

Culture of reading codified into law

Library access, rural resources among measures to engage public with books

By JI HAISHENG
jihaisheng@chinadaily.com.cn

China is set to codify reading into law from Feb 1 with a national regulation requiring stronger support for public reading, longer library opening hours, better-equipped reading rooms, and more systematic funding and planning. It also designates the fourth week of April as National Reading Week, expanding the spotlight from a single day — World Book Day on April 23 — into a nationwide, week-long campaign.

The regulation, reviewed and approved at an executive meeting of the State Council, China's Cabinet, and made public on Dec 16, aims to enhance intellectual and moral integrity, as well as scientific and cultural literacy, to boost overall social civility and build the country into a cultural powerhouse.

Officials, experts and readers have described the regulation as a significant step for China's cultural policy, repositioning reading not merely as a desirable social activity but as a core component of the nation's cultural infrastructure.

It is China's first national legislation dedicated to advancing the cause of reading among the entire population, elevating public reading from a matter of policy advocacy to one of legal guarantee.

Comprising six chapters and 45 articles, the regulation, built on proven practices and experiences, establishes a collaborative model for promoting reading, operating under Party leadership and government guidance with the participation of publishers, distributors, libraries, bookstores and social organizations.

It also introduces a comprehensive framework that sets requirements for reading facilities, resource allocation and promotional activities.

“The enactment of this regulation marks a pivotal moment in China's commitment to promoting reading among the public, elevating it to a strategic priority,” said Chen Mingliang, founder of the Beijing-based Bright World Reading Club and a long-time advocate for reading initiatives. “The move underscores the nation's resolve to enhance the intellectual, moral and cultural well-being of its citizens.”

Chen said that the impact of this undertaking goes beyond shaping individual habits or lifestyles. “It plays a crucial role in fostering shared understanding, strengthening social cohesion and enhancing social governance, all of which are vital for achieving enduring social harmony.

“This effort is of great significance as it seeks to make reading a universal practice and a collective social benefit,” he said.

Highlighting the inclusive nature of the program, Chen said, “From kindergarten children to the elderly, from students to professionals, regardless of gender, occupation or age, everyone can be both a participant in and a beneficiary of this undertaking.”

The introduction of the new rules marks the government's latest step in sustained efforts to promote reading.

In terms of local legislation, Jiangsu province took the lead by enacting the first provincial-level regulation on promoting reading in 2014. Since then, over 20 local authorities across China have introduced their own regulations and rules, creating distinctive legislative models that cater to regional needs.

A significant milestone was reached in April 2016, when the Publicity Department of the Communist Party of China Central Committee and 10 other central departments and ministries jointly launched the first national-level initiative to promote reading.

Since then, April 23 has become an annual focal point for large-scale reading promotions across the country. The government has since accelerated the development of public cultural services to improve public access to books.

This commitment was further reinforced by the inclusion of reading in China's government work reports for 12



consecutive years starting in 2014.

In 2025, the initiative shifted into a higher gear with the country's top leadership emphasizing that “further efforts should be made to foster a culture of reading in our society” while outlining policy priorities for the 15th Five-Year Plan (2026-30) for economic and social development.

Thanks to nearly two decades of consistent efforts, China's overall reading rate among its population reached 82.1 percent in 2024, a significant increase from 51.7 percent in 2004, according to reports by the Chinese Academy of Press and Publication.

Data shows that the country has more than 3,200 public libraries and over 100,000 physical bookstores. In Beijing, more than 30,000 reading-related events are held annually.

Uneven progress

While nationwide efforts have yielded initial results, there still remain persistent challenges, including a shortage of high-quality content, regional disparities in resources, and uneven standards in digital reading.

The regulation introduces a legal imperative for value-driven content creation, pledging State-level support and guidance for the publishing industry to enrich its offerings, optimize its catalog structure and improve quality, all aimed at increas-

ing the supply of quality content.

“It signals a major recalibration of the entire publishing industry chain, as it redefines market-driven entities in the sector into core contributors to the nation's public cultural services,” said Zhang Lei, a Beijing-based publisher.

In an industry increasingly swayed by algorithmic traffic and market trends, this clause acts as a statutory counterweight, Zhang added. It legally defines good books as a public good, compelling the industry to look beyond bestseller lists and commercial metrics.

The regulation also mandates specific support for key groups such as minors, the elderly and people with disabilities, while prioritizing assistance for less-developed regions, including rural and border areas.

“The equity core of this legislation lies in its targeted reach,” said writer-translator Li Yingdeng.

“Spontaneous initiatives, voluntary advocacy and market forces are not enough to promote reading nationwide, as such efforts often fail to reach rural areas and disadvantaged groups. Legislation is therefore essential to guarantee equitable access,” he added.

By clarifying the roles of the government, schools, publishers and other stakeholders, the regulation addresses gaps left by market and social mechanisms, ensuring a more bal-

anced allocation of reading resources, Li said.

He expressed particular support for the regulation's mandates on services for vulnerable groups, seeing them as crucial to achieving reading equity. Li cautioned, however, that “building a pervasive culture of reading in rural China will be a gradual process, requiring sustained effort and time.”

Setting a clear direction, the success of the regulation hinges on the yet-to-be-fully-articulated details of implementation.

“The vitality of laws and regulations lies in their implementation,” said Zhu Bing, former director of the Culture Office at the National People's Congress' Education, Science, Culture and Public Health Committee, in an article released by the Ministry of Justice in December.

Pointing out that putting the regulation into practice presents a significant opportunity to widely promote reading across society, Zhang called for enhanced efforts to publicize the regulation and ensure its provisions are fully carried out.

Governments, departments and relevant parties, he added, should be held accountable for fulfilling their duties and responsibilities as outlined in the regulation.

He emphasized the need to cultivate sound reading habits and foster a reading-friendly environment throughout society.

appeal to a broader audience by incorporating various service programs, such as sessions for the elderly, youth night schools, reading practice camps and English study clubs.

While State-owned chains leverage policy support, private bookstores rely more on market-driven innovations.

Sisyph Bookstore, with 480 outlets nationwide, draws a considerable share of revenue from non-book offerings such as cultural and creative products, in-store cafes, book launch events, merchandise and membership programs.

Bookstores like Zhongshuge and Page One have emerged with aesthetically striking designs to attract readers and counter the convenience of online shopping.

Amid shifts in consumer behavior and the rise of livestreaming, bookstores are adopting innovative marketing strategies to engage younger readers. One popular trend is the “blind box” book sets, which combine books with the excitement and surprise of mystery boxes.

Policy Digest

Shift to more eco-friendly consumption model promoted

An action plan to accelerate green consumption during the 15th Five-Year Plan (2026-30) was made public on Monday, as part of efforts to foster green and low-carbon work practices and lifestyles, and to inject momentum into high-quality development.

Green consumption centers on a shift from buying based on “price and status” to buying based on “environmental impact and resource efficiency”.

The plan, jointly issued by nine government departments including the Ministry of Commerce, aims to improve the green consumption environment and speed up the green transformation of consumption patterns.

It outlines 20 specific measures across seven areas, covering sectors such as agricultural products, home appliances and furnishings, catering and accommodation, while also clarifying supporting financial policies.

Focusing on improving supply in key areas related to people's livelihoods, the plan calls for expanding the availability of high-quality green products. Measures include increasing the supply of green agricultural products, promoting energy-efficient home appliances and eco-friendly home renovations, and encouraging green consumption in the automotive sector.

It stresses the need to upgrade green services, including green catering, accommodation and household services, to better meet people's growing demand for a better quality of life.

Use of public transport data to be optimized

The Ministry of Transport publicized an implementation guideline on Sunday aimed at optimizing the use of public data resources in the transport sector, in a bid to support the growth of the transport data industry and foster new quality productive forces.

The guideline focuses on promoting the compliant, efficient circulation and use of public transport data. It sets out 15 key tasks in areas including building a high-quality data resource system, strengthening public data supply, encouraging data-driven innovation, enhancing data security safeguards and improving policy support.

According to the guideline, by 2030 China aims to have established a more mature management and technical system for the development and use of public transport data, fully build a high-quality industry-wide data resource system, and significantly improve the level of integrated and innovative data applications. Public data is expected to become an important driver of high-quality development in the transport sector.

The guideline emphasizes increased financial support, improved data management systems and standards in the transport sector, advancement of data-related scientific and technological innovation platforms, and the introduction of innovative mechanisms for training and incentivizing data professionals.

It also urged strengthened data security, calling for categorized and tiered management of data to prevent and handle data security risks.

Disaster relief efforts stepped up for winter and spring

The National Commission for Disaster Reduction publicized a notice on Saturday calling for stronger disaster prevention, mitigation and relief efforts in light of the characteristics of winter and spring natural disasters and the evolving potential disaster situation in the coming months.

The notice urges local authorities to fully uphold their responsibilities, strengthen preparedness for major and particularly severe disasters, and ensure the safety of people's lives and property as well as overall social stability.

Authorities are required to release disaster warnings in a timely manner, implement mechanisms for emergency alert calls and feedback, and conduct inspections of disaster risks affecting major infrastructure and public service facilities.

The role of technical experts should be fully utilized, while the public is encouraged to report potential hazards in their surroundings.

The notice emphasizes the timely revision and improvement of emergency response plans for low-temperature, rain, snow and freezing disasters. Other priorities include strict implementation of flood and ice control responsibilities, improving forest and grassland fire prevention, refining earthquake response plans, and strengthening the prevention of geological disasters.