the utilised ancient buildings have witnessed the changes of the city's physical bookstore industry. Ten years ago, the industry was in a slump and a large number of well-known physical bookstores successively closed down. However, with the city's Nationwide Reading development, the physical bookstore industry is recovering and continuing to play its key role in the city's cultural development. Bookstores in heritage sites are exploring a more difficult but meaningful developmental road.

In October 2022, according to a notice published by the Beijing Leading Group for Promoting the Developing of Beijing as China's Cultural Centre, a 15-minute modern public reading service system would be established through the support of public libraries, large bookstores, themed (professional) bookstores and community bookstores to meet the diverse reading needs of the public.

Zhengyang Bookstore assumes some responsibilities for public cultural services. Thanks to the government waiving the rent of the bookstore, almost all funds saved by the bookstore are used for its upgrading and transformation, as well as for rediscovering the city's historical and cultural resources.

Cui has much to do in his role running the store. In 2018, he began to engage in the publishing industry, and has been in charge of publishing more than 10 books to date. Some books have become part of the city's key cultural projects, and the sales of other books have taken the lead on e-commerce platforms. Cui believes that this is the result of the participation of Zhengyang Bookstore as a social force in the utilisation of heritage sites. Among the authors of these books are scholars and enthusiasts who are interested in the ancient capital's history and culture, and some are customers of the bookstore.

"Presenting high-quality publications is our contribution to the public,"

Cui said. Perhaps the market value and economic value of these books are relatively small, and many predecessors could not publish them. However, Zhengyang Bookstore should shoulder it. He added, "We plan to take a portion of our operating budget to establish a fund to encourage the publication of selected topics, and support these enthusiasts and volunteers for heritage preservation while helping them in any way we can afford to."

Some works Cui published have been translated into foreign languages, allowing more international friends to learn about Beijing. He also invited international students from universities in Beijing to volunteer at the bookstore, encouraging them to explore and serve the city in greater depth, giving full play to their language advantages and providing more foreign readers with better experiences and professional services.

"Over the years, we have collected many valuable historical images of the Central Axis of Beijing. We will use scientific and technological means to enable the public to enjoy richer and more valuable content of the heritage sites along the axis in our limited space."

According to the *Development Plan for Heritage Sites and Museums in Beijing during the 14th Five-Year Plan Period*, the city should vigorously develop sightseeing routes under the themes, such as studying, cultural experiences, holidays and leisure, and revolutionary culture supported by the city's heritage resources. The city should rediscover the value of its heritage, and present publications themed on its cultural relics. Using digital technology and new media innovates the methods of spreading cultural relics. It should provide more digital displays on heritage, including the Central Axis, the Grand Canal and the Great Wall. Based on the integrated development of industrial heritage and the sports industry, the city should promote the comprehensive util-

isation of heritage sites of this type, such as the New Shougang Area, the February 7 Locomotive Plant and the Beijing–Zhangjiakou Railway. It should enrich the exhibitions of the Beijing Olympic Museum to highlight the charm of the "Dual-Olympic City."

Occasionally, Cui talks with foreign sightseers in the bookstore. They are often surprised that there are so many books about a city. "We are very proud of it," Cui said. "Beijing not only has rich historical and cultural heritage, including ancient buildings, but also numerous memories of the city."

"I will work hard to share resources with the public through digitisation, publishing and exhibition," Cui said that it is not only a bookstore, but also a window for the spread of Beijing's history and culture, and a demonstration of utilising cultural relics. He added, "Thanks to the support of the government and the public, I am not alone, and Zhengyang Bookstore will adhere to its original intention. These are important factors that can support us to this day."

Introducing physical bookstores in heritage sites throughout the capital city can draw more people to learn about the city through reading.

BE ARK BOOKSHOP HARBOURING THOSE WHO LOVE TO READ

Translated by Wang Wei Edited by Brad Green, Anne Ruisi Photos by Pu Feng

If not searching specifically for it, few people will notice Be Ark (Bi'an) Bookshop on the ground floor of an office building. Half of its shop front is covered by dense shrubs. There are also a few small blackboards with the names of its recommended books standing outside the door, guiding like-minded visitors through a path, up the steps and in through a narrow door to explore the world of books. This is a space that its founder Na Mu has been building step by step since 2009. Over the past 14 years, countless people have walked in and out of the shop.

In recent years, digital reading, e-commerce platforms, the pandemic and various relief policies have all had an impact on the city's physical bookshop circles. Some bookshops have failed, and some have opened new branches. However, Be Ark Bookshop is always there to harbour the city's book lovers.

Unlike its low-key exterior, the bookshop has a business area of over 600 square metres, with a rich layout and elegant background music. Thousands of books are placed in different layouts at the centre of the space.

Na Mu likes books, which for him, are a way to connect with the world. When reading, he is calmed by the adventures, conflicts and excitement that he has not yet experienced in his own life. However, previously, his access to books was limited.

When he was young, he often went to a library to do his homework, where there was a spacious reading room, large desks and chairs. He stood outside a counter and handed a small piece of paper with book names written on it to a librarian.

During his college years, Na Mu was finally able to search books himself on library shelves. High shelves, level by level, went on like a maze. "My field of vision unfolded in a moment. It was fascinating," Na Mu said.

In 1992, Haidian Book City, once regarded as one of Beijing's cultural landmarks, opened its doors. This complex was sponsored by the People's Government of Beijing Municipality and built by private entities, which broke with the norm of only state-owned shops selling books. Publishers began to gather there to open their bookshops to draw students and faculty from surrounding universities, including Na Mu. According to him, each floor of the building was filled with bookshops, side by side. He could easily spend half a day there.

This was the heyday of the city's physical bookshops. In addition to Haidian Book City, small book stalls appeared at the entrances of universities, and large or small bookshops began to gather nearby. Almost all of them could earn money selling books in those days.

In 1996, Sanlian Taofen Bookstore opened on the east street of the National Art Museum of China. With a clean and spacious environment, the bookstore has boasted its professional and complete classifications. Like many people, with a thermos, Na Mu often sat on the steps of the bookstore reading for half a day.

Nowadays, Na Mu is the owner of Be Ark Bookshop. His shop has never cared about customers tearing open the plastic wrappers of new books, taking photos or copying excerpts. In the shop, unsealed books are everywhere, each of which is covered with a transparent book jacket allowing customers to read freely.

He once stood at a new branch of Sanlian Bookstore to express his gratitude to its management. "Back then, I sat on the steps of the Art Museum branch reading books. A few years later, I run my own bookshop and recommended books to people. This was a seed you planted at that time."

A SECRET CODE

Reading can help people gain something and satisfy their spirits. If someone wants to do something important, there is no more direct way than opening a bookshop.

During his college days, after Na Mu and his classmates founded a book club together, he learned about the founders of private academic bookshops, such as Fengrusong and Guolinfeng. However, around 2010, these famous bookshops closed down one after another.

In the new century, the rising rent and human resource costs, in addition to Internet technology bringing digital reading and cheaper books from online stores, created a matter of life or death for many private bookshops. These were all reminders that the era of whitewashed rooms containing bookshelves filled with books has gone.

It was at this moment that Be Ark Bookshop opened. After its planning began in 2008, many of Na Mu's friends advised him to think over it carefully. Na Mu said, "I enjoy reading. From reading, I can gain something and satisfy my spirit. I want to pass it on. My friends and I ultimately believe that if we want to do something important, there is no more direct way than opening a bookshop."

As far as digital reading and online bookshops are concerned, they are regarded as formidable rivals by many physical bookshops. Na Mu does not care, "It is because of the rise of online bookshops that people can easily buy what they need. When physical bookshops closed down in succession, online shops allow people to continue their habit of buying books and reading.

In the eyes of Na Mu, as long as people still buy books online, people will definitely go to physical bookshops. The core of the development of physical bookshops lies in their taste, experience and personality. Books are the embodiment of a bookshop's taste.

Before opening the bookshop, friends in the publishing industry gave him a long list of recommended books. They shared the same goal with him: to focus on serious reading materials. Whether the

books cover physics, literature or philosophy, the most important thing is to focus on people.

When they were free, they went to select books from well-known publishers, such as Sanlian and CITIC, as well as from Tianshuiyuan Book Wholesale Market. This was not an easy job. If they wanted to select what they needed from a list with the names of tens of thousands of books, they had to visit these places again and again to read their contents, touch the thickness of their paper and feel how a book spreads out over the palms of their hands. He spent almost an entire month exploring the quality and features of books on the ground floor of the wholesale market.

Later, he established a book selection team. Every weekend, they visited major bookshops to investigate, and they learned new book information through the Internet. On weekdays, they discussed book lists at a meeting and then sent orders to publishing houses, or went to the wholesale market to select books and arrange for their delivery.

His bookshop does not place value on whether its selected books are bestsellers or not. Even if a few copies of some books can only be sold throughout the year, as long as they are valuable and good books, they will be placed in the most prominent position: a table facing the entrance.

This area, which is an area for books that are worth collecting, presents highly recommended books on humanities and social science, including *The Crossing*, *Love in the Time of Cholera* and *The Road to Serfdom*.

This is the "secret code" between the bookshop and its customers. If a customer asks him to recommend a few books to read, Na Mu will definitely bring him or her to this table. "These are all good books; you can choose from them, and you won't regret your choice."



A bookshop must be beautiful, and should include the rhythm of light and shadow, scattered sights and the combination of sounds.

In 2009, the bookshop settled down in Peony Science and Technology Park, surrounded by universities, with a prime location and a strong commercial atmosphere. This provided an advantage for the bookshop. Many of Na Mu's friends from the book industry came to assist him in planning and decorating the shop.

After three or four months, the shop took shape. Seen from above, the central circular area displays the vast majority of the books. A three-metre-long wooden table is the shop's shortest booth, placed at the centre of the circle. In autumn, it is covered with golden ginkgo leaves, and in winter with red winter-sweet. From inside to outside, the bookshelves also change from low to high. Behind the highest bookshelves are 12 separate small studies for customers to read and communicate.

A bookshop must be beautiful, and should include the rhythm of light and shadow, scattered sights and the combination of sounds. To truly experience this requires mobilising all the senses of the human body.

In the shop, a few timber doors were bought from a second-hand market to be used for partitioning the space. The timber doors are covered with customised acrylic boards for an appropriate decoration that will avoid causing customers to be distracted due to reflection.

More than 100 lights in the store are all in warm colours. Several of the lights are wrapped with black tape or surrounded by plastic sheets, creating a beautiful display of light and shadow in the limited space. There are a vat of tropical fish and several pots of ivy arums. The background music, including opera, musical scores and street artists' albums purchased in Sicily, fill the space.

These not only satisfy the preferences of the shop, but also the needs of customers. During his 14 years of running the shop, he has discovered that people's horizons have been continuously improved and broadened. The key to retaining customers is whether the space is comfortable, the lighting is moderate and even the display method of books is interesting. The characteristics of the shop are related to Na Mu's experience and personality.

He Qicong, an associate professor at Beijing Normal University, has visited hundreds of bookshops in Beijing. Compared to 2016, physical bookshops in Beijing today indeed show a different state. In 2016, most bookshops mainly sold books. Today, most of them no longer just sell books, but have been transformed into public reading and cultural consumption spaces.

"Cultural consumption is the behaviour of paying for culture, which requires the customer to have a certain level of consumption ability and quality demand," He Qicong explained. If people do not have enough to eat, they probably will not consider going to see the blockbuster *Avatar*. Once they have the ability to go to the cinema, they will want to watch the film's IMAX version. This is the gradual upgrading of consumption. Around 2016, consumers and bookshop operators in China, including in the capital city, were exploring a new era of development for physical bookshops.

"If traditional bookshops cannot keep up with the times, they will have to close down," Na Mu said. If their operators want to survive, they must constantly learn and change. Over the past 14 years, Na Mu and his team have frequently visited other bookshops to observe and communicate with their operators, and then return to adjust their own world of books.

As an attempt, a discount area has been arranged near the entrance to reward its customers' love for the shop that brings them such pleasure. The books include *Dante* and *Tarantula*. Although they are discounted, the shop's taste in book selection remains unchanged.

Every time he makes a change, such as simply displaying books in a distinctive shape or adding a casually sketched recommendation card, its customer flow and book sales quickly increase.

Once, a young customer specifically came to visit Na Mu, hoping to get to know him. "He said that he has been to many bookshops in China and other countries, but this was the first time he heard the music of *Notre Dame de Paris* while in a bookshop. Now he has become one of my good friends," Na Mu said. "Look, what level of aesthetic appreciation have Chinese customers reached now?"

No matter how much effort is put into the facilities and creativity of a bookshop, without abundant book resources, it will also lose direction.

Reality tells Na Mu and many people who run bookshops that in the first few years of their businesses, losses should be expected. Unlike other products, the revenue from printed books is very slow. Many times, bookshops have no income for an entire day, but new books must be constantly introduced. This is a problem for his shop, as it is for others such as the Humanities and Archaeology Bookshop, which was founded in 2012.

This bookshop specialises in selling books on archaeology and museums. Its professional books are relatively expensive. When it joined the physical bookshop industry, in the beginning, it had no customer resources, plus the lack of price negotiations put it in a bad position, causing extremely poor sales although books were everywhere in the shop.

At the end of 2021, web-media man Liu Song opened a bookshop with the idea of recommending excellent niche publications. In the beginning, Liu and his partners defined the shop as a space that should be constantly enriched and adjusted. A total of more than 10 weeks after opening, they planned four or five activities and attempted to break the book display method of traditional bookshops: changing from categories to publishers. The novelty stimulated consumption and they sold 830 books in the first 80 days.

However, soon, he despondently discovered that more than half of the sales were completed within the first week. This meant that during most of the business hours, they simply waited for customers to come in and buy books.

Time can bring customers, but no one can predict how long it will take. It took three to four years for Humanities and Archaeology Bookshop to achieve a balance of its income and expenditure. Na Mu's "bookshop plus study space" model has been operating the same since it was founded.

In October 2022, the People's Government of Beijing Municipality proposed to support the exploration and construction of new infrastructure through the "bookshop plus" model to advance physical bookshops to open in shopping malls and parks, as well as on campuses, forming a new layout for the public to love reading. Na Mu's model has

been recognised and will be further supported.

Na Mu believes that no matter how much effort is put into the facilities and creativity of a bookshop, without abundant book resources, the bookshop will also lose direction.

In the past 14 years, Na Mu has been thinking about what else he can do around books. During the pandemic, he installed two art installations in the two corners of the shop. One shows orange rays intersecting and diverging in space, with *The Garden of Forking Paths* by Jorge Luis Borges (1899–1986) casually placed below, alongside *Parallel Worlds: A Journey Through Creation, Higher Dimensions, and the Future of the Cosmos* by Michio Kaku and *The God Effect: Quantum Entanglement, Science's Strangest Phenomenon* by Brian Clegg. At the intersection of the top of the rays, he placed *Being and Time* by Martin Heidegger (1889–1976).

"These rays represent the forking paths in the book and also symbolise parallel worlds," explained Na Mu. He spent six months planning and installing them. With relentless effort, he repeatedly tells the stories of these books to encourage customers to pick up them.

In He Qicong's opinion, Na Mu's idea is correct. A good physical bookshop should definitely put in effort when it comes to selecting books. In 2021, the city detailed its support policies for physical bookshops for the first time, including physical bookshops that have been operating continuously for at least one year: the operating area of a physical bookshop shall not be less than 30 square metres, and its operating area for publications shall exceed 50 percent; its publications shall not be less than 2,000 copies.

Na Mu's bookshop shows that the better book sales are, the better its study space and food and beverage business will be. The shop has many regular customers. However, the study space that can be used for profit is still covered by rows of bookshelves, as a companion for the books.

In the 42nd month after Na Mu opened the bookshop, its financial statements finally balanced out. From then on, the bookshop began to make a profit and has continued to survive.

The bell rings and someone leaves the bookshop to go to their next destination; the bell rings and someone has left their previous destination and arrived at the bookshop.

In the past 14 years, countless people have visited the bookshop. Youngsters, elderly, diplomats, artists and journalist are all well-matched for its selection.

Na Mu remembers two customers who often came to the bookshop as soon as they got paid. One day, they asked him if they could work at the shop. Later, they became its shop assistants.

As shop assistants, they can participate in free activities held in the shop, such as oil painting, calligraphy and flower arrangement classes, as well as carefully prepared training classes by Na Mu. He took examples from Ernst Hans Josef Gombrich's works and led his employees to explore ancient Egyptian art. He also made PPTs from *Fifteen Lectures on Chinese Aesthetics* to showcase the pursuit of beauty.

Na Mu once opened a course introducing photography. One of his employees fell in love with photography and bought his own camera to take part in more professional photography classes. He spent time reading all the books recommended to him by Na Mu. After working in Na Mu's bookshop for four years, he went to a photography studio as a professional photographer.

At the bookshop, some people have found their direction in life, while others have found the meaning of life. In 2018, at the age of 40, He An walked into the bookshop after work and later became a friend of Na Mu. At the invitation of Na Mu, He An, who has been

engaged in research on South Asian and China-India relations for a long time, decided to hold a cultural salon in the study of the bookshop.

He An designed his own posters and invited his friends to participate in commemorating Su Shi (1037–1101) and exploring foreign history. He invested a large amount of time in the bookshop, which seems to be a close companion. Sometimes he comes to the shop just to take a look, or to enjoy a cup of tea while listening to the background music.

He An had always been confused about the meaning of the "other shore" of life. One day, he saw a note written by a young customer on the bookshop message board: "On the frame of the door leading to the atrium of the office building is a bell. Whenever someone opens or closes the door, the bell produces a crisp sound. Whenever the bell rings, the door opens and closes again. For me, the embodiment of this moment is like going from one shore of life to the other." This message made He An suddenly realise that the bell rings and someone leaves the bookshop to go to their next destination; the bell rings and someone has left their previous destination and arrived at the bookshop. Life is a journey of constantly putting aside and embarking.

For the bookshop, customers are all passers-by; but for customers, the bookshop can be a special place of comfort.



ANOTHER POSSIBILITY

Na Mu said that customers can just walk into the bookshop. They may not purchase anything today, but they can definitely feel something.

In 2018, Na Mu's bookshop fell into a slump due to the economic situation. Coincidentally, the city launched a project to support physical bookshops. In that year, the government invested 50 million yuan to reduce the operating costs of physical bookshops to ensure their survival.

The bookshop began to receive subsidies that year. Without this sum of money, Na Mu is not sure if his bookshop would survive. Every year thereafter, the shop has received the support fund. During the pandemic, the fund helped the shop survive for three winters.

In 2016, the city established a special fund to support 70 physical bookshops with a total amount of 18 million yuan per year. In 2020, the total amount of the support fund for physical bookshops at the municipal level reached 100 million yuan.

Supported by the policies, physical bookshops have increased in Beijing. In 2020, Beijing was awarded the title "Bookshop Capital of the Year." As of the third quarter of 2022, there were over 2,100 physical bookshops throughout the city, meaning it has nearly one physical bookshop per 10,000 people, ranking it first nationwide.

Physical bookshops not only need to survive, but also increase their development. In 2022, Beijing provided rent subsidies to 192 bookshops, titled 160 bookshops as demonstrations, and rewarded 9 bookshops the opportunity to open on campuses, in shopping malls and in technological parks. There were 17 upgraded bookshops, and 1,454 reading and related cultural activities were organised.

In the eyes of He Qicong, physical bookshops play a role in spreading a city's urban culture, and establishing good interaction and complementary relationships

between them and other public cultural services.

"Public cultural services in Beijing are an important policy for benefiting its residents," said He Qicong. "However, there is no way to provide personalised quality services for everyone. This is also the difference between public cultural services and paid cultural consumption."

He Qicong believes that Beijing residents have different needs due to their different educational backgrounds and incomes. When someone needs cultural consumption space, a bookshop is a good place for high-quality reading services, allowing its residents to appreciate the joy of reading in a delightful environment.

In Na Mu's bookshop, cultural activities take place almost every day in its 12 studies, where people enjoy tea, practice calligraphy and watch films. The busiest time saw more than 100 people crowded into the largest study for *guqin* player Li Xiangting's elegant ancient music, where the first three rows of audience members could only sit on the ground.

In 2021, while holding a poetry reading commemoration of Tagore at the bookshop, He An ran into a young female native of Beijing. She exclaimed, "I didn't expect that there would be such an event in Beijing. Today, I saw the best side of the city."

In January 2023, Na Mu said, "Without these opportunities and the help of friends, the bookshop wouldn't have survived to this day."

Now, perhaps book sales seem less important. "Customers can just walk into the bookshop. They may not purchase anything today, but they can definitely feel something, just like the seed planted in my heart by Sanlian Bookstore so many years ago," Na Mu said. "In this way, my goal has been achieved."

GENGDU SHUSHE

PROVIDING A SPACE FOR BOOKLOVERS

Translated by Wang Wei Edited by Brad Green, Anne Ruisi Photos by Wang Guibin



If books are a ladder for humankind's progress, today, this ladder is presented in various forms, such as on paper and in electronic format. In recent years, advocates of printed books and e-books have often debated which is the current mainstream form of reading. Online bloggers can interpret a book containing hundreds of thousands of characters in only five minutes. More books are sold these days through e-commerce platforms. Short video platforms are madly depriving people of their spare time. As a result, the space for physical bookstores is being further squeezed out.

However, while many physical bookstores in Beijing are trying their best to survive, Gengdu Shushe (More Than Reading), founded in 2018, has opened 16 branches and more than 50 city studies open 24/7 in Beijing. Thanks to its innovative integration of a library, bookstore and cultural activity centre, as well as offering cultural and creative products, Gengdu Shushe creates a new service model of "characteristic bookstores plus public cultural services," allowing reading to penetrate into the daily lives of the city's residents.

Kang, founder of Gengdu Shushe, said, "In the face of the impact of e-commerce platforms, in addition to selling books, physical bookstores should also guide a lifestyle-related culture and reading to lead to people who do not like reading to pick up the habit. Information that readers did not know before can be acquired through displays in physical bookstores, and they also need to provide increasing cultural experiences related to reading for the public. I think this is a main mission of contemporary bookstores."

The bookstore is not only a space for reading, but also a venue for social gatherings and experiencing programmes. The bookstore keeper believes that "reading can enrich life," and encourages everyone to read carefully and improve their lives through reading.

Books and the People Who Love Them

According to Kang, the name "Gengdu" means "reading at night," and "Shushe" emphasises exchanges between people. The name indicates the original intention of Gengdu Shushe.

Among many of its branches, located in Dongcheng District, the Longfusi branch authentically reflects Gengdu Shushe's original intention. Because of this, the branch has become a popular attraction among the public.

By chance, Li Sheng got to know Gengdu Shushe in 2022, when he registered with the Beijing Public Library Net-

work Joint Card, which allows him to borrow books from many libraries throughout the city. However, due to his job transfer, he moved to the vicinity of Longfusi resulting in several books, borrowed from a library in Chaoyang District earlier this year, being inconvenient to return. While Li was anxious, he happily discovered that he could return his books at the Longfusi branch of Gengdu Shushe.

Li said, "I went there after work that day. It surprised me because it has many books to be borrowed. So, I borrowed a few." This experience made Li become

a fan of the Longfusi branch. He said he was happy for this experience, as it allowed him to find a good bookstore. Since then, he has often bought and borrowed books from the branch, and participated in new book release parties and gatherings for readers' exchanges held by the bookstore.

Its customers include senior residents, elementary school students and people with thermos cups who go there to prepare for their postgraduate exams. They all come together there due to their love of books and reading.

Creating an Ideal Place for Booklovers

William Somerset Maugham (1874–1965) said, "To acquire the habit of reading is to construct for yourself a refuge from almost all the miseries of life." A middle-aged person reading a book in his or her hands in the subway, an elderly person who wears a pair of glasses reading in a park and a child who has to stand on tiptoe to take a children's book from a library bookshelf, are all quietly trying to hide in their books to reap solace of the "refuge." People who are reading are actually a kind of scenery, which can also comfort their observers.

Although the Longfusi branch is located in an alley, it has never been short of customers. Proclaiming "Oh, here is Gengdu Shushe" or "I finally found Gengdu Shushe," one opens the door and steps into the bookstore, seeing a more than 100-square-metre book borrowing

area at the bottom of the shop. Books in this area are labelled as "Property of Dongcheng District Library." People of different ages often read and work there.

This is what distinguishes the Longfusi branch from other ordinary bookstores. Under an innovative model, Gengdu Shushe began to cooperate with Dongcheng District Library. A book-borrowing area is set up in the bookstore to make it serve as both a bookstore and a library. People can not only read and buy books, but also borrow books and study, just as they would at a library.

In the past, due to the lack of grassroots branches, the library could only serve residents around it. However, its cooperation with the Longfusi branch can make it easier to provide book borrowing and returning services for residents. The borrowing rate of books has

been enhanced accordingly. This new form, adopted by Gengdu Shushe, can better meet the needs of customers.

Kang said that the Longfusi branch is located in an alley and the nearby neighbourhoods are under construction. It is difficult to find without a purposeful search. Cooperating with Dongcheng District Library to set up a book-borrowing area can draw more customers. Through guidance and publicity, the bookstore can retain new customers, who will become its loyal ones. He added that physical bookstores are supported by government policies in many aspects. Therefore, we should take the initiative to assume some social responsibilities and invest some funds to reward the public, such as providing some non-profit services to offer desks for those who love reading.

Although Gengdu Shushe's Longfusi branch is located in an alley, it has never been short of customers and has become a popular attraction among the public in Beijing.

Beyond Reading

In the eyes of Kang, Gengdu Shushe can survive by doing more than selling books. Reading is indeed a personal activity, but apart from reading, visitors also need an ideal atmosphere to drink tea, meet friends, listen to lectures, and obtain new information and knowledge. Today, the business philosophy of the Longfusi branch has undergone substantial changes. It is not only a space for reading, but also a venue for social gatherings and experiencing programs. The bookstore keeper believes that "reading can enrich life," and encourages everyone to read carefully and improve their lives through reading.

In addition to deepening reading into everyday life, Gengdu Shushe's service model can organise more activities related to reading. Since its opening, the Longfusi branch has regularly held cultural activities, including inviting authors to sign and sell their books, promoting science knowledge and providing experiential classes. The bookstore also invites experts in the areas of lifestyle, reading, art, entertainment, food and travel to exchange with customers offline or online to share their love for life to lead them into a more interesting world.

On March 18, a sunny spring day, the Longfusi branch was unusually busy. Mi Er, author of the comic book *The Outcast*, shared his creative stories and sold the book with his signature at the bookstore, drawing over 300 visitors.

At the bookstore, restored scenes from the comic book were seen everywhere, attracting many of its fans to stop and take photos. Fan inscriptions on a message board demonstrated their wishes.

Many cosplayers played games on-site. Some participants got to know each other and became friends because of the event. After the book signing ceremony, some would also choose to buy their favourite books or cultural and creative products at the bookstore.

Kang said that many youngsters who love reading comic books are often not social people. This new book signing activity allows them to get out of their homes and meet more like-minded friends. In this process, the bookstore can retain some of them as consumers through cultural and creative products, and its friendly atmosphere and designs.

Stepping into the Longfusi branch and walking to the right, one will find a corner where the cards with many characters from the cartoon *Slam Dunk* are placed. There is a narrow wooden stool in the corner. Above the stool is a bookshelf containing comic books and cultural and creative products featuring classic animation characters. Kang said, "Many people's memories from their childhood include squatting and reading comic books in the corner of a bookstore. We want to use such a corner to restore the childhood memories of people who were born in the 1980s, 1990s and 2000s."

In recent years, online audio programmes have become increasingly popular. After work or on crowded buses and subways, these programmes seem to relieve the fatigue of busy urbanites. Unlike other bookstores, Gengdu Shushe has its own recording studio. It has presented its podcast business by strengthening a variety of conditions and corresponding content. Its current columns include the *Most Popular Strategy for Daily Life* and *Tips from Gengdu Shushe*, which have received over ten million plays online. Through offline activity bases of m.lizhi.fm and ximalaya.com, Gengdu Shushe cultivates the consumption habits of their audio products' users. Combining Gengdu Shushe's activities and podcast products can form a sustainable and healthy business ecosystem online, achieving a synchronous increase of both online and offline users.

A Reading Space for Community Residents

Qiu Yun is an office worker who lives near the Longfusi branch. Recently, she has prepared for an on-the-job postgraduate exam. After work and on holidays, the Longfusi branch has become the third destination apart from her home and her workplace. She often studies in its public reading area. Sometimes, she invites some of her clients to the bookstore to discuss business. She often completes her work at the shop's leisure and social gathering area. In her opinion, its environment can allow her to concentrate on reading, working, studying and communicating with clients. The bookstore serves as a study at the doorstep of the city's residents.

Kang said that Gengdu Shushe's branches have established close ties with many of their customers. During the pandemic in 2022, when an elderly customer came to the Longfusi branch

to buy an extra prepaid card, a staff member reminded her that there was still a balance on her original card. The customer replied, "Buying extra can help your store. During the pandemic, it was not easy for you to run the business." Kang said that such empathy and care from customers provides a strong incentive. Kang added that during one recent activity, a veteran living in a nearby neighbourhood told stories about the Korean War. "We were all moved. Many listeners, including me, felt that this type of activity is significant. At that time, we felt it was really meaningful for us to run this bookstore."

Gengdu Shushe will continue to explore some combinations of new scenarios to enhance the relationship with its customers, such as providing reading activities in parks and holding parties related to reading.

Seven of Gengdu Shushe's 16 branches are characteristic bookstores, combining different themes to create their features. The rest are community bookstores, with a relatively simple style. Thus, the clientele of each branch is its nearby community residents.





A BOOKSTORE OVERLOOKING a Botanical Garden

Translated by Zhang Hongpeng Edited by Brad Green, Anne Ruisi Photos by Wang Weijia

When spring breezes blow over rolling mountains, trees bloom and birds fly across the sky. In Beijing, spring is clearly distinguished from winter. Overnight, trees turn green, flowers bloom and wild ducks appear again on the surfaces of the city's lakes. These scenes herald the arrival of spring in the capital.

In early spring, *hutong* (traditional Beijing alleys) become more vibrant, and hawkers selling sugar-coated haws on sticks are more willing to peddle their products. The city is revitalised again as spring brings more beautiful scenery to the suburbs of Beijing. In a bookstore on the top floor of a botanical greenhouse, people can read books while admiring the green plants below.

When a spring breeze blows through Natural Bookstore at Beijing Expo Park in Yanqing District, readers feel warm, and appreciate this escape to tranquillity from the hustle and bustle of city life.

Finding Spring in Books

If a bookstore can offer several good books, it is useful and beneficial to readers. The bookstore in the botanical greenhouse is located in Beijing Expo Park in Yanqing District. Most of its books are themed on nature. Wang Hexin, manager of the bookstore, said that there are 6,000 copies of books related to nature, involving animals, plants and life.

Wang said, "As the bookstore's theme is nature, we have made the design style, selected books and supporting facilities to be associated with nature as much as possible." Growing together with the bookstore, he was captivated by it at first sight. He said that it is not easy to find such a quiet place on the outskirts of Beijing, where people can read books while admiring the green views.

Books are a haven for the soul and can help readers relax. More than 2,000 nature-themed books in the bookstore can be classified into 9 categories, helping readers explore the relationships between nature and evolution, art and culture. Wang recommends books made

of paper with embedded leaves and branches. When opening one of this type of books, readers can see bright-coloured branches or leaves outlined with dotted lines. Cutting along the lines, people can extract branches and leaves from the paper.

From the nature-themed books, readers can learn more about animals and plants, such as birds and wildflowers. In the bookstore, people can embrace spring. A woman was attracted to the bookstore by its reputation. She ordered a cup of coffee and took a Chinese edition of the bestseller *The Eight Master Lessons of Nature* from the bookshelf. Then, she sat by the French window to read the book from noon to evening.

In spring, everything is revived. Many people like to spend their leisure time drinking coffee or tea and reading books. In the bookstore, visitors can also enjoy green plants while reading books. The bookstore is decorated in white, which makes it noticeable amongst the green plants. White-collar workers

frequent the shop, usually choosing the best area to read while admiring the plants in the greenhouse.

When a few readers visit the bookstore, Wang Hexin often seats himself at the best viewing point to do office work. If tired, he rubs his temples with his fingers and looks outside through an open window. The cool breeze from the window is refreshing to him. From the bookstore, people can view the mountains in the distance. Wang said, "Sitting and enjoying the fresh breeze is a simple pleasure."

A reader left a note to praise the bookstore's excellent environment. She said that the bookstore was full of spring elements, such as green plants and flowers, and it allowed visitors to view nearby natural scenery, including mountains. To date, the bookstore has been operational for four years. It is the most popular destination in the park. All visitors to the bookstore leave contented. Currently, most brick-and-mortar bookstores' operations face challenges, but this bookstore remains popular among readers.

Green Plants Below

Following arrows in the bookstore, people can find books about natural and social evolutions from the emergence of plants to the development of society. If Wang is not busy, he will lead readers in exploring the bookstore. He suggested that readers should not regard it as an ordinary bookstore, but deem their tour in the bookstore as a trip to explore the evolution of life.

On the circular bookshelves are special bookends, which are made of man-made glass and contain various plant specimens. The colourful specimens make the bookshelves and the books therein livelier, creating an optimal environment for readers. Many people are often attracted by these bookends.

The bookstore creates a feeling of spring during all four seasons due to its books and specimens, as well as the bo-

tanical garden below. Over 600 tropical plants thrive in the greenhouse, where people can see *Monstera Thai Constellation* and *Anthurium warocqueanum* or Queen Anthurium.

The greenhouse smells of plants and soil. The large cacti are noticeable there. This is the only place in the suburbs of the capital city where people can view so many green plants in winter. The greenhouse has two floors. The only entrance to the second floor leads to the bookstore. Following the white spiral staircase, people will first see bookshelves in the bookstore through the large French windows. The bookstore looks like a paradise for readers.

Wang Hexin is very familiar with the plants in the greenhouse, including their scientific names, popular names and growth habits. He joked that if the guide

of the botanical garden in the greenhouse took leave, he could take over the job anytime. Wang said as he had worked there for such a long time, he was very familiar with the plants. Although trivial issues in the bookstore have worn down his curiosity about books in the shop and plants in the greenhouse, his love for nature has only become stronger.

Wang said, "I've become very familiar with both our bookstore and the greenhouse." When he has extra time, he often strolls around the botanical garden. Green plants in the dinosaur skeleton-shaped facility make him recall the history of dinosaurs. Sometimes, Wang falls into a trance while observing the plants. This was a new way for him to get along with nature. Quietly standing among the plants, he felt like a tree.

Beauty at Dusk

Some visitors come here to view the scenes at sunset. At dusk, all things in the greenhouse, including books and people, are bathed in the golden light of the setting sun, calmly appreciating the amazing landscape in the distance.

Wang said, "All romantic elements, such as books, coffee and the setting sun, gather in the bookstore." As daytime becomes longer and the sun sets later than before, the bookstore has extended its business hours to allow visitors to appreciate the beautiful scenery. When seeing visitors content with the beautiful sunset, Wang feels happy.

Clouds change their shapes constantly, and each sunset is unique. Sunsets are pink, rosy or purple. The sun sometimes hides behind the clouds. The sunset resembles the volatile moods of humankind.

Some frequent visitors will exchange their contact info with Wang Hexin to get weather information from him. When the bookstore does not have many readers, Wang often chats with the barista at the coffee counter. Wang learned from him how to assess coffee seeds and how to savour a cup of coffee.

Names of different drinks reflect the bookstore's efforts to promote reading. They include Hemingway's American Coffee, Borges' Mocha, Chinese scholar Wang Anshi's (1021–1086) Tea and Austen's Caramel Macchiato. In the bookstore, people feel like they are communicating with great writers and scholars while sipping on their drinks. When the weather is warm, the staff members of the book-

store place chairs and desks outdoors under canopy tents to enable readers to observe mountains in the distance while reading books.

At sunset, the large giraffe-themed dead wood sculpture "Mollie and Her Family" looks livelier and more lifelike in the orange light and shade. This is the largest dead wood sculpture in the world. The wood is from molave trees, which were endangered in the last century due to overcutting.

Some readers have said that the bookstore represents the embodiment of a romantic and idyllic lifestyle. Sui Mao captured the sculpture in his photographs. He said, "This sculpture is made of the scraps of felled trees which were discarded by people. The sculptor uses this artwork to remind people of plants' significance to our lives, and hopes people can reflect on their damage to nature and better protect plants."

Holding Life in Your Hands

Like many others, this brick-and-mortar bookstore was affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. Its operations encountered risks. To overcome operational difficulties, Wang Hexin decided to hold popular science activities at the bookstore. The botanical garden and the bookstore create a good venue for interactive parent-child activities. The bookstore used livestream sales and popular science activities to solve its operating problems.

In a corner of the bookstore are several pots of plants, which are lively and lovely in the sunlight. These are from children who attended activities at the bookstore. The children placed the plants in the bookstore and entrusted staff to care for them. During the activities, children planted seeds in the pots and watered them every several days. Subsequently, they came to the bookstore on occasion to observe the growth.

Children were very interested in

planting seeds in pots and observing their growth. From the emergence of green buds to the growth of leaves, the children felt excited. These pots of plants enliven the bookstore. "We provide children an opportunity to approach and embrace nature. We hope the activities can trigger a love of nature among children," said Wang. He pays much attention to the plants. Every day, after arriving at the bookstore, he usually waters and moves the pots into the sunlight.

The bookstore regularly hosts a plant and reading-themed event, which often attracts the participation of approximately 1,000 people. Other events are also staged to allow participants to explore, share, show and exchange views on reading and nature. Through the events, reading and natural science are promoted among children, who in turn become fond of reading books and getting to know nature.

After work, Wang likes to go downstairs from the side of the botanical garden. Though he sees the plants daily, he prefers to walk through the green space rather than leave from the modern reinforced concrete structure. He said that leaving through the garden is a treat in such an ordinary urban life.

Wang did not hope that the bookstore would only become a popular destination among cyber celebrities and influencers. The bookstore made efforts to allow ordinary people to appreciate the spring scenes there. In the bookstore, Wang is like a guide, leading readers to explore nature.

In March, spring arrives in the capital city. The bookstore, with its French windows, is filled with the sounds of pages turning, and the botanical garden with the chirps of birds. The harmony between the bookstore and nature makes visitors feel relaxed.





JIC BOOKS IN GUOMAO

MORE THAN BOOKS

BRINGING A TOUCH OF CHARM TO THE CITY

Translated by Wang Wei Edited by Brad Green, Anne Ruisi Photos by Wang Fei

Some people may not be aware of the bookstore at Beijing Prosper Centre in the city's Central Business District (CBD), even if they have visited the complex several times. For people who are not so keenly aware of books, even if they walked by its door by accident, they may have missed it.

The Guomao branch of JIC Bookstore Investment Co., Ltd. (JIC Books), as the largest flagship store of JIC Books, in the first year of its operation, was selected as one of the top 10 most beautiful bookstores

in Beijing. The simple and spacious hall of the bookstore makes visitors feel comfortable and relaxed. The 2,000-square-metre space features the red of the Forbidden City, the grey of the old city walls of Beijing, 10 ornamental column-shaped bookshelves and a 50-metre-long wall with books. In terms of its spatial design, the old Beijing elements reveal beauty and harmony all around, much like the quality of the city. In addition to a variety of books, the space is also known for its beautiful scenery.

A Good Companion

On weekdays, there are usually not many customers in the bookstore. They stand in twos and threes in front of the bookshelves quietly reading and selecting books. The atmosphere is quiet and restrained. The cultural and creative area displays some small creative and novel items and ornaments, such as tea sets, bookmarks and desk calendars. Soft leather sofas, cartoon signs and black-board newspapers are all placed and designed to make it easy for customers to sit down and enjoy their reading.

Nowadays, reading is characterised by fragmentations. The tranquillity of reading may not rival fashionable trends in the eyes of some people, however, there are always some who are obsessed with books and will become attached to a bookstore following a lecture or book signing, or by just passing by.

Every weekend, Li, in his 70s, comes to read in the bookstore, usually staying for hours. In addition to reading, he sometimes chats with his book

consultant. As a result, his presence has become a unique sight there.

Li prefers books about history and the military. Every time he comes to the shop, he first asks his book consultant what new books have been introduced into the bookstore, and the two exchange their views and experiences on reading. The book consultant is around 30 years old, and has the same hobbies as Li. Thanks to their common interests, the two have become close friends despite their age difference. As Li comes often, he soon became a favourite customer among the store's staff. Whenever they see him, they greet him warmly; he enthusiastically returns a salute.

The story of Li and the bookstore began around 2020. Due to Li's love of reading, he visited all the bookstores within a few kilometres of his home, but was never satisfied. When he found the JIC Books Guomao branch, he immediately fell in love with it. This is largely due to the role of that professional book consultant.

When most people visit a bookstore, they either have a special purpose and come straight for a particular book, or they may take a long time to choose one. Occasionally, when they go home, they may find that the book they chose is not the best. For this reason, every day, the bookstore arranges book consultants to observe whether customers are just browsing or buying books. They will give recommendations to customers according to their needs, such as buying books for themselves or as gifts to others. This is how Li met the book consultant, and how they became friends; they have much to talk about.

In the beginning, Li bought books in cash, without taking a cell phone or bank cards with him. In order to make

it easier for him to buy books and enjoy corresponding discounts, the bookstore specially registered him a discount card. Gradually, Li became a frequent visitor to the store.

People like Li who regularly come to read and buy books account for a certain proportion of the bookstore's customers. They come over at intervals and sit down to read, not just to buy books, but to enjoy the atmosphere of the bookstore. Sometimes, guidance is needed for them in selecting books, and the staff members will provide corresponding suggestions and services in due course. If customers want to buy books that are not available in the bookstore, they will be advised to go to other bookstores to save time.

In terms of the bookstore's spatial design, the old Beijing elements reveal beauty and harmony all around, much like the quality of the city. In addition to a variety of books, the space is also known for its beautiful scenery.





Over the years, the bookstore has planned a variety of offline cultural activities. Pictured is an exhibition organised by the bookstore in 2021 to mark the centenary of the Communist Party of China.

Creating a Relaxed Environment

In addition to Li, there is also Lu Zhe, who has also become a loyal customer of the bookstore. He has developed a habit of visiting the bookstore every week. However, compared to Li, Lu has no specific preferences for books; he mostly enjoys the atmosphere of drinking coffee and reading in the store's Biography Cafe.

At the age of 30, Lu is a senior executive at a foreign company. A reading salon helped him find this peaceful corner in the hustling and bustling Guomao area. Every weekend morning, after working out at a nearby gym, he comes to Biography Cafe to order a cup of coffee, chat with a barista and begin to read one or two books he favours. In this way, like Li, he became familiar with the staff members in the bookstore, and they soon began to call each other by their names like friends. At noon, he would go downstairs to have lunch nearby, then return to the cafe to continue reading, not leaving until around 4 p.m.

Nowadays, the pace of people's lives is like riding a galloping horse: the pressure of work, burden of family, and caring for parents and children. These are like an invisible horse whip urging young professionals to hurry up, hurry up! To some extent, a bookstore can help them find their own resonance and identity with books and other people. For Lu, the time in the bookstore allows his soul to rest in this "oasis" on the edge of the hustling and bustling world outside.

The model of "A bookstore + creative and cultural products + coffee" is no longer novel, but the bookstore's Biography Cafe still makes many customers feel fresh. *The Night at Firenze*, *The Reed of Pascal* and *The Virtue of Socrates*—each product's name seems to have a story about a master. Portraits of masters such as William Shakespeare (1564–1616), Galileo Galilei (1564–1642) and Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756–

1791) are printed on the backs of the chairs. At the cafe, when customers sit there, they seem to be able to communicate with these giants of history.

Some people read, some ease themselves, and some simply have a cup of coffee and enjoy the street view outside through the glass windows. Due to the relatively tranquil environment, many nearby office workers enjoy meeting people here to talk about work, where they feel more relaxed than in the office.

This is the business philosophy that the bookstore has conveyed to the public since its opening. Zhang Quan, general manager of the bookstore, said, "Because the pace of work in the CBD is relatively fast, at the beginning of its opening, we hoped that it would become a cultural 'oasis' in the CBD. Everyone can slow down and calm themselves here so that the state of their moods can be lifted."

Becoming a Cultural Symbol of the CBD

In this booming era of e-books and audiobooks, people seem more willing to wear earphones and take out their cell phones and tablets to read by touching a screen with their fingers rather than picking up printed books and reading them page by page. As a result, the surviving space for physical bookstores has constantly become smaller.

However, the recent decline of the physical bookstore industry is also an opportunity for its rebirth. The industry will not die, but will optimise, transform and upgrade. In this regard, the bookstore has its own ideas. Books are only a starting point, and the end will be "more than books." As China's first biography-themed bookstore, it adheres to the "more than books" idea to position itself as a new cultural space.

Book displays are always the soul of a bookstore. A variety of biographies has been a long-term theme of its book selec-

tion since the shop's inception. Therefore, what they display are prominent figures, such as thinkers, writers, historians and scientists, and on this basis, the bookstore extends the scope of biographical reading.

Biographies are a treasure box for humankind to collect wisdom and a method of viewing the world. Reading biographies can enrich people's knowledge, and draw some wisdom from others to guide readers to better work in a certain direction. According to Hermann Hesse (1877–1962), "No book in the world can bring you good luck, but they can quietly make you become yourself." Perhaps the charm of reading lies in this concept.

In addition, the bookstore has carried out diversified explorations in meeting the reading needs of its customers. In 2020, the bookstore launched a free borrowing service in association with Chaoyang District Library. The library invests in books, and the bookstore provides a space, book selec-

tions and daily operations. This has formed a new type of "a library in a bookstore" co-operation, which has been recognised by many customers. Today, "borrowing books for free" has become one of the labels presented by the public for the bookstore on social networking sites.

Thanks to the "borrowing books" area, many people come here to stroll and borrow books, and return them when finished weeks later. A customer commented on the bookstore on a social networking site: "Unexpectedly, there is a treasure trove in this office building. A store that also provides library books is not available in other places. We can borrow to read. It's great."

A land without books is as barren as a desert. The purpose of establishing the bookstore is to bring cultural quality changes to the CBD. The bookstore will grow into one of the cultural symbols of the area, and even the city of Beijing at large.

Providing Cultural Consulting Services

In addition to reading classic literature, attending lectures, concerts, exhibitions and films seem to be other popular cultural activities. The main reason why the bookstore is so popular with the public is that it has planned a variety of offline cultural activities and has more interaction with customers.

As China's cultural centre, Beijing has focused on developing its physical bookstores and accumulating strength through the Nationwide Reading campaign for the city's cultural development. To respond to the call, the bookstore not only enriches itself with cultural creativity, but also plays a role as a cultural consultant to extend its services to all areas.

Last year, the bookstore cooperated with entities, including *The Beijing News*, to plan the first Beijing CBD Reading and Life Festival. Activities such as themed

exhibitions, cultural salons, lectures, food tastings, artistic experiences, poetry reciting and concerts have enriched the cultural lives of the city's residents. The festival was attended by many distinguished guests, including Olympic champion Deng Yaping and ophthalmologist Tao Yong.

Running through the north and south of its urban areas, the Central Axis of Beijing is the soul of the ancient capital and a witness to the city's great urban civilisation. Architect Liang Sicheng (1901–1972) praised it: "The unique grace and order of Beijing are created by the Central Axis." In order to enable the public to learn more about the Central Axis and experience the city's rich cultural heritage, last summer, the bookstore, in collaboration with Beijing Publishing Group Co., Ltd, planned an event titled "Starting from a Bookstore to Explore the Central Axis of

Beijing," which received widespread praise both inside and outside the industry.

This represents the expansion of the bookstore's business. In fact, up to now, its cultural consulting services have involved a variety of fields, such as ideology and intelligence, revolutionary themes, humanistic aesthetics, and youth growth and development. The planned activities include customised book clubs, planning themed exhibitions, designing a study for an enterprise and providing cultural space management consulting.

The bookstore's function is not only to sell books, but also to build a high-quality platform to gather resources from other industries. This makes the bookstore a crossroads connecting various resources. Zhang said, "The integration of resources in the bookstore can bring high-quality cultural products into more fields."

A HUTONG HAVEN FOR BOOK LOVERS

Translated by Zhang Hongpeng Edited by Brad Green, Anne Ruisi Photos by Xue Chen

I first learned of Zuoshu Bookshop from an article on its official WeChat account. In the article, the writer explains why editors have no time to scrutinise manuscripts. The article employs funny words to describe the mood changes of editors when they are repeatedly hurried to finalise their work. The article made me curious about the bookshop, so I decided to visit it.

On a recent spring evening, I rang the doorbell of the courtyard at No. 16 Houyongkang Hutong in Dongcheng District, Beijing. This small courtyard is home to a bookshop comprised of a bar counter and a coffee counter, and is dubbed “a parlour for editors.”



Books, Wine and Coffee

Beijing at dusk is always warm and appealing; havens of tranquillity dot the busy city. From Beixinqiao Subway Station, one will reach a quiet *hutong* (Beijing-style alley) after walking hundreds of metres across the well-known food street, Guijie. At the end of Houyongkang Hutong appears the sign for Zuoshu Bookshop.

Entering the courtyard, visitors will find a noticeable bookshop with a large French window, through which bookshelves, desks and a coffee counter can be seen indoors. When I arrived, I saw a teenager in black quietly flipping through a thick book near a bookshelf behind the window.

Images online show the layout of the bookshop, giving a glimpse of its interior. However, when entering the space in person, people often wonder what makes the small bookshop so distinctive and attractive to ardent readers.

The bookshop has simple furnishings. A counter facing the front door is laid with coffee cups and coffee makers. On both sides of the main hall are tall bookshelves against the walls. Some chairs are dotted around the bookshop to serve readers; a few people sit reading books there. As they rustle book leaves,

it sounds like ripples on a calm lake. An employee is busy working behind the counter. While asking new customers for their orders, he quickly prepares coffee for other patrons.

Unlike others of its kind, the bookshop also has a drink cabinet full of beer and wine varieties. Visitors will be amazed by its selection of beer and wine. Actually, the bookshop also operates as a pub and a coffee shop to let patrons sip wine or coffee while reading books.

In the views of some book lovers, both wine and coffee can make people relax, like a good book. A reader, who considers the bookshop an entertainment venue, used to read the same book with his friends amongst the aroma of coffee at the bookshop. When finding heart-touching sentences or phrases in books, he and his friends copied them on their notebooks while feeling tipsy after drinking a few cans of beer. Therefore, he regards the bookshop as an ideal place to share thoughts with friends.

Talking with the bookshop's founder Liu Song, people can learn more about the shop's concept of communication and sharing. The bookshop focuses on creating an optimal environment for social communication. In 2005, Liu

started his career in a bookshop. Since leaving the bookshop, he has worked in a publishing house until the present. Liu and his fellow editors established an online space for editors' meetings, which became the precursor of today's Zuoshu self-media brand. In the space, Liu made many friends with editors, writers and media workers. It seemed to become a meeting place for cultural workers. Now, Zuoshu has gained popularity in the cultural field.

Many readers know the Zuoshu brand, which began in 2013. That year, it established a website and launched a self-media account to tell stories happening in the publishing industry. The account aims to set up a bridge between publishers and readers by describing the efforts of publishers. During these years, Zuoshu has staged more than 100 events in cooperation with over 100 bookshops and cultural spaces.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, Zuoshu realised the importance of the physical space. Through efforts, Zuoshu Bookshop managed to open. A sentence in the Zuoshu account says that it was no longer content with using words to encourage publishers and wanted to build a haven for publishers and book lovers.



Discovering stories behind books



Unique Parlour for Editors

During the development of Zuoshu, editors have been indispensable. On the home page of the Zuoshu account, people can see its intention to work with editors.

Liu told a story about the Beijing Book Fair in 2023, when Zuoshu Bookshop hosted a reception from 7 p.m. to midnight. About 200 people participated in it. Although there were not enough seats in the bookshop, participants gladly gathered to talk about their favourite writers, book copyrights and anecdotes in the publishing industry.

In Liu's eyes, editors are lively and interesting people. They have various lifestyles, and most of them are young. They all remain enthusiastic about publishing and often reflect on editing. In the bookshop, editors can pleasantly exchange their opinions on the publishing industry and culture-related events.

An editor from a publishing company, known by his surname Kong, is an old friend of the bookshop. He said that

because of his work, he frequently viewed articles posted on the Zuoshu account. "I am probably one of the first visitors to the bookshop. During its trial operation, I couldn't help visiting it. I believe that it demands courage to operate a physical bookshop in the context of the rapid development of multimedia," Kong said.

Currently, in addition to its branch in Houyongkang Hutong, Zuoshu Bookshop has opened its second outlet at The New in the Xidan area. Liu Song said that the two outlets have different purposes. The outlet in Houyongkang Hutong focuses on providing a space for social communication, while the one in the Xidan area is dedicated to selling books. Liu said, "Although Xidan is one of the city's trendy shopping areas, our bookshop there only sells books and does not offer food, drinks or cultural products."

In the Xidan branch, books play a dominant role. All elements, including bookshelves and light box advertise-

ments, are related to books. The exclusive focus on bookselling is a characteristic of the shop. Many social media platforms, such as dianping.com and xiaohongshu.com, recommend the bookshop as a popular destination for readers. As a result, passers-by often photograph it with their smartphones.

However, the management of Zuoshu Bookshop keeps a clear mind on the success of the bookshop. Liu commented in an article about the operations of the bookshop: "The number of readers is relatively small. When a new bookshop opens and attracts the attention of cyber celebrities, it will gain popularity in the early months. During this period, it is usually visited by cyber celebrities. Ardent readers are rarely drawn by a bookshop's appearance and decorations. If a bookshop did not have quality books, it would attract fewer and fewer readers. In other words, it is not a bookshop's appearance that attracts readers."

Not Recommending Books

Zuoshu Bookshop not only hopes to win popularity, but also focuses on the quality of its books. In the bookshop, there are many carefully selected books, which are recognised by readers.

Shao Feng, a 23-year-old reader, decided to keep away from his smartphone and conquer his addiction to short video clips one year ago. Currently, he frequents brick-and-mortar bookshops, and Zuoshu Bookshop is one of his favourites. He yearns to reinstate his reading habits and hopes to enrich

his inner world through reading. "When visiting the bookshop for the first time, I knew that it was the place I'm looking for," he said.

The bookshop does not lead readers to the bookshelf for best-sellers. In the Houyongkang Hutong and Xidan branches, specific books are not recommended to readers.

Liu Song said that Zuoshu Bookshop does not recommend books to readers because the bookshop is small and has only a few types of books. Moreover, the

bookshop mainly sells books with small flaws, which do not have a large inventory. Liu Song modestly said, "I have only read a few books."

To surprise readers, Zuoshu Bookshop often sells its selected books at a very low price. In the bookshop, readers are often astonished by the prices of their favourite books. The low prices are attributed to the small flaws in the books.

When a university student bought his favourite book at an affordable price, he felt pleasant and respected.

From Bookshop to Book Fair

A bookshop should consider both how to provide readers with quality books and how to make profits. Liu said bookshops should have advantages in book quality and supply chains, so he decided to improve both areas.

During the early period after the establishment of Zuoshu Bookshop, it mainly sold books made by special-interest publishing brands, including Yuefu and Yazhong. "At the beginning, this business concept was widely recognised when we explained it to readers or our friends. However, after a period of operations, I found that less than 10 out of every 100 customers knew these brands. Most people don't have a clear idea about publishing brands," Liu said.

To meet the needs of most readers, Zuoshu Bookshop launched various events. People can find pop-up shops, blind bags from some publishing brands and noted book fairs in the bookshop.

In 2023, book-related elements, such as book creation, book covers and paper for books, will play an important role at the book fairs. When staff of the bookshop explained the book fair, they mentioned many known or unknown writers who specialise in fields such as science fiction, travel, comics, philosophy, geography and literature. Certainly, editors are the main

participants in the fair, and hundreds of editors will attend it. At the fair, ordinary book covers will be displayed as artwork. This fair will no longer focus on selling books, and it will be a ceremonial party to mark the 10-year development of Zuoshu.

Readers and editors will have major roles at the party. Zuoshu hopes that this event will evoke good memories about books by displaying images of books, book fairs, bookshops or streets full of bookshops.

A reader, nicknamed Xiaoze, bought a book at the bookshop. While carefully touching the book's cover, he expressed his wish that the bookshop can survive and thrive. "I love books. When surrounded by good books, I feel peaceful and comfortable. I cannot imagine what it would be like if a city had no bookshops," said Xiaoze.

An editor surnamed Kong said, "I used to dream of opening a bookshop, but I know it is too difficult to run it. I believe good books are appealing. They make some people decide to be writers and others find their life goals. The relationship between books and people will last forever. Bookshops will not disappear."

Discovering stories behind books

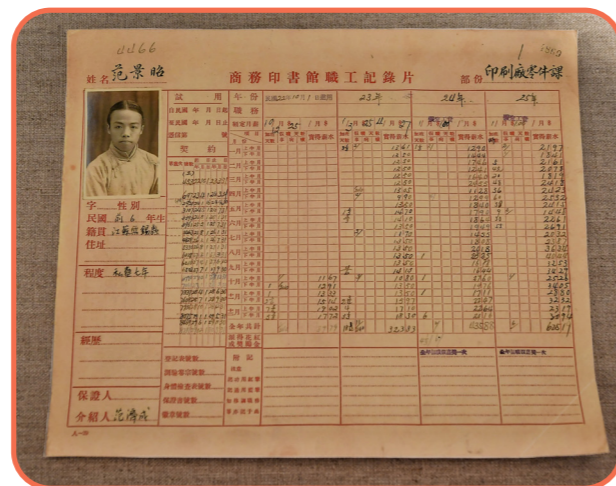
HANFENLOU

A SPIRITUAL HOME IN A BUSY WORLD

Translated by Wang Wei Edited by Brad Green, Anne Ruisi Photos courtesy of Hanfenlou Bookstore and by Wang Guibin

Hanfenlou Bookstore, a two-storey building with a simple appearance, stands on the hustling and bustling Wangfujing Street. Visitors feel as if time automatically stops when they step inside. Its exterior of cyan and white bricks creates a quiet and gentle atmosphere, bringing a feeling of calm to the otherwise busy street.

Unlike other bookstores, Hanfenlou has stronger academic and professional features. The bookstore contains numerous reference books and professional research publications that have clear classifications in art, philosophy, history, literature, law and economics. First opening in Shanghai in 1904, Hanfenlou served as a library of The Commercial Press, but was later destroyed during the January 28th Incident of 1932. In 1954, the press moved from Shanghai to Beijing. A century after it first opened, Hanfenlou was restored in Beijing as a bookstore for the press. In recent years, it has expanded its academic services and research in fields such as literature and arts.



A Century-Old Library

On social networking platforms, such as xiaohongshu.com and book.douban.com, when people search for recommendations on bookstores in Beijing, Hanfenlou always tops the list. These recommendations make people curious about the bookstore due to its long history.

Dongcheng District has many bookstores, including time-honoured brands and emerging niche art reading spaces. If people ride bicycles along a 3.7-kilometre route in Dongsì for 19 minutes, they cannot miss four different styles of bookstores—Sanlian Taofen Bookstore, Zijin City Academy, Hanfenlou and Shanhai Sihe. This has become the most popular route for exploring bookstores, recommended by xiaohongshu.com. Among the four bookstores, Hanfenlou garners more interesting comments on social media.

Unlike the other three's cultural and creative surroundings and books, Hanfenlou features its simple architectural style and strong academic atmosphere, which is noted in online comments. Among the numerous commentaries, "professional," "reference books," "academics," "lectures" and "keep quiet in a noisy neighbour-

hood" have become high-frequency evaluation keywords for the bookstore. Hanfenlou has become one of the most favoured bookstores among the public due to its unique historical background.

In the old days, when it served as the library of The Commercial Press from the 1900s to the 1930s in Shanghai, Hanfenlou was characterised by its collection of rare books and local chronicles. In 1926, Hanfenlou was transformed into the Eastern Library and opened to the public. Due to its abundant books and detailed classifications, it was recognised as one of the largest libraries in Asia, with a collection of over 400,000 books.

However, during the war, most precious books, along with the building, were destroyed. Nevertheless, the tradition of its professional services for academic books has been passed down to this day.

Although Hanfenlou has undergone many hardships, it has also nurtured a profound culture. In 2003, it reopened as a modern bookstore on Wangfujing Street in Beijing. Calligrapher, painter and educator Qi Gong (1912–2005) wrote the bookstore's name for its sign. Hanfenlou

has become one of the city's characteristic bookstores. In addition to visitors who enter the bookstore by accident while sightseeing along Wangfujing Street, numerous customers come to seek professional books every day. In a certain corner of the ground floor are often customers who casually sit and read books. Some take notes while reading. Many of these customers are professionals from different industries looking up relevant information from the books in Hanfenlou.

Outside the bookstore is the prosperous Wangfujing Street, with its endless vehicles and pedestrians. The street is a distinguished contrast to the quiet atmosphere and customers inside the bookstore. Even during the city's peak tourist season, the increase in its customer flow has not accelerated the pace of the bookstore. The reason is that Hanfenlou's customers include many surrounding residents and local admirers. They each have their own purposes in reading, and after finding the right corner, they become immersed in the words on the pages before them.

Passing Down its Academic Services

With a total floor area of over 1,800 square metres, Hanfenlou is divided into the basement, ground and first floors. On the ground and basement floors are a variety of reference and professional books, covering languages, literature, arts, philosophy and economics. About 30 percent of them are published by The Commercial Press, and the rest are products of other publishers. A customer who has profound research and experience in tea and trade discusses the topics with another customer. He recommends an exclusive publication of The Commercial Press, *Shengjin Jieke (Promoting Body Fluids and Quenching Thirst)*, which has a clear record and deep insight into the history of the globalisation of China's tea. Detailed data and interpretations in the book indicate the historical key points of China's tea industry. As a bookstore owned by The Commercial Press, Hanfenlou has high standards in book selection and classified placement. At the store, it is not difficult to find books that combine business and history, and the placement of books is scientific and professional, which can also be understood as something of a "reading list" for customers.

Among the books displayed on Hanfenlou's ground floor, there are many niche business books like the book on the globalisation of China's tea, mentioned before. The bookstore contains a wide variety of business books, most of which have high ratings on social networking platforms such as book.douban.com. In terms of book placement, they are carefully displayed from left to right and from top to bottom according to their complexity and other respective systems. If people come to the bookstore with the purpose of buying specific books, they can easily find what they need. The shop's books can provide some reading references for a customer who needs to focus on a certain field.

The shop's detailed services have also been extended to its first floor, used as The Commercial Press History Exhibi-



tion Hall and Hanfenlou Art Museum. The art museum often exhibits calligraphy, paintings and other works of art. The highlight of April is the Second Guardian International Art Book Fair.

On the afternoon of March 17, Ming Lei, deputy general manager of Hanfenlou, participated in an activity for primary and secondary school librarians in Dongcheng District to visit The Commercial Press and exchange ideas. Similar exchanges are held almost every day at Hanfenlou. Ming's work is to ensure quality services for these academic exchanges and other art and cultural salons.

For Ming, participating in lectures can help him better understand the attributes of such activities and their demands for books. The academic characteristics of Hanfenlou have drawn many scholars to gather here. Academic resources from all walks of life converge in the bookstore to spark new ideas through sharing and communication. Hanfenlou has become an important venue for academic and ideological exchanges of different fields. From books to lectures, Hanfenlou has always played a key role in spreading traditional Chinese culture and making academic achievements.



Expanding its Business Scope

The accumulation of Hanfenlou's academic reputation returns to it a stable income. Professionals from all walks of life have an increasing demand for Hanfenlou's books, art exhibits and academic lectures. For them, Hanfenlou is not only a service provider, but also a resource platform and participant in the sharing of culture. In response to the different needs of different industries, Ming and his team members began to seek professionals and experienced industry insiders to create lists of books for its procurement, and to give suggestions about planning exhibitions and lectures that are in line with the characteristics of the academic fields. The purpose is two-fold: to continue The Commercial Press's over 100 years of academic services, while at the same time, considering the revenue of the bookstore.

The revenue of the capital city's entire physical bookstore industry is declining year by year. With the impact of e-commerce platforms, physical bookstores need to answer the question of how to ensure their revenues. In recent years, Ming has felt that the role of physical bookstores' traditional method of retailing is declining. It is urgent to expand the rev-

enue via a variety of means, even outside the bookstore. All its staff members have actively explored new businesses online and outside the bookstore.

The bookstore is responsible for operating the official flagship stores of The Commercial Press on e-commerce platforms, including tmall.com, jd.com and dangdang.com. At the same time, it expands its business on social networking platforms such as douyin and xiaohongshu. Its book retail revenue online has exceeded that of its physical store. Hanfenlou's professional reference book lists and new book recommendations are popular on social networking platforms, such as xiaohongshu.com and book.douban.com. Even during the unfortunate period of the COVID-19 pandemic prevention and control, the bookstore's revenue reached its highest point in history in 2021. The revenue also met its expectations in 2022.

In order to give people in other regions a better understanding of Hanfenlou and find books they need, the bookstore has developed the holding of mobile fairs for nearly two years. In May 2023, a mobile fair for Hanfenlou's books will be held in Hangzhou in China's eastern Zhejiang

Province. Ming hopes that Hangzhou residents can take this opportunity to learn more about Hanfenlou. In addition to its selected books, Hanfenlou will display its exquisite cultural and creative products at the mobile fair.

Similar mobile fairs will also be held in the capital city. Hanfenlou will present its books and cultural and creative products at this year's Beijing Book Fair, and carry out related themed activities on World Book and Copyright Day. Ming believes that in addition to helping the public learn about the bookstore, the role of its mobile fairs can give people more inner peace and enrich their lives through the power of books.

Ming's personal reading list features history books. He believes that humankind's destiny may repeat its history, which should lead to deep contemplation of the current situation. He hopes that reading can bring young people a sense of calm in today's restless environment. Moreover, enjoying reading enables them to build their own reading system of peace, much like how Hanfenlou brings peace and tranquillity to hustling and bustling Wangfujing Street.

CATHAY BOOKSHOP

A GUARDIAN OF TRADITIONAL BEIJING CULTURE

Translated by Wang Wei Edited by Brad Green, Anne Ruisi Photos by Wu Mengzhen, Wang Jianing, Ma Ke

These days, finding a bookstore in Beijing is not a difficult task. According to the Publicity Department of the CPC Beijing Municipal Committee, there are over 2,100 physical bookshops in Beijing. With their own unique styles, these bookshops are scattered in every nook and cranny of the city. Bookshops not only help people understand the world and learn how to think, but are also part of a city's spirit, helping to create its cultural atmosphere.

Among buildings with traditional Chinese architectural styles featuring red windows, black roof tiles and flying eaves along Liulichang Cultural Street in Hepingmenwai, Cathay Bookshop's Liulichang branch contains a great number of books on literature, history and philosophy, as well as ancient documents. Its rich cultural heritage has drawn visitors from near and far.

Here, new connections are constantly being created between books and people. A senior technician can repair damage and restore the original appearance of ancient books with techniques that have been passed down for hundreds of years. Professionals from a variety of fields constantly flow in and out of the bookshop. The shop's vitality has matched that of the times.



A Must-Visit Bookshop

During the Qing Dynasty (1644–1911), most nationwide candidates for the highest imperial examination came to gather in the areas around today's Liulichang. As a result of this gathering of intellectuals, many shops here sold books, paper and inkstones, forming a strong cultural atmosphere. Today, the street is called Liulichang Cultural Street, where traditional Chinese stationery, calligraphy, paintings and antiques are common, making it a must-visit attraction for domestic and foreign sightseers when exploring Old Beijing culture.

In April, spring flowers bloom along Liulichang Cultural Street. Occasionally, the sound of music can be heard coming from a musical instruments shop, where several elderly people sit together to practice the technique of playing the *erhu* (a two-stringed bowed instrument). Pedestrians walking along the street often slow their pace in order to relax and absorb this interesting cultural atmosphere. A young woman holding flowers passes by, adding an intoxicating fragrance to the old street.

Surrounding street views highlight Liulichang. A century-old locust tree at the intersection has witnessed many legends of the street. Under the shade of branches and leaves, an eye-catching cluster of buildings with traditional Chinese style has a unique atmosphere. Above its main door is a plaque with golden Chinese characters on a black background. These characters, with their strong and powerful calligraphic style, pronounce the name: Cathay Bookshop.

Cathay Bookshop is a chain enterprise and a time-honoured brand in Beijing. The bookshop on Liulichang Cultural Street is one of its branches. Stepping into its south door, visitors will see a small space for the display of books on traditional Chinese culture, including publications for lyre-playing, chess, calligraphy and paintings, as well as seal cutting. Its customers often include scholars who carefully select books for their studies, or parents who take their children to experience its atmosphere of reading. According



In addition to daily work, Cathay Bookshop's staff members often search for and purchase ancient and second-hand books from outside the shop. Damaged books will be restored by the shop's technicians, which can be passed down from generation to generation.

to a salesperson, this southern section of the bookshop focuses on artist books.

Walking further inside, people can see a small courtyard located in the centre of the complex. The quiet courtyard contains vibrant green bamboo and blooming magnolias, accompanied by the chirping of birds. Along the small courtyard's corridor, visitors will arrive at the north section of the bookshop where the latest publica-

tions on literature, history and arts, as well as traditional thread-bound books and cultural and creative products are located.

On the ground floor are neatly arranged timber bookshelves. Each of them is seven or eight levels filled with a variety of colourful books. The first floor is its special display area for ancient books and documents, inscriptions, calligraphy and literature from the past imperial dynasties.

Home of Scholars

"At that time, there were a variety of traditional Chinese stationery and antiques shops along Liulichang Cultural Street. While walking along the street, I suddenly saw Cathay Bookshop. Entering the bookshop, I was delighted and surprised by its rows of classic books," said Zheng Huagai, one of its regular customers. "You will always be helped by shop assistants if you are searching for specific books. It is a particularly good atmosphere. You often see staff discussing certain books with customers."

Zheng, at 68, said he is a regular customer of the bookshop. In the 1980s, when he was on a business trip from Zhangjiakou in north China's Hebei Province to Beijing, he visited the bookshop while strolling around Liulichang Culture Street. He was impressed with the richness of its professional books. Every time he came to Beijing for a business trip, he would always visit the bookshop. Later, he was transferred to work in Beijing and became a weekly regular.

During his latest visit, Zheng found many books he wanted to buy. He happily said, "The books I prefer can always be found in the bookshop and the quality

is also good. It is a happy thing to have found what I needed." Zheng is familiar with most bookstores in Beijing. In his opinion, Sanlian and Wansheng bookstores also have their own characteristics. "However, Cathay Bookshop on Liulichang Cultural Street still attracts me more."

On the first floor, a person who resembled a teacher took a youngster to select ancient books and documents from in front of exhibition cabinets. He said, "This is a palace of learning for intellectuals in Beijing. Many people call the Liulichang branch of the bookshop their second university. Thus, we come to take a look."

When it comes to the relationship between intellectuals and the bookshop, Liu Yichen, its manager said, "Many well-known scholars have visited here to exchange ideas and purchase books. There are interesting stories about them. Scholar Liu Mengxi often came to the bookshop when he was young. Later, he was getting on in years and walked with difficulty. Shop assistants often accompanied him and brought him a chair. Later, due to his poor health, he would call us to send him the books he needed. The former chairman of the Chinese Calligraphers

Association often came here to search for books on calligraphy."

Finding books for customers and finding customers for books, and providing valuable clues to complete reference materials for scholars from various fields is an old tradition of the bookshop. The bookshop was praised as the "home of scholars" by calligrapher and painter Qi Gong (1912–2005). In the eyes of scholar Huang Shang (1919–2012), going to the bookshop's Liulichang branch is, in a sense, a journey of exploring a vast and colourful university and exhibition hall. The bookshop resembles a cultural supermarket with a wide range of categories and a rich variety of innovative books, making it a powerful attraction for people seeking knowledge.

Readng an ancient
book in a bookshop
with a clean
environment gives people a
sense of meeting with sages.

Promoting Traditional Chinese Culture

In the eyes of Liu, the bookshop is like an elderly person who has gone through life's ups and downs. In 1952, Cathay Bookshop was established at a courtyard in Yanyue Hutong, becoming the first state-owned bookshop for ancient and second-hand books in the history of the People's Republic of China. In 1953, the bookshop, with only a dozen staff members at the time, purchased over 200,000 volumes of ancient books, accounting for one-third of the city's total number in this industry throughout the year. In 1955, the bookshop's sales accounted for 50 percent of the city's total book sales, which was equal to that of the other 111 private bookshops in the industry.

In 1958, Cathay merged more than 100 private bookshops, including Laixunge, Suiyazhai, Songyunge and Yiyatang, becoming the main representative of the capital city's ancient and second-hand book industry.

"Cathay Bookshop gives people a special feeling." Liu still remembers when he was a boy, he often saw a branch of Cathay Bookshop when buying books in Haidian District near his home. When he was in college, his connection with the

bookshop became closer. Liu's major was history. When studying, his teacher recommended *Tongjian Xue* as a mandatory reference book. Liu said, "At that time, there were only two copies of it in the school library. One of them was not allowed to be borrowed, leaving only one for students." That book circulated among classmates for over a month.

Under the recommendation of a teacher, Liu went to the bookshop on Liulichang Cultural Street to search. "Surprisingly, I found the book and purchased it. The price was not expensive." Liu remembers his classmates cast envious glances as he brought the book back to his dormitory. Liu added, "During my college years, Cathay Bookshop provided me with great help."

While nourishing many scholars, the bookshop is also constantly growing and developing. Today, the bookshop has become a cultural enterprise that integrates the editing and publishing of classic books, as well as the auctioning of ancient books, calligraphy, paintings and traditional Chinese stationery.

It seems that there is a special connection between Liu and the bookshop.

In 2008, Liu began to work in Cathay Bookshop after college. In the beginning, he sold new books at the Dengshikou branch. In 2010, he was transferred to the Liulichang branch to be engaged in ancient and second-hand books. Today, he is the manager.

Running a bookshop is not simple. In 2012, e-commerce platforms launched a price war, causing physical bookshops to face great challenges and many independent bookshops to go bankrupt. Cathay Bookshop escaped from the disaster, as it mainly focuses on specialising in buying and selling ancient and second-hand books. Afterwards, online platforms selling these books began to prosper, with trading volumes reaching as high as 500 million yuan on kongfz.com in 2015. Cathay Bookshop's branch on Liulichang Cultural Street faced dramatic challenges. Liu mobilised its team members to brainstorm how to address the challenges and spark new vitality. When describing his relationship with the bookshop, Liu said, "Cathay Bookshop is like a family member. It helped me in my school years; now it faces challenges and I need to take good care of it."



ALL SAGES

STRICTLY FOCUSED ON SELLING BOOKS

Translated by Wang Wei Edited by Brad Green, Anne Ruisi Photos courtesy of All Sages Bookstore and by Pu Feng



Less than two kilometres from Tsinghua University and Peking University in Haidian District, All Sages Bookstore (Wansheng Shuyuan), with its simple appearance, has been operating in Beijing for 30 years. This store holds a solid place in the memories of many people who studied at colleges based in Haidian. Countless academics have walked in and out of the bookstore over the years, making it one of the centres of intellectuals in Beijing.

People come to the bookstore for various purposes. Some come to browse, some come to buy books and others simply come to admire the city's cultural landmark. Although they have different purposes, they all share the similar trait of loving books. In the beginning, the bookstore may have been in part of the emotional product of its founders. It has also changed a lot as time has gone by. Ping'an, a cat and known "resident" of the bookstore, has retired and left. The bookstore has relocated several times, but some publishers still sent packages to its old addresses. The only thing that remains unchanged is that one of its founders, Liu Suli, and his wife Zhang Huanping, still want to carry out the original intention—selling books.

The most noteworthy of All Sages Bookstore's features are its books. No matter how a bookstore is decorated, it simply must sell books. In editorial circles, there is a saying that "if a book you participated in publishing has not been selected by All Sages, it is because you did not publish it well."

A Cultural Landmark in the Eyes of Booklovers

Walking along Chengfu Road opposite the east gate of Peking University for less than 10 minutes and entering from a common small shop in Building 1, Lanqiyang in Haidian District, people climb to the first floor and see the sign of All Sages Bookstore, one of the city's most famous independent bookstores.

Compared to the popular Beijing Books Building in Xidan and Sanlian Bookstore, All Sages Bookstore does not feature a fancy appearance and is not large in size. The space between its bookshelves usually allows only one adult to pass through. Most of the books here are about

humanities and social sciences, and there are fewer books about science and engineering. Many of the books on the current best-selling lists are not available here. If people come to the bookstore for a low price, they are likely to be disappointed. In terms of book prices, it has no advantage over e-commerce platforms. However, people can get a 10 percent discount after applying for a membership.

The shop's staff members' attitude may seem somewhat cold as they just want to keep a state of non-interference between customers and staff. If people are visiting the bookstore for the first time,

they may not first understand why it has gained such a charming reputation. They may be surprised to see middle-aged people pushing shopping carts with books they want to buy. A cat that meows and moves among people inside the bookstore adds to the allure.

It has not been easy for the bookstore to continue its operations for 30 years in Haidian District, with the extremely expensive price of land. Running a bookstore was once a good business for making money. However, the bookstore later began to go through ups and downs along with the times and other counterparts in

Haidian. It has strived to survive thanks to price wars of e-commerce platforms and other rising costs.

Guo has been a loyal customer of the bookstore for 14 years. He came to Beijing from his hometown to take the independent admission examination for colleges years ago. He often went to seek books in the bookstore because of its fame in its industry. He said that from his years of observation, there is a phenomenon in the bookstore: those who only read books but do not buy are mostly young people; those who push shopping carts full of books to buy are mostly middle-aged.

The bookstore is close to two of China's most famous universities—Peking

University and Tsinghua University—and not far from other universities and research institutes in Haidian District. Teachers and students from universities in the district are the main customer resource of the bookstore. Students have always read books here because they have time, but often do not have enough money to buy.

Liu said that he later found more and more people were coming to the bookstore with their bags to carry books home in. Upon asking, he was told that many in the shop were students who took notes, sitting on the ground reading books. In those days, they had no money to spend. The bookstore has never discriminated against people who only read but do not

buy. Thus, today, they come back from all over the world to repay the bookstore.

Liu sighed, "Numerous students graduated from nearby universities. My bookstore must survive at least about 10 years after their graduation. Now, more than 10 years have passed, and they have money to buy books."

Over the past 30 years, the bookstore has not only contained the feelings of its founders, but also the feelings of many intellectuals in Beijing.



Judging the Quality of a Book in 30 Seconds

One recent afternoon, Shi Jin, a graduate student from the Chinese Academy of Sciences, sat reading at Thinker Power Cafe next to the bookstore.

When she was an undergraduate at Tsinghua University, she became interested in the bookstore after she read Professor Luo Xiang's recollection of buying books there. She said that many liberal arts students liked going to the bookstore—a centre for intellectuals and a cultural landmark in Beijing. Thus, like many people, she went to the bookstore with the heart of a pilgrim.

How has the bookstore become a centre for intellectuals over the past 30 years? The answer to this question begins with its establishment.

In 1993, at the age of 33, Liu gave up his job at the China University of Political Science and Law and founded the bookstore with Gan Qi near Renmin University of China.

The name of the bookstore is related to the birthday of its founders. Both Liu and Gan were born on Halloween. The bookstore's logo, "Blue Ghost," is also derived from this fun fact. Later, there was a new interpretation of its name. Poet Xi Chuan, a frequent customer at that time, once said, "I would rather understand it as 10,000 saints, who are the authors on its bookshelves." In the end, public expectations won over Liu's personal creative idea.

The English name of the bookstore was changed from "Halloween" to "All Sages."

The bookstore has been considered a pioneer of the independent bookstore industry in Beijing. At the beginning, Liu did not know what a good bookstore should look like. He used to buy books mostly at Xinhua Bookstore, China's largest chain bookstore. There were few models to refer to, and Liu essentially relied on his intuition to run the bookstore. "To be honest, apart from its positioning, it had no features. The bookshelves, displays and management were traditional and outdated."

The bookstore became fashionable after its first relocation. The designer of the bookstore on Chengfu Road was Kang Xiaoyu, with assistance from Gan Qi. The bookstore was small, and they had to focus on renovating its roof and sign. A particularly creative wave-like roof was the result. The sign was also distinctive, and was illuminated at night.

However, the most noteworthy of all the shop's features were its books. Liu said that no matter how a bookstore is decorated, it simply must sell books. Su, an editor from a publishing house and regular customer of the bookstore, said that in editorial circles, there is a saying that "if a book you participated in publishing has not been selected by All Sages, it is because you did not publish it well."

This shows that the publishing industry recognises the bookstore's standard for the selection of books.

Legend has it that Liu can judge the quality of a book in just 30 seconds. Liu himself says this is not a false statement, and that he developed this skill before the Internet era. He had a chart in his mind that was similar to the Mendeleev Periodic Table of Chemical Elements. In the past, when ordering a book, he could only know its title, author, translator or content. For some books, he would learn about their positions in their subjects or fields. As a bookseller, he needed to know which "elements" have been discovered and which "elements" were unknown. The unknown elements became the targets of his procurement. To achieve this, it was necessary to have an authentic love for books. Over time, his skills were developed as a result of accumulated experience. At that time, when ordering a book, he often did not see its sample copy, but only knew its title, author, format and price. From these, he could determine whether to order or not, and how many copies to order.

In the Internet era, Liu often communicates with writers, scholars and editors to learn about new books and uses this information to decide to order the book or not. Many people appreciate the books selected by the bookstore, but the bookstore has paid a price. Every year, 30 percent of the selected books remain on the shelves, only selling copies of the remaining books on occasion. Liu feels that even if no single copy was sold, he must order as it is known as an academic bookstore. If a customer cannot find what he or she needs elsewhere, they know it will be on the shelves at All Sages. In the end, it is a win-win.

Zhang Huanping said that Liu would personally take a quick look at each new book and immediately take notes on parts he considered important. In recent years, Liu has stopped doing so. The volume of his reading is dozens of times higher than that of normal people as a result of running the bookstore.

Adhering to the Original Intention

Over the past 30 years, the pattern of the city's independent bookstores has changed greatly. Many of them that once flourished, such as Fengrusong, Yecao and Shengshiqing, closed down one after another. With each bankruptcy, media flocks to try to record the ups and downs of one of the city's physical bookstores. Liu's bookstore, like very few others, has been striving to survive.

Under the impact of e-commerce platforms, physical bookstores are seeking their own ways of survival. Many bookstores have developed unique cultural and creative products, as well as food and beverage businesses. All Sages Bookstore and its neighbour Thinker Power Cafe have always operated separately. The bookstore has never developed any cultural and creative products. Liu and Zhang worry that once the bookstore begins taking on other roles, it will easily lose its primary purpose—selling books. However, few bookstores that only sell books have survived to this day.

Many people said that a visitor will fall in love with the bookstore after only one visit. When Guo went to the bookstore for the first time, he was a high school student from outside the city. As he visited, an independent bookstore that was different from Xinhua Bookstore, the country's largest chain bookstore, he immediately liked its selected books and applied for a membership card. Fourteen years later, the membership card is worn and tattered. During the period, he did not go to university in Beijing. However, every time he visited the capital, he would buy seven or eight books from the bookstore. Later, Guo settled down in Beijing. He said, "In Beijing, I am most familiar with two places—one is my home, and the other is the bookstore."

Besides the bookstore's cashier desk is a list of its top 20 books sold each month, which has become one of the most influential book recommendation lists among intellectuals in Beijing. Huang, a regular customer, said that in her stu-

dent days, she would pay attention to the list and buy books according to its recommendations. She later purchased books based on her own preferences until she began to enter the workforce. "The bookstore selects a wide variety of books, and each time I visit I can find good books in different fields."

For this reason, Huang also deliberately moved to the vicinity of the bookstore. Now it only takes her 20 minutes to walk from her home to All Sages. The staff members of the bookstore have also changed from generation to generation. Some of them were once its customers; some were college students who just wanted to find a quiet place because they worried about fierce competition elsewhere; and some were labourers from the countryside who occasionally visited the bookstore. Although they have different backgrounds, they have one thing in common: they are all true book lovers. This is also an important criterion for the bookstore to recruit shop assistants. Guo said, "The salespersons at the bookstore may not enthusiastically receive you. And

if you drop a book on the ground by accident, they may be very angry."

Many famous writers and scholars have visited the bookstore during its years of operation. As a student, if Guo met one of them, she would take a copy of his or her works to request the author to sign their autograph. She would hurry home to share it with her parents. This was a precious memory for her when she was still a college student. Tian Zirun, a staff member of the bookstore, said that she once met scholar Leung Man-tao there, whose works had enlightened her to some extent. When Leung actually appeared beside her, even saying "thank you" in his non-authentic Mandarin, Tian felt that it was a particularly beautiful moment.

Congcong, a cat under the age of two, lives in the bookstore today. If Congcong is particularly excited when seeing a middle-aged couple and constantly wants food from them, they are most likely Liu and Zhang. Nowadays, the couple only appear in the bookstore on occasion, but they are still central pillars of All Sages.



YES, I'M
CONGCONG.



OWSPACE

NEVER AFRAID TO WANDER

Translated by Wang Wei Edited by Brad Green, Anne Ruisi Photos courtesy of OWSPACE

OWSPACE (Danxiang Kongjian), one of Beijing's cultural landmarks, has been in operation for 17 years. It is a product of the creative idea of six young people who worked in media, demonstrating their imagination when it comes to bookstores and public cultural spaces for intellectuals.

In Beijing, operating a physical bookstore for a long period of time is no easy task. Therefore, OWSPACE was often relocated, and has since earned the reputation as a "wandering state" by its founders. From its earliest location in Yuanmingyuan (Old Summer Palace) and later Huajiadi to today's locations in Joy City and Dongfeng Art Industry Park, OWSPACE has often had to relocate itself, but its humanistic spirit has never changed.

OWSPACE is not only a bookstore, but also a public cultural space for intellectuals to read, share knowledge and exchange ideas. Its vitality is more durable and resilient than anyone could imagine. This is not because of its founders, but rather, because of the features and quality of the bookstore itself. Here, writers, poets, scholars and directors, together with their readers and listeners, as well as its staff members, are all friends who will need and support the shop forever.

Over the years, OWSPACE has been relocated and renovated several times. The categories of its books have also undergone changes. However, its purpose, to provide a public cultural space, has never changed. The enthusiasm of readers' participation in its cultural salons has not changed over time. No matter where it has relocated to, as long as OWSPACE sends a notice, its physical bookstores or its virtual space will be filled with its loyal followers for a new round of sharing knowledge and exchanging ideas.

The City's First Bookstore to Hold Cultural Salons

"A good bookstore is not afraid of wandering." When the shop moved from SOLANA many years ago, author Shu Guozhi from Taiwan left this note in the bookstore's visitor log.

Shutting down and finding a new location have long been common for OWSPACE as a physical bookstore. Its operators have also opened several new branches in cities outside Beijing.

In fact, a good public cultural space shall also not be afraid of wandering. For the founders of OWSPACE, providing a public cultural space for people who are willing to share knowledge and exchange ideas is as important as selling books. Therefore, OWSPACE was Beijing's first bookstore to begin organising cultural salons.

Today, OWSPACE has two bookstores in Beijing: one in Joy City Shopping Mall on Qingnian Road of the East Fifth Ring Road, and the other in Dongfeng Art Industry Park. The former looks no different from ordinary bookstores in shopping malls. In the crowded Joy

City, it is a small and quiet place where books, cultural creative products, and some tables and chairs are placed for its customers. In addition, the bookstore in Joy City also sells tea and coffee. The latter has a remote location. Walking out of Jiangtai Station of Beijing subway's Line 14, it takes roughly 30 minutes by bus to arrive at the entrance of the art industry park, and a further 10-minute walk from the park gate to the bookstore.

If visiting the bookstore in Joy City for the first time, one will enjoy taking a short break, drinking something or having a quick flick through books after shopping. The bookstore in Dongfeng may be thought of as a study room, loved by young people from the nearby area.

It is recommended to visit OWSPACE on weekends, especially the bookstore in Joy City. Walking deep into the bookstore, one will find a special empty area equipped with chairs. This area is dedicatedly vacated for its cultural salons. On certain days, one may encounter a salon being held, where an author is holding a microphone to share his or her work. He

or she may be a luminary you have heard of, but have never met before.

If you are too far away from the locations of OWSPACE or have not enough free time, worry not. You can follow its official accounts on social networking sites, which will publish its weekly cultural salons via online broadcasts. Thanks to modern technology, a good public cultural space can also organise its activities in Cyberspace.

Many people who participated in OWSPACE's cultural salons have left Beijing to live around the world. Over the years, OWSPACE has been relocated and renovated several times. The categories of its books have also undergone changes. However, the purpose of OWSPACE, to provide a public cultural space, has never changed. The enthusiasm of readers' participation in its cultural salons has not changed over time. No matter where it has relocated to, as long as OWSPACE sends a notice, its physical bookstores or its virtual space will be filled with its loyal followers for a new round of sharing knowledge and exchanging ideas.



A Beautiful Utopia for the Souls of Booklovers

The story of OWSPACE began in early 2006. Six young people working in the media industry, including Xu Zhiyuan, Yu Wei and Zhang Fan, always dreamed of opening a bookstore. They found a courtyard in Yuanmingyuan, where many walnut trees were surrounded by a bamboo fence. These young people decided to each invest 50,000 yuan to open a bookstore there. Opening an independent bookstore was a trendy idea at the time. Xu said that when he studied at Peking University in the late 1990s, he spent much time at Wansheng, Fengru-song and Guolinfeng bookstores. These newly emerging independent bookstores seemed to fill a vacancy of many young people's college lives. Xu believes that the free books in the bookstores provided him with nourishment. As an adult, he felt he had an obligation to create such a place for the younger generation.

According to Zhang Fan, he and the other founders were all fans of Walter Benjamin (1892–1940), so they decided to use the title of his work *One-way Street* to name the bookstore. The total length of its bookshelves was 30 metres. It took roughly 20 minutes to walk from one end to the other when taking a quick look at the books on the shelves. The space of the bookstore was also narrow and long, which conforms to the meaning of the name "One-Way Street."

The name of the bookstore was later changed to OWSPACE because the founders found that "One-Way Street"

had already been registered.

The decoration of the bookstore was simple. All pieces of its furniture were bought from IKEA. It was modest, but the environment was cosy and comfortable. There were a dozen beige two-person sofas in the bookstore. Beautiful sunlight shone through its French windows beside the sofas.

Its small courtyard could meet their needs for creating cultural salons. A dozen glass tables with iron legs, rattan chairs and canvas chairs were placed in the courtyard. When the sunlight was good, there were flickering shadows of trees on the ground in the small courtyard. At first, their friends were invited for its cultural salons, and later, scholars and authors were invited through various channels. Its first cultural salon focused on the poetry of Xi Chuan.

It was particularly difficult to find the bookstore in Yuanmingyuan. Imagine this: you needed to step into the east gate of Yuanmingyuan, turn right, pass a parking lot, turn left and then walk along a gravel path. The sign "One-Way Street Library" could be seen above a bamboo fence. After walking through a 10-metre-long corridor with fences and ground surface paved with gravel, turning left and then right, you could find the bookstore. So, there were not many visitors on workdays. However, when its cultural salons opened, many admirers came to crowd in the courtyard. Sometimes there were not enough chairs and participants

had to stand on the gravel.

Yuanmingyuan is close to universities. Thus, many of its loyal readers were students from nearby. It became a source of enlightenment for them to understand the functions of a cultural salon. The loyal readers include Wu, who is in charge of OWSPACE's offline cultural space business.

In 2008, Wu was a student majoring in journalism at Renmin University of China. He happened to see the poster of one of OWSPACE's activities at school. He felt it was novel to see scholars sharing their ideas on such a non-academic platform. Because he liked the atmosphere there, he often went to the bookstore to buy books and participate in activities. Later, he began to do part-time work there, such as tidying books.

For him, the bookstore in Yuanmingyuan represents his good old days. There, he listened to writer Pai Hsien-yung's memories of old Taipei, film director Jia Zhangke's anxiety about China's rapid transformation and poetry recited by Japanese scholar Shuntarou Tanikawa. In the bookstore, he made some friends who love reading and communicating as much as he did. Like a contemporary utopia, the bookstore received many souls who love reading in the hustling and bustling city of Beijing.

Three years later, the lease of the bookstore in Yuanmingyuan was changed and its relocation began. This was the beginning of its fate to wander.

Each Relocation Creates Memories of the Past

OWSPACE has operated in Yuanmingyuan, SOLANA, Aegean Place and Huajiadi. Each of them became a favourite location in the eyes of different readers. Each OWSPACE relocation created new memories for people.

Su used to be a staff member of OWSPACE. At first, he worked at Huajiadi Bookstore and later went to Aegean Place. He experienced the shutting down of the bookstores in the two areas. The reason for the shutting down of the bookstore in Aegean Place was that the contract for a shopping centre that contained the bookstore expired. Thus, the bookstore was shut down along with the shopping centre. Due to its good location, the bookstore in Aegean Place served as a main venue for OWSPACE's cultural salons. Su said that if he had not worked in OWSPACE, he might not have had opportunities to meet and communicate with so many writers and scholars face-to-face.

Su said that before the shutting down of the bookstore in Aegean Place, a special customer slowly walked to the cashier counter, revealing a troubling secret that haunted her for many years. Thirteen years ago, as a little girl, she stole an English book from the bookstore in Yuanmingyuan. She said, "I thought that the book was too expensive, so I stole it. However, I never read it because my English is not good." She returned it to the bookstore in Aegean Place.

The book was the novel *Nine and A*

Half Weeks by Austrian-American author Ingeborg Day, published under the pseudonym Elizabeth McNeill. The book was donated by Shen Changwen, a publisher, to OWSPACE. Unfortunately, Shen passed away in 2021.

Many loyal customers came to the bookstore in Aegean Place on the night before it was shut down. Some even carried bags with them in order to carry home the last discounted books they wanted to buy from the shop. They drank alcohol, played music, read poetry and bade their farewells to the beloved world of books.

The location of the bookstore in Huajiadi served as a library of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences. The exterior wall of the small, beautiful building was covered with creeping vines and there was a chubby cat named Lydia in the bookstore. Later, the school needed to take back the small building, so the bookstore had to once again shut down. Before that, Su was also full of sadness. Soon, its bookshelves would be empty, leaving no trace. Years later, many people would not know that it once served as the venue for a bookstore, just like the earliest bookstore in the courtyard in Yuanmingyuan. The light and shadow, the style and what it looked like, as well as the stories that took place in the bookstore in Huajiadi only exist as tiny fragments in a corner of some people's memories. However, these memories, no matter how small, bring feelings of joy,

nostalgia, love, regrets or dreams.

The outbreak of the pandemic in 2020 caused the city's sluggish physical bookstore industry even more difficulty. At the beginning of 2020, the number of customers in the bookstores at Joy City in Chaoyang was only 10 percent of that before the pandemic. The bookstore only sold around 10 books per day, 50 percent of which were bought by the bookstore's staff members who love reading. As a result, the bookstore reluctantly launched crowdfunding on its official account to present prepaid cards with different amounts. With the help of its readers, the bookstore pulled through the period.

Providing a public cultural space is the soul of OWSPACE. Pandemic prevention and control measures often resulted in OWSPACE's cultural salons not being held as frequently as before. In addition, the number of participants also decreased significantly. As a result, online broadcast for its cultural salons began to operate, and remains operational to this day. This comforts many readers who often went to OWSPACE, but now are scattered throughout the world.

In the course of its operation, its founders have never thought about terminating it, even though its bookstores had to be shut down and moved many times. Today, OWSPACE has the responsibility to maintain its small public cultural role. A good space of this type can wander, but it cannot disappear.

Planting the Seed FOR A LOVE OF READING in Children's Hearts

Translated by Wang Wei
Edited by Brad Green, Anne Ruisi

When the warm sun rises, willows sprout and the breeze brings the fragrance of flowers. Spring is a season for sowing. At YOURBAY Library, children sit, lean against bookshelves or lie on their backs holding up large picture books. Accompanied by parents or teachers, they explore the numerous worlds found on the pages before them, and the seed for the love of reading is planted in their hearts.

The Joy of Childhood Hidden in Good Books

At First Baby, a branch of YOURBAY Library, shelves along the three sides of its walls are filled with a variety of picture books, as well as popular types of children's books, such as cloth books, books with holes and three-dimensional books.

Zhuzi, teacher and director at the library, was born in the 1980s. She has developed a soft speaking voice, as she is surrounded by children and books every day. "There are nearly 6,000 books in the library, the best feature of which is they are in both Chinese and English editions." A boy, at the age of six or seven, lies face down on the floor laughing so loudly that the book in his hands shakes with his laughter. Drawn by his happy sounds, Zhuzi turned her head to observe the book *Mr. Man and Little Miss* in the boy's hands and nodded her head. "Many children really like this set of books."

When turning the pages of a cloth book, children will hear its rustling sound. This type of book, along with other objects of soft materials, can stimulate the senses of hearing and touch in infants. Books on popular science for exploring the world can satisfy the curiosity of children aged four or five, and answer their one "why" after another. Picture

books about emotion can guide novice parents to interpret why their children may become irritable or suddenly shout.

Zhuzi smiled and introduced that as a parent-child library, it provides book borrowing services and its teachers can give parents professional guidance about their children's education. "Today, parents are increasingly valuing reading for their children, but many of them may not know how to select suitable picture books and interpret them for their young ones. We will guide them on how to ask their children questions and capture their curiosities when explaining books."



English storytelling, puppet drama storytelling and picture book storytelling activities, held at the library, stimulate the imagination and endless creativity of children, enabling reading to have become a more three-dimensional and diverse activity.



Imprinting Reading on the Mind

"You may have tangible wealth untold; Caskets of jewels and coffers of gold. Richer than I you can never be—I had a mother who read to me." This excerpt of a poem from Jim Trelease, an American educator and author who stressed reading aloud to children to instill a love of literature, is inscribed on the most prominent place in the library.

When it comes to parent-child reading, Zeng Yuhui, the head of YOURBAY Library in Beijing, believes that the most important thing is that it can improve parent-child relationships. "When a parent holds their child in their arms in a library to read, their child's ears are filled with the gentle voice of their parent. These experiences can be deeply imprinted on the child's mind."

The streets outside are hustling and bustling with vehicles coming and going. In the library, parents sit, holding their children in their arms and reading books to them calmly. Occasionally, the

children look up and ask questions, and their soft hair touches their parents' faces. Every time Zhuzi sees such a warm scene, she cannot help but be moved. She is most impressed by the special relationship between a certain mother and daughter; the mother is deaf-mute and often takes her daughter to participate in picture book reading activities at the library.

"The daughter is polite, sunny and always has her own ideas. She is willing to raise her hand to answer every question. Her mother helps us tidy up materials after our activities. The daughter helps us communicate with her mother with sign language." Zhuzi said she has often been touched by the two. She added that parents are the best teachers for their children, and under the guidance of their words and deeds, they will grow up happily.

A father brought his daughter to return the books they had borrowed the

week before, and the two picked out more books to borrow that day. The father carefully looked through the books and asked his daughter if she already read this book or that one. If so, she would choose another. The father said that he was indeed busy with work, but tries to find time every day to read with his daughter. The young girl had already begun to develop a love of reading. As soon as she arrived in the library, she took off her shoes and walked directly to bookshelves, picking up a book to read.

Many parents, like this father, take their children to the library near their homes to read, borrow and return books, and continue on and on with this cycle. Sitting on a platform, Zhuzi softly communicated with parents about how to connect with themselves, their children and nature through picture books, how to achieve effective exchanges with their children, as well as how to observe the world from their children's perspectives.

Sprouting and Growing in the Spring Breeze

When the bell rings, a class provided by an institution that collaborates with the library is over. Many small heads instantly appear in the library. Pairs of children's shoes of different sizes are piled untidily in front of the platform, resembling the mood at the moment—happy and unrestrained.

Like many physical bookstores and libraries, parent-child libraries are seeing a gradual decline for various reasons, even though they are still popular with the public. How to develop parent-child libraries has become a focus for their op-

erators. Zeng said that YOURBAY focuses on an embedded strategy: developing its small branches in establishments and communities to try to enable the public to have access to its services within three kilometres from their homes. Some of them had to move to other venues due to the closing down of commercial facilities. However, YOURBAY's model successfully survived through the difficult times caused by the pandemic.

On one side of the library are neatly organised books. Every three to five books are tied with a white paper strip with a

child's name on it. These are books that have been carefully selected by Zhuzi for specific children. Another section of books a few metres away are those which have been recently returned. With this back and forth, it seems that numerous seeds have gradually taken root and the love for reading is beginning to sprout.

The days when children read together with their parents will always be shining memories. A seed that was planted will grow in their hearts in the spring breeze, gradually developing into the strength to face life's challenges and continue growth.

BEIJING FOREIGN LANGUAGES BOOKSTORE

A POPULAR SPOT AMONG INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS

Text by and photo courtesy of Panupan Kaewpoosee Edited by Brad Green, Anne Ruisi

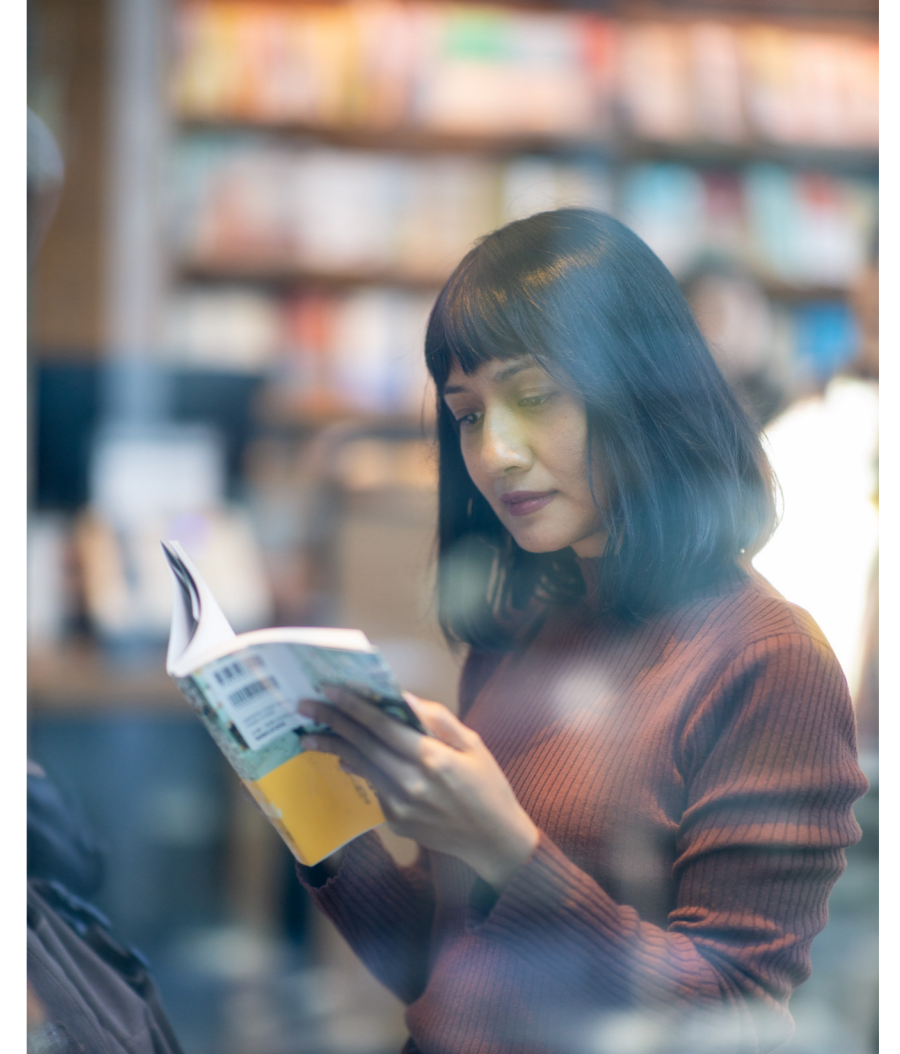
In the crowded city of Beijing, millions of families have settled their lives here, and numerous activities take place in this enormous international metropolis. However, as the city changes, one thing remains constant—the people of Beijing always have a love for reading. As the home of top-tier universities, Beijing's bookstores are always crowded with people, including parents and their kids, students or general bookworms. In addition to the grand national library, where people come and go every minute, and university neighbourhoods where millions of students reside, bookstores are scattered in almost every corner of this massive city. There are many different styles of bookstores in Beijing. One bookstore for those who have yet to master their Chinese skills is called Beijing Foreign Languages Bookstore, found in Central Beijing. This bookstore is located on one of the city's crowded

streets which people often visit for shopping, as there are various shopping malls in this area. Despite the current flow of people in the streets who are there to enjoy shopping, this bookstore never lacks customers. Beijing Foreign Languages Bookstore is abundant in books in foreign languages such as English and Japanese. Most of the books here are English books of various kinds, including novels, art, children's books, self-help, cartoons or reference books. Most visitors here are working persons who seek entertainment or inspiration. The atmosphere of this store is very relaxing, and different kinds of books are presented on many rows of tables at the centre of the store. Customers can freely look for the books they want to read. Moreover, some books in this store are second-hand, allowing people of different classes to afford to buy books. I was happily surprised when I visited

the store to find the English version of *Tao Te Ching*, which is one of my favourite books, as well as other books that I remembered from my childhood. I personally think that this bookstore is suitable for people who are looking for books that have already been released for some time. For example, I found a full series of *The Twilight Saga Collection* with the original covers, which I have not seen for many years. The price of books here is reasonable. One more thing that I like about this bookstore is that no one tries to intervene while you are reading or searching for books. You can spend time browsing the shelves. I spent almost ten minutes skimming one book there without any interruption. No one likes the moment of being interrupted while reading or trying to choose which or how many books they are going to buy. The only drawback of this store is that there is not much space for reading

books inside, which would be nice for those who are tired after walking along the busy streets. However, this is reasonable, because it is located on a busy street with hundreds of stores lining both sides of the road. People can come in and grab what they are looking for without taking too much time. For people who have a list of books they like in mind, this bookstore would be the perfect choice.

After spending time in the Beijing Foreign Language Bookstore, I went to a nearby department store. Unexpectedly, I found another bookstore inside the same building. This bookstore is called Page One, and is located in the APM department store. This bookstore gives a different mood and tone from the latter, as it is much smaller, but it is decorated in a cosier style. Most books in this store are in Chinese, and are categorised into different zones with small benches near the bookshelves, which makes the customers who want to take time browsing feel very comfortable despite the limited space inside the shop. Visitors to Page One are varied in age, gender and interests, and this is reflected in the various genres of books inside. From my perspective, there are more young people than older people. However, this is reasonable, because it is located in a department store that mostly caters to teenagers and young adults. One part of the store is a café where people can spend time reading while enjoying a drink. I like this idea very much, because I personally think that a bookstore should provide at least some space for people to sit and read. One more very attractive element of this bookstore is its decorations, which give a warm and welcoming vibe. People enjoy spending their time reading their favourite books with a cup of their favourite drink. Furthermore, there is a children's section where several toys, dolls and puzzles are presented neatly. It's easy to see why many families take their children to this store. The atmosphere here is warm despite the busy current of people flowing in and out of the store. Even though



there is a limitation of space inside the store, I found a corner to take my time thumbing through the book I was interested in. There is one section of English books, which was enjoyable to browse. I did not spend much time here because of the flood of people in the store, nevertheless, it was a fun and new experience for me. I never considered experiencing such a cosy vibe in a bookstore in a department store.

Due to limited time, I could not explore too many places in Beijing. However, it was clear that bookstores in Beijing are plentiful. On one single street I visited, there were more than three bookstores. There are estimated to be more than five bookstores around my college. This suggests how people in Beijing love to read. Bookstores in Beijing are varied in design, atmosphere and function, and fit the varied lifestyles of the city's residents. If you are a person who enjoys reading in a café vibe, there are many bookstores providing reading space for customers. People who have limited time might want to go to the bookstores

where books are categorized in order to easily find what they need. This, in my opinion, is the charm of bookstores in Beijing, which adapt themselves to the city's urban lifestyle. I personally enjoy bookstores like Beijing Foreign Languages Bookstore, as it is quite spacious and open. I prefer to have time to explore the different books and different categories of books. I could easily spend an hour in such a bookstore. One more thing that I am impressed with in a bookstore in Beijing is the atmosphere of a family taking their children to explore books and toys, which I did not often see in my home country of Thailand. Bookstores here seem to provide a more comfortable atmosphere for children to read, and to discover their areas of interest. Beijing has a bookstore for every kind of reader.

From my observation, bookstores in Beijing are safe and comfortable places where people who love reading can spend time alone or with friends and family. Bookstores not only contain knowledge, but also the warmth of never-ending imagination, which can be shared.





Photo courtesy of New Dongcheng Weekly