

Makeover a breath of fresh air

Award-winning revamp of Baoding bookstore sets tone for the transformation of Xinhua's traditional outlets

By ZHANG YU in Shijiazhuang
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State-owned Xinhua Bookstore Group plans to update its shops to match a new breed of traditional outlets and online retailers.

Part of the plan has been to revamp its store in Baoding, a small city near Beijing, in North China's Hebei province. Last year, the shop had a complete makeover with a new interior design and is now known as the Fresh Air Books Bar.

"We are adapting to a modern trend where people want a comfortable reading environment," said Song Wenjuan, chairman of Baoding Guanglian Digital New-Media Co, which was involved in the bookstore's transformation.

Based on a simplistic style, the shop has even won several international awards for its innovative layout, including Germany's Red Dot Award: Best of the Best.

What also makes it different is that there is space for customers to read books or put their feet up, as well as areas to host themed events, such as lectures and book launches.

"Instead of just buying books and leaving the store straight away, customers can sit down in a cozy place to read in a quiet atmosphere," said



Yang Xiaohong, deputy general manager of Baoding Xinhua Bookstore Co, which runs the bar and 38 outlets in the city.

One young mother, who only gave her family name as Wang, popped

into the shop with her 5-year-old son. She left impressed.

"This is totally different from the old Xinhua bookstores where there was nowhere to read in comfort," said Wang, 36.

The Fresh Air Books Bar, in Baoding, North China's Hebei province, was transformed from a Xinhua Bookstore. PHOTOS BY ZHANG YU / CHINA DAILY

"The old ones were just like shopping malls, usually crowded and noisy," she added. "But now we can read here before buying the book."

Naturally, that is part of the plan. Yang pointed out that potential customers can stay at the Fresh Air Books Bar as long as they like, even if they fail to buy a single book.

"The bar is more like a stylish, fancy cafe or a library in a university," said Liu Mengfan, a graduate student from the Hebei University of Economics and Business.

She made two trips to the bookshop on successive days during her summer vacation, despite the 50-minute bus journey from her home.

"I came here not to read or buy any books but to prepare for my postgraduate entrance examination," Liu said, adding that she found the bookshop quiet and comfortable.

"Plus, I can get a drink whenever I want one," she said, referring to the snack bar.

This laid-back atmosphere has helped entice potential customers who used to buy e-books online.

Opened in April 2016, the Fresh Air Books Bar covers 400 square meters and stocks 6,000 books, selling on average about 20 titles a day, according to Yang.

"The figures are beyond our expectations," she said, adding that the store was redesigned with the help of Baoding Guanglian Digital New-Media.

"Since the project turned out to be so successful, we plan to upgrade other outlets in the near future," Yang said.

Baoding Xinhua Bookstore, a five-story shop covering 5,655 sq m, will be upgraded into a cultural complex similar to the Fresh Air Books Bar.

Reconstruction is set to start this month and should be finished by February 2018.

Science fiction takes off

Chinese writers in the genre have been gaining international recognition along with rising popularity at home

By ZHANG KUN in Shanghai
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Science fiction was featured at this year's International Literary Week, a key part of the annual Shanghai Book Fair.

Thirty-one authors and scholars from home and abroad took part in the festival, signing books, giving speeches and participating in discussion panels on the literary genre which is gaining more popularity in China.

Ye Xin, a deputy chairman of the China Writers' Association, said that a number of Chinese authors have gained international recognition in science fiction writing in recent years.

During the Aug 15-22 Literary Week, Chinese author Chen Qiufan spoke about his experiences participating in the annual Worldcon, organized by the World Science Fiction Society since 1939.

"I saw how people could be much



Science fiction is fast gaining popularity among Chinese readers. GAO ERQIANG / CHINA DAILY

more passionate about the fantasy world, such as the one that was created by George RR Martin, than the real world," he said. (Martin's series of fantasy novels *A Song of Ice and Fire* was adapted for television

in HBO's hugely popular *Game of Thrones*.)

"With the power of words and imaginations, we can fill the gaps between different realities, pacify fears and worries, and inspire emo-

ditional resonance in this age of technology," Chen said.

"Literature is not forgotten. On the contrary, it will glow and bloom to be a guiding star. It's time to redefine the realities."

Author Curtis Chen, who recently had the Chinese edition of his novel *Waypoint Kangaroo* published by CITIC Press, spoke about his childhood days in Taiwan when he watched shows like *Bewitched* and *Star Trek* on television. He became more immersed in the world of fantasy and science fiction when he moved to the United States aged 5.

He began writing science fiction in high school, and it was 20 years later that he got his works published. *Waypoint Kangaroo*, his first published novel, was only available in the US a few years ago.

Long fascinated by the Japanese cartoon series *Doraemon*, in which the blue robotic cat from the future has a magical kangaroo-like pouch, Curtis Chen created a spy nicknamed

Kangaroo who possesses an extra-dimensional pouch that allows him to store and retrieve items. During a vacation, Kangaroo is roped into the investigation of a double murder on the passenger liner to Mars.

Another author present at the International Literary Week was American Rysa Walker, who just had her first novel *Timebound* published in Chinese by Zhejiang Literature and Art Press. She gave a speech at Shanghai Library on Aug 20. The novel was originally titled *Time's Twisted Arrow*.

Published in 2012, *Timebound* won the Amazon Breakthrough Novel Award in 2013. The book has since developed into *The Chronos Files* series which consists of three novels and three novellas.

Timebound is about a teenage girl who discovers that her grandmother is a time-traveling historian from the future. The latter sends the teenager back to 1893 to stop her grandfather from altering the course of history.