

Experiential bookstores boom in China

During this year's National Day holiday, Sun Wenxiao did not spend her holiday visiting crowded tourist destinations, watching box-office hit movies, or shopping. Instead, she went to an "experiential" bookstore in her city of Jinan.

Unlike the traditional bookstores, Pinju provides visitors with diverse activities such as gourmet tasting, photo exhibitions and themed lectures, Sun said. These cultural events make the bookstore a "must-go" for young people, she added.

According to a report by the Publishers' Association of China, the online book sales grew by 30 percent year on year in 2016, while brick-and-mortar book shops saw sales dropping by 2.33 percent.



Citizens read books at the Chengdu Fangsuo bookstore on Apr. 17, 2016. [Photo/Xinhua]

To change the landscape of the industry that looked to be in decline, more and more of these bookstores have popped up in recent years in China, featuring various cultural events, book launches and public readings.

Fangsuo, a bookstore chain founded in 2011, opened its first store in Guangzhou.

While bookshelves cover the walls from floor to ceiling, the 1,800-square-meter store has a coffee bar, a boutique and a handicrafts shop, welcoming more than two million visitors every year, with an average annual sales volume of 70 million yuan (about US\$10.6 million).

The mix space often hosts art exhibitions, lectures and book launches about art, culture and lifestyle, turning it into a center for the city's book

lovers.

“We hope the store can improve the quality of life for people in cities and provide them with more cultural and lifestyle information,” said Mao Jihong, the founder of Fangsuo.

So far, the company has opened another three stores in Chengdu, Chongqing and Qingdao.

The expansion of Fangsuo is the epitome of the growing popularity of these kinds of bookstores in China.

According to a report released by Everbright Securities on China’s retail industry, more than 60 experiential bookstores like Fangsuo have been set up nationwide in the first half of 2017.

Sisyphé, one of the largest private-owned bookstore chains with almost 70 stores in China, is also reinventing itself to diversify its income streams. It offers, for example, special reading and listening lessons for children.

About 80 percent of the store space is planned for bookshelves, 15 percent for coffee shops and 5 percent for creative arts and handicraft shops, said Jin Weizhu, chairman of Sisyphé. “This store space layout will help form a chain effect.”

“Whatever your requirements, a bookstore that combines such diverse activities is your best choice,” said Li Ou, a customer at the Chengdu Fangsuo store.