

# A Study of Children's Reading Services in China - Taking Foreign Children's Literature as an Example

Qingwantong Shi, Junhong Wang\*

Foreign Language Institute, University of Shanghai for Science and Technology, Shanghai, China

## Email address:

[sqwt20020104@163.com](mailto:sqwt20020104@163.com) (Qingwantong Shi), [junhongwang2012@163.com](mailto:junhongwang2012@163.com) (Junhong Wang)

\*Corresponding author

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**Abstract:** Based on the theory of audience analysis, this article takes consumers of Foreign Children's Literature as the research subject, aiming at exploring the factors influencing Chinese audiences' reading preferences. The methodology used in this paper is data collection and questionnaire. Shortcomings in the categorization of reading materials have apparently been revealed despite continued national reading campaigns. China has not yet developed a thorough method for grading readers. At present, new media is gaining popularity among children's organizations and reaching youngsters at an accelerated rate. However, several of the more popular reading software in China have the problems of arbitrary age division and ambiguous classification of Foreign Children's Literature. All of these provide children's books yet restrict kids from using these. This has a detrimental effect on fostering children's independent reading ability and good reading habits. In addition to the popularity of the work itself, the novelty and interest of the content, the values presented, and the logical design of the book's graphic structure, trust on the public house, marketing tactics, best-selling booklists on e-reading platforms, and recommendations from people such as authorities or professors all have a distinct edge in influencing consumers' choices. Building a diverse assessment standard that satisfies Chinese children's reading demands, standardizing the categorization of children's books, and guiding the growth of the book market through responsible media consumption are crucial steps in improving the children's reading service system.

**Keywords:** Reading Services, Foreign Children's Literature, Evaluation Criteria, Reading Classification

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## 1. Introduction

Reading is a crucial means to expand one's knowledge, deepen one's emotions, and widen one's horizons. The quality and scope of education has significantly improved on China as a result of the country's rapid economic development, making reading a social event for all. Residents receive public reading services based on their features as members of age groups and social groupings. Reading initiatives including "The Most Beautiful Bookstore" "Book Park" or "Book Station", which combine reading services with public space, are currently running. The creation of "Bookish City" and "Bookish China" aims to satisfy the society's high standards for reading. Through the development of the multi-dimensional public reading space, reading for all is being formed. There is no denying that reading has become an essential part of family

education, a skill that needs to be developed from an early age, and a lifelong educational practice. By 2021, statistics show that 73.2% of Chinese families with children ages 0 to 8 will regularly read to their kids, a 1.5 percentage point rise from the previous year. Additionally, parents read to their kids every day for an average of 30 minutes in these families with reading habits [1]. The development of children's reading skills is essential for the growth of reading literacy as well as a significant way for kids to absorb outside information and actively shape their own subjective awareness [2]. Reading children's books, especially ones from other countries, is necessary during the foundational education stage. "The distinctive tone and aesthetic qualities of foreign literature, promoting ideals like people-centered and the care of human

nature and other value orientations, as well as the cultural spirit, suit current circumstances and the core principles of society in China." [3] "Cultural contacts between other countries are an indispensable component of the process of globalization and a precondition for the globalization of literature." [4] The internal dynamics of the growth of the publishing market are driven by consumer reading needs, and the publishing market also plays a major role in directing. China has a long history of introducing Foreign Children's Literature, which "opens a window of insight into the world not only for our children and adolescents but also for our children's literature writers, editors and publishers, providing them with the chance to see colorful content and different artistic styles from various countries and to catch the trend of the development of children's lit." [5] In recent years, new reading software like WeChat Reading, Sina Weibo super topic, Amazon audio books, Kindle, etc. have emerged to overcome the limitations of traditional paper reading. This is due to the development of emerging media technology, integrated media, and other information technology. Moreover, a number of well-known foreign literature like *Little Women* or *The Little Prince* has been put into the screen by means of adaptation and remake. The scope and diversity of children's Literature has increased as a result of the burgeoning local and foreign children's book business. On the other hand, in light of the abundance of reading options, the issues of children's poor reading comprehension is becoming more and more apparent. Publishers and educators have both engaged in extensive study and attempted to regulate scientific standards to help children to choose suitable books by themselves or their parents. The American Council of Educators created the A-Z Reading Grading System and Reading Development Evaluation System, which divides books into 27 levels, ranging from easy to difficult, based on 10 elements like type, structure, ideas, and vocabulary. Readers' reading level could be assessed through the results of tests. Chinese scholar Li Mingliang favors categorizing translations of foreign literature into three categories: "literary level" (original flavor and style), "guideline level" (the best chapters are provided initially), and "cultivation level" (for the purpose of cultivating reading interest and enhancing humanistic literacy) [6]. However, China has not yet established any legal policies governing reading. In order to create a scientific service system for children's reading selection, academics should perform more research on the selective qualities of children's reading and the factors influencing them. To increase the caliber of children's reading, it is essential to figure out how to create an effective media communication through foreign literature, with children serving as the audience and the book market serving as the distributor. Renowned communication expert Dennis Mcquail holds that communication via media, particularly mass media, creates a spatial and social gap between communicators and recipients. The gap must be filled by combining the flexible usage of organizing mechanism, promotional samples and the understanding of the audience side [7]. Based on the audience analysis theory, this paper investigates the factors that

influence Chinese audience group to select Foreign Children's Literature, consulting the data collected on the internet and the survey. It could offer some useful advice for establishing a high-quality reading service system about Foreign Children's Literature.

## 2. The Autonomy of Paper Book Selection

The most important market for paper book consumption in recent years has moved from physical bookshops and newsstands to electronic sales platforms. In questionnaire composed of 79 elementary school pupils, the answers to the multi-selection of "self-assessment of the effect of media on reading choices" showed that: The influence of reading software bestsellers lists accounted for 71%, readers for 52%, e-commerce live streaming for 23%, and short videos for 31%. Furthermore, this paper organize the data from Taobao store exceeded 800,000 person-times, with The Official Flagship Store of Dangdang accounting for 11.09 million person-times, Bookuu Flagship Store accounting for 5.95 million person-times, Xinhua Wenxuan Flagship accounting for 4.58 million person-times, Phoenix Xinhua Bookstore Flagship Store accounting for 2 million person-times, Yueyue Book Franchise Store accounting for 1.53 million person-times, Zhuo Chuang Book Store accounting for 957,000 person-times, Blue Whale Book Store accounting for 837,000 person-times. (As for 2022.8.1) Only The Official Flagship Store of Dangdang has a section exclusively for classifying Foreign Children's Literature, and all book stores categorize children's literature by age. Foreign Children's literature is categorized on the biggest book website, Dangdang.com, with best-seller lists organized by years, months, and days (last 24 hours, last 7 days, last 30 days). In the ranking list, publishers with a substantial presence in the publishing industry are more prevalent. People's Literature Publishing House, Shanghai Translation Publishing House, Tomorrow Publishing House, Twenty-first Century Publishing House, and so on are examples. Professional publishers of children's literature include Liaoning Children's Publishing House, Tomorrow Publishing House, and Twenty-first Century Publishing House. The majority of readers have a high degree of faith in the authoritative publishers when making book purchases according to the list. The book e-sales platform is not just a media for transaction, it also encourages consumers' knowledge of books through the mode of information exchanges, achieving the result of positive guidance, as the following sample from the comments shows.

2018.08.28 "It contains drawings, a modest font, and is translated by Ren Solstice. The subject is highly pleasant for children."

<http://comment.dangdang.com/comment/detail/0/23546266/333191059>

2019.06.15 "I purposely purchased this version in the hopes of preserving the original wording,"

<http://comment.dangdang.com/comment/detail/0/23546266/343816293>

Consumer recommendations of book sales platforms are a significant factor. For instance, *The Little Bean in the Window* and *Charlotte's Web* were in the top three of the list of Foreign Children's Literature suggested by several book sales platforms (Table 1) for three consecutive years. *The Little Pea by the Window* has a 99.87% positive rating from buyers (as of 2022/08/08), and according to the book's introduction, it was chosen and unanimously recommended by education experts to be included in the nine-year

elementary textbook. Since its initial publication in China in 2003, *The Little Pea by the Window* has drawn much interest from readers, including professional writers, students and teachers. Xu Hui, a scholar graduated from Hunan Normal University, claimed that *The Little Pea by the Window* has more overtly educational qualities [8]. In this questionnaire, 83% of children reported getting their hands on Foreign Children's Literature either through the Ministry of Education reading list or through recommendations from their parents, teachers, friends, etc. The endorsement of reputable organizations or authority is incomparably influential.

*Table 1. Best-selling foreign children's literature list on Dangdang.com, 2020-2022.*

year	2020	2021	2022
1	<i>The Little Bean at the Window</i> South Sea Publishing Company	<i>The Little Bean at the Window</i> South Sea Publishing Company	<i>Charlotte's Web</i> Shanghai Translated Publishing House
2	<i>Charlotte's Web</i> Shanghai Translated Publishing House	Silver Rocket Junior Science Fiction Series Zhejiang Education Publishing House	<i>The Little Bean at the Window</i> South Sea Publishing Company
3	Silver Rocket Junior Science Fiction Series Zhejiang Education Publishing House	<i>Charlotte's Web</i> Shanghai Translated Publishing House	<i>The Cricket in Times Square</i> Twenty-first Century Press
4	<i>The Little Prince</i> Liaoning Children's Publishing House	<i>The Amazing Fox Dad ·Colorful Pinyin</i> Tomorrow Publishing House	<i>The New Edition of Selected Works of Lindgren</i> China Children and Adolescents Publishing House
5	<i>The Amazing Fox Dad ·Colorful Pinyin</i> Tomorrow Publishing House	<i>Meg's Adventure in Time and Space</i> Wenhui Publishing House	<i>Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone</i> People's Literature Publishing House
6	<i>Harry Potter (1-7)</i> People's Literature Publishing House	<i>Harry Potter (1-7)</i> People's Literature Publishing House	<i>Charlie and the Chocolate Factory</i> Tomorrow Publishing House
7	<i>The Rainy Bookstore</i> New Star Press	<i>The Little Prince</i> Liaoning Children's Publishing House	<i>The Story of the Lena Fox</i> Liaoning Children's Publishing House
8	<i>The Amazing Fox Dad</i> Tomorrow Publishing House	<i>The Rainy Bookstore</i> New Star Press	<i>The Other Side of the Sky Blue</i> Beijing United Publishing Co.
9	<i>The Story of the Lena Fox</i> Liaoning Children's Publishing House	<i>The Cricket in Times Square</i> Twenty-first Century Press	<i>The Amazing Fox Dad</i> Tomorrow Publishing House
10	<i>The Magic School Bus</i> Guizhou People's Press	<i>The Fulfillment of Wishes</i> Zhejiang University of Commerce and Industry Press	<i>Meg's Adventure in Time and Space</i> Wenhui Publishing House

--The data is based on the top foreign children's literature sales in 2020, 2021 and 2022 (as of 8.1)

With the exception of *The Little Bean in the Window*, most of the top 10 books of 2020–2022 involve fantasy or adventure. For the reason that "the more elements of originality, adventure and gripping things the books have, the more psychological pleasure and excitement it might create, giving rise to people's intense concentration, mental stimulation and the understanding of self-cognition." [9] These reading materials satiate children's irrational desire to explore the unknown and pique their curiosity, while also fostering their capacities for limitless imaginative play. These informative and entertaining contents could also satisfy children's craving for knowledge. For instance, *Charlotte's Web*, a novel praised as the first place of Ten Great American Children's Literature, was made into a film in 2006. This story got almost 99.3% favorable rate in China. (as for 2022/08/08) According to the list of required readings during summer or winter for elementary school in Jiangsu Province, *The Little Pea by the Window*, *Charlotte's Web*, *The Great Papa Fox*, *The Little Prince*, *The Cricket in Times Square*, and *The Story of the Lena Fox*, considered as classic works, are suggested for pupils to read. J. K. Rowling creates a wonderful world full of magic and magical creatures for

readers in her *Harry Potter* novels, which serve as a classic sample of fantasy literature. Even if darkness has such a terrible power in this world, it will be dispersed by the characters' commitment to solid justice and virtue. Justice, generosity, warmth of family and friendship present in this works, are largely in accordance with China's efforts to cultivate moral education and moral values. Catching children's psychological requirements and enhancing audience groups' trust on the authority will bridge the gap between communicators and audience and make a great contribution to readers' selection. Additionally, there are two editions of *The Great Fox Dad*: a text-only edition and a color illustrated edition, both published by the same company. The color illustrated edition is ranked higher than the text-only edition. As the reading materials for grade 2, taking their literacy ability in this stage into consideration, the phonetic version is more useful for children to complete reading independently and enhance their reading patience and self-confidence. Nevertheless, "images are intuitive and figurative, so for children whose intellectual development is still incomplete and whose reading ability is still developing, as well as for adults who can read text artfully but are too

lazy to read words, reading pictures is an easier and more enjoyable thing than reading words." [10] The knowledge of children's reading proficiency on different levels, engaging graphic designed in the works, publishers' ability of commanding of the approaches of how to motivate children's reading compassionate are crucial elements that influence the promotion effect.

In a highly competitive media market, Consumers' preference for The Official Flagship Store of Dangdang, a collection of more than 10 million copies, which has a dedicated section for Foreign Children's Literature shows consumers' rationalization of consumption. The majority of parents have only a hazy understanding of reading materials appropriate for their children's reading ability. As a result, the operation of the media market and the scientific advice of the educational community make great influence on the reading material that parents choose for their children. Disseminators, including publishers, actively understand the peculiarities of audience demand and their variation in order to compete for the attention of readership for financial rewards. Usually, they serve as readerships' guidance, giving advice to the option of reading material or rationalizing works' graphic and layout to attract audience. The audience's selection of reading material demonstrates that readers now choose media they used more proactively thanks to the diversification of information technology. Selection of Foreign Children's Literature is significantly influenced by reputable suggestions from reading lists, marketing tactics including user reviews, works' readability, and authors' popularity.

### 3. The Lack of Regulation in the E-reading Market

For kids, their living environment has been changed into virtual world. The digital reading strategy has been strongly carried forward in Chinese primary and secondary school, using extensively in classroom, as a result of the rapid spread of smartphones, iPads, SURFACE, and other teaching equipment [11]. "New media, primarily the Internet, are gaining popularity among children's organizations and reaching youngster groups at an accelerated rate." [12] In recent years, the use and adoption of ICT (Information and Communication Technology) has accelerated the development of screen media (TV, traditional computers, tablets, e-books, cell phones, XBOX, etc.), and an increasing number of kids can access and use screen media, which has an impact on the reading habits of the next generation of children. The widespread use and spread of screen media has changed people's lives considerably, becoming an important part of individuals' lives, and even change the traditional way that people read paper media [13]. "Through modern media, users can get access to a variety of books and e-books. Without a doubt, the simpler and easier experience has had an unprecedented positive impact on the dissemination of works." [14] Apps that provide electronic

reading works have grown to be a crucial source of children's reading materials. Children's literature books are those intended for readers aged 0–15 or for parents and children to read together, according to Hai Fei, a researcher on children's publishing and the former president of China Children and Adolescents Publishing House [15]. Out of the 10 popular e-reading applications currently available, seven of them—Netease Cloud Reading, Tomato Novel, Palm Reader, QQ Reader, Baidu Reader, Dangdang Cloud Reader, and Duo-watch Reader—require users to be 17 years old or older, WeChat Reader and Douban Reader require users to be 12 years old or older, and Seven Cats Novel requires users to be 9 years old or older. It goes without saying that electronic reading application are not rigorous in dividing reading groups based on age, raising the issue of not considering children as an independent and unique reading groups. There is a children's literature section on WeChat Reading, Douban Reading, Palm Reading, Baidu Reading, Dangdang Cloud Reading, and Multi Reading, yet only the Palm Reading app contains a section dedicated to Foreign Children's Literature. Children's books are divided into columns for children's education or parent-child education on Netease Cloud Reading, Tomato Novel, QQ Reading, and Seven Cats Novel.

Furthermore, nearly half of those who responded to the questionnaire "What is your current main reading technique?" are accustomed to reading electronically. Two-thirds of children have readers (screen coal), and with the support of their parents, 71.2% of them routinely read Foreign Children's Literature. It is clear that the arbitrary age division of reading app use and the blurring of the classification of children's literature works can have multiple effects. Additionally, there is the paradoxical nature of reading applications, which limit children's reading groups but offer children's reading materials. Even while e-books have drawbacks such as damaging kids' vision health and being difficult to understand the range of options, their accessibility, extensive reading materials, and low cost could open up new avenues for kids' reading. E-reading will inevitably replace paper media as the preferred reading technique in the era of ongoing new media development. For the creation of electronic platforms, it's critical to consider children's requirements on reading and regulate reading applications.

### 4. Conclusions

The reading service system has improved since the national reading campaign was put into place, but there are still issues like the absence of evaluated reading, particularly for children's reading groups. Because of the expansion of information technology and its diversification, it is clear that readers have a favorable initiative for the selection of media. Reading lists recommended by authorities, marketing strategies such as user reviews, the readability of the content and popularity of works are all factors affecting people's autonomy in the selection of Foreign Children's Literature.

Currently, the Ministry of Education's suggested reading list or recommendations from parents, teachers or friends are the main sources of new reading materials for youngsters. The advice of reputable organizations or people has undeniable benefits on promoting Foreign Children's Literature. And recommendations from electronic sales platforms or schools have emerged as major means for parents to select reading media for their children. Publishers or information distributors actively understand the peculiarities of audience requirements and their variation in order to compete for the readership's attention for financial rewards. They might use media marketing, graphic design, etc. to influence readers' reading preferences. The readership's preference for the medium itself served as the best proof of this. Understanding the psychological requirements of children's reading and fostering people's trust on authorities will help to reduce the distance between communicators and audiences. The study also found that there is a tendency for children to use screen media to complete reading with the support of electronic information technologies. There are problems of arbitrary age division and vague classification of children's literature in the reading app of Foreign Children's Literature. Contrarily, reading apps offer children's reading materials while limiting their access to these applications. Children's selection behavior is inherently constrained by the lack of social experience, and educational literacy, as one of the gatekeepers of their reading selection behavior, most e-reading apps do not treat children as an independent and unique reading group, but the product dependent on parent-child educational activities, ignoring the autonomy and initiative of children's reading activities. It has a negative impact on the development of children's reading literacy and independence in reading.

Although e-books have drawbacks such as harming children's eyesight and making it challenging for kids to select appropriate reading materials from a wide range of books, in the era of continuous development of new media, e-books are bound to become the mainstream reading devices. The requirements of children for reading should be taken into account while developing electronic platforms, and reading applications should be regulated. Meeting children's needs for high-quality reading is an important issue and opportunity for the development of the book market. First and foremost, the scientific evaluation system of reading proficiency should be improved as quickly as feasible by departments relevant to education. Without the assistance of such a system, the book market and educational institutions currently exert more of an influence on children's reading in terms of the market supply of Foreign Children's Literature. It is imperative to construct a pluralistic and suitable reading evaluation system for the sake of satisfying Chinese children's reading needs and standardize the classification of children's books. Secondly, the e-book market needs to be regulated by the government. Children become more proactive in their selection of books as their reading abilities and media literacy skills progress. Each reader's needs can be precisely and efficiently gathered by new media. However, the drawback of these new media is

that they tend to draw readers into blind herd consumption, making it challenging for readers to identify the books in which they are truly attracted. Hence, long-term efforts must be made by the relevant departments to specify appropriate books for children, reinforce the scientific basis of suggested reading lists, and encourage the creation of a system for evaluating books after they have been purchased. There should be an interactive relationship between book market guidance and rationalized consuming behavior in media consumption, which plays a non-negligible role in developing the service system based on the national reading campaign in the new era.

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## Biography

**Qingwantong Shi**, undergraduate, University of Shanghai for Science and Technology.

**Junhong Wang**, doctor (Education), lecturer, University of Shanghai for Science and Technology, Corresponding author.