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Postprint: Challenges and Strategies for the Internationalization of China' s Digital Publishing

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Abstract

Objective: China' s digital publishing sector suffers from deficiencies in core technologies, economies of scale, and industry standards, leading to problems such as technological dependence, excessive costs, immature development models, and lack of consistency in relevant standards. These issues have resulted in a significant gap between China and Europe and the United States in areas such as literature databases, digital journals, e-books, and digital newspapers. Simultaneously, the increasing entry of foreign digital publishing institutions and publications into China has further highlighted existing problems in China' s digital publishing industry.

Method: This article employs a research methodology that combines theoretical and empirical approaches.

Results: It proposes that China' s digital publishing should be grounded in its national conditions and unique advantages, actively learn from advanced international digital publishing experiences, and diligently develop its "internal strengths" in areas such as enhancing digital publishing technologies, optimizing digital publishing content, improving industry standards, and expanding international digital publishing trade, thereby creating a diversified and multi-dimensional digital publishing internationalization pattern.

Conclusion: The enhancement of digital publishing internationalization will strengthen the international influence of Chinese culture, promote human civilization progress through mutual learning among civilizations, and accomplish the transformation from a major cultural country to a culturally powerful nation.

Full Text

Dilemmas and Strategies for the Internationalization of China' s Digital Publishing

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Abstract

[Objective] China' s digital publishing sector suffers from deficiencies in core technologies, scale effects, and industry standards, resulting in problems such as technological dependence, excessive costs, immature development models, and inconsistent standards. These issues have created a significant gap between China and Western countries in areas such as literature databases, digital journals, e-books, and digital newspapers. Simultaneously, the increasing influx of foreign digital publishing institutions and publications into China has further highlighted existing problems in the domestic industry. **[Methods]** This study employs a combined theoretical and empirical research methodology. **[Results]** The paper proposes that China' s digital publishing should build upon its national conditions and unique advantages while actively learning from international best practices. It must strengthen its "internal capabilities" in technology enhancement, content optimization, industry standardization, and expansion of international digital publishing trade to create a diversified, multi-dimensional internationalization framework. **[Conclusion]** Enhancing the internationalization of digital publishing will strengthen China' s global cultural influence, promote human civilization progress through mutual cultural learning, and facilitate the transformation from a major cultural country to a cultural powerhouse.

Keywords: digital publishing; digital publishing internationalization; digital publishing international market

Printing technology, a crystallization of ancient Chinese laborers' wisdom and one of China' s four great inventions, has made tremendous contributions to the development of global publishing. During the twentieth century, China completed its transformation from traditional to modern digital publishing technologies. However, China' s digital publishing started relatively late, and significant gaps remain with Europe and America in terms of digital publishing technology and dissemination speed for literature databases, digital journals, e-books, and digital newspapers. The growing presence of foreign digital publishing institutions and publications in China has further exposed existing problems in the domestic industry. Therefore, research into the dilemmas of China' s digital publishing internationalization is necessary to advance its global development.

1. Dilemmas in the Internationalization of China' s Digital Publishing

1.1 Insufficient Core Technologies in Digital Publishing

Emerging digital technologies such as publication digitization, multi-functional display, data transmission, digital storage, streaming media, and the Internet of Things currently dominate the international digital publishing industry. Variable digital printing and personalized digital printing are widely applied in international commercial quick printing, government document printing, and sectors including finance, insurance, publishing, and packaging. However, China lacks sufficient reserves of core digital publishing technologies. The digitization degree of publishing processes, publications, display technologies, and printing technologies remains low, with inadequate research and development in core technologies such as digital storage, data transmission, and digital printing. China particularly lacks core technologies in data processing and image processing, and needs to better integrate digital printing technology with network technology.

1.2 Failure to Achieve Scale Effects in Digital Publishing

While some Chinese databases such as CNKI, VIP Database, and Wanfang Database, along with numerous online literature platforms, have established corresponding digital publishing platforms overseas, and despite significant progress in digital publishing internationalization over the past two decades—particularly since the 18th Party Congress, when China “vigorously promoted innovation in international communication, streamlined domestic and foreign propaganda systems, built internationally influential media clusters, and actively advanced Chinese culture abroad” [1]—core technology deficiencies, redundant digital publishing content, and non-unified domestic publishing standards, especially the large gap between some online literature platforms and international standards, have hindered further development.

Currently, digital publishing bases in China have proliferated from the national to provincial levels, with establishments such as the Fujian Strait National Digital Publishing Industry Base and the Shandong Qingdao National Digital Publishing Base. However, low inter-base correlation, industrial fragmentation, poor coordination among bases, and weak industrial chain structures prevent individual industrial bases from achieving appropriate economic scale in a short time. Consequently, they cannot exert industrial scale synergistic effects or form international competitive advantages.

1.3 Redundant and Homogenized Digital Publishing Content

Although CNKI, Wanfang Database, Longyuan Journal Network, and VIP Database all include academic journal articles and conference papers—by June 1, 2023, CNKI' s Chinese Journal Full-text Database included over 8,500 domestic journals, Wanfang Data Knowledge Service Platform included nearly

8,000 Chinese journals, and VIP Information's Journal Resource Integration Service Platform included over 12,000 Chinese journals—the “fragmented” situation among different databases has led to vicious price competition, market confusion, industry imbalance, vague positioning, content duplication, and similar retrieval procedures, causing confusion for domestic and international users when making selections.

1.4 Lack of Industry Standards in Digital Publishing

In the current international internet domain, Chinese publishing industry standards are severely lacking—only 3 of over 4,000 international publishing standards were formulated by China. “Standardization lag has become one of the important factors restricting the development process of China's digital publishing.” [2] Digital publishing technologies require standards for coding, document formats, and other aspects. However, China's digital publishing platforms maintain strict technical barriers, with conflicting and 杂乱 standards. The country lacks not only unified domestic industry standards but also struggles to align with international digital publishing standards. Major platforms each have their own closed formats and standards: CNKI's CAJ, Chinese Online's OEB, Shanghai Tongli Company's BOK and ABM formats, Wanfang Database's PDF, Superstar Discovery's PDG, Shusheng's SEP, Founder Apabi's CEB and XEB formats, VIP Database's VIP format, National Library's NLC format, and Huakang Company's WDL format, forcing users to employ different readers and creating inconvenience for domestic and international browsing and downloading. At the 2018 Hangzhou International Information Standards Meeting, only Huawei from China participated in new media standard formulation. Overall, the lack and lag of digital publishing standards constrain the internationalization of China's digital publishing.

1.5 Uneven Translation Quality

The language barrier between Chinese and Western languages also constrains the internationalization of China's digital publishing. Due to uneven translation quality, some online literary works, after being translated into foreign languages, not only lose their original literary aesthetic but also deviate significantly from the original meaning, making them unsuitable for Western reading habits. “Overseas readers encounter main problems in translation quality and update frequency when reading Chinese online literature, with more than 60% of users expressing dissatisfaction with translation quality, and reading difficulty due to poor translation becoming the biggest pain point for overseas users. Translation teams are uneven in quality, with high difficulty and costs, long cycles, slow feedback, and currently no unified standard for Chinese-specific terminology.” [3] Although fantasy and immortal hero novels in online literature, with their themes of leveling up, monster fighting, demon slaying, and countless treasures, are popular among foreign readers, the immortal hero term “Wanbaodian” was directly translated as “Palace of Ten Thousand Treasures.” Later,

Wuxiaworld founder Lai Jingping corrected it to “Palace Opulentia,” derived from Latin, preserving the artistic conception of the Chinese novel in English.[4] This demonstrates that China’s digital publishing translation quality requires further improvement.

1.6 Shortage of Digital Publishing Talent

Contemporary digital publishing development requires not only mastery of traditional publishing processes such as topic planning, editing, and marketing but also familiarity with computer and network applications, understanding of digital publishing models, proficiency in digital publishing technologies, and organic integration of emerging digital technologies with traditional publishing workflows. However, China currently faces two problems: first, the transition of traditional publishing employees to digital publishing positions. “Internal employee transfer, namely the transformation of traditional publishing editors, is currently the main source of digital publishing talent, with 62.99% of institutions choosing this method.” [5] These transferred traditional publishing employees require systematic training to enhance digital publishing skills, posing significant challenges for older traditional publishing practitioners. Second, existing digital publishing practitioners have insufficient mastery of theoretical knowledge and emerging technologies such as mobile apps, social media, network marketing, big data, internet, and media convergence awareness. These two issues have resulted in a severe shortage of digital publishing talent in China, particularly individuals who understand editing, proofreading, and planning while also being proficient in digital publishing graphics, audio, animation, computer and network technologies, publishing and editing technologies, and multimedia design. Some university digital publishing teaching knowledge systems are outdated, with operability far lagging behind theoretical content.

2. Principles for the Internationalization of China’s Digital Publishing

2.1 Political Principle

As an important field of cultural dissemination, digital publishing, particularly in areas related to humanities and social sciences, has ideological characteristics. “One must see clearly what can and cannot be done, stand firm in trials and tribulations, and remain unmoved in the face of temptation and ‘hunting,’ always being politically astute.” [6] On one hand, the internationalization of digital publishing must consider the ideological and cultural characteristics of different countries, requiring research into various nations’ social factors to avoid risks and unnecessary cultural and political conflicts during topic selection, planning, production, publication, and marketing. On the other hand, China must maintain a firm political stance, especially regarding academic achievements involving national and ethnic core interests and major development strategies. External digital publishing must strictly control content, and when introducing

foreign digital publishing, must carefully examine content related to Western cultural colonial policies and resist foreign interference in China's development strategies under the guise of so-called "human rights and democracy."

2.2 Scientific Principle

The internationalization of digital publishing requires not only strict academic control in manuscript review and topic selection but also accuracy in reading and loading technologies and digital processing to avoid input distortion and data omission. "We must pay attention to maintaining the right tone, being both open and confident while also modest and humble, striving to shape a credible, lovable, and respectable image of China." [7]

2.3 Distinctiveness Principle

A diverse world requires distinctiveness. The internationalization of digital publishing must not only fully respect the cultural traditions of various countries and ethnic groups but also maintain its own cultural characteristics, demonstrate cultural confidence, and build digital publishing with Chinese characteristics. Many world classics such as Shakespeare and Tagore sell well in China precisely because of their cultural distinctiveness. The rising "China fever" globally stems from Western scholars' interest in Chinese traditional culture with distinctive features, which not only forms the cornerstone for the diversified development of global digital publishing but also presents business opportunities for China's digital publishing internationalization.

2.4 Practicality Principle

Whether from the perspective of international academic exchange or the introduction of various countries' customs and cultures, the internationalization of digital publishing must have practical value; otherwise, it will struggle to enter international markets. China's dietary culture, silk art, and martial arts traditions are popular in many countries, providing excellent opportunities for China's digital publishing internationalization. Capitalizing on these opportunities, the "Appreciation of Famous Chinese Paintings and Artists" series introducing Chinese cuisine, sports, and medical culture successfully exported its English copyright to North America in 2014. Additionally, the Chinese classical masterpiece comic book *Journey to the West* was exported to France's FEI Publishing House.[8]

3. Strategies for the Internationalization of China's Digital Publishing

The internationalization of digital publishing holds significant value for China's economic development and transformation from a major cultural country to a cultural powerhouse. As of February 2023, "China's online literature has exported over 10,000 works overseas. In 2021, the overseas market size for online

literature exceeded 3 billion yuan, with overseas readers reaching 145 million. Coverage has expanded from Europe, America, Japan, and South Korea to emerging markets such as Latin America.” [9] To further enhance the internationalization level of China’s digital publishing, it must build upon national conditions and unique advantages, actively learn from advanced international experiences, and strengthen internal capabilities in technology enhancement, content optimization, industry standardization, and international trade expansion to create a diversified, multi-dimensional internationalization framework.

3.1.1 Improving the Digital Publishing Policy System

Some Western countries have established specialized agencies responsible for the foreign development of the publishing industry, with France and the UK having formed complete management institutions. The UK government has specially established the “Queen’s Award” for publishing houses and book trade institutions to encourage publishing internationalization. China is also accelerating its deployment in this regard. “Party committees and governments at all levels should increase support for media convergence development in terms of policy, funding, and talent. Propaganda management departments at all levels should reform and innovate management mechanisms, implement supporting policies and measures, and promote media convergence development in the right direction.” [10] Government authorities should encourage more digital publishing enterprises to explore international markets, relax approval for international digital publishing businesses, provide tax incentives and business subsidies, allocate special funds, and fund foreign exchange initiatives.

3.1.2 Expanding International Digital Publishing Markets

Although Dutch is the official language of the Netherlands, Elsevier took the lead in publishing English monographs and English scientific journals, actively exploring overseas markets and integrating into digital publishing internationalization. China’s digital publishing internationalization is overcoming language barriers. In 2018, the Fairbank Center for Chinese Studies at Harvard University, the Center for Research on Ancient Chinese History at Peking University, and Chinese Online Digital Publishing Group Co., Ltd. jointly signed the CBDB (China Biographical Database) project cooperation agreement, placing Chinese e-books on e-commerce platforms such as Amazon, Apple Store, and JD.com for global Chinese readers to purchase and download for direct terminal reading.

3.1.3 Establishing International Digital Publishing Standards

Digital publishing standards should reflect digital technology development, and adjustments and corrections to the digital publishing standard system should be dynamic. The formulation of digital publishing standards requires coordination among various departments including the National Press and Publication Administration and the Ministry of Industry and Information Technology. “Government authorities should sort out the entire digital publishing chain, promoting

solutions to issues such as author authorization, authorization channels, digital publishing technical standards, redundant construction and waste of digital publishing resources, construction of a unified national digital resource platform, business models, settlement methods, and third-party supervision mechanisms.” [11] On one hand, China’s digital publishing standardization should align with international standards; on the other hand, China should actively transform its national standards into international standards. Traditional publishing units that started digital publishing early in China, such as Higher Education Press, Encyclopedia of China Publishing House, and Shanghai Century Publishing (Group) Co., Ltd., are investing in digital publishing standard development. In 2010, Shanghai Century Publishing (Group) Ltd.’s Cihai e-reader adopted the internationally compatible EPUB format, demonstrating China’s gradual alignment with international standards. The *Chinese Standard Link Identifier (ISLI)* is a national standard that uses the redrafting method to modify and adopt *ISO 17316:2015 Information and Documentation—International Standard Link Identifier (ISLI)*. It is also the first international standard in the information and documentation identifier field led by China, officially released by the International Organization for Standardization (ISO) on May 15, 2015, and approved the International Information Content Industry Association (ICIA), headquartered in Hong Kong, China, as the ISLI International Standard Registration Authority, marking China’s leading position in applying link identifiers and building digital composite publishing applications.

3.1.4 Strengthening Digital Publishing Talent Cultivation

Talent is the foundation of every industry’s development, and universities are the specialized training source for digital publishing. Therefore, selecting key institutions to cultivate specialized talent and dispatching personnel with good foreign language foundations and strong publishing professional qualities for overseas study and training are effective ways to cultivate high-end international talent. In 2008, Beijing Institute of Graphic Communication established the “Communication Studies (Digital Publishing Communication)” major, becoming China’s first program with “digital publishing” in its name. In June 2009, Time Publishing and Media Co., Ltd. established a postdoctoral research station and subsequently signed postdoctoral training agreements with Fudan University, Wuhan University, Communication University of China, and University of Science and Technology of China.

3.2 Enhancing Core Technological Innovation Capabilities in Digital Publishing

3.2.1 Strengthening R&D Innovation in Core Digital Publishing Technologies

Currently, China has achieved breakthroughs in key digital publishing technologies such as cross-platform reading technology, structured layout technology, MPR (multimedia print reading) technology, digital copyright protection technology, content structure processing technology, and cloud publish-

ing service technology, with direct overseas output. Tsinghua University Press' s "Wenquan Academy" has undergone five version updates since late November 2020 through integrated platform design and development by its own technical department and subsidiaries. "Chinese All Digital Publishing Group," founded at Tsinghua University in 2000 and China' s first listed digital publishing enterprise, has achieved a series of results and breakthroughs in digital copyright protection, e-reader applications, and online tracking rights protection as one of the undertakers of the national press and publication major science and technology project "Digital Copyright Protection Technology R&D Project." Innovation is an ongoing process, and further strengthening of relevant core technological innovation is needed to face unknown challenges on the future internationalization path of digital publishing.

3.2.2 Improving Digital Publishing Evaluation Systems China' s research evaluation system, including digital publishing, is constrained by foreign databases such as SCI. Many high-level papers submitted to foreign journals are restricted by international copyright, requiring authors to pay to repurchase their own research results. In 2017, five departments including the China Association for Science and Technology jointly issued a document proposing to de-emphasize SCI database evaluation and strengthen the academic value of papers themselves. Therefore, it is necessary to improve China' s digital publishing evaluation system and construct a publishing evaluation system suitable for China' s national conditions and capable of promoting the development of its cultural undertakings.

3.3.1 Improving Translation Quality

Since China implemented the "China Book International Promotion Plan" in 2004, the "Classic China International Publishing Project" and "China Culture Works Translation and Publishing Project" in 2009, and the "Silk Road Book Fragrance Publishing Project" in 2014, it has funded the translation and publication of over 1,000 high-quality Chinese-themed books annually, promoting digital publishing internationalization. CNKI is currently aggregating content from over 130 Chinese English-language journals, and its bilingual journal database has selected and translated 128 representative high-quality Chinese journals from various disciplines. This demonstrates significant development in the scale of China' s publishing industry translation; however, translation quality needs further improvement to achieve not only faithfulness, expressiveness, and elegance but also to enhance aesthetic appeal by incorporating Western linguistic and cultural habits.

3.3.2 Enhancing Professional Standards in Digital Publishing

On February 29, 2008, the Chinese Medical Association publicly tendered and exclusively licensed the digital publishing rights of its 115 medical journals to Wanfang Database, jointly exploring specialized medical digital publishing in

China. Professional fields such as agriculture, construction, and art can establish specialized databases similar to those for traditional Chinese medicine and acupuncture, expanding resource sharing beyond traditional print journals and enhancing digital publishing specialization.

3.3.3 Building Distinctive Brands in Digital Publishing

Distinctive projects, such as sports digital publishing, can establish databases for traditional Chinese sports like martial arts and qigong to provide overseas services. Jane Friedman, President of Open Road Integrated Media, created e-books of all works by Nobel Prize winner Pearl S. Buck, who lived in China for over a decade, and marketed them through a unique “milestone marketing method,” building a distinctive brand for digital publishing.

3.3.4 Accelerating Resource Integration in Digital Publishing

Major U.S. companies such as Walt Disney, Time Warner Group, Viacom, AOL, Murdoch’s News Corporation, as well as France’s Hachette and Germany’s Bertelsmann have begun large-scale acquisitions of various content resources. Although China currently has over ten national-level digital publishing bases, they are relatively small in scale and lack coordination. Therefore, it is necessary to integrate existing resources, enhance the international influence of digital publishing, and build an internationally recognized, independent digital publishing platform.

3.4 Expanding International Trade in Digital Publishing

3.4.1 Copyright Export Some Chinese publishing units have formed strategic alliances with international publishing groups to promote China’s digital publishing to various countries through copyright export. In 2012, CNKI had over 500 users in more than 30 countries and regions including the United States, Germany, Australia, and Japan, including the U.S. Library of Congress, German National Library, Harvard University, Cambridge University, Chinese University of Hong Kong, Tokyo University, and Japan’s Ministry of Science and Technology, further expanding its business scope. The *Handbook of Prevention and Treatment of the New Coronavirus Pneumonia*, published by Hubei Science and Technology Press in January 2020, “has exported copyright to 17 countries and regions in 12 language versions, including English and Korean...” [12]

3.4.2 Product Licensing In August 2007, Beijing Tengwu Network Game Company became the first to operate simultaneously in China and North America through product licensing. To fully mobilize the enthusiasm of operators in various countries, each operator receives profit sharing according to the contract for each game launched, with the sharing ratio adjusted promptly. This sales method accounts for approximately 40% of Tengwu Company’s total revenue.[13]

3.4.3 Joint Development Domestic digital publishing enterprises jointly develop products with international digital publishing enterprises and operate independently by region. Starting in 2004, China's NetDragon and French multinational game developer, publisher, and distributor Ubisoft (UBI) co-developed *Heroes of Might and Magic Online*, with NetDragon handling sales in China and UBI handling sales in the United States and other regions, achieving resource sharing between NetDragon and UBI. On August 20, 2019, Beijing Institute of Technology Press and the U.S. Taylor & Francis Group signed a strategic cooperation framework agreement in Beijing to jointly plan and publish dozens of high-level books annually.

3.4.4 International Cooperation The combination of digitization and globalization not only makes it possible to release digital books and journals simultaneously worldwide but also enables readers to quickly obtain publications from other countries or regions across the internet. This transcendence of time and space improves interpersonal communication efficiency while helping specialized academic publications with narrow audiences find readers worldwide. In 2006, China and Germany jointly issued 36 academic journals and simultaneously established an online Chinese science and technology library to sell digitally priced products globally, sharing profits equally and mutually between Springer and its partners. Approximately 25% of the 1,400 journals published by Germany's Springer company are sold in various countries through cooperation and digital publishing.[14] On September 1, 2011, ingentaconnect, one of the world's three major digital library platforms, launched its Chinese version, providing over 5 million articles from more than 16,000 electronic journals and publications covering over 250 academic and technology publishers.[15]

The internationalization of digital publishing is an important component of China's efforts to strengthen international communication and implement the "going global" strategy for Chinese culture. "We must strengthen top-level design and research layout, build a strategic communication system with distinctive Chinese characteristics, and strive to enhance international communication influence, Chinese cultural appeal, Chinese image affinity, Chinese discourse persuasiveness, and international public opinion guidance." [16] Enhancing the internationalization of China's digital publishing will promote "telling China's stories well, spreading China's voice, and presenting a true, multi-dimensional, and comprehensive China," [16] strengthening China's global cultural influence, advancing human civilization progress through mutual cultural learning, and completing the transformation from a major cultural country to a cultural powerhouse.

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