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Taipei book fair opens with focus on Hungary

The 24th Taipei International Book Exhibition, one of Asia's largest book fairs, opened Feb. 16 in the city, featuring Hungarian literature and culture this year. Over 620 publishers from 66 countries have set up some 1,700 booths at the exhibition.

More than 400 forums, book launches, book signings and other events will be held at the fair, which runs until Feb. 21 at Taipei World Trade Center Exhibition Halls 1 and 3. This year's exhibition features Hungary as the theme country, and includes appearances by Hungarian authors and artists such as film director Péter Gádos, cookbook author Zsófia Mautner, illustrator Katalin Szegedi and musician Mihály Rosonczy-Kovács. Hungarian publishers are also present at the fair.

"Apart from the exhibition of classical and contemporary books, we have planned a variety of activities such as lectures, interviews, music performances, film screenings, and cooking, embroidery and illustration workshops," István Ijgyártó, Hungary's Minister of State for Cultural and Science Diplomacy, said at the opening. As this year marks the 60th anniversary of Hungary's 1956 revolution, this is used as a motif at the Hungarian pavilion, and a photo exhibition on the historic event and Tai-



wan's support is held alongside the fair.

Nikolett Egeni, deputy representative of the Hungarian Trade Office, said about 500 publications are on display at the Hungarian pavilion, which has a theme of "Freedom Love," taken from the work of Hungarian poet Sándor Petöfi (1823-1849). Visitors to the pavilion will be treated to wine tasting and folk music by the Hungarian band FolkEmbassy every day, Egeni said. Egeni said she hopes the Taiwanese people will be able to immerse themselves in Hungarian food, music, wine and books for a week.

Major Taiwanese publishers and independent bookstores are also seizing the opportunity to showcase their latest publications, offering various discounts at the fair. Starting 2013, the Ministry of Culture has helped the establishment of 61 independent bookstores in Taiwan with an aim to encourage people to read more. "Taiwan has the largest number of people in the world using the traditional form of Chinese characters," President Ma Ying-jeou said at the opening. "We hope that traditional Chinese characters can be appreciated by more

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people through our publications.” He noted that Taiwan’s publishing industry produces over 40,000 new titles annually, compared with 440,000 new titles per year in China. “But they have a population that is 57 times ours, so we still have a very strong capacity in terms of publishing,” Ma said.

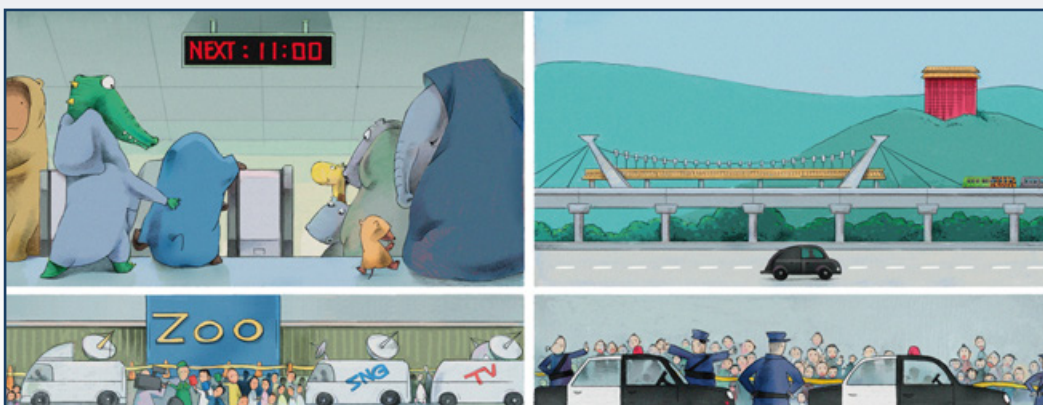
Culture Minister Hung Meng-chi said his ministry last year proposed a plan to revitalize Taiwan’s publishing industry, as the rise of digital publishing has affected local publishing houses. The plan includes training publishing talent, promoting reading, strengthening international marketing, and making books tax deductible, he said.

This year’s fair also features talks by writers from New Zealand, France, Poland, the United States and other countries. Among them are bestselling Polish fantasy author Andrzej Sapkowski, known for his series “The Witcher”. Other attractions at the fair include a special exhibition on the life of Eileen Chang (1920-1995), one of the most

important modern Chinese writers. On display are some of her personal belongings, rare manuscripts and books, while a series of talks on her work and life is also scheduled. At the National Palace Museum pavilion, some of its newly digitized books, including “Splendid Treasures: A Hundred Masterpieces of the National Palace Museum on Parade,” are on display. The museum, in collaboration with Acer Inc. and digital magazine app ZINIO, plans to digitize 100 of its books and is now offering 13 of them for sale online.

The National Museum of Taiwan Literature also has a presence at the fair, highlighting literary families in Taiwan through the presentation of audiovisual material, manuscripts and photographs. The children’s book pavilion, meanwhile, features works by award-winning illustrators from Taiwan, Hungary and Portugal. The annual book fair attracted more than 500,000 visitors last year.

Picture-Perfect Creations



The picture book genre has rapidly emerged as the most dynamic and innovative field in children’s literature in Taiwan.

Visitors to the sprawling children’s literature sections at Taiwan’s major bookstores are typically greeted by the sight of scores of preschoolers and their parents poring over stunningly illustrated picture books. Yet despite their current popularity, works in this genre have only become a mainstay of the country’s literary landscape in the past few decades.

“The emergence of picture books is closely related to economic development,” explains Chen Yu-chin, a children’s author and adjunct assistant professor in the Department of Language and Creative Writing at National Taipei University of Education. In the 1960s and 1970s, children’s poetry was perhaps the most popular genre of literature for young readers in Taiwan, while pictu-



re books, which are expensive to print, were rare. But by the 1990s, as the country grew more prosperous, parents were increasingly seeking out illustrated works.

Although imported and translated picture books still account for a majority of those sold locally, the number of such publications crafted in Taiwan has been rising in recent years. The trend has been helped along by the success of Taiwanese illustrators at the Bologna Children's Book Fair, the most significant professional gathering of its kind in the world.

In the 20-plus years since Hsu Su-hsia became the first local artist to feature in the fair's Illustrators Exhibition, more than 30 other Taiwanese have been included in the prestigious exhibit. Notably, Sun Hsin-yu found success at the fair in 2015 with her wordless picture book *One Day in Beijing*, which was accorded a special mention in



colonial period (1895–1945), and that these works inspired some locals to begin producing illustrated publications for youngsters. However, these early authors were schooled in the Japanese education system, and so struggled to compose picture books in Chinese once Mandarin became the official language following Taiwan's return to the Republic of China. As a result, many of them focused solely on creating illustrations, and locally crafted works with both images and text remained rare until members of the postwar baby-boom generation reached adulthood.

According to Chen, picture books may have been the slowest-developing field in children's literature in the postwar era, but the genre has also shown the most creativity and diversity. Today, poetry, nursery rhymes and novels are all presented in picture book format. Local artists and authors also create chapter books, which help children transition to novels, as well as textless picture books.

Prior to *One Day in Beijing*, Sun had already published two wordless books. Her first was *A Trip from the Zoo*, in which some animals from the Taipei Zoo hop on the city's metro system and go sightseeing around the capital. The story introduces popular destinations along various subway routes, including the coastal town of Tam-sui, the neighborhood of Tianmu, and the Miramar shopping complex, which is located in the city's Zhongshan District.

Children's author Lin Zhe-zhang says literature for adults depicting tales of sweeping tragedy or significance can be cathartic for readers. By contrast, he points out, books for youngsters take a more comedic approach to the serious. On the surface,



Tsao Chun-yen has created more than 200 works of children's literature over the past half-century. Many of his picture books have been translated and published overseas.

the Non-Fiction category of the Bologna Ragazzi Awards. Illustrator and children's author Tsao Chun-yen, who has published steadily for more than a half-century, points out that Taiwan was already importing foreign picture books during the Japanese



works are all about eliciting a smile, but an edgy subject often lurks beneath.

Tsao, meanwhile, says picture books about ordinary experiences can be educational for young readers. In fact, in recent years, he has begun using the genre to tell his life story. “Everyday lives are full of vivid detail,” notes the author, who says that episodes from a normal life can be strung together to trace out the contours of an entire soci-



ety. That being said, the prolific writer also highlights the importance of conveying a sense of fun and joy in works for youngsters. “For children, books are also toys,” Tsao says. A child should be at ease and in charge, and there does not always have to be a point to everything, he adds. Chen explains that “adults and children don’t look at images the same way. Grown-ups are in the habit of focusing on the big picture, but kids zero in on little things.”

One Winter is the result of a collaboration between Chen and illustrator Michael Leu, who spent two years conferring and editing before completing the project. Impressed by the care that Leu had so obviously devoted to drawing the book’s bustling street scenes, Chen ultimately pared down the text, leaving just two sentences in the entire book. “Drawings contain lots of detail, more than you could ever describe using words,” says the writer.

Chen Wei-ping, who heads Taipei-based Hsiao Lu Publishing Co. and has been involved in producing children’s books for 30 years, points out that local reading tastes have become quite cosmopolitan. A consi-

derable portion of the children’s literature in the country originates in the United States, while Japanese publications tend to perform the best of all foreign works. “In their way of addressing a subject, and in their playful approach to design, the Japanese are more in sync with us in Taiwan,” he says.

While Chen is keenly aware of the need to give readers what they want, he endeavors to cultivate Taiwanese authors and

illustrators. “My goal is to develop a bigger pool of local talent,” he says.

The publishing industry executive explains his desire to promote local picture book talent by pointing to the issue of environmental protection. Though this is a problem of global concern, each country faces unique challenges in relation to safeguarding its natural environment. Therefore, he notes, it is important to develop people who can express matters that are particular to Taiwan.

Chen admits, however, that despite his company’s best efforts, as well as the public’s enthusiasm for the inclusion of images in reading materials, there is a shortage of local illustrators who can create well-crafted, thought-provoking pictures. Most images, he believes, are superficial, especially in comparison with the abundance of solid writing.

“In our era, graphics tools and skills have become considerably better, and people’s perspectives have gradually been broadening. But while techniques are easily picked up, cultural depth can only be accumulated bit by bit over time,” he says.



Taiwan Literature

- A brief introduction -

New Literature Movement

Prior to the advent of written languages, early inhabitants in Taiwan passed on stories, mythologies and legends verbally. By the early 20th century, Taiwan's literary scene was dominated by classical Chinese literature. After Western enlightenment ideas and experimental writing were introduced, however, the Taiwan New Literature Movement, which bore parallels to the May Fourth Movement in mainland China, arose in the 1920s. The movement led to a debate in the early 1930s, when some argued that the vernacular Chinese championed by the May Fourth Movement was not a familiar language to the people of Taiwan, most of whom spoke Holo or Hakka, and that Taiwan's writers should use their native languages (mainly referring to Holo) to write about their homeland. A key proponent of these ideas was Lai Ho, whose novels highlighted the excesses of the Japanese colonial government and are now considered classics.

Mainland Émigré Literature

Following the end of Japanese rule in 1945, émigré writers from mainland China came to dominate the literary scene amid the political repression of local intellectuals and the enshrinement of Mandarin as the official language. This period saw a proliferation of anti-communist works as well as realistic fiction about life in the mainland.

Modernism

The development of modernist poetry in the mid-1950s was followed by a rejection of conventional literary techniques in the 1960s, when modernist writers began calling for artistic autonomy and incorporated Western existentialism, stream-of-consciousness, surrealism and antinovel elements into their writings. Such modernist works often focused on philosophical introspection and the plight of traditional human relations in modern society, as in Kenneth Hsien-yung Pai's *Crystal Boys*, which tells of a young man's struggle in the 1960s to 1970s when homosexuality was still a taboo topic, and Wang Wen-xing's *Family Catastrophe*, which highlights stresses affecting families in contemporary Taiwan.

Nativism

The late 1960s and early 1970s also saw the emergence of a nativist movement as a number of intellectuals, criticizing what they saw as modernist writers' tendency toward blind admiration and slavish imitation of Western cultural models, advocated the penning of literature more true to Taiwan's social roots. Representative works include Wang Zhen-he's *An Oxcart for a Dowry*, in which poverty forces a peasant to share his wife with a merchant, and Huang Chun-ming's *His Son's Big Doll*, portraying an uneducated man's struggles to support his family during Taiwan's early industrial days.