

LIFE

# A book feast for the eyes

National expo is back bigger and better, promising more titles and new publishing technology, **Mei Jia** reports.

With its Confucian legacy, symbolic significance of the majestic Taishan Mountain and the Yellow River culture, Shandong province will be the host of an annual national book event in July.

The 30th National Book Expo will be held from July 15-19 with the province's capital city Jinan as the main site. It will also be held in two other cities, Yantai and Tai'an. Its organizers say the expo will be an opportunity to exhibit more new book titles, the latest publishing products and technology, and to also showcase the charm of the province's cultural elements.

Moreover, Yu Jie, director of the Shandong provincial publicity department, says the centenary of the Communist Party of China's founding will be a special focus of the expo.

Like previous book expos, the Shandong expo will fuel the anticipation of readers with a number of publishing forums, book launches, writer meet-and-greets, and free reading vouchers.

At the main site in Jinan International Convention and Exhibition Center, the expo will span eight exhibition halls covering 10 themes. A total of 1,400 publishing companies from all over the country will bring in about 400,000 titles and cultural products.

Wang Guiying, vice-mayor of Jinan, says the city has been busy making preparations for the expo, and the government will offer free book vouchers worth 5 million yuan (\$778,000) to the city's book-lovers to encourage them to purchase books and other relevant products.

Wang says the expo will feature more than 600 events including 10 key forums deemed as the expo's traditional gathering, 100 book launches and writers events, and more than 500 cultural events with a local touch. The writers events will feature Shandong writers including the novelist and poet Zhang Wei, and history writer and lecturer Yan Chongnian.

"We'll also present an exhibition of *100 Red Classics Throughout a Century* to mark the big day of the Party's centennial," Wang adds.

As this is the city's second time hosting the national book expo — the first being in 2009, the organizers say they would present a contemporary expo capable of attracting readers from varied age groups.

In light of challenges in an ongoing pandemic, the expo will also go digital for the first time.

Li Wenchao, who is with the Jinan municipal publicity department,



A visitor takes a look at classical works to mark the Party's centennial at the Beijing Book Fair on May 14. The 30th National Book Expo to be held in Jinan from July 15-19 will feature a similar section. CHEN XIAOGEN / FOR CHINA DAILY



Left: Children look through books at the 29th National Book Expo held in Xi'an, Shaanxi province, in July 2019. ZHANG JIE / FOR CHINA DAILY



Right: Visitors select children's books printed with biodegradable materials at a previous Beijing international book fair. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

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**Liu Xiaokai**, director, print and distribution department under the National Press and Publication Administration

ment, says the online expo will be a complex of VR exhibitions, immersive cultural experiences, smart tailor-made printing, AI technologies, apart from its official website and WeChat account.

"We'll also enhance green ideas, and all the material used in conferences and in building the exhibition pavilions should be environmentally friendly and recyclable. Nonbiodegradable plastic products are not allowed," Li adds.

Liu Xiaokai, director of the print and distribution department under the National Press and Publication Administration, says it is a remarkable year to hold a grand national book event, both online and on site.

"We hope the expo offers a chance for us publishing professionals and readers to gain a deeper understanding of underlying logic and reasons — be it theoretical, cultural, political or social ones — to support the achievements Chinese people have made over the years, and the happy lives they're enjoying," Liu says.

Last year's book expo in Xi'an showcased 340,000 titles, including 159 titles by or about President Xi Jinping, and 2,400 quality titles winning national awards. Revenue from the Xi'an expo exceeded 228 million yuan.

The three cities selected for this year's expo have their own unique attractions.

Jinan is known for the Longshan Culture which dates back more than 4,000 years. Tai'an is the birthplace of the Neolithic Dawenkou Culture, a place where the earliest engraved texts were found. It is also where the Taishan Mountain is located, a double heritage crown in terms of both nature and culture.

Wang Yanyan, who is with the Tai'an municipal publicity department, says Tai'an is home to the country's first and only press and publications theme town.

"We now have 60 companies in the printing and publication business here, and will aim to reach around 100 companies in five years," says Wang, adding that the theme town welcomes visitors during the book expo.

A city known for its oceanic attractions, Yantai will incorporate music into its poetry recital events at the expo.

Organizers hope booklovers will enjoy the expo, and that they will also have a culturally enriching trip, whether virtually or on site, to one of the origins of Chinese civilization.

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# ‘Silent’ bakeries serve the world through smiles

WUHAN — At Pica Pica Bakery in the Central China city of Wuhan, cashier Wan Xiaohui bends her thumb twice as she hands paper bags packed with fresh bread and cookies to customers.

The gesture, meaning “thank you” in Chinese sign language, has been repeated countless times over the past four years by employees and patrons in the bakery, which employs people with hearing impairments.

During a charity bakery course in 2017, Tan Ting encountered a group of students with physical and intellectual disabilities.

"Their upbeat manner and attentiveness touched me deeply," Tan says. That was when she had the idea of opening a bakery that could provide jobs for the disabled.

For the next six months, she busied herself collecting information from overseas and visiting “silent” bakeries, cafes and special education schools in major cities including Nanjing, Guangzhou and Changsha. After learning the relevant policies and professional training and management methods, she opened Pica Pica, which means magpie, in December 2017.

"Though ordinary as the Pica Pica, or magpie, may be in China, it

represents a tough-minded personality and serves as a representative of joy and good luck in our culture," says the 34-year-old. "The bird is just like us, ordinary but unflinching in life and spreading happiness."

After the bakery opened, she began to recruit people with hearing impairments. "We're not a charity organization and we face fierce market competition, so we do not just accept anyone who is looking for a job," Tan says. Communication and writing skills, as well as an understanding of the baking industry, are what she looks for in potential employees.

After a three-hour written and in-person interview in 2018, Wan joined Pica Pica. "For me, the bakery is my school and home. I've learned many baking skills and made many friends," says the 27-year-old cashier in sign language. Wan had lost her hearing at birth. "What's more, the job ensures I have a great sense of accomplishment."

In their spare time, Pica Pica employees often visit nearby communities, nursing homes and schools to offer free baking courses.

"Hearing-impaired employees cannot engage with the world

through sound, but they always embrace the world with smiles," Tan says. "We organize an average of five charity events every month to bring joy to others with our professional baking services."

Apart from Pica Pica, other bakeries and cafes hiring people with

disabilities have mushroomed over the years in China's major cities including Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou and Changsha, providing more job options to the disabled.

"These new forms and channels of employment enable people with

disabilities to support themselves through their own efforts and allow them to realize their value," says Zhang Wanhong, executive head of the human rights research institute at Wuhan University and vice-president of the Hubei Disabled Persons' Federation.

Zhang says the services sector such as bakeries and cafes can help bring people together to learn about different skills and talents, and this will also help change negative stereotypes of people as disadvantaged or being a social burden.

Han is the mother of bakery employee Li Xing, who has hearing impairment. Han says that special education schools in China have helped her daughter become educated, and that increasingly diversified career options have facilitated her daughter's integration into society. She also praised the country's subsidies for those with disabled family members.

"This job enriches her life and guarantees her an equal opportunity to earn money through her own efforts, just like others," Han adds.

Looking to the future of people with disabilities in China on the National Day for Helping the Disabled, which fell on May 16 this year, Zhang notes two concerns.



A cashier at a bakery in Guangzhou, Guangdong province, communicates with a customer using sign language. The bakery's employees are people with impaired hearing. CHEN JIMIN / CHINA NEWS SERVICE

"Though China's poverty alleviation campaign has been successful, the disabled, especially those who live in rural areas, still face the possibility of returning to poverty. It is necessary to further improve their development opportunities and consolidate the monitoring and assistance mechanism for the disabled," Zhang says.

"This year marks the 30th anniversary of the implementation of China's law to protect the rights and interests of people with disabilities. Over the past three decades, the legal system protecting the rights of disabled people in our country has been basically established. The focus now is to implement the laws."

To date, Pica Pica has hired eight employees with hearing impairments. Some of its former employees have since launched their own businesses in the sector.

Tan hopes Pica Pica can be a place that creates dreams for those with hearing impairment.

"I will give them all the support and guidance I can provide, hoping that the skills they learn here will help them lead better lives in the future," she says.