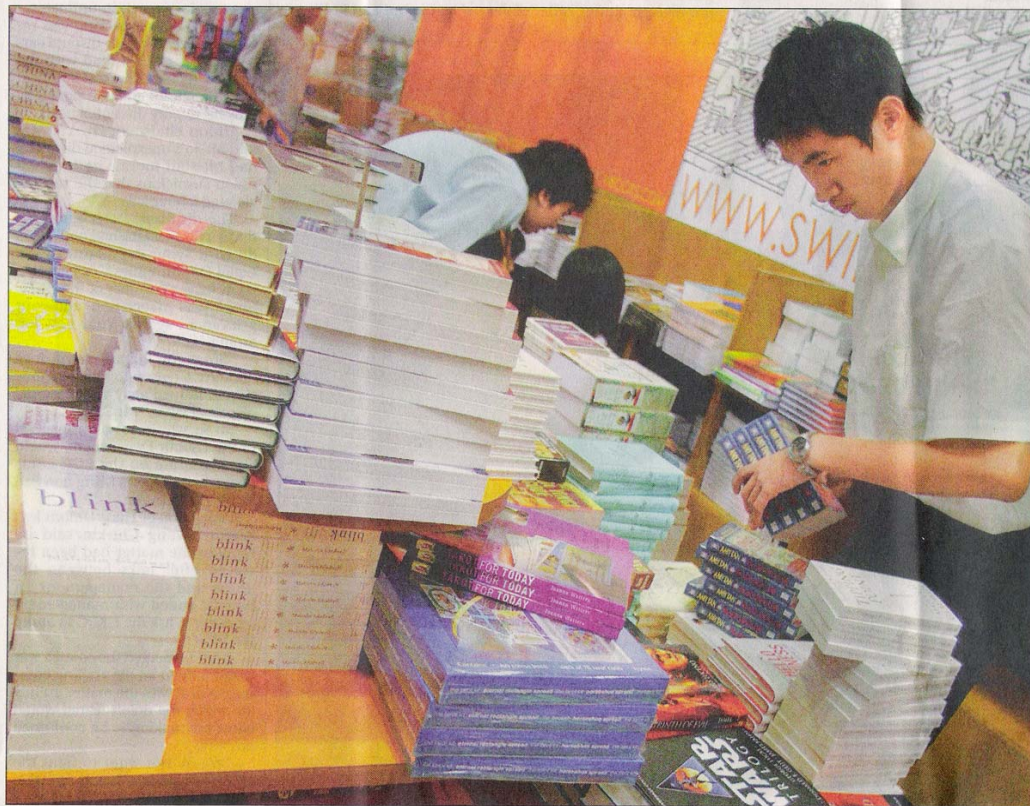


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Workers set up the Swindon book booth at the HKCEC in Wan Chai yesterday in preparation for the Hong Kong Book Fair 2005. Photo: Jonathan Wong

Gossip magazines top readers' list

Agnes Lam and Vivienne Chow

Hong Kong's top earners like nothing better after work than to relax with a good . . . gossip magazine.

That is the conclusion of a sociologist who studied the city's reading habits.

And the remarks by Li Pang-kwong, on the eve of the annual Hong Kong Book Fair, struck a chord with exhibitors who said Hongkongers were not great book-buyers, especially of fiction.

The study, by Lingnan University, found about half of 1,007 respondents read "infotainment" magazines.

Professor Li, of the university's politics and sociology department, said a large number of these were well-educated and earned more than \$30,000 a month.

They spent on average about \$100 a month on magazines, and devoted nearly three hours to reading each publication.

"Hong Kong is a very busy city, and their hectic lifestyle makes people feel very stressed. Reading

magazines can help them loosen up," Professor Li said.

By contrast, the half of respondents who said they did not read magazines were mostly primary graduates who earned less than \$10,000 a month.

"Hong Kong people don't buy a lot of books," said Madeline Progin, who is running the French books booth at the fair.

When they do, "they tend to read to learn rather than for pleasure, unlike the French, who love reading novels and essays".

Hong Kong-based Canadian author Jay Scott Kanes agrees.

"My impression of Hong Kong people's reading habits is that they read newspapers and horse racing guides but not books," he said.

Kanes' novel, *Dog-Gone Cat Case*, set on Lamma Island, is on display at the Canadian books booth.

The survey also found that a third of people read fiction, such as the Harry Potter series, or the martial arts novels of Louis Cha.

The findings alarmed Professor Li. He said that residents of a city with a knowledge-based economy such as Hong Kong needed to keep up to date.

He reminded parents who often read gossip magazines that they should set a good example for their children by reading more books to develop their reading habit.

FAIR FACTS

TIMES and PRICES

Open 9am to 10pm, today until Monday at the Convention and Exhibition Centre, Wan Chai.
\$20 adults (\$10 after 6pm), \$10 children (primary pupils and children under 1.22m), free under 3s and over 65s

DAY ONE PROGRAMME

Children's Paradise opening ceremony: 11am-12pm at Hall 5B. Guest: Rita Fan
Conference: Exploring the new frontiers of writing: 2.30pm-4pm, room 201. Guests: Zhang Yihe, Nan Fong-shuo, Chan Koon-chung, Su Tung
Dialogues with authors: 4pm-5pm, rooms 202-205, 209-212

Book signing sessions: singer-actress Gigi Leung Wing-kei, radio personality Jim Yan Chi-hong, Emperor Entertainment Group's talent manager Mani Fok Man-hei

VENUE GUIDE

Hall 1: Major bookstores such as Page One, Dymocks, Joint Publishing/Commercial Press
Hall 5: Family corner and stationery
Hall 2: International Cultural Village, Swindon and HK cartoon piglets McDull and McMug
Grand Hall: Mainland exhibitors

TALKBACK

How can we build a stronger reading culture?

Send your comments to talkback@scmp.com

Please include name, address and phone number