THE PUBLISHING OF YOUTH-LITERATURE IN CHINA

by

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Abstract

The publishing of youth-literature in China, which is defined as literature written by and for youths aged 14 to 20, emerged at the beginning of the twenty-first century and quickly became a large scale phenomenon. Over the last decade, it has continued to grow and expand. This study traces the publication of one particular book by drawing on the author’s first hand experience and, more importantly, reveals the inner mechanisms and external social and cultural elements that have shaped this trend in Chinese publishing through careful examination of the publishing histories of two leading youth writers. The author argues that several major elements worked together to make this phenomenon extraordinarily successful: state-owned and private publishers pursuing profit; rebellious or material-oriented youth writers pursuing success; and China’s first only-child generation craving for self-expression and entertainment. These elements were further enhanced by the flourishing of internet and youth popular culture in the new century.

This study also reveals that the success of youth-literature publishing comes with consequences for the growth and welfare of Chinese youth. Not only does the pitfalls of commercialization work in publishing for children, but the result has much to do with the history of Chinese children’s literature and the roles that children play in it. By carefully examining controversies, scandals, and debates that have been common in the publishing phenomenon, the author also offers readers a glimpse of the Chinese publishing community and industry, as well as Chinese society during this transitional time.
Preface

This thesis is original, unpublished, independent work by the author, Lingyun Zhao.
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My parents spent six months with us in Hamilton and for the first time “witnessed” something of what I have been doing since I left home at the age of 14. They would not think they had anything to do with this thesis, but they are my roots in this world, and whatever I do can always be traced back to them.
To my sister Zhao Min (1970-2010)
Chapter 1: Introduction

This thesis examines the publishing of qingcun wenxue (youth-literature), which is literature written by Chinese youth aged 14 to 20 for their peers to read. Beginning in the twenty-first century, youth-literature publishing has become a most fascinating phenomenon both in Chinese publishing industry and society over the past decade and it is still ongoing and in transition.

1.1 Definition of Youth-literature

Qingcun wenxue translated literally means “youth-literature” with qingcun meaning “youth” and wenxue meaning “literature.” However, it is worth noting that the Chinese term qingcun is not precisely equivalent to the English word “youth” for it refers only to the state of being young rather than to young people. The origin of the term is hard to trace, but one critic Bai Ye suggested that it was likely coined by the media and used conveniently by booksellers to categorize books (“Balinghuo”). As a newly emerging genre that still awaits serious academic research, the term “youth-literature” is used quite loosely by literary and cultural critics. According to another critic Li Yi, it is sometimes interchangeable with the term balinghuo xiezuo (the writings of post-1980s generation), which defines the phenomenon by specifying its particular creators. These writers belong to the first only-child generation—children born after 1980 in China.

A background discussion of terms will help position the subject of my research within the contexts of publishing and writing in China. Youth-literature could precisely have fit into the definition of young adult literature in Western children’s literature. However, although, as Ge Hongbing argues in his paper, the coming-of-age novel, a major genre of Western young adult literature, has been absorbed into Chinese children’s literature since the middle 1980s, the concept of young adult literature, or the novel written for adolescents, itself has not yet been introduced to the field in China. As a result, there is confusion about and different attitudes towards the definition and nature of youth-literature. At the beginning, works by its future leading writers such as Han Han and Guo Jingming were considered works of children’s literature because both the writers and the targeted readers were mostly high school students. This explains why Cao Wenxuan, a renowned children’s writer, was invited by the publishers to write prefaces for them. Around 2004 when youth-literature as a phenomenon was taking shape
in the book market, a clear definition of it was thus needed. Most people, including writers, publishers, and booksellers, were uncomfortable placing youth-literature within the general field of children’s literature; instead, they envisioned it as a literary genre that stands on its own. For example, Bai Ye, a noted critic of contemporary Chinese culture and literature, contends that “youth-literature” is a new kind of literature that belongs neither to adult literature nor children’s literature; it instead exists as something between these two (“Balinghuo”). Later on, when some authors of youth-literature started receiving critical attention the wind changed and youth-literature was studied as adult literature.1 “Youth” is a recurring theme in Chinese contemporary literature. *Qingcun wansui (Forever Young)* by Wang Meng is a representative and the most popular novel of its kind and thus the works of youth-literature are more likely to be placed in this tradition. The only difference between previous works on youth by adult writers and current writings produced by youth writers is that the former mostly describes the state of being young from memory, while the latter are documenting their own ongoing experiences. For example, authors Gao Nan and Jiao Shouhon treat the writings of youth-literature as a part of Chinese contemporary literature. Similarly, Julia Lovell in her article “Finding a Place: Mainland Chinese Fiction in the 2000” considers youth writers Han and Guo to be part of a new generation of adult writers rather than writers of literature for children (7-32).

Youth-literature is commonly viewed as a commercial publishing phenomenon. The majority of publishing professionals involved has no prior experience in children’s publishing and do not hold the notion that they are publishing for children. In major bookstores in Beijing, such as Xinhua and Xidan, youth-literature is not displayed in the area designated for children’s books but in a separate area under the category “youth-literature,” usually adjacent to the trendy, popular, and fashionable books such as “internet literature.” In other words, it appears that booksellers treat books of youth-literature as products of popular (youth) culture rather than as books with literary merit, which is in sharp contrast with their treatment of children’s literature.

Over the years, along with youth-literature publishing establishing itself as a lucrative niche market, the definition of youth-literature has been expanding. As long as they can attract the interest of young readers, any work, no matter if it is written by youth for their peers to read, is labeled and marketed as “youth-literature.” For example, pure entertainment texts for young

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1 This shift has more to do with the influence that youth writers have obtained due to their market success than the shift of the readership from youth to adults. That is to say, critics were no longer able to close their eyes, pretending that youth writers did not exist.
girl readers, which have existed in the market since the 1990s in China, are promoted as youth-literature, but the major writers in this area are actually in their late 20s to middle 30s (Jiao 128). Also, internet literature has developed hand in hand with youth-literature and produced some popular genres such as fantasy and time travel novels, and horror novels with a special focus on the theme of “tomb digging”—which is very popular among young readers. To some degree, internet literature is overlapping with youth-literature (D. Tao, “Qingcun”).

In this study, I use “youth-literature publishing” in its strictest sense, that is, as a publishing phenomenon featuring young writers writing for an audience of young readers. Accordingly, the term “youth writer” specifically refers to the young authors of this genre.

1.2 Background

Youth-literature began with a single author, Han Han, who in 2000 at the age of 18 achieved tremendous success with his first novel San cong men (Triple Door). Some observers trace its origin back to the 1990s seeing as its initiators two young girls, Yu Xiu and Xu Jia, who published Huaji yuji (Flower Season, Rain Season) and Woai yangguang (I Love Sunshine) respectively. These books became popular among readers while the authors were still in high school. The writings of these girls basically depict a bright and warm world which, although not without struggle and confusion, fits in the imagination of adults toward children and youth and thus are spiritually different from the work of youth writers whose literary worlds are more dark and unsettling and which may make adults feel uneasy or alienated. Han made an effort to differentiate himself from Yu by implying to his publisher that her novel was naïve (Yuan, “Wobian”).

An essay competition entitled xingainian zuowen dasai (New Concept Essay Competition) also made a critical contribution to youth-literature and its publishing by providing it with a source of writers. The competition was first launched by a youth literary magazine, Mengya, in Shanghai in 1999. Mengya was then experiencing a serious financial crisis because its subsidy from the government had been cut as a result of the latest economic reform. At the same time, public discussions were underway concerning the reform of the educational system, which was

2 Category romance by Taiwanness female writers such as Xi Juan and Yan Qin were very popular in the 1990s. Entering the twenty-first century mainland writers Rao Xueman and Guo Ni followed the suit to publish day-dream novels/series for this targeted market.
being criticized for focusing only on high academic marks at the cost of students’ originality and creativity. Against this background, Mengya organized the New Concept Essay Competition with the specific purpose of challenging the way literary writing was being taught in Chinese school. The competition called for submissions that were “free, spontaneous, and creative writing,” which was in sharp contrast to the formulaic and stale writing that Chinese students were forced to excel at in literature exams.\(^3\) As a magazine sponsored by the Chinese Writer’s Association, which, unlike professional organizations in the West is a state-owned institution, Mengya managed to invite a bunch of well regarded writers to serve on the selection committee. More importantly, it gained support from ten top universities who promised to offer free admissions to the first-prize winners who also had a high school diploma. With this great incentive, the competition became a sensation among teachers, students, and parents, which in turn drew overwhelming media attention and public interest (C. Zhao, “Juechu”).

When the results of the competition came out, both Mengya and the public were thrilled with the discovery of the talented young writers who demonstrated extraordinary personalized writing styles and profound thoughts. It provided the media with fresh material to continue discussing the educational reform and criticizing that young writers who were so talented and capable of writing were not well educated in the school system. As one of the first-prize winners, Han was singled out to support their argument. As a first year high school student who was talented enough to finish a novel, Han had failed in all his school subjects including literature.\(^4\) While newspapers generated heated discussions about the competition and its winners, several shrewd publishers came to profit from them. The collection of the winning essays, entitled \textit{Shoujie quanguo xingainian huojiang zuopinxuan} (\textit{Winning Essays of the First New Concept Essay Competition}), was published in 1999 by \textit{Zuojia chubanshe} (Writers Publishing House), one of the most prestigious literary publishing houses in China. Learning about Han and his manuscript of \textit{Triple Door}, the same publisher also offered him a contract. Both the essay collection and \textit{Triple Door}, especially the latter, was an instant market success (Yongheng Chen, “Xingainian zhouguo shiwonian”). Han’s novel won an audience of his peers immediately and

\(^3\) In Chinese school, teaching and writing is charactistic of a practical and utilitarian attitude. The great part of training in writing is done surrounding a given topic, so that students have little chance to express what they really want to say. Similarly, when a student conducts reading, the purpose is always to find something meaningful rather than to entertain yourself.

\(^4\) See \textit{My Son Han Han} by Han Ranjun, Chapter 17 “Media Coverage”. The author gathered extensive information on newspaper reportage of Han Han and the New Concept Essay Competition. (note: only a chapter number is given for this reference as the book is online.)
eventually with record sales became China’s best-selling literary work of the past twenty years.5

Inspired by the miracle that Han had created in the book market, Chinese publishers started to search for prospective youth writers from the winner lists of New Concept Essay Competition, which had become an annual event with nation-wide participation. Guo Jingming and Zhang Yueran (both first-prize winners of the competition in 2001 and 2002 respectively) were hence discovered and achieved great success after entering the market. Together with Han, these three are the most popular and bestselling authors of youth-literature. Some less talented winners, such as Li Shasha, Jiang Feng, Yan Ge, and Xiao Fan were also published with moderate success in the market (Yonghen Chen, “Xingainian”).

The publishing of youth-literature became a well-known phenomenon to the public because of the huge market success it achieved. Works by the leading writers Han and Guo sold over a million copies, while Zhang, who was considerably less successful, sold 200,000 copies of her literary-oriented works.6 When considering the significance of these sales figures, we should keep in mind that no more than a handful of adult writers in contemporary China have sold more than 100,000 copies of their books, and a standard first run of a literary work is 6,000 copies which for most titles is sufficient for the market to absorb (Qian).

The debates and scandals that controversial authors in this field created also helped to attract tremendous media and public attention. Mostly born after 1980, the writers of youth-literature are drawn from the first only-child generation in China. Literary critics, academics, education professionals and members of the general public, even if most of them have little interest in youth-literature itself, have shown a strong interest in and even concern with the writers and readers of this literature. Those who have an interest in browsing books of youth-literature are looking for the authors’ unique, unprecedented growing-up experiences as

5 This information almost becomes a standard description of Triple Door, which appears everywhere in articles, interviews or introductions to Han. However, it is hard to find the original source of it.
6 To give an idea of the sales figures: Han Han: The Triple Door (2000), 2,000,000 copies; One Degree Below Freezing (2000), 900,000 copies; Like a Speeding Youth (2002), 550,000 copies; Press Release 2003 (2003), 400,000 copies; A Fortress (2005), 500,000 copies; His Kingdom (2009), 650,000 copies; 1988; I Want to Talk with This World (2010), 1,200,000 copies. Guo Jingming: The City of Fantasy (2003), 1,500,000 copies; Never Flowers in Never Dreams (2003), 1,100,000 copies; Cry Me a River (2007), 700,000 copies; Tiny Times (2010), 1,300,000 copies. It is necessary to add that these numbers, although mostly taken from the official websites of these two authors, can not be verified. The unregulated media environment in current China has prevented readers from knowing whether the information presented by an article is precise, exaggerated or simply mere fabrication. This is particular the case with youth-literature publishing. It is not unusual for publishers to “purchase” news articles to falsely claim sales figures as a means of promoting sales. I have tried my best to quote materials from newspapers or journals with good reputations, but nonetheless we should treat with caution the statistics here, as well as many others I will quote throughout the thesis.
the first semi-autobiographical documentation of the only-child generation in China (Y. Zhang, “Chuantong”).

In retrospect, we can see that a niche market featuring youth writers writing for their peers was taking shape around 2003-2004. With a huge market, youth-literature publishing grew rapidly. It reached its first peak season between 2005 and 2007 (Xue). According to an unofficial statistic cited by Bai Ye, more than 300 out of 580 state-owned publishing houses were involved in this market, issuing several thousand books written by more than one thousand young writers. Nearly one hundred of these writers met with popular success. This newly-emerged publishing genre accounted for ten percent of the entire literature published in China at that time (“Yifen”).

Youth-literature entered a relatively quiet period of development between 2008 and 2009, but a second peak soon came in 2010 when more resources were invested in the area of youth magazines making them a new profitable area in youth-literature publishing (Y. Zhang “Qingcun”).

1.3 Personal Interest Statement

Youth-literature publishing became the focus of my research in a quite unexpected way. From 2001 to 2004, I worked as an editor for the publisher Shijie zhishi chubanshe (World Affairs Press) in Beijing, China. An elite, state-owned publishing house, it specialized in books on international political relationships and translated books (primarily from English), which made up a major portion of its production. While an editor at World Affairs Press, I participated in the publishing of a teen romance novel, Naxiaozhi zhenshuai (Gorgeous Guy), written by a 16-year-old South Korean girl called Ke Aitao (귀여니 착하이). The book proved to be an immediate success, selling more than one million copies. It was selected as one of the best-selling books of 2004 by a leading newspaper in the publishing industry and later inspired some copycats in the book market (Tu).

I recalled this publishing experience when I took a course on children’s print cultures during my Master of Arts in Children’s Literature program at the University of British Columbia. It was not until then that I realized Gorgeous Guy was actually an exemplary sample of youth-literature in the area of publishing for children. Considering it in this new light, I prepared a class presentation about the production process of Gorgeous Guy. By asking why a house like the World Affairs Press would publish a teen romance novel and by analyzing the marketing
strategies employed to make the book successful in the Chinese market, I discussed the issues concerning the children’s book market and publishing for children in China. The instructor of the class and my supervisor both suggested that I further explore the material I had presented on, which in turn led me to recollect my impressions of the publishing of two leading authors of youth-literature Han Han and Guo Jingming. While gathering the material, I was increasingly fascinated with the uniqueness of youth-literature publishing. Although occasional teenage publishing is quite common in Western and Chinese publishing, it is rare to see a phenomenon like youth-literature produced on such a scale and for so lengthy a period. Eventually I decided to research the entire phenomenon of youth-literature publishing based on my participation and observations.

My status as a former insider in the publishing industry has given me a privileged position from which to explore this phenomenon. This means that I can decipher the codes of this complex industry, which, unlike the industries of the West, is divided into state-owned houses and private publishers. The relationships of these two groups are complex and as will be discussed in the following chapters are critical to understanding the growth of the youth-literature phenomenon. Moreover, they are virtually inaccessible by outsiders.

In addition to my working experience, studying children’s literature in Canada has furnished me another point of view. For this research, I am highly conscious that I am discussing a subject of Chinese children’s literature and its publishing, but this consciousness is not shared by Chinese researchers. In China, youth-literature is generally not discussed as children’s literature and its publishing, if studied, is more likely to be treated as a subject of communication studies.

1.4 Research Questions

In order to address its particularities, I developed two research questions regarding the emergence of Chinese youth-literature publishing, its nature, and the dynamics behind its evolution. To reflect my particular perspective on this phenomenon, I developed two additional questions. Therefore, altogether there are four questions to be investigated throughout the study:

1) Although it began with a literary mission, youth-literature publishing became an increasingly commercialized phenomenon. How have the forces internal to the Chinese publishing industry shaped the result?
2) How have external elements in contemporary China contributed to the flourishing of youth-literature publishing? Over the decade, this area of publishing became similar to the entertainment business. How did it occur?

3) How does the production of youth-literature publishing contribute to Chinese children’s literature? What kind of coming-of-age experiences have been recorded and revealed by the products of this publishing?

4) What can we learn about publishing for children in China and the broader Chinese publishing industry through this study?

1.5 Significance of the Study

This study fills some significant gaps in studies on children’s literature and publishing in China. No one has previously researched this phenomenon from this perspective particularly from that of the living experience of a publishing insider. It will bring an entirely unknown phenomenon to the knowledge of children’s literature scholarship in the West.

1.6 Overview of Thesis Chapters

In Chapter 1 I introduce the topic of research, explain my motivations for engaging in this area of research, and clarify the research questions.

Chapter 2 is a Literature Review that is organized under the following headings: 1) English scholarship on Chinese children’s literature; 2) Chinese publishing industry; and 3) publishing for children in the West. These reviewed materials shape my perspectives to approach the research subject and raise the issues I will explore in this study.

Chapter 3 is designed to present my theoretical framework and methodology.

In Chapter 4, involving the creation and production of Gorgeous Guy, I create a personal memoir of my working experience in World Affairs Press from December 2001 to July 2004. It centers on my experiences of, and interactions with, the editors and the editing process and explores in detail the particular nature of reform in the Chinese publishing houses during the market era.

In Chapter 5, I trace the publishing history of Han Han from 2000 to 2012. I discuss various aspects critical to the successful publishing of Han such as his personality, the strategies
his publishers used for his publication, and the great public interest he drew as the representative of China’s first only-child generation. In particular, I examine how Han accumulated his social influential power, which was the key to his success, as well as the entire youth-literature publishing phenomenon.

Similarly, I devote Chapter 6 to the publishing history of Guo Jingming, another leading youth-literature writer, from 2003 to 2013. Being both the most successful writer and publisher in this field, Guo endeavored to explore the entertainment value in the field, from creating work with entertaining elements to transforming himself into an idol to serve the entertainment needs of his readers and fans. Consequently, youth-literature carries similarities to entertainment business.

This thesis ends with Chapter 7 in which I present my conclusions and discussion of the findings as they relate to the research questions.
Chapter 2: Literature Review

Given that youth-literature and its publishing have yet to be sufficiently studied, there is not much scholarship that is directly related to my study. Hence, this review covers areas that relate to my study in a much broader sense and with a focus on English scholarship. It consists of three sections: Chinese children’s literature, the Chinese publishing industry, and publishing for children in the West. Specifically, I first examine the historical development of Chinese children’s literature and at the same time deal with a few major issues most relevant to my own topic. Then I move on to survey the contemporary Chinese publishing industry and Chinese children’s book market from the early 1990s to the present. My particular attention is on the challenges that the industry has encountered over the course, its response to the transition from a highly-planned economic system to a market-oriented one, and the effects on the book market. Finally, in order to help understand the industry of publishing for children in China, for comparison I examine a few scholarly works regarding publishing for children in the West. Given that China’s publishing for children has experienced a major shift to a market economy over the past thirty years, I take as the focal point how its counterpart in the West has maintained a balance between culture and commerce.

2.1 English Scholarship on Chinese Children’s Literature

Chinese children’s literature is an understudied field and the English-language research on it is scanty and superficial. This comes as no surprise considering that Chinese children’s literature is quite a young and marginalized field in its own right. Few classics of children’s literature have been produced in China and even fewer have been introduced to the Western audience. So far, in English-language scholarship, only a small number of books and articles can be found on Chinese children’s literature, the majority of which are byproducts of research in fields other than children’s literature, primarily the politics or culture of modern China. Nevertheless, a groundbreaking and award-winning book, *Modern Chinese Children’s Literature: from Lu Xun to Mao Zedong* by Mary Anne Farquhar has significantly improved this disappointing situation. The book traces the historical evolution of, and examines critical issues in, Chinese children’s literature. This book, along with other book chapters and articles that I was able to gather, provides the Western understanding of Chinese children’s literature, which is
enough to serve as the remote background in which to position youth-literature.

My focus in this section is on the evolution of Chinese children’s literature with special attention to its nature, the shaping forces, and the major products. I also pay special attention to the conception of children as well as the role played by Chinese children’s literature in society. We will see that the creation of Chinese children’s literature has been under the strong influence of the social, cultural, and political pursuits of children’s writers and theorists. Therefore, it is easier for us to understand the inner dynamics of this literature if we recall that most, if not all, examples of the literature are the product of a certain belief or political purpose. In addition, I give a brief survey of the publishing history for children in China, an aspect that has been documented by scholars only in passing.

2.1.1 Historical Development

Chinese children did not have their own specific literature until the early twentieth century and the gap was and has been largely filled by their abundant borrowings from adult literature, which has a history of more than 4,000 years and is well known for its richness and diversity.

Two authors have discussed the traditional reading materials for Chinese children. Dorothea Hayward Scott in her book, *Chinese Popular Literature and the Child*, points out that over the course of several thousand years, in addition to Confucian classics that were used as the primers at school, Chinese children took pleasure in reading classic tales of romance, adventure, mysticism, and the supernatural, some of which were adapted from adult literature to meet their reading abilities (2-3). She also states that children benefited from wandering storytellers with a rich repertoire of legends, myths, folktales, and short stories (5). In her overview of Chinese children’s literature for Peter Hunt’s *International Companion Encyclopedia of Children’s Literature* (1029-1037), Laina Ho agrees with Scott stating that “Whether it was oral or written, Chinese literature was readily and abundantly available to children” (1031). She further seeks answers to the question about children’s enjoyment of adult literature in traditional China by analyzing literary techniques of the classical works, the conciseness of the Chinese language, and the rhythm and tonal quality that make Confucian classics easy for children to memorize without necessarily understanding them. She points out that the traditional reading materials continued to be an important component of Children’s reading diet even after a specific children’s literature had emerged (1030).
It is worth noting that even if a specific literature for Chinese children finally emerged, it was created not to satisfy children’s special reading needs but to meet social and political concerns of the time. Farquhar has done an excellent job in tracing the emergence and the development of the modern history of Chinese children’s literature in parallel to specific social and political events in Chinese history. From the early twentieth century, China was thrown into chaos by a series of significant political events, including the fall of the Qing dynasty (1644-1911), the beginning and end of the First World War, and the Chinese revolutions taking place at the turn of the twentieth century. It was against this background that a new literature exclusively for children was created by Chinese intellectuals in an attempt to save the fate of China and its people (1-2). This literature has experienced several distinct developmental stages largely decided by the varying social and political contexts (7). Accordingly, Farquhar divides modern Chinese children’s literature into several schools, some of which may overlap in the chronology:

1) May Fourth Children’s Literature, 1919-36

The May Fourth Movement occurred on 4 May 1919, when Chinese students rallied against the corrupt government over its promise to cede one province of China to Japan. This movement was a call for Chinese intellectuals to build a new country through social reforms. Among their various efforts was one to create a literature specifically for children. Established writers for adult literature, such as Lu Xun (1881-1963), Zhou Zuoren (1885-1967), Ye Shengtao (1894-1988) and Bing Xin (1900-1999) turned to this field either as theorists leading debates over childhood and children’s literature, as translators of foreign children’s literature, or as writers endeavouring to create “a children’s world” for children. For example, Ye depicted the outer world of children and the society in which they lived in Daocao ren (The Scarecrow), while Bing described the inner world of children, their dreams, longings, and fears in Ji xiao duzhe (Letters to Young Readers). These two books have both become children’s classics (91-139).

2) Revolutionary Children’s Literature, 1937-49

Revolutionary children’s literature started in 1921, the year that the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) announced its founding, and ended in 1949, the year that the People’s Republic of China (PRC) was founded. The Japanese invasion of China in 1937 marked a crucial turning point in modern Chinese history. So, as a school of writing, revolutionary children’s literature
first co-existed with May Fourth literature for eighteen years and then dominated the field following 1937 (143-87).

Following a Marxist theoretical guideline claiming that all literature was an ideological weapon, revolutionary children’s literature played a part in achieving China’s larger social goals: freedom, equality, and awakening the people to fight for a new society. Although its social inspiration was similar to that of the May Fourth literature, revolutionary literature promoted radical social change and social equality. It thought highly of heroic actions, and thus produced heroic adventure stories featuring child heroes in wars. One of the most important works during this period is a comic work Sanmo liulang ji (An Orphan on the Street) about an orphan Sanmao who endured adversities that included poverty, war, and discrimination in the 1930s (143-87).

3) Children’s literature in the People’s Republic of China

During the period between 1949 and Chairman Mao Zedong’s death in 1976, children’s literature became part of the institution of the state controlled by civil or military bureaucracies. At the apex of these bureaucracies stood the Chinese Communist Party; therefore, in place of major social events, specific Party policies were the controlling factor for the development of children’s literature. Accordingly, Farquhar divides children’s literature during this period into four sections (249-95).

a. Children’s Literature 1949-57: This period witnessed a concerted effort to support children’s literature and was thus viewed by Chinese scholars as “The First Golden Age of Children’s Literature.” Excellent writers from the 1920s to the 1930s were still active in writing for children at this time. Meanwhile, the government was making efforts to support, or control children’s literature by establishing specialized magazines, publishing houses, theatres, and children’s organizations. Many outstanding works in this period continued the legacy of children’s literature from the May Fourth Movement period on creating a “children’s world” (257). Some writers devoted their writing to depictions of children in their daily life both at home and school. One of classics from this period is Luowenyi de gushi (The Story of Luo Wenying). It features a boy protagonist Luo Wenying who makes all kinds of mistakes at home and school but eventually is corrected with the help of his classmates and the “uncles” from the Chinese Liberty Army (251-55).

b. Children’s Literature 1957-65: In this period, political controls on children’s literature increased resulting in children’s literature becoming propaganda. Party policies insisted on
revolutionary popularization and on education about class struggle. The creation of children’s literature followed the regulations of the so-called “revolutionary realism and revolutionary romanticism” (271). The novel *Xiaobing zhangka* (*Little Soldier Zhang Ka*) was an exceptional product differentiating itself from the propaganda materials produced in this period. Zhang Ka was depicted as a brave and charming young soldier during the Anti-Japanese War in the 1930s, who lost his parents to the war and fought with the Communist Army and eventually became a Party member (271-283).

c. Children’s Literature 1966-76: Historically, this period is called the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution, in which cultural activities and production mostly ceased. In response to the Party’s call to become Red Guards of Chairman Mao Zedong, millions of high school students left school and went to the remote countryside to work as farmers. Little literature was produced for children during this period and what was published always complied with the political dictates of class struggle and proletarian literature (283-91).

Farquhar’s book ends at the death of Mao in 1976. The following years are taken care of by other scholars. Lijun Bi, in her article “Capitalist Bears and Socialist Modernisation: Chinese Children’s Literature in the Post-Mao Period,” discusses what Chinese children read from the late 1970s to the mid-1990s. She points out that, after Mao’s death, China experienced an essential shift in focus on the class struggle to the great program codified as “four modernisations”—to modernise the nation’s industry, agriculture, technology, and national defence (58). She carefully examines specific Party polices, such as the “open door policy,” and discusses how they were reflected in writing for children (66-71). The stories produced in this period are didactic. They encourage children to study hard to become “somebody” in the future rather than to be ordinary workers, peasants, or soldiers (69). Moreover, in accordance with the appearance of the “only-child” in many families due to the installation of the “one-child-policy” in China, some works advocate the ideals of sharing, collectiveness, and team work to these children (72).

In “China,” Laina Ho discusses children’s literature in the 1990s as part of her overview of Chinese children’s literature. In her view, important changes took place in Chinese children’s literature during this period as people realized that “children’s literature should be told from the viewpoint of the child, using real-life childhood experience instead of the staid, journalistic, story-telling style noticeable in the older writers” (1033). Ho reviews a group of emerging female writers who explore the themes of growing up and are considered as great contributors to this
literature. In spite of considerable progress in writing for children, however, Ho points out that there was less observable development in children’s poetry, songs, rhymes, and drama (1037).

Ho’s emphasis on the changes that Chinese children’s literature experienced was echoed by some children’s writers and critics in a special issue of Bookbird on contemporary Chinese children’s literature. On the basis of her own writing experience, Chen Danyan claims that she tries to express the inner feelings of teenage girls. Chen is also one of the few who believe that China’s only-child policy would greatly influence the future literary production of Chinese children’s literature: “Nobody knows how they [the only-child generation] develop, what they are capable of, and what goes on in their heads. No adult has any experiences from their own childhood that can help them to judge what is going on for this new phenomenon of only-children” (18). She believes that this new generation will exert as much influence on Chinese society and its culture as the students who initiated the May Fourth Movement in 1919 (18). Tang Rui stresses the changing attitude toward childhood. She claims that “Chinese children’s literature is back to children” (29).

As for the future of Chinese children’s literature, critics do hold some hope. At the end of her article, Ho states that a major new development in children’s literature of this period was the promotion of the status and value of Chinese children’s literature domestically and internationally alike. This task was viewed as the responsibility of academics with the assistance of relevant publishers, organisations, and research institutes. Passionately though somewhat vaguely, Chinese critics expressed the hope of “Chinese children’s publishing joining the network of international market” (Ho 1037).

2.1.2 The Concept of Children in China

Critical discussions about the role of Chinese children’s literature can be seen as efforts to understand the underlying dynamics behind the evolution of Chinese books for children. Education and politics are the two key terms to understand the creation and production of Chinese children’s literature.

As discussed earlier, Chinese children’s literature has its roots in a Chinese literary tradition that is permeated by Confucian teachings emphasizing the responsibility of literature to convey moral values (Scott; Farquhar; Ho; Loving). Dorothea Scott states that “it is impossible to consider children’s literature in China without reference to the system of education” (2). Ho points out that in traditional Chinese society, children were often treated as miniature adults and
that education for children from wealthier homes was only a means to pass the imperial civil service examination (1030). Moreover, children were also expected to learn moral values through studying literature. This is because literature in traditional China was seen as a vehicle to convey Confucian doctrines, and thus a work of Chinese literature always meant a moral lesson (1031).

Farquhar examines the political and social roles that Chinese children’s literature played in its modern history. She first discusses the approach of some active, well known writers in the May Fourth Movement such as Lu Xun who saw children’s literature as a means to promote social changes. In his eyes, children as the “future architects of a strong China” should not be spiritually poisoned by traditional Confucian reading materials (39). Thus, children needed their own specific literature which made them better people and, eventually, would help to save China from decline and build a new society (42-43). Later, in the 1930s and 1940s, while China was fighting against the Japanese invasion, revolutionary children’s literature dominated Chinese children’s literature. It was advocated that all literature was an ideological weapon (143). Due to its easy accessibility to the mass illiterate and semi-literate people in China, children’s literature was used as a vehicle to mobilize the poor and the dispossessed to fight for their future (167). As a result, children’s literature as a field was less distinct than it had been in the early 1920s. In the writings of this period, portrayed as “little adults”, children did not inhabit “a special world” instead they shared with adults the same goal and task of struggling for China’s independence (179).

After the People’s Republic of China was founded in 1949, not only did children’s literature continue to preach abstract Communist ideology, but it further became a direct propaganda product of certain government policies. It is in this sense that Farquhar claims that “children’s literature, like all arts, was centralized under layers of bureaucracy and harnessed as an instrument of social control and ideological change” (249). Communists believed that “children were successors to the proletarian revolution and their literature was to nurture these successes.” They thus required children’s literature to educate the young so that revolution could continue (200).

It is worth noting that although Chinese children’s literature has undergone tremendous changes in response to external political and social conditions, its educational role continues to be stressed. Farquhar argues that,
The most crucial assumption is that the importance of children’s literature lies in its educative function, and that this is located in the social domain. Most critics, whether they are Confucian, liberal or Marxist, regard social and historical context as fundamental. The often vehement debates on children’s literature take place within this framework; they question the educational theories and practices and the concepts of childhood which inform children’s literature, but never question the primacy of its educational role. In almost all cases literary value in a text is conferred according to its perceived “educational significance” and, as a corollary, its implications for the future directions of Chinese society. (9)

In this vein, Lijun Bi points out that, after Deng Xiaoping took power in the late 1970s, although children’s literature was no longer expected to serve the old goal of the “class struggle,” its rhetoric remained the same when the government encouraged children’s literature to take a role in the “Four Modernisations” program in this new era (58-59).

In contrast, contemporary Chinese writers and critics are relatively more aware of the role that Chinese children’s literature is supposed to play in a child’s personal life and the society in which they live. In 2006, Chen Danyan claims,

In Chinese thinking, children’s literature is more or less seen as having a didactic function. Children’s novels have always tended to have educational themes. How does a child behave as a good person? How can he be useful to society as a person? How can she be a dutiful child to her parents? All the writer is supposed to do is to insert education into literature. (19)

2.1.3 Self, Family, and State

In accordance with the socio-political concern embedded in children’s literature, exploring the relationship between self and the state is a basic issue for modern Chinese writers. Marian Allsobrook, in her overview “Early 20th Century Chinese Children’s Literature: Self, State and Story,” approaches modern Chinese children’s literature from the perspective of the self-state relationship. She finds that in stories for children, Chinese writers have tended to educate the young to work for “saving China” and, in certain historical periods, even advocated sacrificing children for the interest of the country. In other words, “state” has a priority over “self,” and “self” should be pursued in the process of working for the state (5-11).

Since family is one of the most important aspects in a child’s life, the change of the relationship between family and state is also reflected explicitly in children’s literature, as is discussed by Jane Parish Yang in her article “A Change in the Family: the Image of the Family in Contemporary Chinese Children’s Literature, 1949-1993.” Yang examines a particular adult-child relationship in the writing of contemporary writers. Communist ideology changes the
relationship between family and state, which in turn subverts the adult-child relationship. For an individual in traditional China, the interest of his family or clan came before state interests, although these two were quite compatible because holding a public service career was almost always the best way for an individual to benefit his family (86-87). During the period from 1949 to 1966, which Yang sees as the first more peaceful period, socialist values were shown in the writings for children to bolster the family rather than conflict with its interests (87). In the Cultural Revolution from 1966-1976, however, family nearly disappeared from fiction for children due to an extreme stress on state interests. Children were depicted as directly linked to the state, often presented not in the context of family but rather in a state-controlled setting interacting with peers. A child’s primary duty was to serve the state for the revolutionary goal. The family hierarchy was reversed, and it was now the young who directed their elders how to behave properly in this new age. Children, with their new dominant peer groups, upheld state ideology against the parochial interests of the family (90-95). In the same vein, during the contemporary period (1985-1993), the Chinese family was presented as an entity lacking in moral authority and incapable of carrying out national goals (100-104).

### 2.1.4 Chinese Publishing for Children

A few scholars have touched on the area of publishing for children in China as a related, but not central, issue in their research.

Farquhar mentions the flourishing of publishing for children during the inter-war period in the 1930s, and observes a connection between publishing and education: “In the cities, especially Shanghai, children’s literature was well established as part of the commercial publishing world and as part of the process of modern education by 1936” (124). She notes that during this period, children also had their own magazines due to the sponsorship of some big publishing houses “as proof of the recognition of ‘a world of children’ with its specialized literary needs” (124). Unfortunately, Farquhar does not discuss publishing in new China except for providing some statistical information. For instance, she cites a newspaper editorial claiming that “in 1954, over 400 new titles were published in 13,690,000 copies for a population of 120 million children, aged between six and fifteen” (254).

Scott also comments on the relationship between publishing and education when discussing publishing for children in the People’s Republic of China (PRC). She claims that “the total change in the publishing world of books for children since the establishment of the People’s Republic in 1949 is but one reflection of the revolution in education for the masses which has
taken place” (132). Like Farquhar, she does not elaborate on this relationship. She describes three aspects in the development of publishing for children during the period from 1949 to the 1980s. First, there were several publishing houses specializing in publishing for young people, including regional and minority group publishing houses for youth as well. Second, the number of books published each year for children grew steadily. Between 1950 and 1960, twenty thousand different titles were produced with first printings of two hundred thousand copies. Third, the distribution system organized by the government was excellent. The New China Book Publishing Company, one of the major publishing houses in China, had over three thousand branches and sub-branches. In the more isolated villages, bookstands were set up in the village store or commune headquarters (130-34).

Ho discusses the flourishing of publishing for children in the 1990s as a result of China’s economical reforms (1034). From the 1990s onwards, the importance of education for children and children’s reading needs were fully recognised. This brought prosperity to Chinese children’s literature, which can be examined from several perspectives. Along with the proliferation of writing for children, book production also became a big business. With strong support from the market, several publishing houses are now able to produce hardback Chinese picture books of high quality. Collaborative efforts between Taiwanese story-tellers and mainland Chinese illustrators were established for the first time. At the same time, there was also a trend towards commercialised production of picture books. Noticeably, when describing these new and exciting developments, Ho nonetheless raises a concern regarding commercial publishing in the market of children’s books in China: fewer works of literary quality were produced compared to the more lucrative fantasy genres (1035).

2.2 The Chinese Publishing Industry and Book Market for Children

I review in this section several articles to present an overview of the publishing industry in contemporary China. My focus is on the particularities of this industry, as well as its continuous changes in response to challenges created by China’s rapidly changing socioeconomic environments. Based on two sections dedicated to the Chinese children’s book market in Publisher’s Weekly, together with other resources, I present a glimpse of publishing for children in today’s China. This section constitutes a supplement to my survey of the history of publishing for children in China. Most of these articles are journal articles that are more descriptive than analytic. Lastly, I examine a serious academic book Consuming Literature: Best
Sellers and the Commercialization of Literary Production in Contemporary China by Shuyu Kong, which deals with the commercialization of literary production in the 1990s and is closely related to my study.

2.2.1 Overview of the Chinese Publishing Industry

Publisher’s Weekly is a critical source useful for gaining a basic understanding and to garner up-to-date information on China’s publishing industry and the sub-market of Chinese children’s books. One of its main purposes is to provide Western publishers with information on how to do business in China. Since the 1990s, the number of short articles in this journal introducing China’s book market has increased and this tendency has continued into the 2000s. Sally Taylor’s article “China: the Once and Future Market,” published in 1998, offers a clear and comprehensive understanding of the Chinese publishing industry in the late 1990s. Most of the particularities of this industry she reveals are still applicable to its current situation. The author was first deeply impressed by the profitability of this industry, stating that “the top profit-making industries in China today, so some people say, are tobacco, alcohol and publishing” (3). But she did not think it is necessarily good news for Western investors because “not many foreign publishers are making money in China—at least not yet—and those few who are make it with educational and technical titles, rarely with trade books” (3). She then points out the exclusiveness of this industry: no one else except official publishing houses were allowed to publish books. Over 500 state-run publishing houses in China were issued with the International Standard Book Number (ISBN) (per book per ISBN), and without it nobody is allowed to publish any book. Meanwhile, state-run houses were financially supported by the state (3).

However, as a result of China’s transition from planned economy to market economy, these houses were no longer subsidized while at the same time they also had a broad set of publishing ethics and goals established by the government. The author thus offers a critical observation of Chinese publishing industry by stating, “publishing in China is still not a straight commercial exercise, though the author found many a good business mind at work in the business and an eagerness for new ideas and information” (3). Taylor makes a comparison by rightly pointing out that “in China, publishing is about culture and knowledge. It is less commercial than in the West” (9). She also notes a regional difference in China’s publishing culture stating, “China’s national publishing might was gathered in Beijing by the Communists, but Shanghai still enjoys the

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7 Chinese government uses ISBN as a means to control the publishing industry, which is similar to its using citizen residence card to control the mobility of the population.
intellectual echoes of its long publishing tradition, with many there the third and fourth generation in the business” (14).

Some Western journalists reporting on China were able to provide the most up-to-date information on the Chinese publishing industry. One such article addresses a special type of publisher—the private publisher. In “New Grey Market in China Loosens Grip on Publishing,” Elisabeth Rosenthal briefly talked about the private publishers and the controversial materials they published. Private publishers emerged as a result of the commercialization of China’s publishing industry. Without legal status, they had to collaborate with state-owned publishers. Rosenthal noticed such collaboration as a very complicated process with many secrets involved but failed to provide any detailed information in this regard.

At the turn of the twenty-first century, more academic-oriented articles were published that place more stress on the changes taking place in the Chinese book market. A 2009 article “The Current Status of the Publishing Industry in China” by Sun Ji, Yang Yang and Meng Mao discusses “the swift rise of new types of productive forces in publishing” (93). It appears that when China joined the World Trade Organization in 2001 it became a major influence on the publishing industry and the professionals working in it. The authors state:

[U]nder the policies of reform and opening to the outside world that began in 1978 and China’s participation in the World Trade Organization (WTO), the entire industry faced the challenge of the free-market economy, a major incentive for nationally owned enterprises to adapt to the new competitive mode by adopting new productivity targets. Most professionals in the field now recognize that working like their Western counterparts would be helpful in becoming active players. (93)

The authors go on to point out that the Chinese publishing market has increasingly become part of the international market (100). In addition, they detect a tendency which, with the progress of commercialization, traditional state-owned houses have been transformed into joint-stock companies, which are owned by various partners but predominantly by the state (102).

Following the same line of inquiry, the article “Publishing in China Post-WTO: A Scorecard of the Five-year Transitional Period, 2002-2006” by Lifang Xu and Fang Qing examines how much publishing in China has actually changed as a result of membership in the WTO and its emphasis on oversea investments. Xu and Qung’s major point is that foreign publishers were allowed to open book distribution businesses in China only after the 1980s, but their situation has not been improved because of China’s membership in the WTO. In the
authors’ view, “to date overseas investment has not produced a substantial impact on China’s publication distribution market, and therefore has not fundamentally changed the structure of the market” (16). Nevertheless, they note the influence of WTO on international acquisition of copyrighted non-Chinese titles stating that “the copyright trade of books in China has been booming, with an unparalleled introduction of new titles” (19).

The article “A New Binding: China’s Book Industry Gets a Rewrite” is unique in that, unlike other articles focusing on the changes that the Chinese publishing industry is experiencing, it stresses the backwardness of this industry. The article points out that “because of its political sensitivity, publishing is one of the last industries in China to undergo a restructuring” (“A New Binding” 66). After discussing the complex relationship between private publishers (as cultural studios or companies) and official publishing houses, the article predicts “China would like to see such partnerships between studios and publishers lead to a massive consolidation, leaving half a dozen giant companies capable of spreading Chinese words internationally” (66). It is true that the cooperation between these two types of publishers has become increasingly intensive, but it is still open to question if this is the result of deliberate governmental intention.

2.2.2 The Children’s Book Market in China

In 2007, 2008, and 2009 Publisher’s Weekly published a section of a specific issue dedicated to the Chinese children’s book market. Most of these articles are short interviews with successful children’s publishers in today’s market, and they thus offer a brief overview of this ever-growing market. The article “Five Major Trends in 2008” discusses five significant developments in the children’s book sector: the increasing numbers of blockbuster titles; the rising popularity of comics; the revival of picture books; efforts to promote reading; and the increasing number of online methods of distribution. It notes a big step for the Chinese publishing industry in 2007 when some publishing houses entered the stock market, seeing it as the industry’s first foray into market capitalization. It also points out that among all genres, novels for teenage readers, comics and picture books were the most successful (“Five Major Trends” 1-3).

A significant number of Chinese publishers have shared their successful stories of publishing popular domestic and translated titles for children in China. In the article “No Boundaries in Children’s Publishing,” Bai Bing, the editor-in-chief of Jieli Publishing House, talks about the company’s publishing and licensing activities as well as the regulations and criteria that they observed. He confirms that their attempt to combine mass-market skills and
imported best sellers has proven very successful. In one case, one of the editors discovered Bill Bryson’s *Short History of Nearly Everything* on the Internet and realized its potential in the Chinese market. He was then allowed to purchase the title and work closely with his colleagues to devise a creative promotional strategy. Beginning with the 2005 spring book fair, Jieli House launched a nationwide promotional campaign and eventually more than one million copies of the book were sold (4). Similarly, the publishing of Thomas Brezina’s *Tiger Team* achieved immense success in China (11-12). From the stories of these editors and publishers, we have a general impression that the Chinese children’s book market is quite lively, at least in the business sense.

In addition, Tang Rui’s article “Chinese Children’s Literature in the 21st Century” discusses in passing China’s commercial publishing for children. The author examines the success of the Pretty Cloth Series by three female writers, believing that it was inspired by the Harry Potter phenomenon. Marketed as commercial products—which included the books and add-on cards and other small gifts—this domestic series enjoyed huge commercial success in the Chinese children’s book market (28-29).

Beyond these journal articles, the book *The Publishing Industry in China*, edited by Robert E. Baensch, is important because it endeavors to “provide a practical resource to the publishing industry, which is going through major changes” (Introduction 14). Due to the efforts of a few of its meticulous Chinese contributors, it provides us with statistical information regarding demographics and annual figures for the Chinese publishing industry. Two chapters are particularly useful for my own study, one dealing with children’s book publishing and the other surveying the Chinese young adult reading habits. The first chapter entitled “A Growing Children’s Book Publishing Industry in China” by Li Yuanjun includes a concise survey of this publishing area. It examines the situation of children’s book publishing up to 2003 and covers issues such as the problems, weaknesses, challenges, and potential for the future development (85-99). Li considers the book market for children “gloomy” because of its lack of creativity and originality. Consequently, he urges children’s publishers to open themselves to the challenges of a market economy, which he sees as an opportunity for development and growth. He also notes a tendency toward “more and more international communication” in the children’s book market (89). The second chapter entitled “A Study of Chinese Young Adult Reading and its Market,” in which the author Lin Chenglin points out that “Chinese young adult readers may be the busiest and hardest working students in the world . . . they have very little leisure time they may spend
on after class reading” (105). Lin brings to our attention a large gap between the supplemental materials recommended by teachers and the entertainment materials that students would like to read at their leisure (103). Based on a survey conducted in a middle school, Lin reports that “stories of campus life, literature classics, and psychological self-help titles are their [the students’] top favorites” (107). It is worthwhile to note that Lin briefly touches on a category of books “that tell stories of students’ lives that are written by young authors who sometimes are teenagers themselves” (108). Lin believes that the emergence of such books is because “young adults are increasingly developing their self-esteem . . . they take every opportunity to express themselves” (108).

2.2.3 Commercialization and Literary Production in China

Finally, I examine the book Consuming Literature: Best Sellers and the Commercialization of Literary Production in Contemporary China, an in-depth study that strongly relates to my research. Its author, Shuyu Kong, is a native Chinese who received her Ph.D. in Chinese contemporary literature at the University of British Columbia. Based on her three trips to China and a number of interviews with Chinese publishers, Kong cogently discusses the impact of the market economy on literary production in China. Her focus is on the production of best sellers in the 1990s (the 2000s are included when appropriate) a direct result of the shift in the Chinese publishing industry away from the planned economy to the market economy. She carefully examines how this change influenced the ideas of non-traditional writers and the structure of the publishing industry, pointing out that it led to a rapid rise in private publishers (5-16). She conducts careful case studies of publishing houses as well as of literary authors who were successful in the avid pursuit of best sellers. It is worth noting that she has a particular interest in newly emerging publishing phenomena, such as the flourishing of women’s private literature, which, in some respects, is similar to the publishing of youth writers in the youth-literature phenomenon.

In contrast to other writers mentioned above, Kong apparently has a deeper understanding of the changes and challenges that faced and continue to face the Chinese publishing industry since the economic reform. She is the only one who identifies a special dilemma that Chinese publishers have to tackle, stating:

Publishing and media enterprises are still owned and supervised by the state, and thus are impeded by hidebound, socialist-style bureaucracies; but at the same time, they must heed the state’s calls to compete in the market, to become financially independent, and
(ideally) to manage and operate themselves as if they were private companies. (12)

A case study that Kong conducted on a traditional publishing entity, Writers Press, is revealing. In response to the market economy, the focus of this house shifted from publishing serious literature to publishing popular literature. Given that the youth writer Han Han was first published by Writers Press, Kong includes him in her discussion of this popular literature publishing trend (43-54).

Kong has a strong knowledge of private publishers, the group of people who will be the focus of chapter 4 of this study. She states:

The gray area of publishing . . . is also known in China as the “second channel”—a term that includes both unofficial publishing and private book distribution. The second channel was an almost inevitable consequence of economic reforms in the cultural field, and emerged to supplement the often inefficient, uncoordinated, and slow-to-reform “main channel” of state publishers and the Xinhua bookstore system. In one sense, therefore, the second channel represents the most commercialized and liberated area of book publishing and distribution. (65)

Private publishers consisting of this second channel first appear as shushang (book businessmen) in the 1980s and then as cultural studios or companies at a later stage. They have a codependent relationship with state-run houses. To solve their financial problems, traditional state-owned publishing houses increasingly cooperated with private publishers, either by selling them the ISBN numbers or co-investing in certain titles recommended by the latter (66-68).

Equipped with insiders’ information from her interviews with those private publishers, Kong demonstrates that the official publishers have mingled with unofficial ones so tightly that it is almost impossible to tell whether or not a book has been produced by the primary or secondary channel (70). She holds a quite positive attitude towards these untraditional publishers, pointing out that although they tend to publish for profit, they are more willing to publish controversial literature than traditional publishers. (77).

Kong’s discussion on women’s private literature serves as inspiration for my study as well. In fact, if seen as a cultural phenomenon, the publishing of youth writers is quite similar to that of women writers. Both are unique and controversial in terms of content and authorship: women writers for their gender and body and youth writers for their rebellious spirits and their young age. These were two traditionally marginalized groups in publishing world, but, in the market era, their unusual energetic adventures were viewed by the media and the public as a ready indicator of changes of this society. All of these elements have made it easier to kindle
intense media interest and the involvement of the latter in turn enhanced the market success of the former. Herein we find intricate relationships between authors, publishers, and the media, which are distinct from the ones between serious authors and traditional presses (95-110).

### 2.3 Publishing for Children in the West: Community and Professionals

In this section, I review several books regarding publishing for children in the West in order to gain a comparative perspective to understand the Chinese publishing professionals and industry, which is vital for us to understand the production of youth literature publishing.

The books *Minders of Make Believe* and *Picturing Canada* are comprehensive studies on publishing for children in the United States and Canada respectively. The first book is a comprehensive and meticulous treatment of more than 300 years of publishing history of children’s books in America. Similarly, the second examines the history of publishing and children’s books in Canada from the late 19th century to the early 21st century through the lens of illustrated children’s books.

Paying particular attention to working professionals is a shared approach to documenting the history of publishing for children in the West. Researchers reveal how passionate, devoted, and hard-working professionals as well as the close-knit community they form have contributed to the prosperity of this publishing field.

Marcus believes that “to understand the thoughts and actions of the people responsible for the creation and dissemination of children’s books is to glimpse the inner machinery of one of literate society’s primary means of self-renewal” (xi). He discusses “minders,” such as the publishers, critics, librarians, and booksellers, who have shaped American children’s literature over the last three centuries. Armed with the “communication circuits” theory and stressing the “community of children’s literature,” Edward and Saltman examine a broader range of people involved in publishing for children—“the communities of creators, publishers, disseminators, critics, and readers who directly shape the communications circuit of children’s literary production in Canada” (3).

Female working professionals have attracted much scholarly attention. Marcus discusses extensively about female librarians, writers, editors and booksellers in his book, while Jacalyn Eddy chooses to focus on six individual female professionals in her book *Bookwomen: Creating an Empire in Children’s Book Publishing, 1919-1939*. These women, some of whom shared the
common modifying words such as white, middle-class and childless (Eddy 11), devoted their lives to their careers. As pioneering professionals in the fields associated with children, these women were employed mainly because of their gender, which made people believe that they had a natural knowledge of children (Marcus 78; Eddy 8). They endeavored to enhance their understanding of children throughout their careers and in doing so developed their working philosophies about children’s books. For example, as a children’s librarian, Anne Carroll Moore believed in quality books for children (Eddy 48); as a children’s book editor, Ursula Nordstrom, who was not afraid of bringing up controversial titles to attract the interests of child readers, developed a theory of publishing “good books for bad children” (Marcus 160). These women and their child-related careers were a huge success and contributed to the flourishing of children’s publishing with their hard work.

These female working professionals finally formed a close-knit community for support through networking at library conventions, children’s book awards events, and at special spaces like the famous 105 Room in the New York Public Library. In her work, Eddy goes into detail to show how the success and growth of children’s literature were realized largely because of this kind of community, which represents the combination of devoted people, a variety of institutions, and social events. She notes:

In addition to the expansion of individual expertise, the beginning of a collective culture among bookwomen was evident by 1924. The creation of the Newbery Medal in 1922, the first professional reward in the field of children’s books, lent prestige, encouraged new talent, bred a sense of competition, and heightened interdisciplinary interest. Children’s Book Week, rich with the rituals of preparation, selection, anticipation, and celebration, became an important event around which bookwomen gathered as a community. The creation of children’s departments in publishing houses provided formal institutional expression of bookwomen’s vision of better books for children. (87)

In comparison, Edwards and Saltman go beyond this gendered community in publishing for children. Their book “traces the vital role of kinship networks among creators, publishers, critics, and readers” (3). Given that there is no gendered community in China regarding publishing for children, their methodology is more suitable for my study.

*Dear Genius: The Letters of Ursula Nordstrom* collected and edited by Leonard S Marcus is a collection of letters between the legendary children’s book editor Ursula Nordstrom and children’s writers, illustrators, and, occasionally, child readers. It gives us a rare opportunity to have a close look at the efforts of a children’s editor in the editing and production of such classic
children’s books as *Stuart Little*, *Charlotte’s Web*, and *Where the Wild Things Are*. These efforts constitute a sharp contrast to the working style of publishers focused on profits, which we are going to examine in the following chapters.

What is most striking in this book is how closely Nordstrom worked with her writers. Considering herself a member of a “most devoted editorial staff” (385), Nordstrom was never hesitant to invest time and energy in encouraging and complimenting her writers. She was profoundly and intimately involved with the creative talents throughout the creation of a book. For example, she advised Maurice Sendak to develop his vague ideas into the groundbreaking picture book *Where the Wild Things Are* (166). In the actual editing stage, she offered the writers and illustrators detailed suggestions. In one letter, for example, she gave more than thirty comments on several pages of a dummy for a picture book (104-107).

Over the years of collaboration, Nordstrom developed an intimate and rewarding relationship with her writers and illustrators. As she states in one letter, “I don’t expect creative artists who do books for children to think about children all the time. They never do—the really great ones—because they do what they do for themselves” (156). Also, she showed genuine concern for child readers who sometimes approached her with letters inquiring about a specific writer or book. She patiently wrote back to address the issue with the reader and, in one case, she even took the trouble to write to the teacher of a child asking her to explain a question to the child (326).

As a professional who worked in the publishing industry, Nordstrom needed to deal with the business side of publishing as well. In some cases, this concern caused friction between her and her writers (154). However, she never considered the financial side of publishing as more important than the creation of the books, as evidenced by her declaration that “[making money] is not the only side of publishing that concerns me” (154). She believed that good books would naturally make money, insisting that she not publish only for commercial success. She stated that “all of those above-mentioned projects were enormous commercial successes, as it happened, and that was very gratifying. But not one of them were done because we thought it would be a smart piece of merchandise or that adults would go for it and give copies to each other, etc” (155).
Chapter 3: Research Methodology

In this chapter, I address my methodology and explain the theoretical framework and critical lenses I apply in researching the history of youth-publishing in China.

3.1 Rationale for Selection of Primary Research Subjects

My research explores the publishing history of the genre of Chinese youth-literature by tracing my personal history in publishing in youth-literature in China and the histories of two of the most significant figures in the genre of youth-literature, and by contextualizing these histories within broader frameworks of the history of children’s publishing in China. The study focuses on the publishing history of youth-literature, rather than on the literary analysis or close reading of specific youth-literature texts.

My experiences as an editor working on Gorgeous Guy, one of the first youth-literature titles in the history of publishing in China, provided one important source for my study. My personal history as an editor at a major publishing house in China is unique to western scholarship. Through a recounting of my lived experience, I provide an insider’s view of the emergence of this literature and the tensions involved in the negotiations between private and government publishing houses.

I also focus on the publishing histories of Han Han and Guo Jingming, two leading writers whose experiences have fundamentally shaped youth-literature. My rationale for choosing these two writers as research subjects is grounded in their importance to the emergence of the genre of youth-literature in China, and their high profile within the publishing industry. Han inspired the emergence of youth-literature publishing with his first novel Triple Door published in 2000, and has since continued as China’s best-selling writer to this day. Guo is the most competitive publisher of youth-literature, and the bestselling author in this genre. My two subjects both have played a critical role in the emergence and evolution of youth-literature publishing, and have profoundly shaped this field. Tracing the histories of their publications, therefore, will reveal the genesis and exponential growth of youth-literature publishing as a distinctive genre within publishing for children and young adults in China. The two authors are totally different in personality and public personae, and have differing approaches to work and life, thereby contrasting and complementing each other in a fascinating way.
3.2 Theoretical Framework

This thesis is a study of the publishing history of a specific genre, youth-literature, within the context of the dramatic social and economic changes that China has experienced during the first decade of the twenty-first century. I built my critical framework on the scholarly approaches and perspectives of two books on the history of publishing for children in the West -- *Picturing Canada: A History of Canadian Children’s Illustrated Books and Publishing* (2010) by Gail Edwards and Judith Saltman, and *Minders of Make-believe: Idealists, Entrepreneurs, and the Shaping of American Children’s Literature* (2008) by Leonard S. Marcus. Throughout their histories, Edwards, Saltman, and Marcus convincingly document how publishing for children, as an economic enterprise, has been sensitive to the social, political, and economic changes during the past two centuries. On a more abstract and deeper level, they expose the tension between commerce and culture inherent in the publishing industry as an underlying force shaping publishing for children in both Canada and the United States. I have modeled on these perspectives to approach, analyze, and document the history of publishing of youth-literature in China. Viewed through the critical lenses of these two seminal histories of publishing for children, and following their structure and approaches, both chronologically and thematically, I address the elements of social, cultural, educational, political, and commercial forces that interact to create publishing for youth. Modeling on their content, I investigate personalities of creators, publishers, and editors of a variety of publishing houses.

To understand the complexities of the publishing industry for children and youth in China, and the ongoing tension between commerce and culture, which lies at the heart of Chinese publishing, I utilized the critical lenses of Edwards, Saltman, and Marcus. In their histories, they document the transition of the publishing industry from its genesis as a “gentleman’s business,” that, although distinctly different from other types of business, still needs to make a profit. This point holds particularly true in the capitalist economic system of the West, where publishing is an intricate balance between art and commerce. *Picturing Canada* and *Minders of Make-believe* document how commercial and cultural tensions have played out in the specific contexts of Canadian and American publishing for youth, respectively, from its origins in the nineteenth century through the present day. Commerce has played a stronger role in the United States than in Canada, where government support has played a significant, if complex role in the development of the publishing for children.
Viewed through this framework, Chinese youth-literature publishing can be understood as a societal and political phenomenon, a complex endeavor that encapsulates the tension between commerce and culture in the Chinese publishing industry and in the society itself, rather than a mere literary or commercial endeavor driven by the pursuit for profit. As discussed in the Chapter 2 literature review, the publishing industry in contemporary China has never been a straightforward business, for a variety of historical and political reasons. The tension between commerce and culture in the development of youth-literature in China must be seen within the broader context of the difficult coexistence of state and private publishing since the introduction of a market economy in the 1980s. The overarching concern of this study is thus to examine how this tension plays a role in shaping the publishing of youth-literature, and, is critical to an understanding of the broader Chinese publishing industry.


3.2.1 Minders of Make-believe: Idealists, Entrepreneurs, and the Shaping of American Children’s Literature by Leonard S. Marcus

Leonard Marcus explores the importance of both commerce and culture in the development of children’s publishing in the United States, identifying the tension between those who see children’s literature as a tool for pedagogy and moral instruction, and those who seek to profit from children’s publishing (Preface, x). Marcus briefly touches on the history of mass-market commercial publishing for children, including cheap chap books (105-106), Golden Books, (164-168), comic books (136-137,144-145), and series fiction for girls (294-295). He describes the generally negative attitudes towards such reading materials held by many adults, especially children’s librarians, while noting that some writers and editors, such as the noted children’s publisher Ursula Nordstrom, understood the child reader’s attraction to popular reading materials (160).

Marcus’s approach to his subject traces the creation, production, and reception of quality books for children, and how commercial elements also played a critical role in the industry. According to Marcus, women in children’s book-related professions, including librarians,
booksellers, editors, authors, and educators, worked with devotion and passion to publish, sell, and introduce quality books to children. As a consequence of this pursuit of quality children’s literature, the business side of publishing was obscured though by no means neglected. For example, the opinions of librarians and teachers were valued by publishers because they represented two important institutional markets -- public schools and libraries -- although their influence has dwindled significantly with the contraction of these markets in the late twentieth century (181-182, 205, 238-242, 280-281). Entering the twenty-first century, as mergers and transnational media corporations gained control of the industry, publishing for children has become increasingly commercialized (282-284). Many children’s professionals lament “the atomization of the publishing industry as a whole: long-standing relationships of all sorts increasingly stood for less, and a speculative almost casino-like atmosphere infiltrated the once-gentlemanly culture of publishing” (284).

The result of the competition between commerce and culture is not always negative in children’s publishing. Little Golden Books is an interesting case that represents a good marriage of art and commerce. According to Marcus, this resulted from the working relationship between two publishers, Dorothy Bennett and Lucillel Ogle: “Bennett usually took the side of art for art’s sake as against Ogle’s more pragmatic approach. Neither woman yielded ground readily, and the creative sparks their clashes generated had much to do with the lasting value of so many of the books they published together” (166).

Drawing on Marcus, in my study, I pay close attention to the significant impact of individuals on the industry and the ongoing tension between commerce and culture.

3.2.2  Picturing Canada: A History of Canadian Children’s Illustrated Books and Publishing by Gail Edwards and Judith Saltman

In Picturing Canada, Edwards and Saltman convincingly argue that, in Canada, the emergence and development of children’s books, especially picture books, is one facet of the broader cultural pursuit of Canadian identity. Thus, the authors state that it “is possible to illuminate the development of Canadian publishing for children as an expression of national identity and cultural consciousness and to locate children’s publishing within broader histories of Canadian publishing and cultural production” (13). Government financial investment has functioned as a critical force in shaping Canadian publishing for children in support of the formation of a national identity (78). The history of the rise and fall of small alternative children’s presses offers an example of publications in which social and cultural concerns
outweigh the demands of commerce. As the authors point out, the growth of new specialized children’s publishing houses in the 1970s was “driven by social conscience and ideology more than commerce” (78). To a large part, the financial aid from the government made it possible for these emerging specialized publishing houses to publish books related to social or cultural issues about which they were concerned.

In addition, Edwards and Saltman examine how globalization has impacted children’s publishing in Canada in recent years, noting that “commercial merchandising trends now dominate children’s publishing, ranging from the book-plus-toy combinations to multimedia and movie and television tie-ins, and the use of children’s book characters to sell toys, clothing, and other product” (132). They discuss a major change in the operations and goals of publishing houses for children from an editorially-driven to a profit-driven focus after the mergers and international media conglomerates began to dominate the industry with the result, as pointed out by one of their interviewees, that “commercial success is the new publishing criterion,” and that leading publishers are “always looking for best-sellers” (132,133).

The issues of globalization and government involvement also appear in my research. I have drawn on the work of Edwards and Saltman to locate the history of youth-literature within the political and societal formation of the texts through processes of creation, publishing, dissemination, and reception.

3.2.3 The Approach to My Personal Experience

In contrast to publishing in Canada and the United States, the Chinese publishing industry lacks experience in dealing with the business side of publishing. As discussed in the section in the literature review in chapter 2, in the section “Chinese Publishing Industry and the Book Market for Children,” publishing houses in China served primarily as a means of state propaganda until the late 1970s, when the introduction of the socialist market economy forced them to respond to government that they become self-supporting. From this historical juncture, private publishers have emerged and developed in coexistence with state-owned houses. Commerce and culture now intertwine in the publishing industry in China through the complex interaction of private and state publishing shaped by the socialist market economy of contemporary China.

In the case of youth-literature publishing, as the genre moved from mainstream state-owned houses to private publishers, there is a clear shift in approach and style.
Thus, a close examination of how state and private publishing have interacted with each other and how they have respectively contributed to the emergence and development of youth-literature is key to understanding this particular publishing phenomenon of youth-literature, and to an understanding of the internal forces that shape the economic and editorial decisions made by Chinese publishing houses.

The tensions between government and private houses and between commerce and propaganda, which I experienced in my publishing career at a state-run publishing house, shaped my decision to focus on the history of the publication of the youth romance novel Gorgeous Guy, issued by World Affairs Press during my time there as an editor. As well as providing an insider view of the production process of a youth book in China, through my memoir I also explore how the tension between state and private publishing played a role in the production of this popular novel by a mainstream house. On the one hand, World Affair Press, which had a reputation for issuing serious, scholarly work, was an unlikely candidate to issue a commercial title for a youth audience. On the other hand, the novel was produced by an editor who acted as a private publisher within the house. My memoir interrogates how this editor/publisher relied on the cultural resources of a mainstream house to achieve the instant (and anomalous) market success of a mass-market title.

Drawing on my lived experience as an editor engaged in the publishing of one of the first youth romances in China, and on the publishing histories of two highly successful youth-literature authors, I locate my study of the Chinese youth-literature publishing industry -- its commercial, social and political changing identity, the challenges facing it, and the behaviours of the individuals engaged in it within the history of Chinese children’s literature and the broader publishing industry in China, in order to explicate the power struggle between state and private publishing that characterized the industry in the decade following the introduction of the socialist market economy.

3.2.4 The Approach to the Narratives of Two Youth Writers and Their Publishing Experiences

In the second part of my study, I trace the histories of two leading youth-literature writers over a decade, using the critical framework of the communication circuit from author to publisher to distributor to reader as utilized in Picturing Canada and Minders of Make-believe. Both these histories analyze the structural elements working behind the formation of publishing for children in Canada and the United States. Picturing Canada, in particular, explicitly frames children’s publishing in Canada within “what Robert Darnton famously called the
communication circuit, in which texts circulate from creators to publishers to the market place to readers and back again to creators” (13). Inspired by this approach, I endeavor to construct my narrative of youth-literature publishing in China in terms of people, events, and publishing houses. I pay particular attention to the question about how publishers, writers, readers, and critics, separately and in collaboration, have made possible such an extraordinarily successful publishing phenomenon. Like Edwards and Saltman, I seek to “explore the histories of the communities of creators, publishers, disseminators, critics, and readers who directly shape the communications circuit of children’s literary production in Canada” (3).

As I explored the publishing experiences of Han Han and Guo Jingming, the two writers dominating the youth-literature publishing over the past decade, I paid particular attention to the ways that critics and readers and fans have contributed to the economic success and widespread popularity of their publishing output. As scholarly research is not available on these two authors, I synthesized data from personal blogs, newspaper and journal articles, and comments by cultural figures to document the authors’ publishing histories, and to trace how and why they achieved market success. In conjunction with my personal publishing memoir, the careers of these two authors provide an understanding of the dynamics of youth-publishing in contemporary China, and the tensions between culture and commerce. Following the models of Edwards, Saltman, and Marcus, the publishing histories of the two authors can be located within the broader context of the cultural and societal forces and elements outside the publishing industry that have shaped the evolution of their careers. By doing so, I place their individual publishing experiences in the larger context of Chinese culture and society, in order to gain a fuller understanding of the two authors’ publishing experiences as well as the publishing history of Chinese youth-literature.

3.3 My Writing Model

This thesis is written in fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of the Master of Arts in Children’s Literature. The Master of Arts in Children’s Literature is an academic-based program that incorporates Creative Writing as a major component. Theses in this program have incorporated creative writing elements within an academic research-based study. I follow this hybrid approach in my synthesis of academic research and the writing of a personal memoir, drawing on my own personal experiences and the publishing histories of the two leading writers. This is a structural and methodological decision in accordance with the nature of the research subject, the interdisciplinary nature of the Master of Arts in Children’s Literature Program, and
my own personal interest. China’s youth-literature publishing is evolving rapidly, and there is little scholarly literature on the topic that would provide comparative information or useful theoretical conceptualization. As a researcher engaged in a preliminary study, I face the dual task of documenting the nature of youth-literature publishing, and at the same time tracing its history and current state. I believe that my carefully constructed narratives, informed by my research and autobiography, place the genre and phenomenon within multiple contexts, offer telling and interesting details unavailable elsewhere, and build a foundation for further research in this subject.

In addition, I chose to present my research findings and memoir in narrative format for other reasons. Firstly, scholarship in English on Chinese children’s literature is still an understudied field due to overwhelming social and political concerns, as well as linguistic and logistical challenges. My decision to craft a narrative that combines historical, biographical, and autobiographical details allows me to include some vivid and intimate details that provide a much-needed insider view of the Chinese publishing industry, and allows me to provide different entry points to the history of a new literary genre. The personal publishing histories of youth-literature writers can be read as success stories, as coming-of-age stories, as narratives of the first only-child generation in history, or as stories reflective of China in the twenty-first century.

Lastly, my personal interests play a role in my choice of methodology. I have been influenced by Ray Huang’s highly acclaimed 1587: A Year of No Significance, a subtle and nuanced model of historical inquiry, in which academic research and creative writing, history and biography, are intricately interwoven. The book consists of seven chapters, each devoted to the life story of historical figure. Huang uses these life stories examine the innate weakness and eventual downfall of the Chinese political system in Ming China, making the complexities of his subject accessible to a wide readership. I utilize Huang’s fusion of academic research and popular narrative as a model for this study, drawing together publishing history and personal memoir as a way to explore the broader histories of contemporary publishing in China.

Following guidelines from the University of British Columbia’s Office of Research Services, in Chapter 4, which is a memoir of my publishing work experience, I use pseudonyms when discussing those editors and publishers whom I came to know in my work life in the publishing industry. All other individuals in the chapter and other chapters are given their real names.
Chapter 4: The Publishing of *Gorgeous Guy*: An Insider’s Story

When the memory of publishing *Gorgeous Guy* in 2004, a teen romance novel by a sixteen-year-old South Korean girl, Ke Aitao (귀여니), came back to me after 2010, it had acquired completely new meaning. It was no longer “just one single book” that I had participated in publishing during my short term as an editor; instead, it had obtained its own identity as an exemplary case of the youth-literature publishing phenomenon. It is in this new light that I recount the process of producing *Gorgeous Guy*, in the hope of documenting information that has rarely been recorded about the phenomenon this book belongs to.

Recounting the experience of publishing this book also serves as an inward journey to explore the publishing house I once worked for. Asking “why did the house take up a project which was outside its mandate,” gave me a new perspective on the environment into which *Gorgeous Guy* was born. From the micro level (the individual editors, the editorial office, the house) to the macro level (the Chinese publishing industry, Chinese social system), I was finally able to grasp the indications and implications of what had happened to the editors and the house, particularly the changes and challenges that they had been facing during this transitional period in China, about which I had not the slightest idea at the time. As such, beyond specific production details, the publishing of *Gorgeous Guy* provides a window to see something deeper.

4.1 The World Affairs Press

On a late December morning in 2001, I was standing in front of the Beijing Foreign Affairs College. It was the first day of my new job as an assistant editor at World Affairs Press, and I was waiting at one of the designated pickup locations for the commuter car the firm ran for its employees. Not many publishing houses in Beijing offered free transportation to employees and I was lucky to live on the pick-up route and spare myself from travelling on the packed public bus in this huge city. After a few minutes of waiting, a woman joined me. I learned that she was an editor as well and just returning to work after a vacation in a foreign country where her husband served as a diplomatic official. A white 12-seater van stopped for us in the busy morning traffic. I followed the woman into the van where we were met by warm air and lively greetings. I sat with her in the front row and she joined the conversation with the driver and
several middle-aged men and women. The topics were about overseas vacations, rumours about Chinese embassies or the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and lunch gatherings at some new restaurants. Gossiping this early in the morning? I listened with curiosity.

Our van passed Zhongnanhai, where the Chinese government hold offices, the Forbidden City, and eventually entered an alley behind Wangfujing (Beijing’s Wall Street). The alley had an odd name—Ganmian hutong (Dried Noodles)—but it is famous in modern Chinese history and literature. After the founding of the new China, the houses of many well-regarded writers, artists, and academics that were assigned by the government were located in this street. The van arrived at its destination in the middle of the alley. While we were getting off, another van from another route came in. The World Affairs Press is located in a renovated traditional Chinese quadrangle. Four low-rise buildings form a square with a yard in the middle that also serves as an open parking lot. People were dispersing in different directions as I headed for the four-story building housing the book editorial department.

The World Affairs Press is a prestigious, state-owned publishing house, under the direct leadership of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The house specializes in publishing books on politics and international affairs (most books are translated from other languages) as well as magazines. There are six editorial teams, called “offices,” in the book department, and I would be working for the No.4 Editorial Office, which occupied two rooms across the hall from each other on the second floor. I knocked on the door of the one on the left, and walked into a medium-sized room furnished in a modern style similar to that of foreign-owned company offices in Beijing. It was a sharp contrast to the office in which I had last worked—teaching literature in a high school where the shabby condition of the buildings and offices was quite normal for state-owned institutions. When I began teaching a decision had been made that the huge office I shared with eleven other teachers would be torn down at any time but it was still intact when I left two years later—that was normal, too.

I sat at my table with its brand new computer awaiting what my new employment would bring in. Yan, a woman in her late 20s, handed me a translated manuscript of *The Cambridge Illustrated History of the Islamic World* to read. She volunteered a little extra information after giving me brief instructions from our director Qin, “You are lucky to be spared the training part. When I started the job, I was asked to spend three months in the proofreading office before undertaking an editing project here.”
At lunch hour, Yan accompanied me to the cafeteria located in a two-storey building across the yard. Although the meals were not fully subsidized as they used to be, having one’s own cafeteria as with having commuter cars, was a privilege for state-owned institutions. Also, in consistent with the concept of socialist equality, the women behind the counter helping with the food were not just service workers; like the transit drivers and the other editors, they were our colleagues.

The atmosphere at our lunch table was not positive or optimistic. People were discussing the new round of government reforms and the financial difficulties of the publishing house. According to rumour, the house did not have enough money for this month’s salaries. The driver, whom I had met that morning talking in such high spirits, commented while slurping his noodles, with a disgusted tone, “Reform, reform! We are only getting poorer from it!”

Yan showed little interest in the topic, although she may have been more worried about the situation in a remote part of the world than that of the publishing house, since she would be leaving with her husband to work in the Chinese embassy there in a few months. I also didn’t worry too much about it, for such depressing rumours were fairly routine in the state-owned institutions which had been losing their previous privileges ever since China had entered the years of reform. Besides, I was not even paid directly by the house, which held quite strict and specific rules for accepting new employees. It was Yan, a graduate from Beijing University (China’s Harvard) with a Masters degree in Middle Eastern politics, who was the standard candidate the house was looking for. But either as a gesture or as a result of the reforms, the house was gradually loosening its hiring standards and editorial offices had the freedom to hire whomever they chose, provided they were willing to pay them with the profits the office generated. When Director Qin was searching for an assistant, he didn’t mind that I came with a background in literature. After all, the books published by our office were no longer focusing exclusively on politics and foreign affairs.

4.2 Director Qin

Qin was in the office, just getting off the phone, when we came back from the lunch. Yan passed on the lunch gossip, to which Qin responded with surprising anger, “No money for salaries? People are rich! Look at the cars in the yard!” Indeed, the bare yard in the morning was now so crowded with cars in a variety of colours and sizes that you might be worried how you
would ever drive your car out. Qin, in his late fifties, was the senior editor of the house. He came to Beijing in the early 1980s from a small city in remote Northern China where he had worked as the secretary for the mayor. It was hard for him to get a position in the publishing house and he worked hard to fit in. His great interpersonal skills as well as the refined editorial skills he later acquired helped him make a smooth transition. He even received special commendation from the house president; in the Chinese working sphere that made a lot of difference. One of his most successful publishing projects was a history classic, *The Rise and Fall of the Third Empire*. It had extremely high sales but that was quite normal for the Chinese publishing industry in the 1980s because the country was just recovering from a shortage of books caused by the Cultural Revolution and almost any book could easily sell over 100,000 copies. Qin took pride in the cultural and intellectual value of the book.

Qin also was productive and successful in his position in the 1990s not because of his reputation as an excellent editor, but because his efforts contributed to increasing profits. By the 1990s, the reform of the Chinese publishing industry finally underwent several serious financial changes that enabled a devious route for private investors to enter the industry. As a result, editors of the state-owned houses, which had to find new sources of revenue to compensate for state imposed budget cuts, sometimes found themselves a new job dealing with private publishers who needed to purchase ISBN numbers, which function as a kind of book licensing in China, on behalf of the house. In some cases, it was possible that editors received commission fees for their services. These sorts of private transactions, while not legal, were tolerated by the authorities. The possibility of future editorial contracts with private publishers was another incentive to navigate the sometimes murky business world that straddled public and private interests. It required a clear head and a keen sense of business. Qin proved to have such talent. He devoted as much of his energy as possible to work on book projects for several selected private publishers with whom he made friends through the ISBN number purchasing, and with his professional editorial skills.

In the late 1990s, Qin was offered the position of editor-in-chief of the book department, but he declined. He wanted to stay out of trouble as he saw no hope for the future of World Affairs Press. In his opinion, the house was doomed because of a paradoxical situation: it needed to shift to being more of a business company in order to survive and to thrive in the new market
economy, but in reality it also had to continue operating as a state-owned institution.

Being viewed as a means for political propaganda, publishing houses, as well as other media forms, have always been firmly controlled by the government. One way of exerting control is to put them under a specific supervisor, and so World Affairs Press was under the control of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Over the years, the relationship between the house and the Ministry was not unlike that of son and father. As a result, even if it was demanded by the state that World Affairs Press should gain financial independence and become profitable in the book market, the interdependency was so strong that there was no easy way for them to separate from one another. The location of the World Affairs Press, including the fully furnished buildings, was actually a gift from the Ministry. Otherwise, World Affairs Press would never have been able to afford it. Publishing projects, especially those on politics and foreign affairs, were partially or fully subsidized by the Ministry. Meanwhile, the Ministry had the right to appoint the president and editor-in-chief of the house. Typically, ambassadors returning from overseas stints for which the Ministry had difficulty finding suitable jobs inside would be appointed to the position. The Ministry also constantly borrowed editors from the house whenever there were vacancies in Chinese embassies. These vacancies were often located in less affluent or problematic countries, which the Ministry had difficulty filling. Employees between the Ministry and the house were to some degree interchangeable. In addition, the house was also a place for some officials with power at the Ministry to resolve job problems for their spouses or relatives, most of whom were given support staff positions, with an exceptional few becoming editors.

This situation made adaptation to the new economy even more difficult for the house: on the one hand, the house lacked the motivation to make serious changes since there was no danger of going bankrupt as long as the Ministry still needed them; on the other hand, even if the house was willing to take radical steps, it did not have much freedom to do so. The commuter cars and cafeteria service, for example, should have been cancelled long before due to the limited budget. Drivers, food servers, as well as some other staff should have been laid off too but their connections in the Ministry made that very hard, if not impossible. The house needed an extraordinarily strong leader who knew marketing and management to help it through the transitional period, but how much could be expected from those former ambassadors who knew

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8 The information in the following chapter comes either from my personal knowledge (specifically regarding the house) or common knowledge that one would gather when working in a state institution in China.
nothing of publishing and whose intention was little more than peacefully passing several years before real retirement? The state-owned houses who did adapt to the market well and made substantial profits, were mostly provincial or local houses, as opposed to national, because, without much privilege, they were much more motivated or pressured by the harsh reality. As the old Chinese saying goes, “a big boat is hard to turn,” as such previously privileged houses such as World Affairs Press were to some degree helpless and hopeless.

Qin may have been wise to reject the job offer; entering the new century, the situation of the house was not that promising. The Ministry seemed more determined to help the house face reality by cutting the funding and other benefits in greater measure, but at the same time it still reserved his previous rights. Nothing exciting was going on in the house: a new president was assigned by the Ministry to the house; the editors borrowed to work overseas fought for ways to become permanent employees of the Ministry to avoid returning to the house; at the same time, other editors were working hard trying to get “borrowed” for the first time.

The reform strategies that the house copied from other houses and carried out in the book department resulted in the emergence of a group of wealthy individual editors, but the house was not benefiting much from their success. The basic idea was to make front line editors responsible for the bottom line. Each editor was charged with making a certain amount of profit. If they made more than the required amount, they would get a certain percentage of the surplus as reward. By the same token, if they failed to make the required amount, they would only have their basic salaries, which would not be enough to meet their basic needs. However, in reality this strategy was difficult to carry out and instead resulted in a policy of “reward but do not punish” as it was believed that half of the editors would starve otherwise. While the small number of the lucky newly rich was flourishing, the house was becoming less profitable. More and more new cars were being driven into the yard while the house struggled to afford the salaries. Qin was convinced that those shiny new cars must have been purchased with grey or even illegal money—people had been quite resourceful in helping themselves become wealthy, but not the house. Qin’s anger, however, stemmed less from a sense of injustice than from his frustration at being unable to continue to create profit for the publishing house in the new century as he had before.

Qin dialed a number and then put the phone down after several hollow laughs. It was an unsuccessful call. He made it a regular practice to contact his previous private publisher friends to let them know he was more than happy to collaborate with them on titles with bestselling
potential. This was the only way he could take part in the current trend of publishing bestsellers, but his efforts were less than successful. The game was changing. The private publishers no longer pursued or even begged him for help. As they were gaining momentum in the book market, private publishers now had the upper hand. The editors from state-owned houses pursued them (especially those very successful ones), hoping to develop a real partnership by co-publishing, or at least co-distributing the books they took in instead merely selling ISBN numbers to them. As the numbers of such editors were high, so was the competition in this pursuit. It was true that there were manuscripts piled up in Qin’s cabinet which would take more than three years to get published, but Qin had no confidence that there were any that could bring him real profit.

Working with private publishers was the main method Qin used to fulfill his profit objective and, as a result, his life as a senior editor was reduced to asking for help from private dealers. The only suggestion he gave to me was to search online for bestselling titles. As a director, he was quite frank and kind to young fellow workers, advising me, “I am getting old and I am having difficulty keeping up with the era. You should learn from Lai, who is the most successful editor in the house. See what she is doing and try to learn from her.”

4.3 The “Dark Horse” Lai

Late that afternoon, the door was pushed open. A woman in her late thirties entered with a pile of books in her hands. She was Lai, just back from a book exhibition in Europe. While handing out chocolates, she did not forget the newcomer, but no small talk, just a nod.

She had graduated from the same university as Yan, ten years earlier in the mid-1980s. She was of the last generation of university students who were still assigned jobs by the government. However, unwilling to leave Beijing, she landed a position at World Affairs Press by coming to the door herself, a virtually unheard of and audacious act at that time. She might to some degree have regretted it, however, as she experienced several rocky years after joining the house. Lacking all the qualities that helped Qin swim smoothly in the house, Lai found reading manuscripts unappealing. She tried to study overseas, but was unsuccessful. The house let the directors pick their own team members; however, Qin had been quite reluctant to take her on worrying that she would be a burden. Lai turned out to be quite a dark horse. She created profit from the successful titles that no one else could compete with, and she was the only one in the
house who did not have a director position but nonetheless had a personal assistant.

Even Lai herself was surprised at her own achievement. The house’s strategies to push the editors to market totally worked for her, helping her find her true self: she was still not interested in reading manuscripts, but she turned out to have a real knack for dealing with the business side of publishing. She learned packaging and marketing skills from the private publishers. The private publishers started to have their own book exhibitions in a rented hotel in the mid-1990s, expanding from several rooms to the whole floor and then to the entire building. Unlike the mainstream book exhibitions, due to limited budgets, the environment of these exhibitions was both smelly and stifling. Lai would sit in the rooms for hours, asking the booth owners all kinds of questions about the choice of the titles, covers, and interior design, to the distribution channel. Like Qin, she collaborated with private dealers and befriended the ones who were highly intelligent and street smart. Working closely with them, Lai mastered the essentials she needed to venture into the business side of publishing.

Lai came to be the first editor at the World Affairs Press to give herself a new specialization: publishing bestsellers. Her debut project was a collection of serious academic works by noted Sinologist John King Fairbank, which by ordinary standards did not have bestselling potential, but the collection was successful both financially and culturally. With her first experience of being a professional editor resulting in the production of a quality book, she declared, “Who could believe that such serious books could sell this well? Which book dealer is able to do that?” She didn’t continue with academic titles, but instead mostly worked in the area of business and management books and self-help books which were then in fashion in the book market.

With the growing confidence of a successful editor from a state-owned house successful in the market, Lai despised Qin for “begging from book dealers.” Indeed, she took her collaboration with private publishers to a higher level while she was achieving success inside the house. She started to invest together with them. Simply put, outside the house, Lai operated like a book dealer herself. Thus, it would be possible that when she brought in a manuscript trying to collaborate with the house representing a dealer, she might also be an investor behind the deal. Qin was aware of Lai’s dual identities, but he never used it against her. Despite exchanging the occasional harsh word, these two maintained a mutual understanding. Lai did not come to the office very often, but when she did, she always came to chat with him first before going to her own office.
Thus she was now sitting there flipping through the books that she had just brought in. I recognized two familiar items: a cute pink pocket-sized illustrated book for young female readers and a book with a black abstract design on its cover by a youth writer named Han Han. I was struck by curiosity again: was she even interested in those books? As a lover of the classics, those were not my cup of tea. Later, I learned that Lai did not actually read them; she had stopped reading books once she became more involved in the making of the books. She bought the books only to examine their contents and designs in an attempt to discover the reasons why they were successful in the market.

At that time, I could not have predicted that the most enriching part of my experience at the World Affairs Press was to be publishing a bestselling youth novel with her.

4.4 The Editorial Office

Several months later, Yan left for her new job in the embassy, another editor left to visit his wife overseas, and Lai’s assistant left to prepare for her application to graduate school. Whether they were to return was unclear. Qin did not mind very much, perhaps because he was planning to take an early retirement.

A new president came to World Affairs Press. He was, without any surprise, a former ambassador, but he seemed to be quite different from his predecessors at the firm. At his first meeting with the house staff, he frankly admitted that he knew nothing about publishing but that he was determined to learn. He firmly believed that the World Affairs Press should do far better in the book market than it was doing currently given the reputation and the resources that the house had accumulated. His conclusion was, “We just need some effective structural reform.” He soon proved that he was not just talking. His first step was to reshape the distribution team and the next would be the book editorial department. A delicious rumour passing around the lunch table was that the president was so eager to help clear the inventory of the house that he even tried to sell a bulky World Knowledge Dictionary to a nun who came to talk with his wife!

Lai came to the office more often than before. She was summoned by the new president several times and seemed lost in her thoughts after returning. She worked in front of her computer very late into the night. I didn’t know if I was really learning anything from Lai, as Qin had advised, but somehow we formed a friendship through working late and dining out together. One night she mentioned that the house had offered her the opportunity to have her own team. The president wanted to deepen the reform of the book department by establishing special offices
focused on producing bestselling books, which would be led by the few editors who had made themselves rich through past rounds of reforms. It was believed that these editors would make the house rich, if they could run their own office with more autonomy as was the experience of some other houses already using this model. It was theoretically sound when viewed from this perspective. This new policy, in essence, would let editors like Lai bring into the house what they did outside. In other words, they would be operating like a private book dealer inside a state-owned house without investing any of their own money. It was tempting, but Lai still hesitated. Her biggest doubt was whether or not the house could keep its word that the degree of autonomy would be stable, and, even more importantly, that she would really get her share (which was not a small percentage) if she earned strong profits. Her worries were also validated by the experience of some other editors in similar situations. “Everything in this house is too complex and complicated,” she sighed. Being younger and naïve, I nudged her: “Take it! It is not that often that we could have a president like this! He only gets five years here before retirement!”

Lai did accept the offer. The new editorial office named after her consisted of five young people: two straight from college, one with five years of television experience, and one with one year of experience as a book distributor. In addition, Lai borrowed me from Qin because she needed someone with editorial experience. I was considered experienced in editing although I actually had not even gone through training myself. Qin granted her request although he was unhappy with Lai’s leaving. Moreover, he did not forget to point it out to me, “What is she able to do with those young, stupid people? She is crazy to hire them—a desperate action to save money!”

It turned out that Lai’s young team not only had something to do with lower salaries, but also with her new publishing direction. She planned to publish books written by youth writers, a genre soon to become a widely popular publishing phenomenon. No wonder Lai keenly followed the promotional moves of the Chinese edition of *Harry Potter* with a rather plain comment, “Books for young people do sell.” Finding a new publishing area was a direct result of having her own editorial office. Lai needed to achieve a larger profit margin, plus she had to feed her own team, a price for running a special editorial office within the house. On the other hand, the competition in the publishing industry was fierce, especially in her previous field of business, management, and self-help books. As a result, the new trend was “play big, earn big” which also meant, “lose big” if you miss the target. Lai had several unfortunate incidents in her outside
investments; she had learned the dangerous part of the book business in a hard way. Thus, she needed a new area where the rule would be “play small but earn big.”

Books for youth readers seemed to have such potential. The publishing of such books came with a strong media appeal because of the young age of the writers. Lai’s decision to publish books for youth readers was also based on three beliefs: that literary books could become bestselling books without requiring high investment (as proven by the rapid development of online literature); that children’s books have a strong market; and that books regarding popular culture and entertainment sell well. She further came up with methods of finding suitable titles. She hired two part-time employees who were college students studying Japanese and Korean and put them in charge of researching bestselling titles directly from Japanese and Korean websites. It was an unheard-of position about which Qin readily described as “a sheer waste of money!”

The current youth books which sold well in the market were all written by domestic writers, but Lai, who lacked the resources in this area, believed that there must be some similar publishing resources in foreign books. Given that the popular cultures of Japan and Korea had been in fashion in China, it was worth looking for titles in these areas. This work could be given to the people in the copyright office of the house, who were in charge of handling copyright issues for the editors and occasionally recommended titles to the editors. Lai, however, had long abandoned them because of their unsatisfying performance. Instead, she had switched to rely on private copyright agents, but there were also bugs in their services: they charged too much; the competition was fierce for titles with bestselling potentials. Now Lai decided that the best way was to hire some people to look for her directly from the internet, which was cheap and effective - you knew exactly what you were looking for, and if you could find it, you could get it at a lower price before anyone knew about it. Having it all planned out, she simply dismissed the criticism voiced by people such as Qin, claiming, “As long as I can find one good title, the salaries for those two are nothing.”

Lai did not have much publishing experience either in children’s books or in literary books, and already had two failed attempts in these areas. That was not going to hold her back, however, as many other people with much less experience had flocked into publishing at the time. I once worked with private dealers who were still graduate students, venturing into the publishing world equipped with no experience and little capital but with firm optimism that they would “make a top bestseller” very soon. With the radical shift from professional publishing standards to the requirement only to make money, there were no longer designated areas for
individual houses. It seemed that everyone could do publishing and you were able to publish anything you wanted.

Lai was a meticulous woman when it came to doing business. Before launching into the new field, Lai initiated a project, which also aimed to test her new team. The project was a South Korean novel based on the theme of doing business ethically targeted to a reading audience of executives. The title was a modern classic in Korea and Lai paid special attention to its translation and editing in order to ensure the quality. Her entire team was thoroughly exhausted with packaging and promotional work before the book was put on the market.

One night I was asked by Lai to go out for dinner, but we ended up circling aimlessly in the dark vastness of the city with a bewildered taxi driver who couldn’t get direction from his passengers. Lai was under enormous pressure that could not be shared. The Korean novel had barely sold more than 10 copies at one of Beijing’s biggest book plazas. She was afraid that Qin’s prophecy would be fulfilled and that the 100,000 RMB (equivalent to 13,000 USD at the time) that she had spent on the book’s promotion was “carelessly throwing the house’s money to the water.” With clear traces of anxiety and insecurity on her face betrayed by the dim light inside the car, she murmured, “Losing the house’s money felt worse than losing my own money.” Fortunately, sales began to pick up and the book became a bestseller one month later.9

4.5 The Publishing of Gorgeous Guy

While still enjoying the success of the Korean business novel, Lai was made aware of two titles targeted at young readers: Gossip Girl by Cecily von Ziegesar, recommended by a copyright agency, and Gorgeous Guy by Ke Aitao, suggested by one of the two college girls researching bestselling titles for her. Seeing the strong potential of both, Lai had a hard time making a choice, but after having one chapter of each of the two books translated, she compared them and eventually decided to go with Gorgeous Guy. She believed that Chinese readers would find it much easier to relate to Korean than American school culture.

Gorgeous Guy was a typical “girl gets boy” teen romance novel. However, what differentiated it from the norm was that it was written online by a sixteen-year-old girl. It had amassed wide popularity among the online communities of young people in Korea and from there it was discovered by a book publisher and achieved major success in the book market.

9 This is from personal knowledge.
Typical of popular romance novels, *Gorgeous Guy* was a series consisting of four books.

For this publication, Lai’s decisions regarding translation and editing were different than for the business novel. When looking for a translator, she believed that established ones—for example, the professors who had done the translation for the business novel—were not a good match for this project. She needed a translator who was familiar with young people’s lives and would capture the authentic voice of the sixteen-year-old author. As a result, she gave the job to the college girl who had helped her locate the title. Li was not much concerned with the accuracy of the translation. However, she gave specific instructions regarding the book’s title, the author’s name, and the names of the main characters of the novel which must be very “cute,” fashionable and which must appeal to, or even entice, young readers. These aspects were considered crucial to the success of the translated manuscript.

The editing of *Gorgeous Guy* was greatly simplified compared to the editing of the business novel manuscript, which had been entrusted to me. More than once, she had advised me that, although the business novel was not a serious work of literature, I still needed to apply my best editorial skills in order to make the manuscript read as smoothly and elegantly as a Chinese novel: poor quality of language would drive away the more sophisticated adult readers. In contrast, based on the belief that young readers cared more about a good story than its literary merits, the editing of the manuscript of *Gorgeous Guy* was divided among her four young employees as their first editing job. The actual editing involved simply checking for wrong characters or adding or deleting words to make the sentences read more smoothly.

Lai herself never read the manuscript of *Gorgeous Guy*. The people editing it did not read beyond their assigned sections either. A meeting was organized to discuss the names of characters to be used in the translation. Various names were considered and evaluated for their appeal to young readers. The most difficult element was choosing the title of the book. After going through more than ten titles, Lai decided to go back to the original one sent by the translator. It actually sounded more like a sentence than a book title, and it was believed that the casual feeling it conveyed would have a special appeal to young readers who always seemed to want something new and different. Then, at the end of the meeting, out of the blue, Lai raised a question regarding censorship—perhaps her old instincts as an editor in World Affairs Press had been aroused. She asked if there were problematic scenes regarding teenage sex that parents
would find objectionable. She was satisfied to learn that this romance novel was quite innocent and that it contained only one attempt at a kiss—an unsuccessful one.

Cover design was an area into which Lai poured more of her energy. Now a veteran of publishing bestselling books, she was well aware of the critical importance of cover design. It was said that a customer would make a decision whether or not to buy a book in less than five minutes and that the cover was the crucial factor. The original cover was fine, but she wanted one with even stronger appeal. As she had with the copyright office of the World Affairs Press, Lai had long abandoned the services of the cover design office. Moreover, she was convinced that the private designers she had worked with over the past years were not good enough for this project either. She concluded that she needed to search for new talent. It was not hard to find a new designer in Beijing where private design companies were flourishing in response to the growing Chinese publishing industry. There were many late nights during which I worked with Li in the office as we waited for the cover designers to email their design samples. They would get responses immediately or receive a visit from us the next afternoon in their offices. We went through dozens of samples and continuously showered the designers with suggestions until they were clearly on the verge of quitting! Finally, we settled on one design.

Besides the cover, illustrations were another essential part of the winning formula for books aimed at young readers. In January, 2003, while we were working on Gorgeous Guy, another future leading youth writer, Guo Jingming, was having great success with his first novel, The City of Fantasy (幻城), which featured a cover and illustrations in the Manga style. The original edition of Gorgeous Guy had several illustrations. However, to help Chinese readers better relate to the book, Lai hired a young illustrator who was just out of college to redo the illustrations.

With every decision she made necessarily having young readers in mind, Lai increasingly realized that she was not yet familiar enough with these targeted readers. Unlike her usual market of professional business people, she found young readers were less well defined. Then she recalled my experience as a high school teacher. I volunteered to arrange to have one of my former colleagues and a few of her students come to the office to do a consumer test. They

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10 We can safely assume that Lai’s self-censorship here is mostly because she wanted to stay out of trouble. As a mother herself, she might share the opinions of other Chinese parents: sex is not supposed to be an issue for their children until they reach the age of getting married. They would rather ignore this question completely and make every effort to prevent their children from being “poisoned” by it.
arrived on a hot Sunday morning in June and we were surprised at the outcome: the students hated the title of the book! They also preferred the original illustrations rather than the new artwork by our Chinese illustrator. To our relief, though, the cover appealed to them instantly, especially its “cute” leaf-shaped jacket. A new printing technique which made it possible to add a silver shade to the lovers’ images on the cover, also won the hearts of the young students.¹¹ Even though they did not have any experience with publishing, these young students had very clear views on almost every production detail from the interior book design to the size or style of the characters.

When it was time to think of promotional strategies, Lai found her young employees invaluable. She felt that she could not just copy the standard promotion strategy she had successfully used for the business novel. She needed something specifically targeted at young readers but she wasn’t certain of what strategy to develop. One of the young employees suggested promoting Gorgeous Guy online. It was a new territory for Lai. She talked with the CEO of the Tengxun website, at this time in its early days, but which ultimately went on to become one of the most popular websites for young people in China. Ambitiously expanding his company, the CEO was eager to take on new work and readily agreed to cooperate in the promotion of Gorgeous Guy for free. A specially designed website would be made for Gorgeous Guy: his staff would provide technical support while Lai’s staff would be in charge of providing the content. They further came up with a few strategies regarding how to encourage the participation of the readers. In these meetings, Lai found her young employees again to be helpful as she frequently was baffled by the website jargon.

Online promotion was quite a novelty at that time. Book exhibitions were the more common venue for attracting book distributors who were a major force in deciding a book’s fate in the market. Gorgeous Guy was ready to make its debut at the Beijing Book Exhibition in September. This is one of the most important exhibitions for publishing houses and Lai was well prepared. She had two super-sized posters erected in the front door of the exhibition museum at a favoured spot where anyone entering could hardly miss them. The main event for Gorgeous Guy was a book launch inside a conference room. A former child star was invited to be the hostess, which was also the idea of Lai’s young employees. The room was filled with reporters from a

¹¹ This technique, called “duyin,” is usually used for fine postcards. The printing factory Lai worked with was then a high-end one, with its base in Hong Kong.
variety of newspapers who had been invited by Lai in advance.

Upon leaving, every reporter was given a small paper bag containing promotional materials and, most importantly, an envelope containing a small amount of money (the equivalent of $30 to $50 Canadian dollars). It was called a “transportation fee,” the grey money that the reporters received from editors who were hoping to gain favourable media exposure for their books. For this sum of money, one hoped that the reporter would include several lines regarding the book in his or her newspaper. Editors needed to pay five or six times this amount of money if they wanted to have a full book review appear in the literary or cultural section of newspapers or in professional publications such as China’s Reading Paper and China’s Book Weekly. However, unlike in Western countries, such book reviews were often written by the editors themselves or by their employees rather than by independent reviewers. Such reviews were more a promotional device than independent criticism.12

Well versed in the mechanisms of gaining reviews, Lai knew that she couldn’t rely too much on the reporters who appeared at the book launch. The more important negotiations were made at dinner tables with several media people who had worked with her on previous projects. She received a valuable suggestion from an editor at Beijing Evening Daily. For a book like Gorgeous Guy there would not be much to talk about in a review regarding its literary merits but it could generate much discussion regarding issues to do with teen popular culture, a vibrant and sometimes chaotic field in which controversies generated a great deal of attention. Thus, Lai was advised to invent controversial reviews about Gorgeous Guy rather than solicit regular favourable ones.

Lai not only took up this suggestion by producing reviews containing harsh or arguable points on Gorgeous Guy, she also extended this strategy to the online promotion of the novel. As soon as the book was put on the market a website dedicated to it with contributions ostensibly from readers appeared. All of her team members, even friends of theirs, were asked to leave fake comments online regarding the novel in order to attract readers. Complimentary remarks were certainly welcomed, but the harsh ones which had the ability to arouse debate were even better.

These promotional strategies worked very well. A month later, the bestselling status of the novel was assured. It is noteworthy that Gorgeous Guy cost far less to promote than the

12 It is worth noting that both the reporters and editors believed that they were just doing their jobs rather than self-serving. Such working place bribery is accepted as normal in China.
business novel. The book launch for the latter cost 50,000 RMB (approximately $8,000 CAD), while the former cost only one tenth of that.\textsuperscript{13}

\textit{Gorgeous Guy} was exhibited at the winter book exhibition in Shanghai three months later where there was a surprising competitor. A new book with the title \textit{Wo bushi chongming nvsheng (I Am Not a Smart Girl)} by Dong Xiaolei carried great similarities to \textit{Gorgeous Guy} in many respects from the cover design to the promotional materials. The editor behind the book booth was not a stranger. He was Lai’s former employee with five years of television experience, who had quit his job just before \textit{Gorgeous Guy} came out. By early 2004, there were more imitations of \textit{Gorgeous Guy} appearing as it was viewed as a “phenomenon” in the book market by \textit{Chinese} a leading newspaper in publishing (Tu). The publishing team had mixed feelings toward those imitators, some known to us and some anonymous. While we certainly felt betrayed by them, we also felt in no small way quite flattered.

The new year of 2004 began with the publishing of \textit{Gorgeous Guy 2}. In April, when it was ready to be put on the market, Lai decided to do something big for the promotion of the new book. She wanted to invite the Korean author to do a book tour in China.

In May of 2004, Ke Aitao, the Korean girl writer came to Beijing, accompanied by her father. To Lai’s delight, she had definite star quality. She was good looking, easygoing, and used to being in the spotlight. She was instantly put on tour in six major Chinese cities. She signed autographs in bookstores, and sang or danced a little for her fans since she was unable to speak Chinese. Using translators, reporters from the internet and from the traditional media interviewed her. Her activities were documented online and enthusiastically discussed by her books’ fans.

\textit{Gorgeous Guy 2} did well in the market. Lai found that she had entered a totally new field and she was eager to explore it further. She started to go out to meet movie directors and presidents of entertainment companies in order to seek the opportunity to make a Chinese television drama or movie of \textit{Gorgeous Guy}. \textit{Gorgeous Guy} had been in the process of being adapted into a movie in Korea when Lai had first decided to buy the rights to it. She believed that a movie or TV drama would make far more money than a book as the entertainment business seemed to be more lucrative than the publishing business. Lai had always had a dream of making big money and she could not see why she should not go for it if there were more opportunities in industries other than publishing. She once declared, “Money making is a game for me. I want to

\textsuperscript{13} This information is from personal knowledge.
play it bigger!”

However, while Lai did not mention anything further about an actual move to the entertainment business, the notion did arise when she implemented a new method for the promotion of the upcoming third book in the *Gorgeous Guy* series. It was announced on the website that the house, together with a cultural company, was looking for a leading actor for a soon-to-be-made *Gorgeous Guy* movie. Anyone who was interested was encouraged to send a photograph as well as a completed reader’s feedback questionnaire regarding the new book. Before long, letters were arriving in large numbers from young readers. They wouldn’t know that their dreams quickly ended up on storage shelves after being reviewed for fun during lunch breaks.

In July 2004, it was time for me to say goodbye. I was leaving for Canada to visit my husband not knowing if I would return after my vacation was over. I found myself recalling one promotional event during which a mother had approached me and asked, “Do you think this is a good book for a young girl to read?” I remembered that I had been a little taken aback by such a bold question. On the one hand, I was feeling satisfaction that our hard work had finally paid off. On the other hand, the old literature teacher in me—the lover of the classics—had rendered me unable to defend this beautiful looking tribute to the marketing, not the literary arts.

### 4.6 Reunion

In 2009, early December, I was in Beijing to catch my flight back to Canada. With Qin spending his carefree retirement days in the United States and Yan serving another stint at an embassy, after my five year absence, Lai was the only old friend from the World Affairs Press I was able to see. Lai did not work for World Affairs Press any longer. One year after my departure, the president had died of a sudden illness. Lai had been increasingly conflicted over many issues in the house and she did not get along with the new president. She then decided to leave with her entire team having accepted a better offer from another house. Her team, which had expanded to 15 employees, produced a net income greater than that of World Affairs Press with its more than 100 employees.

We met for lunch in a chic vegetarian restaurant inside a new book plaza and continued to talk together right through dinner. The catching-up part was taken care of in a few minutes while Lai spent most of the time talking about Buddhism. She had become a devoted follower as many
successful Beijing businesspersons had. Apparently, she was not entirely fulfilled by playing the money game in the publishing industry.

Lai brought me two new titles from her work as a gift. They were literary translations from Germany and France. She added as a note, “Books of high literary quality sell quite well, mostly by themselves, though it may take a longer time. Books with big promotion do not always win.” Gorgeous Guy was not mentioned. She had produced one more youth novel about martial arts authored by a fourteen-year-old girl, which was not very successful. After switching to the new house, she had withdrawn from this area.
Chapter 5:  Rebelling for Success: the Publishing of Han Han

In early 2012, Zhao Dingxin, a Chinese sociology professor at the University of Chicago, and Zhou Yiqun, a Chinese professor in the department of Asian Studies at Stanford University, each posted online articles discussing Han Han, a leading youth writer in China. Han was not an object within their respective research fields and they did not seem to have any particular personal interest in Han. Indeed, up to this point, neither of them had apparently read any book published by him. They wrote to join the heated discussion among Chinese intellectuals and professionals from all walks of life on the accusation of Han using ghostwriters for his works. They were involved not because they were particularly concerned about copyright issues, but because of Han’s fame. Over the past decade, Han had become a household name for his versatile public image as a high school dropout, a young literary genius, a professional race car driver, a rebel against the social system and authorities, and, eventually, as a young public intellectual. As one of the most influential figures in present-day China, he was irresistible.

Han’s fame originated from the bestselling novel Triple Door, which he wrote at the age of 17. Afterwards, his public image was colorful and ever shifting as his fame kept growing. In turn, his fame helped to sustain his status as a bestselling author. As the writer who initiated the phenomenon of youth-literature publishing, Han has been one of the most successful authors in this field. Moreover, his rise to fame was inseparably entwined with his adventures in the publishing industry. Han and his publishers are certainly the main characters of this story, with intellectuals and professionals, or more specifically, critics, serving as crucial supporting actors. Without the input of those cultural or intellectual authorities, both in negative and positive ways, the rebellious Han would never have been able to gain the social influence he enjoyed. Accordingly, his adventure in the book market would have turned out differently.

5.1 A High School Dropout

Winning an essay competition helped introduce Han to the publishing world; however, his troubled school life was also a deciding factor in his future success. It seems that an extraordinary literary talent and unpromising academic performance worked hand in hand to make Han achieve great success in publishing.
Han was born in a lower-middle class family in 1982 in a suburb of Shanghai. His father was the editor of a local government sponsored newspaper and his mother was an accountant for a social welfare institution. Being typical Chinese parents, what they wanted most was that their only son achieve success at school. However, Han was not an excellent student. When he was young, neighbours frequently witnessed his father chasing and berating him because of his low school examination scores. Han’s father had sought ways and paid much higher tuition to get his son into a better junior high school, but it did not work well for Han (R.Han).

In 1998, Han was admitted to the prestigious Shanghai No.52 High School due to his talent as a long distance runner. In Chinese high schools, especially those with strong reputations, high marks are all that matter. Students with athletic talent are usually marginalized because of their typically below average academic grades. Han trumped this athletic type because of his attitude. He seemed not to care about school at all and sat in class without paying any attention to his teachers and instead occupied himself with the things he preferred. What he did most was write. He would read some part of his pieces to his friends, who were often quite entertained by them. Though belonging to the marginalized group at school, Han enjoyed some popularity in another way. A quiet-spoken young boy, Han was also good looking and had a natural charisma, which drew a group of followers. For example, he had a habit of eating instant noodles during lunch break and his preferred brand of the noodles soon became popular among fellow students (M.Chen).

To his teachers, Han’s popularity was meaningless. His low performance already harmed their job evaluations and from their experience, they knew the limits of how far such a seemingly attractive personality could go if not backed by a decent college degree. Mostly likely, Han would end up miserable and stuck at the bottom of society. In the eyes of his teachers, Han was apparently heading in that direction even if he was only a high school freshman. They might have been right if Han had not won the New Concept Essay Competition in March 1999 (R.Han).

It seemed to be destined that Han would win. Han did not even know of it at first. His father submitted two of his essays without his knowledge. The selection committee, which consisted of well-regarded writers of books for children and adults, critics, and university professors, was so impressed by his two essays that they could hardly believe that a young student wrote them. Some wondered if they were written by an adult on behalf of Han. According to the rules of the competition, the participants were asked to write an in-class essay
after passing the first selection round. Han was one of those asked to come back for the second round of writing. While the committee was eager to meet Han to find out the “truth,” he did not show up due to a failed delivery of the attendance notice. Out of a desire not to let any talent go unrecognized, after learning about the mistake, the committee phoned Han before the winners list came out, and asked him to come in right away for a make-up session.

Han proved to the committee that more than merely being able to write at a much advanced level for his age, he was, in fact, a literary genius. To reflect the philosophy of the essay competition advocating “original and creative writing,” the committee gave Han a writing assignment determined by a spontaneous act. In this case, one of the judges dropped a piece of paper into a teacup. That simple act defined the assignment and with a time limit of three hours, Han was asked to write anything he saw fit. In only an hour, Han finished a 1000-character essay, entitled, “Seeing People through a Cup.” It featured philosophical thoughts, an abundance of references to the Chinese classics, and a clever and humorous language style. The committee was extremely impressed with Han’s essay and his name was immediately added to the list of first-prize winners of the competition, which came out in the afternoon the same day.

The local Shanghai newspapers extensively covered the result of the competition. More than the other first-prize winners, Han caught the attention of the reporters when they learned about his unusually poor academic achievement at school. During his freshman year, Han had failed all seven subjects including literature. This shocking contrast served as an ideal example to question the problems of the Chinese education system against which the competition was launched in the first place. At first, the reporters tended to interpret Han’s low performance as the incapacity of the school system to support students with special talents.¹⁴ Before long, some educators and teachers offered different opinions arguing that it was Han’s own fault as he had been unwilling to comply with school norms and expectations. The topic was then expanded to include the question of whether China should abandon its Yingshi jiaoyu (exam-oriented education) to adopt Suzhi jiaoyu (quality education). Seen as a victim of the Chinese education system, Han received much wider attention during the ever-increasing debates (M.Chen).

*Mengya,* the organizer of the New Concept Essay Competition, was glad to see the media’s interest in Han and did its part to help. Zhao Changtian, the editor-in-chief of *Mengya*

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¹⁴ The way in which Chinese teachers taught literature echoed that of the former Soviet Republic, and it had a tendency to dissect a literary piece to find out “its central meaning”, implications, and writing skills. Therefore, it was often criticized for killing rather than inspiring students’ imaginations.
(also the chairperson of the selection committee), recommended Han’s manuscript-- this is what had occupied him during his classes—to a publishing house. *Mengya* had launched the New Concept Essay Competition as part of the magazine’s survival plan during the new economic era and had decided to expand across the nation the following year. Han would make a good spokesperson to help the continuing success of the competition (C. Zhao, “Juechu”).

While Han was achieving fame in society, his school life continued to deteriorate. Han was already repeating the first year of school and it seemed that he would still not make it to the second year. To be fair, Han’s school made special efforts to accommodate their newly famous student such as assigning him a single dorm room and allowing him to skip some classes. For his part, Han appeared willing to cooperate, shutting himself up in the dorm to concentrate on his studies. However, none of those efforts was fruitful. He eventually decided to drop out of high school after he obtained a contract for his manuscript from a national literature publishing house (R. Han).

Containing obvious autobiographical elements, Han’s manuscript was about a young boy’s frustrating transition from junior high school to high school, as well as his ill-fated first love. The protagonist, Lin Yuxiang, felt afraid to express his love to his dream girl because she was a much better student than he. Even if she had been interested in him, he would not have been able to attend the same high school she was determined to attend. But she was interested, and, ironically, as she chose a lesser quality school in order to be with him, Lin instead was able to gain admission into the better school, in part because of his sport talents and in part due to his parents’ efforts.

The manuscript had been kept in the Shanghai Literature House on the recommendation of the *Mengya* editor Zhao for nine months, but it was eventually turned down: “The manuscript lacks something upbeat and optimistic, while it has too much dark and ambiguous stuff” (M. Chen). Han’s manuscript did indeed contain some unusual and disturbing elements. For example, he made a comparison between teachers who offered private tutoring services after school and prostitutes, stating, “Teachers are worse than prostitutes, for the latter make money by giving people pleasure while the former do so by giving people pain” (24). This was unheard of in a country where traditionally students were advised to treat teachers as their parents.

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15 I have translated all quotations of Chinese materials into English throughout and kept the Chinese originals in the footnote. The quotation here is that “老师比妓女厉害多了。妓女赚钱，是因为妓女给了对方快乐；老师挣钱，却因为给了对方痛苦。”
Besides this, the house might also have worried about how Han’s fame might reflect on them. No matter how much attention Han had been able to generate in the public, especially for parents who had school age students, Han was simply a bad student. In Chinese school culture, students are usually grouped as “good students” or “bad students” according to their exam marks. Being a “bad student” not only pertains to his or her studying ability, but also implies a moral problem. To some extreme minds, a bad student does not deserve to get anything good. It was said that the selection committee of the New Concept Essay Competition had received a call from a parent protesting that the committee gave the first prize to a bad student, Han Han (M.Chen). The Shanghai house, cognizant of the dangers, refused to take a risk with Han whose fame had become increasingly controversial after the competition.

Fortunately for Han, traditional values were changing and what parents complained about was becoming the very thing that young students welcomed. While under review by the Shanghai Literature House, a small part of Han’s manuscript was published by a magazine. Before long, Han received over 10,000 letters from young students across the country. A more adventurous editor, Yuan Min from the Writers Publishing House in Beijing, who was also the publisher of the collection of the winning essays from the New Concept Essay Competition, decided to try this declined manuscript. To Han, this was a better opportunity because the Writers Publishing House, as a house on the national level, enjoyed higher recognition among literary readers. He rushed to meet Yuan after finishing his evening classes and was offered a contract during their first meeting (R.Han).

This contract helped to put an end to Han’s struggles with school. Han decided to drop out. Hearing of his decision, one of his teachers questioned him about how he would make a living without even a high school diploma. Han answered with confidence, “On my book royalties.” He was laughed at for his naïveté (M.Chen). Teachers always know better—most professional Chinese writers could barely survive on their book revenues!

One year after winning the competition, in April 2000, Han was accompanied by his father to the principal’s office to take care of the paperwork regarding his withdrawal where they were made to wait while the principal chatted leisurely with a student who was soon leaving to study in the United States. The principal turned cold when starting to process the documents for Han (R.Han). He might well have read Han’s decision as a betrayal not only of his particular school but also of the entire education system—something a large part of the public would also feel later.
The father and son swallowed this humiliation. Both knew that, given his performance, Han did not really have the choice of continuing school. Han moved on, equipped with the soon-to-be published manuscript entitled *Triple Door,* as a high school drop out with quite controversial fame.

### 5.2 Han Han and the State-Owned Publishing Houses

Yuan Min, from the Writers Publishing House, offered Han Han a contract, although not without people inside the house doubting who would buy a novel written by a 17-year-old (Yuan, “Wobian”). That Yuan was able to insist on her choice was thanks to the structural reform happening in the publishing houses. The Writers Publishing House was a forerunner in this aspect. Actually, World Affairs Press had borrowed some strategies from it.

Then in her mid-forties, Yuan was a graduate from a writing program at Beijing University. She was new at her job in the publishing industry. She had worked as a journalist for an economic newspaper for five years before joining the Writers Publishing House. The house, located in Beijing, was under the direct leadership of the Chinese Writers’ Association, which gradually lost their power in the economic era. Unlike the World Affairs Press, without a rich father and thus having to rely on itself, the Writers Publishing House became successful in the 1990s by repackaging domestic “serious” literature writers and turning them into bestselling authors (Kong 43-54). Yuan came to the house when it attempted to recruit new editors with media experience as promoting and marketing had become critical elements of book publishing.

As a newcomer, Yuan realized that she had to find new publishing resources to create her own list as senior editors had already taken up the lucrative existing resources of the house. She was soon attracted by the New Concept Essay Competition and obtained the rights to publish its winning essays. Instead of following the traditional idea of making the essay collection supplementary educational material, Yuan promoted the collection by stressing it as fresh, new, creative expressions of the only-child generation. The collection was well received by students and became a hit in the book market after she put out several well-crafted reviews offering controversial opinions on these writings and on literary teaching in Chinese schools (Yuan, “Youxin”). After all, as a former reporter, she knew how to attract public attention.

In the same vein, Yuan’s decision to publish Han was more due to his ability to attract media interest than his literary talent. The media’s interest in Han intensified and spread from
Shanghai to Beijing after the news was released that he had dropped out of school and yet was about to be a published writer. People heatedly discussed whether it was wise for Han to drop out. Han’s bold responses revealed a rebellious spirit, for which the public was unprepared. Regarding his grades, Han shamelessly declared: “seven red lights will shine on my future” (“red light” here implies failing a subject). When Fudan University, an elite university located in Shanghai, offered him an opportunity to audit some classes there, Han declined, claiming that he would rather pursue his own road in real life. These sorts of remarks sounded quite offensive to the public. Accordingly, the media shifted from depicting Han as a victim of the Chinese education system to more of a rebellious youth firing an open attack on the education system, or, at another level, the traditional way of living. While some people praised Han’s courage to choose his life path, many more people criticized Han for lacking the ability to conform to the social rules -- a characteristic believed to be typical of the only-child generation. Han thus turned into a controversial national figure.16

The publishing contract that Han obtained from Yuan significantly added fuel to the above discussions surrounding Han, which must have been something that Yuan was glad to see. However, how to manage Han’s controversial fame to achieve success in the book market was the major task Yuan was facing when publishing Han’s Triple Door.

During the editing and production process of Triple Door, the first thing Yuan wanted to take care of was the censorship issue. Censorship is a tricky issue in the Chinese publishing industry with which even veteran editors such as Qin, the director of the World Affairs Press, constantly wrestle. There are mostly vague guidelines, and not many concrete and specific rules to follow. In practice, editors were often left to rely on the experiences of their own or other senior editors to make appropriate decisions.17 Yuan did not disclose the details of her own censorship of Han’s manuscript; instead, she just mentioned that Han was willing to cooperate and she was quite satisfied with her young writer’s deftness at making revisions. She commented: “His revised work contained the gist of his writing intact but at the same time he has taken care of what you might have worried about.”18 The final draft was eventually published without

16 See Han Renjun My Son Han Han, Chapter 5-6; Wang Fan Archival of Han Han, Chapter 3.
17 It is extremely important for Chinese editors to be careful with some sensitive political issues. For example, the authorities should always be respected and Taiwan should belong to China. Sex is another sensitive area which may lead to the banning of books. So, Yuan Min might have advised Han Han how to treat authority figures in his novel with tact.
18他对小说的修改既完全地保留了自己，又让你觉得你所担忧的某些东西他已极有分寸地做了处理.
further revision (Yuan, “Wobian”).

Yuan also invited her former teacher, Cao Wenxuan, a well-known children’s writer and a literature professor at Beijing University, to write a preface to *Triple Door*. Cao, who served as a member of the selection committee for the New Concept Essay Competition, elaborated on the literary merit of the novel. He summarized several characteristics of Han’s writing, including deep thoughts, sharp satire, personalized prose style, and wisdom, all of which people usually do not associate with a young writer. “Han Han’s writing is very mature for his age. You would not know that this is written by a young student if not told so”²⁹ (Cao, “Xu”).

Yuan valued her young writer’s opinion. In response to Han’s special concern for the book’s cover design, Yuan invited a high school student who had won a major design competition to do the job for *Triple Door*. She believed that the young designer would better understand the equally young writer. The resulting cover of a baby sleeping upside down inside a belly baffled the distribution staff of the Writers’ Press. They wondered if the book was about advocating for China’s only-one-child policy, but it was readily appreciated by Han, and later on by his young readers, as they believed the cover conveyed the loneliness and the struggle experienced by this generation (Yuan, “Wobian”).

*Triple Door* was published in June 2000. It sold 30,000 copies within three days and 1.3 million copies in the first year. This huge market success brought another round of intensive media coverage, which eventually evolved into what was referred to as the “Han Han Phenomenon.” The topic of the media coverage still focused on education and the only-child generation, but the tone now was not as favorable toward this newly successful writer. It seems that Han’s success brought him more and more criticism. On one occasion, Han was invited to appear on a talk show of CCTV-2, the second channel of China Central Television, where he was “attacked” by a group of good students selected and invited by the show, and by special guests who were professors or education experts. The audience all agreed that leaving school was completely Han’s own fault. One expert even predicted that Han was doomed to failure in his future. Throughout the show, Han seldom uttered a word, remaining silent, cold and showing little desire to communicate with the audience (“Hanhan xianxiang”).

With the possible intention of counteracting the increasingly negative attention, Yuan herself wrote a postscript in the 2003 edition of *Triple Door* entitled, “The Stories Before and

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²⁹ 韩寒的文字很成熟，事实上，如果不知道的话，很难相信是他这个年纪写的。
After Publishing *Triple Door,*” which delivered a straightforward message asserting that Han was not simply a rebel. First, she pointed out that Han was not as bad as the students and the media had depicted him and that he had entered that prestigious Shanghai high school with fairly good entrance grades. She proceeded to say that Han once talked with her in private and expressed his longing for a university life. She also mentioned Han’s willingness to work co-operatively as he had demonstrated in the revision of the manuscript. Finally, she shared her personal perceptions of Han. According to her observations, Han was a shy, polite, quiet young man, which was a sharp contrast to the public image of him as portrayed in the media. Yuan’s efforts to balance Han’s controversial image showed her clear understanding of the important elements of publishing a bestselling book in China in the new century: controversy helps, but it must be contained within certain limits, especially when publishing for the high school student market. Although young students loved controversy, their parents would protest unconventional attitudes.

While Yuan managed to stress the traditional side of her rebellious writer, Han made another radical decision. Now with an established reputation as a bestselling youth writer, instead of proceeding to become a professional writer, Han chose to become a race car driver. Han had moved from Shanghai to live alone in a suburb of Beijing after the success of his first book, believing that Beijing was a better place for a person to cultivate a cultural career (M. Chen). Now, however, with the huge profits he had made from his book, Han decided to pursue a dream associated with cars and sports that he had long cultivated. This unexpected decision brought a glorious renewal to his rebellious image, and made him more appealing to his youthful readers. He was everything they were not, but wished they were. Race car driving was a new profession in China (no more than 20 people pursued such a career in the country, according to Han’s information in his later book, *I Drift*) that was not accessible to ordinary people, and certainly not to high school students. Moreover, with this decision, Han distanced himself from the spotlight and placed himself in a marginalized minority group, which made him look even more appealing and “cool” to the young.

Although having no desire to commit himself to being a professional writer, Han did not abandon writing and publishing. He needed royalties not only for basic survival, but also to support his new and very expensive career. He did not hesitate to confess that he would return to publishing a book whenever he was short of funds, a statement he repeated over the coming years (Fang). This attitude was shared by later youth writers who were comfortable in admitting
that although they loved writing, they did not believe that it was possible to take it seriously (Y.Zhao).

Yuan published two more books by Han. *Xian shaonian yiyang feichi (Like a Speeding Youth)* is a novel reflecting his experience as a racecar driver and *Tong gao 2003 (Press Release 2003)* is a collection of essays on his opinions on school and education problems. Both novels feature a lonely adolescent male youth protagonist. The collection of opinion-driven essays became Han’s major type of writing. Both books, plus another essay collection called *Lingxia yidu (Below Zero Degrees)*, published by a local Shanghai publishing house in 2001, continued to achieve success in the book market, though none on the scale of *Triple Door*.

After a short but quite successful career, Yuan left the Writers Publishing House in 2004 to manage a literary magazine where she hoped to find the fulfillment of her old literary dreams. While other publishers (such as Lai of the World Affairs Press) inspired by the success of Han and other youth writers, rushed to explore the newly emerging book market for youth readers, Yuan did not publish any youth writer except for Han. Instead, she focused on new types of popular adult literature such as TV drama novels and internet literature (G.Zhou).

Yuan and her young author had maintained a warm relationship throughout their collaboration. Yuan showed genuine concern and affection toward Han. She had for example advised him not to drop out of school when she offered him the contract (“Wobian”). Meanwhile, Han addressed her as “aunt” not as the standard “teacher” a Chinese writer would use to address his or her publisher. In later articles when referring to Yuan, he describes her as a “benefactor” ("Taijin"). Here this rebellious youth writer expressed his gratitude using rather traditional manners.

With Yuan’s departure, Han changed publishers and worked with another “aunt” editor, Wen Hang, at another state-owned house, *Zhongguo qingnian chubanshe* (the Chinese Youth Publishing House). There he published an essay collection called *Du (Poison)*, and a martial arts novel, *Chang’an luan (The Chaotic Chang’an City)*, which was a light and interesting read, but not impressive in terms of plot and character development. Han’s books continued to sell well, with readers caring more about the colorful persona that Han had created than his actual work (Fang).

Wen brought a special understanding to Han’s writing. She had twenty-five years of experience as a professional editor of children’s books. She wrote a preface for *The Chaotic
Chang’an City, pointing out that Han’s writings should be placed within the tradition of children’s literature in China. In her opinion, Han’s works were youth-centered, constituting a sharp contrast to adult-centered writings that were produced by adult authors for young readers. She believed that Han had brought to the literary world the unique perspective of a youth interpreting the adult world (1-4). However, her insights did not bring anything new to Han’s work, for she worked with Han for only a little more than one year. Wen, like Yuan, was a loving and caring “aunt” figure to the young author. Both of them had paid attention to the literary talents of Han, but neither of them intended to cultivate him in this regard; instead, they simply exploited these talents as a selling point for his works.

Wen retired in 2005. Han left the Chinese Youth Publishing House after her retirement, which he presented as the official reason to the public. It was revealed in later years, however, that Han had been having some financial conflicts with the house, which had failed to pay as much in royalties to him as promised (Fang).

5.3 Han Han and the Private Publishers

Han had a brief working period with another state-owned publishing house, Jieli chubanshe (the Jieli Publishing House), before he switched to working with private publishers near the end of 2005. Lu Jinbo became his major publisher from then on.

How Han was published by private publishers is a complex story. It concerns, first, Han’s efforts to reshape his image and to reinvigorate his fame, which would guarantee sustaining the successful publishing of his work, and, second, the role of Lu, and what he might have done behind the scenes.

5.3.1 Han Han: From Youth Rebel to Young Public Intellectual

After Triple Door, the publishing of Han transformed into a case of publishing a celebrity. Fame was the key to his success in publishing, and his image as a youth rebel spoke more strongly than his books to his readers. 2005-2006 was a critical period of transition for Han. As a race car driver, Han had made significant progress by becoming one of the most competitive drivers in the field; at the same time, the bestselling author was losing sales. His latest book, Jiu zheyang piaolai piaoqu (I Drift), published by the Jieli Publishing House in December, 2005, was a collection of his photographs and reflections on his race car driving experience. Han was not reluctant to admit that he wrote it to make quick money. The book sold 300,000 copies,
which was not bad in itself but did not measure up to his previous work (Fang). Without proper action, it would not be long before Han was totally forgotten by the book market, which was his only source of income. Luckily for Han, the rapid development of the internet in China, and especially the flourishing of personal blogs, helped to bring him back into the spotlight (M.Chen).

During 2005-2006, the online community in China was experiencing a critical transition from internet forums and discussion boards to personal blogs. A sphere of alternative public opinion was gradually taking shape online, where intellectuals, professionals, and grass-roots “netizens” participated with great enthusiasm in the effort to voice their own opinions and to seek “truth,” that is, what underlies the coverage of the ideologically controlled official media. They wanted real opinions about current affairs (Ji). Han was invited to open a personal blog online, and he successfully came back to the spotlight by sparking online controversial dialogues with famous cultural and intellectual figures.

The Han-Bai controversy, an online debate which occurred in 2006 between Han and a noted literary critic, Bai Ye (also a seasoned chronicler of contemporary Chinese writing), over issues of youth-literature, was Han’s impressive online debut. It seemed to be a pure accident at the beginning. In late February, 2006, Bai posted an article called “Balinghou de xianzhuang yu weilai” (“Status and Future of Youth-Literature”) on his personal blog. This article was originally written for a conference on the writings of youth writers, and afterwards it was published by a literary magazine (“Balinghou” 32-37). The Sina website, one of the most popular websites in China, was promoting its new blog service at that time. As a promotional strategy called “Celebrity Blog,” many celebrities were invited to open a blog account in it. Bai and Han were among those invited. In hoping to reach out to more readers, Bai posted the article online. Indeed, it did attract one special reader – Han.20

In the article, Bai offered his observations on the flourishing of youth-literature in recent years, confirming that “youth writers are becoming a phenomenon.”21 Bai expressed his reservations regarding youth-literature, believing that “youth writers are entering the market, but not the serious literary arena; youth writers have not yet become real writers.”22 For Bai’s

20 For Han-Bai controversy, there is extensive media coverage. The articles by Xia Yu and Xiong Yanqin are available to readers who want a clear depiction of the event.
21 青春文学已经成为一种现象。
22 青春文学作者进入了市场，还没有进入文坛。
generation, a typical way for a writer to emerge is as follows: first he/she is discovered and published by noted literary magazines, then receives positive reviews or praise from critics, and finally publishes a novel in a few years that would establish his/her reputation as a writer. In other words, it was editors and critics rather than the market that decided who is a real writer. He cited the writings of Han and other writers to support his judgments. At the conclusion of the article, he kindly encouraged young writers to work hard in order to become real, serious writers in the future. The opinions expressed in this article were exactly what people would expect to hear from a senior cultural critic, but it was unacceptable to Han, who responded with an article of his own, pasted on his blog, with the provocative title, “Wentan shi ge pi, shui ye bie zhuangbi” (“The Literary Circle is a Fart, and No One Needs to Be Pretentious”). He declared that “anyone who could write is already a writer, and youth writers do not need anyone’s permission to get this identity.”

He sneered at Bai’s old-fashioned mindset of acquiring the authority to judge others, making it clear that youth writers had not the slightest interest in joining the Writer’s Association. In addition to the strong emotion, there was coarse language regarding body parts scattered throughout the article (“Wentan”).

Bai was taken aback by Han’s response, to which he replied with calmness and dignity, both as a professional critic and a caring adult, clarifying some of his points, and, more importantly, reminding the young writer of appropriate manners. He stated that Han had crossed the boundaries of literary debate into the realm of humiliation and personal attack (“Wode”). Han, totally ignoring the etiquette lesson, interpreted Bai’s response as criticism. His blog entries, which were clever, humorous, and caustic, immediately drew followers who showed their support by leaving comments, or, more accurately, curses, dressed in obscene and profane language, on Bai’s blog site. Bai was stunned at this level of outrageous online attack, and came to realize that online debate was a totally different world, and there was no way for him, an identified public figure, to reason with those anonymous internet users. He announced the closure of his blog one week later when it was almost crashed by Han’s supporters (Y.Xia).

Bai’s withdrawal brought a few of his supporters to join the battle in order to bring justice to him. Jie Xizhang, a fellow critic, advised youth writers that they should stay open to criticism and be grateful to Bai, who, known as “the caretaker of literature,” had contributed to the success of young writers and the publishing of their books. He was so offended by Han that he claimed

23 任何人都可以成为作家。
that, “If he was my son, I would slap him on the face!” (“Baiye”). A veteran writer, Lu Tianming, also spoke up with concern: the way Bai was treated by the younger generation reminded him of how the “monster” little red guards of the Cultural Revolution had treated their seniors (“Hanbai”).24 This selfless intention only brought Lu his own first-hand experience with those new online little red guards. The verbal abuse expanded to such a level that Lu’s son, a famous movie director, and one of his son’s friends, a famous pop musician and lyric writer, joined the debate and thus involved more noted cultural figures (Y.Xia).

None of this had any influence on Han and his followers. Instead, the more serious Bai’s side was becoming, the more Han’s side seemed to enjoy it. Han seemed able to defeat his “enemy” with the ease of a needle deflating a balloon. His responses brought delight to his followers. Han declared victory after “the team of father, son, and friend” shut down their blogs and left (Y.Xia).

With such renowned people involved, this chaotic online war was widely covered by the traditional media. Critics, editors, publishers, intellectuals, and academics were interviewed for their opinions on various topics, such as youth writers, youth-literature publishing, and the morality of the only-child generation. Basically, they held opinions similar to Bai and his supporters. To further the argument, issues such as commercialization were raised as the major reason for the troublesome behaviors of Han and his followers (Y.Xiong). Chinese intellectuals were generally unhappy with the rapid social and cultural changes caused by the commercialization, and discussion of youth-literature and its writers seemed to provide them with an outlet for expressing their anger.25

Interestingly, even though the intellectuals criticized Han and his generation, they did not necessarily support Bai. As the Chinese writer Gu Qingsheng stated, “The mostly meaningful achievement of this debate was that Han Han exposed Bai’s hypocrisy and the corrupt book reviewing system in China”26 (“Cong”). It had emerged that Bai was not only a critic, but also a part-time publisher in collaboration with some publishing houses. At issue was the way in which

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24 During the Cultural Revolution, on many documented occasions “Little Red Guards” publicly criticized, beaten, and even killed adults who were their former teachers, supervisors or respected senior professionals. They also reported to the government against their parents or relatives which, in some cases, led to their arrest.

25 In the 1980s, due to the “Culture Mania” that pervaded the country, Chinenese intellectuals had an extraordinary status in society and enjoyed high popularity. In the 1990s, with the deepening of the economic reform, they were replaced by merchants as heroes and their glory waned. For contemporary Chinese intellectuals, therefore, commercialization has a bitter implication.

26 韩白之争最有价值的，是暴露了白烨的虚伪以及中国书评制度的腐败。
Bai profited from these double identities: in order to promote the publishing projects he participated in, Bai used his expertise as a highly regarded critic to write positive book reviews. Moreover, he used his position as an institutional expert to set up a literary award, and then gave the award to a book he submitted as a publisher. As addressed by Han jokingly, it was like that the judge was at the same time the mother of a contestant, so there was no way for her to be fair (“Cijiu”). Thus, when the critic Bai kindly admonished youth writers about their market success, he himself was actually a part of this destructive market. Bai’s double identities, as well as some of his ungraceful promotional activities, had not been entirely unknown to the media, but by integrating the heretofore scattered information in a powerful essay with his signature sharp satire, Han not only struck a death blow to Bai’s personal morality but also expanded his criticism to the entire corrupt authority class in China. This sentiment was especially echoed by the intellectuals who held a traditional ideal and had long been despising people like Bai selling their dignity for profit. In light of this larger issue of corruption, Han and his supporters’ problems with inappropriate manners were largely ignored. Consequently, although his new fame was still controversial, Han’s image as a rebellious young man against the corrupt authority class appeared quite positive (Y.Xia).

It is worth noting that the chaotic nature and massive scale of the Han-Bai controversy was not entirely naturally born. It was said that the Sina website made great efforts to fan the flames of the controversy by hiring people to paste controversial comments online. Whether or not this is true, the Han-Bai controversy was surely a benchmark for the development of Sina blogs, which would soon become the most popular site among bloggers (Yue). Some newspapers, mostly at the local or provincial level, out of desperation to increase their sales numbers, also contributed to the controversy. For example, the writer Lu was tricked by a friend into expressing his opinions on the controversy in what he thought was a private communication, but his opinion appeared in the newspaper for which his friend worked, after being deliberately distorted to be much more radical (Lu “Wo”).

After the Han-Bai controversy, Han continued his online war with modern Chinese poets (September, 2006), a famous pop singer (April, 2007), and affiliates of the Chinese Writers’ Association, with each causing a strong sensation in online communities and successfully serving as eye-popping titles for newspapers (Ya, Tao and Y.Yu). Besides picking fights with celebrity figures, Han also started to write blog entries commenting on current social affairs starting in 2006, and, with over 580 million hits, Han became the most famous blogger not just in
China, but in the world (Hewitt). It became a habit of his readers to rush to see Han’s opinion whenever something of social and cultural interest occurred.

By 2008, a great portion of Han’s blog followers were mature and sophisticated readers. They were attracted to Han not just for his opinions themselves, but because of the way he expressed them: Han was seen as owning a fresh, genuine, humorous, and powerful voice, which seemed particularly enchanting when used for important and legitimate subjects (social events) rather than for personal attacks. As well, Han’s talent in revising Triple Door seemed to have developed to the next level, for he was admired for his use of wit and subtle allusion in his writings, playing a cat-and-mouse game with Chinese government censors. He was also praised for his straightforwardness and courage in speaking out for ordinary people (Luo, “Gongmin”).

Resonating with the sentiments of his readers and fans, mainstream newspapers started to pay attention to the seriousness underlying this former rebellious youth who had just made it back with several online controversies. Han had transformed himself into a social critic in the internet sphere, and eventually evolved into a public intellectual figure, in the perception of the traditional media. Among the social media favouring Han, “nanfang ziyoupai meiti” (the Southern Liberal Media Group) was his strongest supporter. This media group, consisting of several newspapers and magazines, was located in Guangdong province close to Hong Kong. The group was popular among readers but was unfavorable to the government due to its political standpoint. Accordingly, this media group showed special interest in Han because of his rebellious attitudes. To some degree, it attempted to promote its own value system by praising Han (G.Chen). In addition to this media group, a few influential individual intellectuals were particularly active in extolling Han’s virtues. One social critic, Liang Wendao from Hong Kong, even saw Han as the “future Lu Xun,” who was one of the greatest writers in China and considered the soul of the Chinese people in modern history (F.Zhou). With the endorsement of those public figures, the former high school dropout Han was depicted as growing up to be a responsible citizen and youth opinion leader. His image had become quite positive, with his controversial attitudes and behaviours diminishing (Yongheng Chen).

Han, as the most popular youth writer and blogger in China, had also seen his popularity spread overseas. In April, 2010, Han was short-listed by Time magazine as one of the 100 most influential people in the world, and the British magazine New Statesman in September listed Han 48th in its listing of the World’s Fifty Most Influential Figures for 2010. He has been the subject of articles in the New York Times and the New Yorker. His name was linked to the president of the
United States—he was on the list of the world’s 100 most influential figures next to Obama. He was interviewed by CNN regarding Internet censorship. Foreign coverage helped to solidify the influence of Han inside China. Zhang Ming, a history professor from Renming University of China, commented: “One hundred Chinese professors combined together could not beat Han Han in terms of influential power” (Yongheng Chen).

In sharp contrast to the constant changes in Han’s image and ever-increasing fame, the writer Han seemed to remain fairly consistent. Han published three novels and two selections of blog articles from 2006-2008 with the private publisher Lu Jinbo. The three novels were entitled Yizuo chengchi (A Fortress) in 2006, Guangrong ri (Glory Days) in 2007, and Ta de guo (His Kingdom) in 2008. There are three basic common elements in Han’s novels: a small town youth, a motorcycle or a car, and a girl. The young male protagonist was always wandering and lonely, and his world was unfathomable. As in his previous works, there was not much plot or character development; all of these novels were emotion-driven. The only thing, typical of Han’s writings, to sustain reader’s reading interest was the humorous and cynical prose.

In 2010, Han published another novel, 1988: Woxiang he zhege shijie tantan (1988: I Want to Talk with this World), with another private publisher, Shengda. This novel was welcomed by Han’s book fans, many of whom proclaimed to renew their love for Han, feeling that literary youth Han eventually came back after Triple Door. It generated positive responses from several serious critics, convincing them that Han actually could write (Q.Kong). Han repeated the basic components of his writing in this new novel: a lonely youth drives an old car to pick up a friend who is about to be released from prison. He meets a young, pregnant prostitute on the way, who, by the end of the novel, leaves her baby to him after contracting AIDS. The novel had heavy political implications: the car is named “1988”, which automatically led readers to think of the year of 1989 when the June Fourth Movement, the most critical political event in contemporary China, took place. The friend, a former college student, was held in prison and eventually died there, which was a clear allusion to what had happened to the students participating in the movement. Moreover, the novel was embedded with social concerns as seen through the eyes of the protagonist driving through remote areas of China, as well as through his interaction with the prostitute. Here Han depicted a rural China in sharp contrast to the rising China that the mainstream media was embracing with great enthusiasm. The character development and the plot line of this novel were still weak, but Han demonstrated a quite distinctive and mature narrative voice.
5.3.2 Lu Jinbo: A Hidden Player

Han’s online journey may have appeared to be a one-man adventure, all about him making independent decisions, just as he had done to drop out school and to take up his driving career. However, Han may not have been alone this time: the experiences described above may have been the result of teamwork with Lu, a private publisher with whom Han had worked since late 2005. In other words, the pursuit of profit may have played a major role in the above story of pursuing fame.

It came as no surprise that Han would team up with Lu, for they shared many similarities in personality. Born in the middle of the 1970s, Lu was an adventurous individual. After graduating from college, instead of pursuing a traditional occupation, he became one of the first online writers to appear in the late 1990s. With his light and witty writings, Lu made himself one of the four most well-known writers in online communities. Lu also developed, along with fellow writers, the largest of the Chinese literature websites “Rongshuxia” (Under the Palm Tree). These experiences paved his way to becoming a private publisher focusing on internet literature publishing in the beginning of the new century, as he determined that he would never be able to make a career out of being an online writer (Kun).

Similar to youth-literature, internet literature was a newly emerging publishing area in the new millennium. Unlike the Western notion of online publishing, internet literature publishing in China meant that a publisher used the internet as a publishing resource to find authors and writings and then publish them in hard copy form. In 2002, when he purchased a minor copyright from Han, Lu was still a newcomer to the industry. However, by the end of 2005, when he approached Han for the copyright of a new novel and possible long term cooperation, Lu was able to offer him a colossal sum in advance, hoping that Han could help him to elevate his success to the next level (Kun).

Lu’s secret to achieving quick success in the publishing industry was in his reducing the book business to a simple matter of creating fame and fortune. In publishing online writers, the deciding factor for him was not the literature, but the popularity of the writer within the online community. As a publisher, his task was to transfer the writer’s online fame into the real world. Because the writers and the targeted readers were mostly young professionals who cared about popular culture much more than the literary value of the writings, Lu focused on promoting the writers themselves rather than their works. Lu was very sensitive to popular culture and understood the needs of the younger generation, so he was quite good at creating “topics” for his
writers to attract media interest and the young audience’s attention. Some of his promotional moves were so bold, vulgar, and without boundaries that he developed quite a notorious reputation (Ying Zhang, “Wenhua”).

Even though Lu published Anni Baobei, the most popular writer of internet literature up to that time, internet literature was still marginalized, and could bring Lu only limited rewards. While continuing to cultivate new writers from internet writing communities, Lu sought authors with mainstream success who would not only bring him fortune but also some public recognition. To some degree, signing Han with a huge advance, which was widely covered by the media, was also a self-promotional strategy for Lu and his book company (Ying Zhang, “Wenhua”).

In the following years, Lu enjoyed talking about his writer Han as a charming star with some impressive behaviours; however, the details of their working relationship remain quite elusive. We know for sure that Lu offered critical help in 2005 when Han was under transition. As a publisher who had experience in dealing with fame, Lu understood that popular figures must refresh their image periodically in order not to lose appeal and audience. Lu had implied in interviews with the media inside China (Kun), and later with more directness to a New Yorker journalist in 2011, that he had told Han that his youth rebel image was becoming outdated as he matured into adulthood, so he needed to freshen it in order to sustain his success in publishing (Osnos 53).

Besides this, Lu has not explained how he helped Han achieve this goal, so it is necessary to speculate. It is possible that the Han-Bai controversy was a deliberate ploy of Lu rather than a pure coincidence. Han did not have much experience with the internet, as his driving training was often in remote areas usually without internet access. On the other hand, online debating had its own rules and required a special type of writing, and it needed abundant experience to win over others. As part of the first generation of “netizens” in China who had eventually developed a successful career from it, Lu was especially capable of organizing online arguments in the late 1990s. Han’s switch to writing socially-concerned blogs might also have been influenced by Lu, as the latter once told a reporter clearly that he would like Han to concentrate on writings regarding social and political issues (Kun). In addition, Lu had some personal ties with the liberal media group which contributed to the transformation of Han into a public intellectual (Ying Zhang, “Wenhua”).

From 2006-2008, while cultivating his fame online, Han made some exploration in the
entertainment sphere in the real world. With the emergence of the hit television show *Super Voice Girls* and *Super Voice Boys* (a contest for singing talents, also discussed in 6.2.2 of chapter 6), popular youth culture was flourishing in 2005, and young singers had received great media attention. Viewed as the “Super Boy” of the literary field, Han was reluctant to be left out. In 2006, Han’s debut album, *Shi ba jin* (R-18), was released with all lyrics composed by him. Afterwards Han frequently appeared in commercial events and also took up commercial advertisement work. His name was associated with popular actresses. Han’s rivalry with another youth writer, Guo Jingming, became a constant gossip topic in the newspapers. As a result, instead of educational or cultural sections, Han appeared in the entertainment section of newspapers (N.Liu). How Lu was involved with these elements is not known, but it is clear that these moves perfectly matched Lu’s self-proclaimed publishing strategy: “Let the publishing become an entertainment business. In order to be successful, writers should make efforts to achieve stardom”\(^{27}\) (Kun). It was only after Han’s image as a blogger with social concerns achieved more recognition in 2008 that Han’s involvement with the entertainment world diminished. In fact, Han posted a message in his personal blog of a list of “not-to-dos”, including no advertisements, no interviews, etc, with the clear intention of distinguishing himself from entertainment stars.

Even though the above speculations many never be confirmed, it is still interesting to see how the story could read differently if we draw Lu into the picture. After working together for years, both the writer and the publisher often made almost identical remarks. For example, Han once claimed, “I do not need a market, I myself [am the] market” (“Wo jiushi”). As if to provide a footnote to his writer, Lu bragged in later years, “I could sell more than 100,000 copies if I just put a bundle of empty pages together but have Han Han’s name on the cover”\(^{28}\) (Ying Zhang). The general public gained the impression that Lu was closely involved with the publishing of Han both as his publisher and his agent, although Lu firmly rejected the agent role. Lu even at times deliberately played down their working relationship, only saying that were good buddies, and that he occasionally offered Han advice as an older brother might (Kun). It is obvious that Lu preferred to let Han take full credit, which certainly would make him seem hero-like and even

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27 出版应变得像娱乐业一样。作者如果想成功，就要把自己变成明星。
28 我就是把几十页白纸装订好，写上韩寒的名字，我也能卖十几万册。
more appealing to his young readers.29

Following the pattern of Han’s former “aunt” publishers, Lu also wrote an article about his star writer in 2010. He allocated a great deal of space to depicting Han’s personality, which contained contradictory aspects: Han indulged in new cars and girlfriends, both of which he changed at a rapid rate, but at the same time he was said to prefer a quiet lifestyle—no smoking or drinking, eating foods from make-shift vendors along roadsides, spending most of his time in the countryside with his grandparents, where living conditions were far from comfortable. Simply put, Lu illustrated a contradictory persona, both superficial and substantial, modern and conservative. That these seemingly opposing traits co-existed in one person was a myth, but many of Han’s fans had no problem believing it.

Lu’s attitude toward Han was itself also a bit contradictory in this article. On the one hand, Lu admired Han wholeheartedly, predicting that “Chinese universities will have courses in ‘The Study of Han Han’ in the near future.” On the other hand, Lu pointed out the shortcomings of Han’s writing, stating, “Han Han’s novels were not particularly well crafted – his work was quickly written, short in length, always having good beginnings but very lousy endings.”30 Lu’s remarks were credible -- after all, he was once a popular online writer himself. At first glance, it is hard to understand why he did this to his own writer. However, it may have been a clever promotional strategy. The article was written near the end of 2010, when Han’s fame had already reached its peak. Therefore, mentioning his weakness could not hurt Han at all and instead perhaps would only make both Lu and Han seem honest and real—after all, speaking the truth had become the landmark of Han’s blog writings.

So while we are unable to trace very much in the way of direct influences between Lu and Han, it seems that, to Lu, as long as Han generated fame -- whatever type of fame -- the most important part of the publishing cycle had already been accomplished. Cultivating and maintaining fame and image were the most important publishing activities for both the writer and the publisher; the fame would automatically sell the book. He was correct: Not only did all of Han’s works sell well, but Lu himself and his company became quite well known. In 2009, Lu

29 Unlike the West, China has not yet developed literary agency professionals. Chinese writers rely on themselves to find publishers for their books. Accordingly, a writer who has an agent might be taken by the public as demonstrating that he/she is not creative enough so that he/she requires help from outside. This partly explains why Lu declined to take the role as an agent.

30 韩寒的小说并不是写得特别好。他写得很快，篇幅都不长，开头不错，但结尾很潦草。
was described as “the representative of the new generation of publishers in China” by a Germany newspaper at the Frankfurt book exhibition (Ying Zhang, “Wenhua”).

Lu, however, was not the exclusive publisher of Han. Han worked with another private publishing company as well, the Shengda company in 2009. By the end of the first decade of the new century, the Chinese publishing industry had entered a quite active stage with some large, successful publishing houses listing on the stock market as much more investment flowed into the industry. Shengda was one of the results of this new investment spree. In addition to the novel 1988: I Want to Talk With the World, Han edited a magazine called He cang tuan (Solo Chorus) with Shengda. Inspired by the success of another leading youth writer, Guo Jingming, there was a trend for established youth writers to edit literary magazines for young readers. The first issue came out in 2011, with a circulation of more than 1 million. However, the magazine was terminated after the second issue because of its inappropriate political content.

5.4 Down-Han Movement

On April 1, 2012, Lu Jinbo released an unusual publication entitled Guangming yu leiluo (Glory and Candour), which was basically Han’s handwritten manuscript of Triple Door. In the history of Chinese publishing, only a handful of first-level writers had had their handwritten manuscripts published as a gesture of honouring their literary achievements. Han’s manuscript was, however, not published for this purpose; rather, it was released as an act of defense against the accusation, in late January, 2012, which argued that Han, the former high school dropout, had no capacity for writing at all. It was alleged that everything he had accomplished in publishing belonged to others. His father, who was a literature aficionado, was believed to be the actual writer of Triple Door, while his blog was believed to be written by Lu or someone else he hired. The accusation was named the “Down-Han Movement”, with the focus on Han’s early works, especially Triple Door, and it lasted for more than six months.

The Down-Han Movement bore similarities to the Han-Bai controversy, but with the essential difference that Han in this case was in the position of the critic Bai. It started online, again essentially by accident. A computer technician with the online ID “Wheatfield” posted an article challenging Han’s authorship based on quite thorough research of his early works after noticing a minor conflict between Han’s race car driving schedule and the entry time of a few of his blog articles. Han responded with derogatory words, referring to Wheatfield’s body parts.
However, the strategies that had been so effective in the past in launching attacks backfired when being used to defend himself. It was Han’s very responses that caused much more suspicion toward him than his accuser’s statements, for people started to wonder how it was that a young intellectual who was so sharp at criticizing societal problems could act as a villain toward others’ criticism of himself. Did Han have any real substance to justify his high reputation?

The questions caused many people to look for evidence by analyzing Han’s novels and the video interviews he had done over the years. Over 1,000 articles appeared within two months, which were edited and made into a file by volunteers for readers to download online (Asmallboy). Later, a special website was created for the matter. According to the findings that were disclosed by those amateur detectives, many well-known facts about Han were turned upside down. Not only was Han’s first novel written by his father, they claimed, but Han’s victory in the New Concept Essay Competition was also transformed from a legend into an intricate act of conspiracy: the two essays Han’s father mailed out for Han actually were his own work; Han’s missing the second round of writing was by deliberate design, and at least two judges in the committee, including the one who supervised Han writing his famous essay, were friends of Han’s father. Moreover, what was previously considered as a cool personality now was thought to have been a way of masking his lack of ability. For example, that Han only liked to talk about cars, girls, and sex in interviews, shunning any topics regarding literary issues and his own work, was now reinterpreted as evidence showing that Han was simply unable to conduct a serious discussion because of his poor education.

In sharp contrast to the Han-Bai controversy, professionals and intellectuals, instead of fans, played a major role in this movement. Well regarded social figures, including professors from a variety of fields (law, literature, communications, etc), journalists, and even accountants and property tycoons, offered their opinions via social media, mostly the Sina microblog (Chinese version of Twitter). However, that did not necessarily mean that the discussions of the Down-Han movement were any more substantive than the usual chaotic and often empty online debates. After all, none of these professionals and intellectuals was an expert on youth writers. Their thoughts about contemporary Chinese society, not their knowledge of Han and the publishing of his works, determined their positions and opinions on the issue of his authorship.31

31 Chinese society has experienced tremendous changes over the past decade, for which intellectuals and professionals in particular have much to address. In this sense, Han Han, as a young adult, offered them a rather safe venue to vent their repressed anxiety and confusion.
Even overseas intellectuals such as professors Zhao and Zhou, mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, could not avoid being biased even if they enjoyed a relatively objective position. In other words, those intellectuals and professionals did not really care who the real writer of the *Triple Door* was; they just wanted to make a point about their concerns with respect to the societal and political situation of contemporary China. To some degree, the ultimate purpose of those intellectuals participating in the Down-Han Movement perhaps lay in finding an opportunity to make such statements as, “If Han does not topple down, China will be going backward to the Cultural Revolutionary year” (D. Zhao).

Accusations have always accompanied Han, the rebellious and controversial figure, throughout his career, but the winds of destiny, which had always been favourable to Han, were against him this time. The master of riding the bumpy road was on the verge of crashing. The efforts to support Han, which were far less in proportion to those of the Down-Han group, turned out to be ineffective, rendering his supporters laughingstocks. The reputation of *Southern Weekly*, a newspaper of the Southern Liberal Media Group, suffered greatly after running special coverage to defend Han. The publisher Lu’s move of publishing *Glory and Candour* was received by the public as a ridiculous joke, and, contrary to his intent, the publication only provided more material for the Down-Han group to gather textual evidence against Han. The Down-Han Group eventually declared victory, proclaiming that the writer Han had been proved to be fake, with solid evidence.

As the “defeated” Bai in the Han-Bai controversy seemed not to be influenced a bit in real life and continued to play his role as an active critic, so the “collapsed” Han carried on with his life according to his own plans. In June, 2012, he was giving speeches for youth on TV with the theme of growing up; he was visiting political leaders in Taiwan in September, 2012; and he even published a new blog collection in January, 2013. However, when *Triple Door* came back in such an unexpected form 12 years after its first edition, something must have been forever changed. To some degree, it ended the era of Han writing as a youth writer.

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32 如果韩寒不被倒掉的话，中国将退回到文革时代。
33 As a researcher who has been studying the publishing history of Han for three years, I believe that there might be some degree of ghostwriting involved in Han’s works given the fast rate at which Han has been published, but there are also continuities in the themes, thoughts, and writing styles of Han’s novels. Especially for 1988, it is hard to imagine who was able to create such a distinctive voice beside Han Han himself. (Interestingly, this book was rarely mentioned throughout the movement.) Those who believe that Han is fake because Han does not behave and talk like a writer seem to have mixed up Han’s public image and the real Han Han. They either failed to recognize the discrepancies because they do not know enough, or deliberately ignored them to suit their own argument.
Thus, we can read *Glory and Candour* as the last glimpse Han has left in the field of youth-literature. Han has added a new preface (1-2) and afterword (438-444) to this handwritten manuscript, which could serve as the most recent materials to explore Han. The preface is a letter that Han addresses to a Hong Kong pop singer, who committed suicide on April 1, 2003. (Lu chose the anniversary of that particular day to launch the book -- a very convenient promotional move.) With apparently genuine emotion, the letter is written as if Han is talking to the superstar while driving the 1000 miles from Beijing to Shanghai. In it, Han states that he now better understands how lonely the pop star must have felt when he was alive – in contrast to the popular imagination of what a young intellectual would do under such circumstances. Han seems to find a kindred spirit in this pop music idol at the lowest time in his own life.

The afterword is a long article, in which Han made up a list of 17 points of evidence to prove that he was the actual writer of *Triple Door*. It stands in sharp contrast to what he did in that CCTV show 12 years earlier when the young boy and first time author bit his tongue tightly when being besieged by the audience. *Glory and Candour*, at 444 pages, was priced at only 10 RMB (less than 2 Canadian dollars), which means the publisher Lu lost 5 RMB for each copy sold, which in turn belied his previous claim that he could make money simply by bundling up empty pages with Han’s name on the cover. Apparently, both the writer and his publisher were doing something unusual, and why did they do that? In the very beginning, and again by the end of his afterword, Han stated his purpose very clearly: “This publication is a thank-you note to you, my dear readers” (444). It seems that at the end of his publishing history as a youth writer, the rebellious and carefree Han revealed a major layer of his multiple identities, which had been obscured ever since his public intellectual image had stabilized: he was a pop idol produced by the Chinese publishing industry with the help of other social elements. His writer identity might not have been entirely toppled by the “Down-Han Movement”, but the young public intellectual might have been irretrievably damaged. Meanwhile, Han revealed what really matters to him, something that earlier he was reluctant to admit: the market and the readers, which were necessary to his success, were elements against which he could not afford to rebel.
Chapter 6: Exploring Entertainment Value: the Publishing of Guo Jingming

On July 14, 2009, in the largest bookstore located in Xidan, Beijing, a long line consisting mostly of high school girls and boys zigzagged from the main floor all the way back to the underground parking lot. With frenzied enthusiasm, this was a typical “fans meeting idol” event resembling those that have frequently been seen in the West during public appearances of super pop music icons like Justin Bieber or Taylor Swift, and one might assume that those young Chinese were there for the same reason. But while China, as a developing country, has been busy catching up with the outside world in many respects since it opened its doors three decades ago, what it “caught” was not exactly the same thing. In this particular case, those loyal fans, with books and magazines clutched in their hands, were not waiting for music idols, but rather were in line to see a group of young writers. The event lasted over seven hours, from 6:00 pm to 1:30 am. Five trucks kept running back and forth between the warehouse and the bookstore to meet the demand of the more than 5,000 fans. Altogether, 15,768 copies were autographed. According to the store manager, this was the biggest book-signing event that had taken place in Beijing since the founding of the new China in 1949 (Tian).

The group was headed by Guo Jingming, whose status was superior even to that of Han Han in youth-literature, for he was not only one of the most successful writers, but also a major publisher in the field. The other young writers were new talents Guo had discovered and nurtured over several years. In addition to writing talents, those writers all had pop star qualities: good looks, plenty of charm, and they dressed meticulously. With the face of a Japanese manga character, Guo was the shiniest star among them.

Book-signing events that looked more like pop star events had become the defining characteristic of book launches for Guo and his writers (Zeng). In recounting the publishing history of Guo, the key is to understand how he transformed himself into an idol and how the youth-literature publishing business presents so many similarities to the entertainment business. Catering to the entertainment needs of his readers/fans was Guo’s secret to his continued success in writing, which later would also become the cornerstone of his publishing empire. As critics played a major role in the publishing history of Han, so fans assumed the active role in Guo’s publishing story. Like mirrors held up to each other, both the writer and his fans worked together
to construct the empire of youth-literature through mutual empowerment.

6.1 A Small City Youth

Guo won first prize in the New Concept Essay Competition twice, in 2001 and 2002. Winning the competition did not bring him much fame, and even the free tickets to top universities had been cancelled as of 2001. The recognition, however, readily brought him a publishing opportunity. Guo had cultivated a literary dream from his early years when he was confined to bed due to health problems and spent much of his time reading. He had had a few pieces published before participating in the competition, and he was a constant contributor to the flourishing literature websites. One month after winning the competition in 2001, Guo received an offer and published a collection of his essays entitled Aiyutong de bianyuan (At the Verge of Love and Pain) in late 2001 (Yi). However, his real breakthrough in the publishing world would come later.

In March 2002, Guo received an email from a young editor, Shi Xiangxuan, from Chunfeng wenyi chubanshe (Spring Wind Literature House), soliciting manuscripts from the winners of the New Concept Essay Competition. In spite of being preoccupied with the coming national university entrance examinations, Guo was the only one who answered with a polite email, informing Shi that he might have “something” after the examination (F.Liu).

That “something” was a fantasy story of two brother princes who lived in a crystal-like world with permanent snow. On their journey to the throne, the brothers experience love, betrayal and death. This 20,000-character piece was developed to entertain Guo himself in one of his stressful evening classes for exam preparation. Perhaps in order to seek some relief, Guo crafted a story that took place in a totally different world from the one in which he was struggling. After the examination, Guo expanded it into a novella entitled Huan Cheng (The City of Fantasy) and submitted it to Menya, which had became a regular place for the winners of the New Concept Essay Competition to publish their writings. The novella came out in the October issue, which quickly sold out. Enthusiastic readers swarmed to the website of Menya, sharing, discussing and appealing to the author for more. Expressed in typical “netizen” style, they claimed that they had never read anything as entertaining as this -- it was such a good read that it actually made them shed tears (F.Liu).

The sensation of the Menya website caught the attention of Shi, as well as several other
publishers. After consulting with his house, Shi flew to Shanghai, where Guo had just begun college, in November. He offered Guo a contract with a strict schedule: Guo needed to expand the novella into a full-length novel in one month. Guo accepted the challenge and, after many sleepless nights working on a laptop borrowed from a classmate, he submitted the completed manuscript of 120,000 characters to Spring Wind Literature House in time (F.Liu).

Spring Wind Literature House was a provincial house, located in the far eastern region close to the Russia-China border. It had grown into a strong player in the pursuit of literary bestsellers in the 1990s. The house did not have the rich resources of established writers and works like Writers Publishing House, so its strength lay in doing heavy promotion and marketing for their productions (S.Kong 79). It did well commercially, but not without a cost. One of the house’s most famous projects was the series of works by a group of so-called “beauty writers,” who gained their fame and fortune mainly due to their flashy and sexy looks, rather than through the literary merits of their works. Shanghai Baobei (Shanghai Baby) by Wei Hui was the most successful novel of the series, but it was banned in 2000 for inappropriate descriptions of sexual activities. The house’s publishing license was temporarily suspended by the government, and the editor-in-chief was forced to leave (Z.Chen). To a state-owned house, this was the highest cost it could pay for going too far in the pursuit of profit.

Therefore, Spring Wind Publishing House was hoping to regain its place in the publishing world by participating in the newly emerging youth-literature market. The house hoped that Guo would fill the void left by Han, who at that time was busy with his new race car driving career (Z.Chen). The bestselling value of Guo’s work was readily recognized. According to Chang Jing, the deputy editor-in-chief of the house, Guo had two special appeals to young readers: First, his writing had a rare entertainment value. The storyline and the characters of The City of Fantasy clearly took inspiration from the Japanese Manga Crusades and from popular online games such as The Legend of the Immortal Sword, while at the same time Guo made it very Chinese through his intricate prose style. The combination was a rapid and delicious read. Secondly, Han’s writing conveyed a permeating loneliness, a theme which resonated strongly among the readers of China’s only-one-child generation. In contrast to the satire of Han’s writings, the trademark of

34 The novel describes the sexual life in detail between the female protagonist and her lovers, one of whom is a German businessman working in Shanghai. The attitude of the author towards those “degenerate” details is even more problematic: the protagonist seems to actually enjoy and not feel anything wrong about the activities, which was clearly against traditional Chinese values.
Guo’s writing was the sadness of youth (Zhuo Zhang).

The Spring Wind Publishing House had decided to play it big with Guo. *The City of Fantasy* came out in January, 2003, and the house created a careful and extensive plan for promotion and marketing. The noted children’s writer Cao Wenxuan was invited to write a preface for Guo, as he had done for Han. The first print run of *The City of Fantasy* was 100,000 copies -- it was an unusually high number, and a courageous decision for a publishing house to make. For comparison, Han as a first-time writer enjoyed much more fame than Guo, but the first print run of *Triple Door* was only 20,000 copies. The president of the house recommended *The City of Fantasy* as their major book of the year 2003 to the major distributors at the Beijing book exhibition. A carefully prepared promotional kit was distributed to the invited media, in which Guo was depicted as a “good kid,” standing in stark comparison to Han: Guo was an excellent student, and he also respected teachers and parents (X.Zhao).

*The City of Fantasy* earned immediate success, with 600,000 copies sold in the first two months (Zhuo Zhang). This encouraged Spring Wind Literature House to bring its promotion to the next level. On March 27, 2003, a conference dedicated to the book was held in Shanghai by Spring Wind Literature House in collaboration with the University of Shanghai which Guo attended. Running such a conference for a young writer had no precedent in China. More than 20 university professors and critics generously praised Guo for his ability to create an imaginary world and to create a new type of prose (X.Zhao). It would not have been a surprise if some of these participants had not read the novel at all---they were paid to be there by the house. At the conference, it was announced that, in keeping with the mode of publishing “beauty writers,” Spring Wind Literature House offered an exclusive contract to Guo through his college years. Guo was required to submit at least one manuscript of a novel to the house in the coming four years, and, in return, the house would pay for his tuition at the college. The conference and the exclusive publishing rights were extensively covered by the Shanghai newspapers (X.Zhao).

With the controversial Han preceding him, the media’s interest in Guo mostly addressed his success in the book market with a negative tone. The issue of market success versus literary value was raised, and the exclusive contract especially drew criticism as questions were asked: Was it wise that a youth sacrifice his education for fame and fortune through a now profit-driven

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35 In Chinese culture, the purpose of conferences for a specific contemporary work or writer is to solicit praise, especially for the new writer or new book. It has evolved into a promotional event sponsored by the publishing house.
publishing industry? Should a publisher push a young writer like this; would the young writer, lacking life experience, actually be able to produce another manuscript in the near future? (Y.Lu).

The way Spring Wind Literature House promoted Guo was questioned, too. Immediately when *The City of Fantasy* was first published, there were increasing numbers of publishing-related activities filling the life of the college student Guo. Accompanied by the team from the house, Guo was always on the way to attend book-signing events or other social and commercial activities to gain media exposure. Zhao Changtian, the organizer of the New Concept Essay Competition, mentioned with disapproval that Guo lived a life not unlike that of an entertainment star, after the latter had failed to attend a writing workshop that *Menemya* ran for youth writers (Peng).

Guo apparently did not share these well-intentioned worries. Instead, he adopted a quite open and active attitude toward the book market, especially the promotional work. Spring Wind Literature House had experience in using gender and the body as selling points to promote their “beauty writers,” but it seemed they did not think that the same strategy could be applied to youth writers (young age alone was usually the selling point for youth writers). It was Guo himself who took an interest in exploring his “star” potential. Despite being short and thin, Guo had a handsome face and a passion for dressing up. According to his editor, Shi, Guo once suggested that the house hire a designer to take care of his hair style and clothes for his public appearances (Zhuo Zhang). It was not mentioned if Guo’s request was satisfied, but his cross-dressing habit and love of wearing make-up, which would be extensively covered as gossip by the media in later years, apparently originated at this time.

Guo was extremely hard working. In spite of his hectic student schedule, he finished his second novel, entitled *Mengli hualuo zhi duoshao* (*Never Flowers in Never Dream*) which was issued on November, 2003. The motivation underlying this second book was not simply to entertain himself, as it was with his first book. As a youth from a small inland city, Guo had now been cultivating a Shanghai dream.

Guo was born in 1983 in Zigong, Sichuan province, in the southwest of China. This province had a long history of producing significant cultural and literary figures, as well as for its huge population and the resulting poverty. Like Han, Guo came from a lower-middle class family. Although of modest means, his parents nonetheless always sought to give the best things to their only son. The biggest shock Guo had encountered after coming to live in Shanghai was the discovery that he was actually poor, and he felt greatly diminished by the fact. He once talked
about this matter quite frankly: “There is no way for you to live a Shanghai life without money. If you do not have money, you have to eat every meal in the school cafeteria, unable to go out to try the fancy restaurants of Shanghai. You watch your classmates obtain the latest model of cell phone, only to abandon it in no more than a week. Back home, I was the kid who wore the best clothes and used the best stuff. But in Shanghai, especially in my university, where most of the students came from rich local families, I am nothing and I feel really bad because of that”

The only-one-child generation, to which Guo belonged, is the generation that grew up during one of the richest periods in recent history in China, blessed with abundant material wealth of which previous generations could only dream (Yiwu Zhang, “Chuantong”). Paradoxically, however, this generation also seemed to suffer greatly from an unsatisfied desire for material objects and experiences that they did not have. Guo was already fabulously rich by Chinese standards from the royalties from The City of Fantasy, but he apparently felt it was not enough. Pursuing financial success seemed to become Guo’s main motivation for writing. He was determined to labour to make his Shanghai dream come true.

Guo was on his way to becoming one of the richest writers in contemporary China, and materialism was to play a significant role in both his life and his writing.

6.2 The Plagiarism Lawsuit over Never Flowers in Never Dream

The novel Never Flowers in Never Dream, as expected, brought Guo another round of market success, but it also immersed him in a plagiarism scandal. This plagiarism issue was the most critical event for Guo in his writing life. He became a household name, but through notoriety.

6.2.1 A Lawsuit

It was said that the sales figure for Never Flowers in Never Dream was over 600,000 copies in the first month (Ye Wang). Shortly afterward, however, Guo was accused of having plagiarized a novel called Quanli quanwai (In the Circle and Out), which had been published in

36如果没有钱，你不可能过上上海生活。在自贡，我吃的用的都是同学中最好的。可是在上海，我是个穷孩子。我们学校的学生大多来自上海的富裕家庭，一星期换一个手机。如果没有钱的话，你只能每餐都在食堂吃，不可能到外面餐馆中去吃。

37 Authors often receive 10-15 percent for each book sold, so Guo could have earned more than one million RMB with 600,000 copies, based on the price 28.00 RMB of The City of Fantasy. In 2003, the general annual salary for an editor was no more than 20,000 RMB.
February, 2003. The novel was written by Zhuang Yu, who worked as a magazine editor in Beijing after a short period as a visiting international student in Toronto. The case was brought to court in December, 2003, and Guo ultimately was found guilty of plagiarism in May, 2006 (Sun).

This scandal might not have come as a great surprise to the public, considering the fast rate at which Guo published: two novels within one year, while a full time college student. In addition, Guo had special difficulties in writing this second one. *Never Flowers in Never Dream* is about four college graduates coping with the big issues of life: their dreams, friendship, love, betrayal, and death. Unlike *The City of Fantasy*, this novel was contemporary realistic fiction, but Guo still created it as an alternative world from his own: the characters were college graduates, while he was a sophomore; the setting was Beijing, while he lived in Shanghai; and his characters spoke Beijing dialect, with which, as a Southerner, Guo was unfamiliar. In addressing this last point, Guo claimed, unconvincingly, that he constantly asked for help from his Beijing friends while writing (“Qingcun”).

Plagiarism for a young writer with a strong desire to succeed was not that uncommon in the history of publishing; typically, the media’s interest in such things passed quickly. However, the *Never Flowers in Never Dream* case attracted great attention from the media throughout the process, more because of the way Guo dealt with it than because of the plagiarism itself. At the beginning of the court case, Guo and his publisher strongly denied the accusation. Spring Wind Literature House even accused the writer Zhuang of bringing up the lawsuit as a promotional means to improve the sales of her own book. Zhuang was not entirely innocent with respect to this accusation. Her novel did not sell well after first coming out, and, while the lawsuit was still in process, it reappeared in the market with a new dust jacket carrying the statement: “A novel that was stolen by the famous youth writer Guo Jingming” (X.Guo). The entire situation created bad impressions for both the accuser and accused.

Nonetheless, the first court decision in December, 2004 validated Zhuang’s accusation. Guo filed for an appeal and was thereafter reluctant to comment on the matter. On several occasions when pressed to do so, he never directly answered questions. Instead, he implied that he was a victim of other people’s avarice, but he had decided to swallow the injustice and concentrate on his own projects. In 2006, the court released the final judgment, announcing that Guo had violated Zhuang’s copyright, and ordered him to pay a penalty and to offer a public apology to Zhuang. Guo obeyed the first, but refused the second requirement. As a result, the court had to run a public apology on his behalf in a newspaper at the demand of Zhuang, for
which Guo dutifully paid the press fee (X.Guo).

Guo’s reactions, which were summarized as “Keyi peiqian, juebu daoqian” 38 (“paying money but no apology”), astounded the public and outraged the media. The slim sympathy the public had held towards Guo, whether from their knowledge of the chaotic state of the publishing industry, or just from tolerance for a promising young author, completely disappeared.

Guo did speak up regarding his attitude once, but his remarks were not directly intended for the general public. In a blog entry on June 5, 2006 (“Liangxiaoshi”), Guo shared his thoughts and feelings regarding the lawsuit with his book fans, claiming that this was the first and also would be the last time he would do so. In it, Guo repeated his previous “brave victim” tone, with added details regarding how things had become worse after the scandal: people were blind to how hard he had worked, only willing to talk about the plagiarism; friends who had once surrounded him now “changed face” quickly. He then continued with a list of the projects that he had accomplished during the tedious three-year lawsuit. He was proud of himself for those achievements, saying, “I never wasted one minute on the lawsuit, which perhaps [was] the reason I eventually lost it.” 39 Finally, Guo thanked his fans for their sincere support and made it very clear that his strategy of “paying money but no apology” in dealing with the court order was because it would disrespect the efforts he had put in the writing and the feelings of the fans who still loved his works (J. Guo, “Xiaosi”).

While the public found Guo’s reasons unfathomable, his position was readily appreciated by his fans, who had assumed an active and public role throughout the lawsuit. Based on Guo’s official website, “Disi wei” (“The Fourth Dimension”), fans exercised their power online in a manner similar to Han’s verbally abusive army during the Han-Bai controversy. At the outset of the scandal, they had attacked Zhuang by leaving messages on her blog or making direct phone calls to her office. They cursed Zhuang on many issues, including her age, appearance, literary ambition, and writing skills. 40 Appalled and devastated, Zhuang eventually closed her blog and quit her job (X.Guo). Guo’s explanatory letter then added fuel to his fans’ fire. Deeply moved and eager to return the trust and love of their beloved writer, fans defended Guo with all their

38 可以赔钱但绝不道歉
39 惟独没有在官司上浪费任何精力（或许这也是导致它败诉的重要原因）.
40 As in the West, cyber-bullying has increasingly caught public attention in China. The difference is that Chinese youth seems to have directed the online verbal abuses/attacks more toward the older generation or authority figures than to their peers. Perhaps for this reason there is more tolerance for their abusive behaviors.
might, following an even more absurd logic. Some of their typical expressions (qtd. in Y.Xia):

“What is wrong with plagiarizing? It is totally O.K. as long as you do it better than the original writer!”

“I would love Little Four (Guo’s nickname) forever, no matter what he did!”

“Everybody is stealing! Anyone who writes steals from others!”

Such remarks appeared to have a different impact than had been intended. They not only made Guo look worse, but also made the fans themselves a target of criticism. The public, barely recovering from the problematic debating manners of Han and his supporters during his online controversy, were shocked again to find the deteriorating moral state of Guo and his followers, as well as the only-one-child generation they represented. Trying to find reasons for it, some reporters viewed Guo’s behavior as being a result of the corruption caused by his market success, while others went on to blame Chinese society as a whole (F. Liu, Sun, and Wei). Due to the rapid changes that had been taking place over the past three decades, China was becoming a country of fakes and fraud, in which even university professors were frequently accused of academic dishonesty (Wei). Thus, the discussions on the moral problem of Guo and his fans were expanded to include the larger generational, economic, and societal issues.

It is interesting to note that, although the lawsuit was widely covered by mainstream newspapers, individual cultural or intellectual figures kept silent about it (Ying Xu). It seemed that the adults had learned something from the Han-Bai controversy: they shunned interactions with the internet generation. An established writer, Fang Fang, after being pressed, offered her explanation: “Nowadays, as long as some people stand up to speak, they are sure to be met with irrational dirty words by a group of anonymous online IDs, who act like crazy people or villains”(Ying Xu). It seemed that youth-literature had become a battlefield, where many people felt they were better off not to get involved.

Guo’s fellow youth writers were the strongest of his critics. A group of so-called post-80s generation writers wrote an open letter to Guo to sever themselves from him, largely an act of self-promotion (Yi Wang). The other two leading writers, Han Han and Zhang Yueran, took their own actions. Zhang, who was also published by Spring Wind Literature House and was once

41 “抄袭有什么错？只要你抄得好！” “不管小四做了什么，我都永远爱他！” “天下文章一大抄！人人都在抄！”

42 一旦有人站出来说话，就会遭遇一群蒙面人失去理性的谩骂，就像一群疯子和流氓。
promoted together with Guo, expressed the most vehement remarks. In her article, she first lamented Guo’s betrayal of the pure literary dream, and then went on to offer a serious reflection on youth-literature publishing with a heavy heart: “Our youth writers were made famous by a variety of forces which only wanted to exploit us, and youth writers lose their moral foundation because of the enticements of big fame and fortune.”

Han’s responses, which were addressed in a light and humorous tone, were more influential because some of his clever remarks were abridged as news titles by newspapers. Basking in the glory of defeating Bai Ye, Han wrote two blog articles criticizing Guo, his “brain-crashed” fans, as well as Spring Wind Literature House (H.Han, “Jiuma”). To this point, Han and Guo had achieved equal status in the field of youth-literature (Guo was even superior to Han in terms of market success). To the public, Han and his fans might have looked the same as Guo and his fans. However, taking advantage of the plagiarism scandal, Han seemed to deliberately differentiate himself from Guo. With the help of the media, Han represented the rebellious, critically-thinking and socially-concerned group of the post-1980s generation, while Guo represented the ridiculous, money-driven and morally corrupt group. To some degree, Guo had made the previous “bad student” Han look much better (Yantao Chen).

Amidst such critical turmoil, Guo appeared undisturbed. He adopted a simple coping strategy by just working non-stop. He had been transformed from a hardworking guy to a workaholic. According to the list included in the explanatory letter to his fans after the lawsuit, Guo had finished many projects in three fields from 2004-2006. First, Publishing: He had set up an editorial office in Shanghai with Spring Wind Literature House in June, 2004, and published ten issues of a youth magazine called Island. Second, Entertainment: He was invited to write a screenplay for a big budget movie Wuji (The Promise), which was a hit in 2006. He also published an experimental music novel Mi cang (Lost) in CD form. Third, Writing: He published his third novel, Xiazhi weizhi (The Summer Has Yet Come), in 2005 (“Liangxiaoshi”).

The Summer Has Yet Come was a special and important work to Guo. Always trying to create an “alternative world” in his writing, Guo confessed that this novel was the only one containing his personal life experience (Pan). It was about a group of high school friends, their sweet and innocent friendship and the conflicting love affairs among them, as well as their

43 我尚在懵懂之间，就已经成了一位“明星作家”（我与郭敬明被媒体定义为“80 后金童玉女”），我以往的作品曾经被各种力量推举上一条招摇、喧嚣的道路。
respective life journeys after graduation. The male protagonist, Fu Xiaosi, possessed similarities to Guo. As a handsome and tender boy, Fu was a promising comic artist, and, soon after making a name for himself, he was falsely accused of plagiarism. He paid a price for being famous, and eventually decided bravely to move on. Fu’s psychological state is depicted with sophistication.

*The Summer Has Yet Come* served as a transition work in Guo’s writings, from the crystal and snowy world of *The City of Fantasy* to the heavy and dark world of his later works. It contained a half bright and half dark world. The first half was about youth and love, while the latter was about violence and death, as the characters leave high school and begin their respective journeys into the adversity of real life experiences. The tone of the novel was melodic due to the sweet and innocent years, then giving way to the cruelty of reality. *The Summer Has Yet Come* sold over one million copies by the end of 2005 and became an all time favorite of his book fans (revised editions were issued in 2008 and 2010), and according to Guo, it also laid the cornerstone for his future publishing empire (Pan).

### 6.2.2 The Awakening of an Idol

As a writer, Guo’s reputation suffered deeply because of the lawsuit—to the public, *caoxi zuojia* (a writer who plagiarizes other’s works) has thereafter been his official title. On the other hand, Guo’s career in youth-literature nonetheless came out intact, and he continued to attain greater and greater achievements both in writing and in publishing. Among the many reasons used by confused or offended people to try to explain this unexpected outcome (Huang, “Caoxi”), timing served as the most critical factor. Guo was very lucky in that the plagiarism allegation happened in parallel to the flourishing of fan-based youth popular culture in China. By transforming himself into an idol, not only did Guo survive the crisis, but also he thrived because of it.

Guo’s plagiarism allegation took place in early 2004, the same year that a hit television show, *Caoji Nvsheng (Super Voice Girls)*, was broadcast by a provincial TV station. An imitation of *British Idol, Super Voice Girls* quickly resulted in a nationwide sensational response. The major appeal of the show lay in the fact that viewers, the majority of whom were 14-20 years old (the same age range as the readers of youth-literature), had the right to vote via text-messaging or phone calls to decide the winners. Similar to the internet, this feature was experienced with huge enthusiasm in China where ordinary people, especially youth, had not had many opportunities to express their decisions and opinions. Young viewers were so engaged that their acts and comments became talking points for the show, too. The public was impressed by this new
generation of fans for their active participation in idol-making and their huge consumer capacity. They did not simply pursue idols; they sought a variety of ways to contribute to the idol-making process.\textsuperscript{44} Moreover, fans constituted a huge and strong market, as a catchphrase best described: “Fans who do not spend money are not good fans.”\textsuperscript{45} With its extreme success, which immediately inspired several copycats in the television industry, \textit{Super Voice Girls} introduced the notion of fan culture and the fan economy into Chinese society. The word “fan” became a buzz word in the Chinese media, and people soon extended this new knowledge to areas beyond the entertainment world (Gao and Yuan 32-43).

Youth-literature publishing was thus reinterpreted from this new perspective. Guo and Han were readily viewed as “wenxue caonan” (“super literary boys”) and their followers/readers were “fans.” Writers as idols and readers as fans became from this point forward a characteristic and motto of youth-literature publishing (Yong Zhao). In turn, this ongoing fan culture further enabled writers and readers of youth-literature to recognize a model for, and to justify, their behaviours and actions. In other words, both writers and readers came to claim their identities and were thereby empowered. As discussed above, fans had exercised great power in defending Guo throughout the lawsuit. During the process, Guo also came to claim his idol identity.\textsuperscript{46}

There was an idol/fan component in the relationship between youth writers and their readers from the very beginning. Compared to Han, Guo especially had some level of consciousness of using himself to do the publicity for his books. However, it was not until the lawsuit that Guo publicly and fully recognized his idol identity and acted on it accordingly. Two actions by Guo against his personality after the lawsuit help verify this point: As a young man who preferred working to talking, Guo wrote an explanatory letter to his fans regarding his thoughts on the result of the lawsuit. Also, as someone who always avoided arguing with people, Guo defended his fans firmly. In response to Han’s harsh remarks about his fans, Guo, who never responded to any word by Han about himself, immediately protested: “You can mock me, but not

\textsuperscript{44} In addition to voting diligently and regularly for their beloved singers, there are many other things that fans can do, such as creating online forums, forwarding their detailed responses to the idol’s performances, collaborating with the idol’s agent to mobilize more resources to attract public attention.

\textsuperscript{45} 不花钱的粉丝不是好粉丝。

\textsuperscript{46} I would like to point out that the idol-fan identities of youth writers and their book readers are not “given to” but “realized by” themselves. In other words, they are more self-made than produced by a mature industry as Western entertainment companies do to their stars and fans.
my fans” (Yalian Yang). The experience of the lawsuit perhaps made Guo see very clearly that as a writer, he might not be able to survive the scandal, but as an idol, he had no difficulty at all in retaining his position.

The idol identity helped Guo take a new approach toward his writing and publishing in youth-literature. His success in the book market lay in that he offered writings with rare entertainment value for young readers. Guo was able to do that because he was one of them: what he found interesting himself had a natural appeal to his readers. Put another way, the bestselling author unconsciously met the strong needs of his readers to be entertained. Now as an idol who had decided to take responsibility for his fans, Guo faced the task of figuring out how to cater to their needs. Through fighting alongside them hand in hand during the lawsuit, Guo perhaps came to realize that fans not only needed entertaining writings, but they also needed an idol to entertain them in a more vivid and direct way. In other words, what they needed most were teen idols, much like Justin Bieber or Taylor Swift in the West, which the underdeveloped Chinese entertainment business and generally conservative society were still unable to provide. For example, icons from Super Voice Girls were what China could produce for their teens, but for a high school student, pursuing such icons was difficult because both their teachers and parents would not allow them to do so. However, a literary idol with book productions was, relatively speaking, more tolerable. There was a void in popular youth culture to be filled, just as there was once a void in the book market for youth readers which youth-literature came to fill. Apparently, Guo was a suitable candidate to take up this task.

Since Guo never mentioned any possible “enlightenment” he had obtained from the lawsuit, the above argument is at best speculation. However, it can be supported by some observations that publishing professionals have provided in retrospect. The publisher Lu Jinbo commented in 2010, after Guo achieved another peak of his career by editing popular youth magazines: “While other publishers are still doing their jobs following the routines by finding manuscripts and writers, Guo has already published according to the specific needs of a specific group of readers” (Ye Wang). Lu did not explain explicitly which group and what needs he was referring to, but it is obvious that this specific group must refer to Guo’s fan readers, while the specific needs refer to their entertainment needs, to which Guo so diligently catered. Also, Lu
did not go further to ask why Guo was able to do so while others could not. The secret might be the lawsuit, as another observer pointed out that the lawsuit was where Guo got his vision in writing and publishing for youth (Ye Wang).

Guo grasped the opportunity that destiny had offered him through the lawsuit, and popularized himself as an idol for his fans, which was as important as creating the entertaining writings to satisfy them, if not more so. His blog, beginning in 2005, serves as an ideal place for us to observe his transformation. Except for one or two entries containing book launch news, you could hardly tell that the owner of the blog was a writer. Guo took great interest in dressing himself up with designer clothes and posing for the camera. He uploaded numerous photos of himself with the luxurious consumer items and clothing he purchased, as well as his posh apartment. There were also enthusiastic reports about the glamorous parties he attended with other popular stars. Guo shared with his blog followers the intimate details of his everyday life. Simply put, the life Guo constructed in his blog was what his fans expected from a popular star. Guo’s fans were attracted to his lifestyle and to his material wealth, although the blog also brought Guo criticism for advocating materialism (“Xiaosi de youlechang”).

The idol Guo adopted a new approach to dealing with his fame. The lawsuit had turned Guo into a notorious figure. To some degree, Guo was demonized by the media. Everything about Guo, including his short body stature, feminine personality, sexual orientation, and his dressing style, was ruthlessly ridiculed (Zhou Zhang). Instead of resorting to his previous passive response, which was to ignore such things and concentrate on work, Guo started to get involved actively with the media. Thanks to the flourishing of popular teen culture, as a controversial or even notorious figure, Guo got many invitations to appear on television shows or at commercial events. He never missed any of those opportunities, believing that media exposure could help the sale of his books. In order to create talking points, Guo even conjured up items to feed the media. On one television appearance, he declared that he needed ten steps to wash his face. It soon went viral on the internet and Guo was viewed by people as pathetic. In a subsequent interview, Guo explained that he fabricated this for the sake of its effect on the program, as a popular star would do (Hou). Afterwards, through various manipulative methods, such as posting semi-nude photos on his blog or aggressively advocating consumerism and materialism, Guo attempted to maintain himself in the center of the media spotlight (Zeng). What Han Han had understood from the very beginning of his career -- what adults dislike is exactly what teenage readers welcome -- Guo started to actively employ.
As an idol, the first and foremost point for Guo was to understand and fulfill the needs of his fans. At the same time, understanding fans equals understanding the market. Equipped with the knowledge of the marketing of youth-literature publishing that was not widely known to others, the writer and idol Guo cultivated himself as an excellent businessman. He developed a pragmatic philosophy toward life and work. He admitted without hesitation that he would be glad to do anything that would help his career. In the same vein, he did not care about accusations from other people. As he explained: “Why should I care? Will I gain one dollar for that or I will lose one piece of flesh of my body for that?” (Y. Xia, “Guojingming”). The previously quiet and meek “good kid” Guo had changed. Some of Guo’s readers, who had a genuine liking for his early works, detected the effect this change in him had on his writing. They lamented that Guo had stopped writing for youth dreams and now was only writing for the market (F. Liu).

In spite of the lawsuit, Guo surpassed China’s bestselling adult authors and was listed 38th on the Forbes list of the wealthiest people in China in 2005 (Ni). By 2008, he was reported by New York Times as “the most successful writer in China” (King). It seemed that Guo had made his Shanghai dream come true, all by himself, for which he was praised by fans as a hero. In the following years after the scandal, the idol and businessman Guo would increase his profitability by focusing on selling his Shanghai dream to his fans.

6.3 Guo Jingming after the Plagiarism Lawsuit

With the lawsuit coming to the end in 2006, Guo terminated his collaboration with the Spring Wind Literature House. Spring Wind Literature House had become a major publisher of youth-literature mostly thanks to the success of Guo, who had also produced a bestselling youth magazine for the house, but they were unable to sustain their golden boy. Due to some management problems, Spring Wind Literature House held back profits and, over a one-year period, Guo was left with no funds to pay royalties to the magazine’s contributors. Always seeing Spring Wind Literature House as his benefactor, Guo took the blame himself, which provided another reason for the media to criticize his “avarice” (Zhuo Zhang). Losing the lawsuit was perhaps the last straw for Guo. Upon leaving, Guo was as famous a bestselling author as Han was, and at the same time he brought with him a team which could produce lucrative revenue,

49 我为什么要关心？他又不给我一块钱，我又不少一块肉。
just as Lai of the World Affairs Press did. Thus, he not only looked for a house to publish him as a writer, but also searched for a strong publishing partner for his future endeavors in this industry.

In September, 2006, from among many enthusiastic candidates (especially private publishers), Guo chose to affiliate with Changjiang wenyi chubanshe (Long River Literature House). Like the Spring Wind Literature House, Long River Literature House was also a state-owned provincial publishing house, located in Hubei province. In the late 1990s, the house set up an editorial office in Beijing in order to make use of the advantages of Beijing as a cultural centre, as many promising provincial houses had done at that time. Long River Literature House did quite well in popular literature publishing, and, in 2005, as a means of expanding their business, Li Bo and Jin Lihong were made directors of the Beijing office. Both individuals had worked as a team for the Beijing house Huayi (an established press in Beijing with a reputation for aggressively marketing best sellers), and had established a reputation as the the most successful partners for bestsellers publishing, with special expertise in celebrity publishing (Bao). As well as with Jin and Li, Guo would also work with Anbo Shun, the previous editor-in-chief of Spring Wind Literature House who had transferred to Long River’s Beijing office due to the censorship of Shanghai Baby.

Although viewed by the public as only caring about money-making, Guo had concerns regarding changing publishers beyond the issue of profit. He stated in an interview: “There is much money out there. Many people are ready to offer me millions of dollars, but these people only want to make money. I want to have a career from publishing”50 (Ye Wang). He made a good choice with the Long River Literature House. Years later, one of his close friends commented on this: “Long River Literature House is very important to Guo, just as Spring Wind Literature House was to him before. Without their packaging, it would have been impossible for Guo to alleviate his negative reputation as a plagiarist; without Li and Jin’s help, Guo would not have become the cultural businessman that he is today”51 (Zhuo Zhang).

6.3.1 The Writer Guo Jingming and His “Image-Improving” Publisher

Guo’s market value did not suffer because of the lawsuit, but his public image was

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50 外面的钱很多。但是他们都是想挣几百万就走，我是把出版当职业做的。
51 一位郭敬明身边的朋友告诉记者：“郭敬明当年的选择现在看来非常正确。黎波和金丽红是郭敬明事业中第二个伯乐。没有黎、金的包装,郭敬明很难从负面新闻中摆脱出来,没有黎波的栽培,今日郭敬明也不会成为文化商人。”
extremely poor. Even if he acted indifferently toward it, according to Li, Guo was almost devastated. Long River Literature House understood that Guo’s market value would be eventually harmed if they allowed Guo’s fame to deteriorate. Therefore, Long River engaged in damage control to help Guo. The task they were facing was much more difficult than that dealt with by Yuan Min over Han’s controversial fame. However, with the resources it enjoyed as a mainstream house, as well as the respective capacities of Li, Jin, and Anbo to package authors, Long River Literature House was well positioned to carry out the task.

Long River Literature House developed a thorough plan, aiming to attach positive mainstream values to this marginalized writer. First, they appointed Guo as editor-in-chief of a new magazine, *Top Novel*, in 2006 and later, nominated him as the vice president in the Beijing office, as an endorsement of his value by the publishing house. Next, they assisted Guo in joining the Chinese Writers’ Association in 2007, and obtained support for Guo from the prestigious writers/critics Wang Meng and Chen Xiaoming. This created a conduit for Guo to move into the mainstream writing community (Ma). Finally, in order to raise his social status, the house arranged for Guo to be invited to several mainstream cultural events and to appear on television talk show programs. Guo was also advised to participate in charity activities. For example, he donated a certain part of the revenue from the magazine to some Chinese education programs, and sponsored several other well chosen charity projects (Zhuo Zhang).

These tactics were not carried out without controversy – for example, Guo’s joining the Chinese Writer’s Association caused a sensation, and even Long River Literature House was questioned over its role in this “inappropriate” case -- but it seems that at least they had successfully provide Guo’s fans with further sound reasons to worship their idol writer (L.Zhao).

As for Guo’s novels, Long River Literature House emphasized their literary value by boldly linking Guo’s writings with those of classic writers. In 2007, Guo published his first novel, *Beishang niliu chenghe (Cry Me a Sad River)*, with Long River Literature House, for which Anbo wrote a preface. It is interesting to compare his preface with that written by Cao for Guo’s first novel, *The City of Fantasy*. Cao had emphasized the newness and non-traditional quality of Guo’s writing, while Anbo was praising Guo for his classicism by comparing Guo to classic writers both in China and in the West – *The Catcher in the Rye* was mentioned, for example (1-3). However, it was not very credible to be suggesting that the same writer, or that a writer’s style, could have changed so much over such a short period of three years. Anbo’s preface was more or less shameless flattery of Guo, which suited the former’s notorious reputation for flattering his
writers without much in the way of boundaries (Z.Huang).

*Cry Me a Sad River* was also the first novel Guo published after the plagiarism scandal. It was a high school love story with an extraordinarily tragic ending: three out of the four main characters commit suicide due to a complex love triangle. Other themes of violence, prostitution, teen pregnancy, parental divorce, and betrayal deepen the dark quality of the story. Death is a recurring theme in Guo’s novels. In his previous works, *The City of Fantasy* and *Never Flowers in Never Dream*, death was treated as a dramatic element to propel the plot. In *Cry Me a Sad River*, death also served as an efficient device to resolve conflicts, but the unexpected triple deaths struck readers as overly dramatic. In addition, it was not hard for readers to make connections between this grimly cold novel and the dark psychological state of the writer who had just gone through so much upheaval and distress.

Guo’s writing was not original in plot or characterization -- almost all of his novels brought allegations of the author borrowing too much, or plagiarizing, from other popular works. *Cry Me a Sad River* was said to imitate a Japanese manga, *Nana*, for example. Guo’s narrative skills were maturing over the years, but his works were becoming more and more like manufactured and commercially created fiction. His talent seemed to lie in his ability to integrate some genuine feelings or experiences into his formulaic plots and characters, and his intricate (sometimes excessive) prose style also appealed to young readers. *Cry Me a Sad River* sold one million copies in its first ten days on the market (Ye Wang).

It was not surprising that Guo next moved into writing series fiction. He continued to write at a speedy rate, with two series of novels published from 2008 to 2012: *Xiao shidai* (*Tiny Times*) and *Jue Ji* (*The Marks of Duke*). *Tiny Times* was realistic fiction. The storyline was similar to that of *Never Flowers in Never Dream*, concerning four college roommates’ life on campus and their later working life in a big city. The novel was written in a style reminiscent of television drama, without much genuine personal feeling involved as compared to his previous writings. *Tiny Times* marked the transition of Guo’s writing style from depicting the sadness and beauty of youth life to focusing on fashion and material goods. A noticeable characteristic of the novel was the use of product placements and brand names: the protagonists are particularly fond of luxury products. Apparently Guo borrowed inspiration from the movie *The Devil Wears Prada* and the American television drama *Sex and the City*. The setting of *Tiny Times* is Shanghai. Finally, Guo had decided to write something set in his real world, and, by including many real Shanghai place names, it was obvious that Guo wanted his readers to believe that the Shanghai
he depicted was the real one. However, as one critic pointed out, Guo’s Shanghai was anything but real. It was a city of fantasy, which was carefully constructed to conform to the imaginings of what a big city should look like in the minds of the youth who live in less developed cities in China (P. Huang, “Dashidai”). The youth writer Han Han commented sharply that Guo created a Shanghai dream for young girls who live in the borderline area between cities and the country (Luo, “Guo Jingming”). The first print run of Tiny Times (1-3) was each over one million copies; for the most popular one, that number was reached in one week (Ma).

_The Marks of Duke_ featured a boy witch and his experiences growing up. With many specially crafted terms, adult readers would find it hard to follow, as literature professor Gao Yuanbao complained in one article. An abridged version of this novel was published in _People’s Literature_, a serious literature magazine in China. The issue had very good sales and it also generated discussion: Should a serious literary magazine lower its standards to include a popular work like that? Nonetheless, it could be read as a sign that Long River Literature House’s efforts to alleviate Guo’s bad reputation as a plagiarist had worked. In 2009, Guo was even invited to a book launch for a new novel by a noted writer, Mo Yan (the recipient of the 2012 Nobel Prize in literature), for the publisher believed that Guo’s appearance could attract young readers (Liang Li).

### 6.3.2 The Publisher Guo Jingming and His Empire of Youth-Literature Publishing

The relationship between Guo and Long River Literature House was not simply between writer and publisher; the more critical dimension of this relationship was that Guo worked with the house as a business partner in publishing.

Guo ventured into the publishing business by editing youth magazines. In early 2004, while having a working lunch with the deputy editor-in-chief, Chang Jing, of Spring Wind Literature House, Guo randomly mentioned that he had several friends who were interested in writing and illustrating, but found it very difficult to find places to get their work published. Believing that young people knew best what young people like, Chang proposed setting up an office in Shanghai specializing in youth magazines (Zhuo Zhang).

In June, 2004, an editorial office was established in Shanghai, therefore, by Guo and five of his friends including his college classmates, kindred spirits he found from the online community, and his avid book fans. The team rented a three-bedroom apartment in a residential building and started to work and live together. Such an office -- consisting of college-aged staff
majoring in youth-literature, targeting young readers – was of a very rare kind in the Chinese publishing industry (Le). The office was in charge of publishing a youth magazine entitled Dao (Island) on an irregular schedule. Guo was the soul of the magazine and the leader of the team. It was obvious that Guo greatly relied on his own fame as an emerging bestselling author to help the development of the magazine. He contributed feature articles to each issue, which were usually accompanied by photographs of Guo, shot by professionals. His new novel, The Summer Has Yet Come was serialized in the magazine before being published in book form. Additionally, efforts were made to introduce the editorial team to readers. There was a special section in each issue reporting on the life of those young editors. Their distinctive personalities and quirky, fashionable and colorful lifestyles were well documented to appeal to readers. As well, Guo paid special attention to the design and illustrations of the magazine. Together with the second most important figure in the team, who had great talent and shared a passion for design with Guo, Guo produced a magazine providing a strong visual attraction to readers. To some degree, Island was a hybrid of traditional youth literary magazines and contemporary star or entertainment magazines. Guo had not yet developed his philosophy or recipe for editing magazines (in retrospect, Guo said he followed his instincts to produce Island), but the core of it—creating a combination of stylish writings and manga-like illustrations -- was evident from the outset. The first issue of Island sold 50,000 copies and successive ones circulated from 150,000 to 300,000 copies (Ma). In comparison, Shou huo (Harvest), the bestselling serious literary magazine in China, had a circulation of 40,000 copies.

The ten issues of Island proved that Guo was a gifted magazine editor and had an acute sense of how the publishing business worked. As mentioned above, Island significantly increased Guo’s value during his move from Spring Wind Literature House to Long River Literature House. The major part of his collaboration with Long River Literature House involved creating popular youth magazines for the house. In September, 2006, based on the former Island office, Guo and Long River Literature House opened the Aike Entertainment Company in Shanghai. Guo and his twenty staff members were in charge of providing “ready to publish” products and creating marketing and promotion plans, while the house was in charge of investment and distribution (S.Zhang).

The main product of Aike was a new monthly youth literary magazine called Zui Xiaoshuo (Top Novel), which was extolled as being more mature and professional than Island in terms of both design style and content. Guo applied his experience in editing Island to a more
sophisticated level, emphasizing high quality printing and illustrations. As the soul of the magazine, Guo’s writing and photographs of him were staples for the magazine and favorite sections of subscribers. *Cry Me a Sad River* was said to have been created with the purpose of helping to promote the magazine. Both *Tiny Times* and *The Marks of Duke* were first serialized in *Top Novel* (S.Zhang).

Meanwhile, Guo was keen to discover new talents among contributors to the magazine. He looked for writers with distinctive styles that were easy for readers to identify with. The way Guo cultivated writers was similar to that of an agent and his young entertainment stars. A new writer would be assigned to a special editor, whose main job was to help the writer develop and maintain a group of fan readers. Guo also made sure that the needs of fans/readers were the most important element to be addressed. *Top Novel* set up a variety of methods to communicate and receive feedback from readers, such as online discussion forums, blogs, microblogs, and questionnaires attached to each issue requesting fans/readers to evaluate their favorite writers or written piece. According to the responses that readers made online, writers could promptly modify the plot, character, or ending of their serialized novel. As expected, *Top Novel* achieved great success after its debut in October, 2006, reaching a circulation of 500,000 shortly afterwards. In the short time period of three years, Guo was able to create four branch magazines by expanding the most popular sections of *Top Novel* into individual publications (S.Zhang).

Guo became the most successful publisher in youth-literature publishing. As well as the magazines, Aike published over 100 books that were developed from contributions to the magazine. Starting from the period of *Island*, Guo had more than 20 bestselling authors with a selling record of over 100,000 copies. Among them, four writers were able to sell more than 500,000 copies. Aike controlled 90 percent of the entire production of youth-literature. Guo’s team of 30 members earned more than half of the profits for the entire Long River Literature House.52 Inspired by the success of *Top Novel* and its branch magazines, around 2009 several established youth writers were invited by publishers to edit youth magazines. The trend brought youth-literature publishing to another height (Yang Wang).

In 2010, Aike was expanded, renamed as Zuishi Cultural Company, and purchased an

52 Among the ingredients of the recipe for Guo’s success, his ambiguous sexuality seems to hold underlying appeal for his young girl readers. What his readers love most about him, such as his delicate figure, his obsession with beautiful objects, and the strength to make his own publishing empire, all suggest a mixture of female and male sensibilities.
entire floor in one of the trendiest business buildings in Shanghai. According to a reporter, the company became a real-world version of *The City of Fantasy*: staff members working there were all beautiful and sensitive youths, “as easily startled as little deers” and the interior decoration was of an abstract postmodern style with a grand crystal lamp as a focal point of attention. Guo, seated amidst the luxurious furniture in his office, was the king of this empire (Le). Long River Literature House offered him maximum freedom. As the director Li said in an interview: “We do not know a thing about this market [youth-literature], so we let Guo take full responsibility in this regard. We only offer things [about which] young people do not have much sense, like maintaining basic editorial standards and avoiding censorship. And we sometimes need to advise Guo on the administrative work.”

6.4 Marching Toward the Entertainment World

On many occasions, Guo expressed his passion for publishing. Compared to his uncertainty regarding how long he could continue writing, he was confident about making a lifetime career out of publishing. In his opinion, the working mode in Chinese industry was outdated, and he was determined to bring some fresh air to this field (Zhuo Zhang). Marching into a bigger world was perhaps one such effort.

From May, 2008 to July, 2009, Guo held an essay competition in order to find new writing talents. The competition, named “The Next: New Literature,” was an imitation of the hit television show *Super Voice Girls*. The 36 candidates, who were chosen from thousands of contestants nation-wide by the editors of *Top Novel* and its readers, gathered in Beijing to meet the selection committee. The final winner, after surviving several rounds of heated competition with other candidates in writing, would be rewarded with a roster of big prizes, including a publishing contract from Beijing Penguin House and an exchange study opportunity at Cambridge University (Hongling Xia). The second “The Next” was held from September, 2010 to July, 2011, with over 280,000 collected essays, and it was also sponsored by several state-owned institutions (Yang Wang). The third began in June, 2013.

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53 我们都不了解这个市场，一切都听他的。我们只在编辑把关方面提供一些意见。有些时候对于管理也给他一些意见。
54 It is a novelty for Guo to run a traditional essay competition in the same way as a singing competition, and there is no any precedent for this. To some degree, only a young adult has the imagination to do such a thing. His success in this respect, however, has much to do with the financial power he has gathered over the decade. That is to
“The Next” received strong media coverage and was immediately compared to the New Concept Essay Competition. The Mengya editor-in-chief, Zhao, stressed the differences between these two, stating that the former was an entertainment activity while the latter was more literature-oriented. The director, Li, from the Beijing office of Long River Literature House, argued that, since the selection committee of “The Next” consisted of literary experts (some of them actually had once served in the New Concept Essay Competition) and employed a set of literary criteria to choose winners, “The Next” was still a literary activity with the only difference being that it generated much wider participation. Guo seemed not to be bothered with the nature of the competition. He openly stated: “The purpose of the competition was to search for the new stars for the future, who must have both strong literary writing skills and market value.” In searching for young talent, Guo attempted to duplicate himself, as “the Next” was viewed as searching for the next Guo (M.Zhao). Unlike Han’s publisher, Lu, Guo was comfortable being viewed as the agent for the young writers he had discovered.

In August, 2013, with the film adaptation of Tiny Times being released, Guo went even further in the entertainment world. Guo had three roles with respect to this movie: the original writer, the screenwriter, and the director, with his only related experience being as a withdrawn college student who had majored in filmmaking. Guo’s confidence was based on a single firm belief that “no one understands Tiny Times better than me.” Youth-themed movies became popular in China starting in 2011, and set many records for Chinese domestic films, but Tiny Times eclipsed all of them with over one billion RMB in box office value (Yang Wang). Tiny Times also caused controversy of a scale that eclipsed the Hai-Bai and the Down-Han movements. The core of the controversy regarded the materialistic values conveyed by Tiny Times, exaggerated to a ridiculous level in the film. People’s Daily, the most authoritative and influential newspaper in China, published three commentary essays in succession, which was very rare for a paper of this kind. Even Han during his peak had not received such treatment (Q.Liu).56

Guo responded to these mostly unfavorable comments from the mainstream media with say, with his money he “bought” the cooperation of some mainstream institutions.

55 我们要寻找的是文字好，同时具有市场价值的作家。

56 It would be hard to understand the criticism against Guo’s materialism without some knowledge of traditional Chinese values. In this culture, materialism and affluence are not considered healthy for the cultivation of people’s inner strength. Therefore, Chinese culture does not have much tolerance for sheer materialism as Guo has bragged.
little concern, instead stating: “I think that it is a great honor that *Tiny Times* could bring up discussions.” Moreover, Guo acted in a manner similar to Han when the latter was caught in online wars, deliberately creating topics to provoke the public. In several television interviews, Guo defended his obsession with material goods and money quite aggressively (Q.Liu). Guo must have been well aware of how the general public would feel toward his words, but he did not care about it, for, after all, they were not his audience.

During the promotion of the movie, Guo made an obvious attempt to connect himself with a larger issue—the so-called “China dream.” In late 2012, China’s new President, Xi Jinping, brought it up in a speech for an exhibition, and ever since it had become the hottest topic among mainstream newspapers. Guo proclaimed: “I am one of the representatives of the China dream,” depicting himself as a model for youth achieving success through hard work (Yiyi Chen). From having been the representative of the only-child generation to now becoming the representative of the China dream, Guo apparently was attempting to generate wider influence and power. This is reminiscent of the efforts witnessed in Han’s journey transforming from a youth rebel to a young public intellectual. In Han’s case, the rebellious hero ultimately was seriously damaged; how far, then, would Guo be able to go as a hero who excelled at achieving financial success? What would his publishing empire become if he were to maintain his efforts to succeed in the entertainment world?

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57 能引起争议是很有价值的事。
Chapter 7: Conclusions and Discussion

This research study addresses four research questions, with the first two regarding the emergence of Chinese youth-literature publishing, its nature, and the dynamics behind its evolution, the third on how the production of this publishing contributes to Chinese children’s literature, and the last on how this study helps us understand publishing for children in China. In the four sections below, I address them one by one.

7.1 Youth-Literature Publishing as a Best-Seller Phenomenon

As discussed in the Literature Review, there have been two types of publishers—state-owned houses and private publishers—coexisting in China since the late 1970s. Among the publishers we have discussed in this study, Writers Publishing House, the World Affairs Press, Spring Wind Literature House, and Long River Literature House are state-owned houses, while Lu Jinbo and Guo Jingming are private. Each with its own advantages and disadvantages, state-owned houses and private publishers have distinctive approaches to carrying out publishing projects. Roughly speaking, state-owned houses as a group care more about the cultural side of publishing, while private publishers emphasize the commercial side of publishing. From each of the three case studies of publishing, I have already portrayed in detail how a state-owned house like the World Affairs Press published a youth book Gorgeous Guy, and with more complexity, I have traced the specific strategies the related state-owned houses and private publishers employed to effect the initial and continuing success of the publishing of the two writers Han Han and Guo Jingming. Now, integrating the results from these three chapters, it is possible to see that the coexistence of these two types of publishers is the key to understanding the inner driving forces of youth-literature publishing. By examining the similarities and differences between these two types of publishers, as well as their complicated relationship, I am able to grasp the operating mechanism of the Chinese publishing industry in order to understand the emergence and development of youth-literature publishing. In short, the coexistence of these two types of publishers has decided the nature and the contours of youth-literature publishing.

Publishers/editors of state-owned houses participating in youth-literature projects were designated special editorial offices in their own houses, which operated like private publishers with the ultimate goal of making a profit through best-seller publishing. Writers Publishing
House, Spring Wind Literature House, and Long River Literature House made names for themselves in publishing bestselling literature in the 1990s when bestselling publishing in China was just taking shape, and they all sought ways to continue their success in the new century as best-sellers became an overwhelming trend in the industry. World Affairs Press, as a latecomer, desperately wanted to catch up with best-seller publishing as a means of solving its financial crisis. The state-owned houses discussed in this study excelled or at least tried to excel at obtaining increasingly successful market experiences. They are the market-oriented houses among traditionally culture-oriented state-owned houses. As for private publishers Lu and Guo, they belong to the latest generation of private publishers. Different from their predecessors, who mainly relied on illegal piracy or publishing street literature to make a profit, Lu and Guo were talented, well educated, and sensitive enough to focus on publishing cultural or literary bestsellers. They were the more culture-oriented among profit-driven private publishers. Thus, these particular state-owned houses and private publishers were culturally and financially competitive. This makes them both rarities in Chinese publishing, which typically did not have much experience dealing with the innate struggle between commerce and culture in the publishing business. In this sense, the publishing forces we have discussed in this study are representatives of the results of reform in the Chinese publishing industry. The similarities between these two types of publishers have to some degree determined the nature of youth-literature publishing: It is a bestseller phenomenon, and it is mainly cultivated to make profits for the publishers, rather than to be of service to youth.

It was the differences between these two types of publishers, however, that exerted influence over the different development stages of youth-literature publishing, thus shaping its contours. Youth-literature was originally initiated and promoted as a national mainstream phenomenon by the state-owned houses, guided by the state-directed pursuit of books with both economical and moral values. Accordingly, state-owned houses had more resources to carry out such tasks than did private publishers. Even if they failed to explore the literary aspect of the works of youth writers, they did endeavor to associate them with bigger societal issues. For example, Yuan Min juxtaposed Han’s rebellious self-expression/accusation with the dull Chinese education system, while publishers/editors of Spring Wind Literature House interpreted Guo’s personal sadness as a signature emotion for China’s first only-one-child generation. Sometimes they could go too far, as the case of Gorgeous Guy illustrates. In itself this book can be seen as a piece of trash literature, but it was linked to youth popular culture in order to boost its value. As
market-oriented state-owned houses, they were able to mobilize the abundant human, social, cultural, and financial resources to help a new, young writer achieve success at the national level. For example, Yuan had the capacity to seek the authoritative endorsement regarding the literary merits of Han from a major children’s writer and influence the media coverage of her young writer, while Spring Wind Literature House was able to “buy” critics and professors to hold a conference for Guo. In doing so, both Han and Guo gained influence beyond young readers and the school domain, thereby enhancing their success in the book market. To some degree, only state-owned houses with strong cultural and financial resources were able to promote a young writer this way: private publishers usually lacked these resources, as did less market-driven state houses.

Moreover, publishers/editors of state-owned houses displayed deftness in balancing mainstream values and the rebellious spirit of their young authors. They knew how to walk the fine line between being controversial and being truly offensive. In China, bestsellers greatly rely on controversial topics or writers to gain success, but they must eventually conform to mainstream values. Otherwise, the specific book or writer would be marginalized and face censorship. We can see that Han’s publisher, Yuan, and Guo’s publishers of Long River Literature House similarly took steps to neutralize their controversial youth writers. Although relatively new in the best-seller publishing area, the publishers/editors of the state-owned houses were quick to grasp and master these intricacies. This reminds us that publishers and editors of state-owned houses usually come from a strong educational background, and their strengths in culture help them to excel in dealing with the business side of publishing. Young writers such as Han and Guo have also displayed a sophisticated understanding of the complex relationship between rebellion and conformity, perhaps partly being influenced by their publishers. All in all, it was state-owned houses that initiated youth-literature and helped it grow into a national phenomenon.

In contrast, private publishers have affected youth-literature publishing in a very different way. Unlike state-owned houses, private publishers did not have the obligation to produce books of both economic and spiritual values. Their single-minded goal was to make a profit, and the

58 The main concern of these editors is to catch media and the public’s attention by poking at sensitive issues but at the same time to stay out of trouble with the authorities. They do not really care what kind of messages the productions market at young readers, and how the targeted readers receive those messages unless such concerns are helpful in sales. Currently, Chinese editors intend to manipulate the cultural issues to generate sales, rather than to create any kind of culture for youth.
cultural value of a production would only be taken into account if it could serve that end. As a result, youth-literature publishing became increasingly commercialized, and books and reading changed to become more of a non-literary fashionable commodity and activity for Chinese young readers. Lu and Guo produced and sold books in a way not very different from that employed to market and promote other commodities. Aiming at obtaining maximum profits, they use a variety of approaches to stimulate sales, such as limiting print runs, and marketing with add-ons, like small items enclosed with a title, even including real gold. Guo was especially effective in this aspect when publishing his literary magazines. Apart from making it more commercial, private publishers further maintained the continuous popularity and influence of youth-literature by fusing its publishing with popular and entertainment culture. These publishers harnessed the “fan-based” economy fashioned in China beginning in 2004. They established youth writers as idols utilizing methods that the entertainment industry uses to foster entertainment stars, and published and publicized their books with entertainment industry tactics. Consequently, they blurred the boundaries between the publishing and entertainment industries.

Not only has youth-literature publishing produced phenomenally successful and wealthy bestselling authors, but it has also created popular teen idols. To their fans, Ke Aitao, Han and Guo serve the role that teen pop music icons play in the West. Such a strong entertainment factor sets youth-literature publishing apart from the best-sellers for adults, but it also places youth-literature publishing at risk of eventually becoming an entertainment business for youth in pursuit of higher profits, thus losing its identity within the publishing industry. The future will determine whether Guo’s entry into the entertainment world will promote or destroy the youth publishing empire he has built up over the years.

The respective influences of these two types of publishers can be further explored based on some speculation. Had these works been published first by private publishers, youth-literature publishing would most likely have been used to make a quick profit and then would have disappeared from the market. In the best possible scenario, even if it had survived, it would have been confined within a limited sphere of purely commercial publishing. In the same sense, youth-literature would be in a very different state today had it been restricted in its position within the state houses. Both the professional pride of editors and publishers and the restrictions imposed on them by the houses would have prevented the field of youth-literature from becoming an entertainment-like business. It is likely that youth-literature publishing would not have been able to continue its success in the book market without the endorsement of a
“fan-based,” popular culture of youth.

The sequence of state-owned houses preceding private publishers in youth-literature publishing is not simply the latter following the former to join the arena, however. As this study shows, it involved a transfer of some publishing resources from state-owned houses to private publishers. For example, as an author, Han moved from the state-owned houses to the private publisher Lu. Guo had been working with state-owned houses along the way, but during the process he constructed himself as a new type of private publisher and established his own publishing enterprise. As an editor/publisher, Lai left the World Affairs Press to become a private publisher after her successful attempt in youth-literature publishing. This shift happened due to some structural problems in the Chinese publishing industry: state-owned houses found it difficult to sustain the success created by the editors and writers they had discovered and nurtured. By contrast, private publishers became attractive because they could offer more profit and freedom to writers.

Rather than specifically belonging to youth-literature publishing, such a shift in publishing resources is becoming quite common in the broader Chinese publishing industry (R.Yu). With private publishers gaining more momentum while state-owned houses are losing their privileges, the landscape of Chinese publishing is moving in the direction of commercialization. In this sense, youth-literature publishing could be seen both as a result of the reform of the Chinese publishing industry and as an example by which to observe the progress of this reform. For this study, the publishing of youth-literature also serves as a case example for observing how commercialization influences publishing for children in the Chinese context. It is obvious that youth-literature publishing shares some of the perils of commercialization that have been imposed on publishing for children in the West, such as sacrificing literary merit for profit, and treating books as commodities and readers as merely consumers. While starting with a literary mission, youth-literature has ended as a new type of formulaic writing; promising writing talents may wither rather than being fully developed.

However, what is more revealing is the difference between China and the West in terms of commercialization that youth-literature publishing helps to illuminate. First, the chaotic state of youth-literature publishing suggests that in China, the issue of commercialization is still being discussed without the foundation that a mature market establishes. Along with debates, scandals, and controversies, there are many inappropriate activities underlying the production of youth-literature. For example, commercial publishing and mainstream publishing are two rather
distinct areas in Western publishing industry, unlike in the industry of present-day China. The World Affairs Press taking up the project of *Gorgeous Guy* could be viewed as an example. Although youth-literature publishing is commonly accepted as a commercial phenomenon, the extensive involvement of mainstream houses makes it hard to say so without hesitation. In addition, there are some issues in this publishing scene that might not be allowed in a more mature publishing environment, such as cultural or literary critics also serving as publishers of the books they are reviewing, intellectuals and professionals engaging in online arguments with aggressive youth, or book publishing holding so many similarities with the entertainment industry. The business world is always murky, but the Chinese publishing industry is murky in its own way. When compared to commercialization of publishing for children in the West, we must remember that sufficient, stable market or business regulations have not yet been established in this and other industries in China. That youth-literature publishing has been developed on such a large scale in such a short time period is a direct result of this abnormal environment, and its flourishing might be hard to sustain when the market becomes more regulated.

In addition, the so-called commercialization is experienced in China with a rather positive aspect in that it allows people to explore the business side of this industry, while in the West, scholars generally lament the commercialization trend in publishing for children. In theory, acknowledging this valuable lesson would be healthy for the Chinese publishing industry; in reality, the way the Chinese publishing industry will enact the outcomes of this lesson is rather awkward: the coexistence of two types of publishers is an indicator of the limitations and confusion embedded in its efforts. Nonetheless, market or commercial power serves as a tool for China to gain some liberty from its long traditions and the current government. In the case of youth-literature publishing, the market is a means to empower youth. The market liberates youth writers from the Chinese education system and allows them to explore different ways to live. To some degree, the market enables the voice of the only-one-child generation to be heard. Without the market, as well as the internet (to be discussed in the next section), the youth could not develop and advocate different values. Without acknowledging this positive aspect, it would be hard to understand the complex passion people show for this publishing phenomenon, which is not merely experienced as a publishing phenomenon for youth, but as a product of this market era.
7.2 Youth-Literature Publishing As a Cultural Phenomenon

The sphere of the publishing industry alone is not sufficient to enable consideration and understanding of the development of youth-literature publishing. In fact, especially in chapters 5 and 6, when tracing the publishing histories of two youth writers to understand their success in the book market, discussion regarding external factors far outweigh that directly associated with publishing houses and the industry. To some degree, we could even say that these two chapters do not engage in publishing matters directly. Instead, they focus on the technological, social, and cultural factors external to the publishing industry that have significantly contributed to the history of these two youth writers, as well as youth-literature in general. As observed in this study, the internet, fan-based youth popular culture, and media interests regarding the only-one-child generation have all exerted critical influences on the shaping of this publishing phenomenon. However, this phenomenon is by no means passively impacted by those factors; rather, through the authors and publishers of youth-literature, there is an active interaction between youth-literature publishing and its external shaping factors, which contribute to the exceptional vitality of this phenomenon.

Based on this study, we can see that there are three ways for the internet to contribute to the development of youth-literature publishing. The internet offers technical support, such as helping editors searching for publishing resources, using it as a free promotional space, and means of receiving feedback from the readers/fans, as detailed in the production process of Gorgeous Guy. More importantly, for youth writers, the internet is a critical means to sustain their publishing careers, as displayed in the cases of Han and Guo: the former might have failed in his successful comeback without his online wars, and the latter might have been totally isolated by society and lost his courage in writing and publishing if not for the support and consolation of his online communities of fans. Had Han Han and Guo Jingming had stopped publishing midway in their careers, it is highly likely that youth-literature publishing would have ended also.

Lastly, at a more abstract level, the internet, similar to the market briefly discussed above, also serves as a means to empower youth. Both the Han-Bai controversy and Guo’s plagiarism scandal are good examples of this point. Tao Dongfeng, a professor of literary theory, offers an inspirtiting interpretation of the Han-Bai controversy. He reads it as a “father killing event” out of the Oedipus complex. Through killing off the father figure Bai Ye in cyberspace, Han and his followers claimed their coming-of-age. In China, which has so far remained a patriarchal society,
cyberspace might be the only space for youth to be a rule-setter and openly fight with these fatherly or authority figures. Similarly, Guo and his fans use the internet as a safe haven to enforce each other while advocating their new values of materialism, which are antithetical to the traditional Chinese value systems. As important as the internet is to youth-literature publishing, the latter also contributes to the development of the internet.

Youth-literature publishing is viewed as part of youth popular culture in China. Youth popular culture has provided critical momentum to the development and success of youth-literature publishing since its growth in 2004. As evident in Guo’s publishing history, he probably would have not survived if his plagiarism scandal had happened in any other era than at the emergence of fan-based youth popular culture. Under its influences, youth writers have emerged as icons, more like popular stars, readers have become loyal fans, and the entire youth-literature publishing has situated itself more like an entertainment than a publishing business. On the other hand, youth-literature publishing contributed greatly to youth popular culture in the first place. It produced two of the most popular youth idols, Han and Guo, for this culture, and defined by demography, the fans of youth-literature are overlapping with members of youth popular culture. To some degree, we can say that youth popular culture in China would be different without the presence of youth-literature publishing. In today’s film market in China, youth-themed films have become very popular. Shilian sanshisan tian (Losing You in 33 Days) in 2011, Zhiwom zhongjiang shique de qingcun (To Our Forever Disappearing Youth Years) and Tiny Times in 2013 are all hit movies. All of them are adapted from novels written by youth writers. Therefore, the relationship between youth-literature publishing and popular youth culture could be described as codependent in some way: the former helped foster the latter, and then benefited from, and eventually became, a major part of it.

From its inception, youth-literature publishing has been in the spotlight of media coverage. Han and Guo are particular favorites of both traditional newspapers and new social media. How media coverage helped their success in publishing has been extensively examined in this study, and it is worth noting that some newspapers, and most especially the internet, explored youth-literature publishing as an element of their own growth. Liberal Southern Media Groups apparently used Han to bolster up their own value systems in opposition to those of the reigning Chinese Communist Party, while a few low-level newspapers benefited from covering or fabricating stories/rumors regarding Han’s conflicts with other cultural celebrities or Guo’s demonization to increase their circulation numbers in order to survive or thrive in the
competitive media environment. The internet relied more heavily on youth-literature publishing. The controversies regarding youth writers and youth-literature often started online, which sometimes acted as a hidden curator. For example, Sina blog service to some degree “cultivated” the Han-Bai controversy to foster its own popularity. Sina microblog service fanned the flame of the Down-Han movement.

The interaction between youth-literature publishing and these technical, social and cultural factors takes place through the medium of youth writers and readers of China’s first only-child generation. Youth-literature is expressly associated with China’s first only-child generation. To some degree, we can view youth-literature publishing as a result of the coming-of-age of this generation.

The close relationship of youth-literature with the growth of the first only-one-child generation raises some issues. Since this generation has now become adult, will youth-literature continue to develop? Is it possible for younger generations to continue the glory of the post-1980s writers? My answer is negative. The attention that media and the public paid to the post-1980s generation can hardly expand to include future generations of young writers. The second only-child generation born after the 1990s, when compared to the first, has its own distinctive features, but those differences are not essential and simply cannot attract enough attention. Insufficient influence means less attractiveness in the market. Some publishers have made efforts to discover writers who were born after 1990 but none of them have been able to reach the same level of influence as the 1980s writers.

7.3 Youth-literature Publishing and Chinese Children’s Literature

Since the emergence of youth-literature, readers in China have expressed great enthusiasm for it, hoping to read unique growing-up experiences of China’s first only-one-child generation that only youth of this generation could create with authenticity. However, the reading public has largely been disappointed with the result. Youth-literature soon became a new kind of formulaic writing, in which the writers have built an imaginary, strange world (Jiao). Wang Meng, a well-regarded adult writer who started his prominent literary journey by writing a youth-themed novel at the age of 19 half a century ago, once commented on youth-literature: “The settings and life style described in their writings could be anywhere in the world—you
could hardly recognize that it is China where they are writing about “Wangmeng”.

Taking this perspective, the writers seem to write not in order to understand but to escape from the world in which they live, which appears to suit their interests and inclination.

In the same vein, when looking for growing-up experiences in the writings of Han Han and Guo Jinming, we surprisingly find that the main interests of both writers are not in what they are presently experiencing in the process of coming-of-age. Han barely touches on what it is like in his “inside” world; instead, he seems more interested in offering his observations and opinions about society. Guo takes great pleasure and effort in depicting an “alternative world,” which has made him famous as a fantasy writer, and even in his realistic fiction, his “real world” seem unreal. Compared to Han, however, whose concerns are of society and authority, Guo in his prolific writings does touch on many growth-related problems, such as drugs, single-parent families, teenage pregnancy, violence, suicide, and ambiguous sexual orientation, but these themes are mostly used as elements to enhance a dramatic story rather than explored as the reality of life for this specific generation. Neither of these two leading youth writers touches on the quest for identity, which is a central issue in Western young adult literature. Both Han and Guo excel at conveying the feelings of loneliness and isolation, which are universally associated with youth, but are felt more acutely by the only-child generation. Their works are to some degree emotion-driven, but obviously, as their works are published at the rate of one book per year, they cannot retain the freshness and authenticity of such emotions.

When contrasted with their novels, which provide rather narrow and limited experiences, I find that, by contrast, their publishing journeys more strongly reveal their unique coming-of-age in present-day China. These real-life stories are complex and complicated. On the one hand, they are fabulous and powerful stories of success in terms of fame and fortune; on the other hand, they are chaotic and cruel stories of failure in terms of personal growth. Both writers expose a deeply flawed personality during the process. It is noticeable how little help these young people could obtain after embarking on their journey into society: neither their parents nor the professionals with whom they worked understood the difficulties they were facing. There is also evident, through their publishing careers, a profound power struggle between youth and adults, as reflected in the controversies between Han and Guo and critics. This may be seen as the adult nurturing, criticizing, and withdrawing from the youth while the youth rebels, is

59 他们写的东西可能发生在世界上的任何地方，你根本看不出来他们写的是中国发生的事。
defeated, and then seeks conformity with, and integration in, the adult world and society. It is similarly surprising to discover that although there are such heated debates in cyberspace between youth and adult critics, it seems that these two groups do not really communicate with each other. Simply put, engrossed with their own issues, they are never on the same page.

The writings of Han and Guo (as well as those of other youth writers), although limited, contribute to Chinese children’s literature by bringing into it new content and writing styles. Their real-life experiences in the publishing industry perfectly reflect some characteristics of Chinese children’s literature. The entire body of Chinese children’s literature to some degree could be read as how Chinese children/youth experience extreme social conditions. In this sense, the publishing experiences of Han and Guo, as a direct and sometimes brutal confrontation with the market, resonate with the experiences of classical protagonists of Chinese children’s literature. These protagonists include, among others, the orphan Sanmao experiencing poverty in the 1930s, Little Soldier Zhang Ka experiencing war in the 1940s, and Red Guard experiencing the Cultural Revolution in the 1960s.

The relationship between youth writers and critics is somewhat problematic. This is not, however, something new and shaped by the internet and the market as we may imagine; there are also parallels in the history of Chinese children’s literature. For example, in the stories of Little Red Guards, the power relationship between youth and adults was reversed as the Communist Party mobilized the youth to carry out their political plans.

Li Jingzhe, a literary magazine editor, observes that “Youth-literature publishing is a cultural phenomenon, and it is not a literary phenomenon.”60 The reasons for this include not only the difficulties imposed by the market, but also the inner weakness of youth writing. Although youth writers have an advantage in their ability to write about their own growing-up experiences, it is also limited by their age, and the fact that the scope of their life activities usually is confined to school and family. In fact, the understanding of, and insight expressed by, these “insiders” of youth as a developmental stage are rather superficial and narrow. Consequently, the depth and breadth of their writings are limited, and they have, instead of writing primarily of the societal experiences of their generation, conjured up imaginary and strange worlds. In fact, it may be that only adult writers are able to seriously reflect and examine youth as a developmental stage; as the critic Huang Ping rightly points out: “People who are

60 青春文学是一种文化现象，不是一种文学现象。
undergoing the experiences cannot at the same time reflect and examine them”

Thus, the fascinating real-life stories of Guo and Han have yet to be written with any authentic reflection or by any adult writer who seriously cares for this generation and its future. This suggests that the success of youth-literature, that is, its becoming a commercial publishing phenomenon on such a huge scale over a decade, owes more to a variety of non-literary rather than literary shaping forces. In this sense, the flourishing of youth-literature in China does not have a solid literary foundation, but can instead be seen as a commercial and cultural phenomenon.

Nevertheless, as a researcher of children’s literature, I feel it is essential to ask if youth-literature publishing could act as an impetus to the emergence of a Western style of young adult literature as a genre in Chinese children’s literature. The answer is far from promising: over the years youth-literature has become a subject that is increasingly irrelevant to Chinese children’s literature. The relationship of these two has been weak from the beginnings of youth-literature, and has severed almost completely as youth writers matured. Youth writers are eager to write for mature readers, as shown by Han and Guo; meanwhile, youth-literature has increasingly become a closed circle accessible only to the youth, thereby denying the participation of adult writers. In contrast to children’s literature academics and other experts, academics and professionals from contemporary Chinese literature play an active role in cultivating and “harvesting” the phenomenon of youth-publishing. To some degree, as a publishing phenomenon, if youth-literature leaves a literary legacy, it may be that of youth-literature supplying Chinese contemporary adult literature with a new generation of writers. That youth-literature publishing ends up not having much to do with children’s literature is a result of the marginalization of children’s literature as a whole in China.

7.4 Youth-Literature Publishing: Professionals and Community

Examining the Chinese publishers and editors in this study and, by contrast to the Western publishing professionals for children and their committed, close-knit community discussed in the “Literature Review” chapter, it is possible to comment on the nature of the publishing professionals in China and in what way they work with those engaged with youth-literature publishing.

61  正在经历青春的人是无法反省青春的。
With their strong desire to achieve personal success, these Chinese publishers and editors could be seen as heroes within present-day China where the government places economic development as the top priority. They are adventurous, competitive, and hard-working. They are uncanny players because they know how to juggle different balls at the same time: they strive to establish new norms in the publishing industry, while they are especially capable of manipulating or even preying on the old social systems to make profits. They entered youth-literature publishing with individual intents and purposes, and left the field after their goals had been realized. In the case of Yuan Min, her involvement with youth-literature served to initiate a new career in the publishing industry (she later switched to publishing for adult readers and then for literary magazines). In the case of both Lai of World Affair Press and Lu Jinbo, youth-literature publishing served as a new area of investment in order to elevate their success in publishing to the next level. Among them, Guo Jingming was the only one who devoted himself to this publishing area. He was determined to establish a career in youth-literature publishing, implicitly defining a successful career as making as much profit as possible.

Those publishers and editors probably did not excel in their editing skills or editorial concerns as compared to Qin of the World Affairs Press, but they were very effective in the business side of publishing and, fortunately for them, they worked in an era that suited their talents. Nonetheless, it should not be implied that they cared only for market success. This statement is most applicable to the earlier generation of publishers such as Yuan Min and Lai, who longed for something more significant than market share. In fact, Yuan eventually left the field to pursue her literary dream, and Lai devoted herself to Buddhism in her private life. These two, as well as others we discussed in this study, seem not to recognize that in youth-literature publishing there is something deep enough to give them professional pride and to meet their spiritual needs. In other words, their views of publishing for youth were quite limited. They came to the field with little knowledge of youth or publishing for children. At the outset of their careers in youth publishing, they relied on the innate, natural knowledge of their young colleagues or authors to carry out the publishing projects. Afterwards, unfortunately, it appears that they did not seem to learn much about youth other than their needs as book consumers.

Although these publishers and editors failed to discover the significant aspects of youth-literature publishing, they did not shoulder the sole responsibility for that. On the one hand, those individuals who would be most likely to contribute to this aspect are absent from the publishing scene. Children’s librarians and teachers, who serve as advocates and gate-keepers for
the publishing for children and young adults in the West, are noticeably absent from the histories I have traced in this study. There is no room in my research to offer a detailed discussion of the impact of their absence. Suffice it to say that this is primarily due to the fact that China’s system of librarianship is very different from that of the West and, under the current Chinese education system, Chinese teachers concentrate on textbooks and are not responsible for what students read outside the classroom. (I had worked as a high school literature teacher and still have friends working in this field). Even if teachers are sometimes asked for comments on certain publishing phenomena, their responses have little impact on the publishing industry because they are not supported by the strong institutional market that their Western counterparts enjoy. In fact, youth-literature entirely relies on the retail rather than institutional market. On the other hand, people who are engaged with youth-literature, such as literary critics, do not contribute greatly because they either use youth-literature publishing to address their own cultural and social issues (for example, to criticize Chinese society or authority), or when they discuss youth, the connection between literary production and youth growth is not one of their concerns.

The way the publishers and editors work with youth authors, as evidenced by Han Han’s experiences with his two types of publishers, is more a personal interaction embedded with warm feelings and support built on Chinese social customs than a rewarding professional collaboration centering on the literary productions. Lacking a clear and coherent commitment to children’s literature or to youth-literature as a larger purpose in their cooperation and collaboration, even if Chinese publishers and editors work together with writers, critics and readers in order to pursue business success, it is not possible to state that they would function as a community in any sense.

Reflecting on Chinese publishers, editors, and others engaged with this publishing industry enables us to understand from a different perspective the reality into which youth-literature publishing was born. When critics and other individuals lament the growing commercialization of this publishing phenomenon and vehemently criticize publishers and writers as greedy and profit-driven, their criticism has validity, yet they fail to recognize that there are no resources to offer an alternative path for the development of youth-literature publishing. For example, if China had children’s librarians and teachers who were involved with

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62 Although there are special libraries set up for children and youth in China, especially in big cities such as Beijing and Shanghai, these libraries fail to play a significant role in the reading lives of Chinese children for many reasons. For example, Children’s librarians do not exist in Chinese everyday life. There are libraries at Chinese school, but they are usually no more than a storage room for outdated books. For more discussion, see Guo Renqi’s article on the underdevelopment of children’s libraries in China.
children’s books, as well as devoted publishers, editors, and critics who were concerned with the welfare of youth, youth-literature publishing might have experienced a greater opportunity to maintain its literary and cultural merits; it might also have encouraged the emergence of the genre of young adult literature.\(^{63}\)

As an influential commercial and cultural phenomenon, the publishing of youth-literature has raised a certain awareness of this trend in society: “Youth is a Fabulous Business,”\(^{64}\) as aptly proclaimed on a magazine cover (Kun Wang). While serving as an example that illuminates the market era that this publishing phenomenon was born into, such a statement reminds us again of the marginalization of Chinese children’s literature in this society, which is the other side of the coin of this publishing phenomenon. The overwhelming commercial trend of youth-literature combined with a weak children’s literature foundation may present a barren field in which to sow the seeds of publishing quality books that would reflect contemporary experiences of youth.

At the completion of this study, I find it ironic that, starting with the determination to focus more on details concerning youth and their growth, I conclude by discussing more about the society of this specific period than youth themselves. A variety of economic, social, cultural, and technical issues dominate the discussion of this phenomenon, while youth and literature, paradoxically, are not key terms within the discourse. The stories told here are stories of China in the new century, thus being somewhat distinct and separate from my original intention. This should by no means come as a surprise, as we recall that China has a tradition of not treating children as at the center of its culture or society, even in its children’s literature. This is a tradition; this is also a reality. In present-day China, which is experiencing a major transition from the socialist society to the economic era, personal growth, including that of childhood and youth, has not yet received sufficient attention and recognition as significant, in society and its literature.

### 7.5 Limitations of the Study and Further Research Recommendations

The outcomes of this study are limited by the availability of research material. I

\(^{63}\) Youth writers are usually seen negatively by Chinese adults, who have a tendency to criticize them rather than try to understand their pursuits. If there were knowledgable children’s literature experts in China, I believe that people would be more tolerant towards the youth writers. Eventually, youth writers would even be encouraged to reflect seriously their writing and coming-of-age experience in China.

\(^{64}\) 青春是一門好生意
conducted this study in Canada, which imposed a limit on my access to abundant youth-literature productions and related Chinese secondary materials. Accordingly, although the materials that I have mobilized in this study to explore core issues of youth-literature publishing are critical and significant in content, my conclusions could possibly be more solid and have more general application had my research been conducted in China, where more material is available.

Due to the limitation on the length of a Master’s thesis, it is also regretful that I cannot include one more chapter exclusively studying another leading writer, Zhang Yueran, who, together with Han Han and Guo Jingming, was considered as one of the sanjia mache (golden troika) in youth-literature. Zhang was much less influential than Han and Guo, but for many people she represented the literary pursuit within youth-literature. Studying her less successful career, when compared with those of Han and Guo, would help to better illuminate the underdeveloped literary aspect of this phenomenon. Zhang would also be a good example to examine the gender issue in Chinese children’s literature, for the major writers of this field are predominantly male.

For future studies of youth-literature publishing, I would first suggest conducting a comprehensive survey of the field. On the basis of such a survey, scholars can move forward to explore and understand the world and the longings of Chinese youth as found in the literature, rather than continued investigation of cultural, social, or communication matters in contemporary China. Furthermore, a comparative study would be revealing between Chinese youth-literature, mostly written by youths themselves, and Western young adult literature, primarily written by adult writers.
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