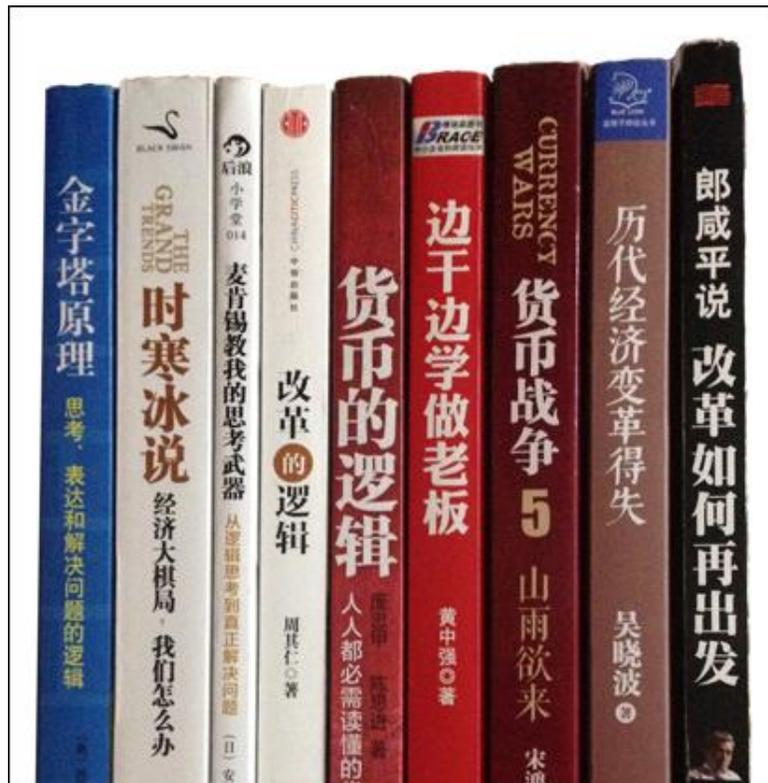


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DEPUTY GENERAL MANAGER PENG & HIS DEPRESSING BOOK CLUB:

A comparative study of popular business literature in the PRC and the USA



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Mange tak.

Abstract

The purpose of this thesis is to compare best-selling business literature in China and the US. Snapshots of Amazon.com and Amazon.cn bestseller lists were captured in early 2014, and the 25 highest ranked titles in the designated “business” category on each website form the foundation for comparison. The books mainly touch on Economics & Politics, Management Studies, Productivity & Life Management, Logic & Decision Theory, and Investment Theory. The 50 titles are analyzed quantitatively, proving that the Chinese titles are (1) cheaper to buy, (2) more recently published, and written by (3) a more international and (4) a more male-dominated group of authors. The books are then analyzed qualitatively, resulting in six observations: American economists tend to be more hopeful, Chinese authors tend to be less boastful in their opening chapters, Chinese management books lack a clear relationship to the history of management studies, Chinese management books never refer to Chinese political history, the Chinese economics books are written for a more educated readership, and political opinions in Chinese economics books are expressed with a voice that sometimes speaks to ordinary citizens and sometimes speaks to leaders in government.

论文摘要

本论文旨在将中国的商业类畅销书与 2014 年年初亚马逊美国 (Amazon.com)、亚马逊中国 (Amazon.cn) 网站上的畅销书进行对比。各个网站排名前 25 的经济管理类畅销书作为此次比较的参照系。这些书籍主要涉及经济与政治、管理学、生产力与寿命管理、逻辑与决策理论、投资理论。通过对这 50 本书籍的定量分析, 结果表明中国书籍: (1) 价格更便宜; (2) 出版日期更近; (3) 以外国作者居多; (4) 以男性作者居多。通过定性分析, 结果指出以下六种情况: 美国经济学家期望更高, 中国作者在开篇阶段描写更加谦虚, 中国管理类书籍缺少与管理学历史的关联, 中国管理类书籍绝不提及中国的政治史, 中国的经济类书籍的读者为受过教育的对象; 有关中国经济类书籍涉及的政治见解, 其表达口吻有时是针对普通公民, 有时是针对政府官员。

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1. Introduction

1.1. Background

During the almost four decades since the People's Republic of China (hereinafter China) started transitioning toward a free-market economy, Chinese business people have *seen some things*. Stratospheric amounts of foreign direct investment combined with large dormant demographic potential have produced an economic miracle; modern economic laws and accounting regulations have quickly developed and solidified; new markets have abruptly appeared; and quick shifts in socioeconomic circumstances have produced a workforce of impossibly diverse employees. These and countless other factors mean that managers and economists in the strange and wondrous world of corporate China face a lot of unique problems.

So how do they deal with all of this?

1.2. Research Question

In European business academia, research studies are sometimes conducted to measure what business ideas are popular in literature over time (see Kjell Arne Rövik's study in *State of Research* section). The relevance of popular literature lies in two dovetailing reciprocal forces: the readership will demonstrate their interests through what they purchase, and what they purchase will, in turn, influence the readership.

So what do Chinese business people read? Where are the loci of common challenges? What are popular authors saying? How do authors approach economic and managerial problems? Where do they find evidence for their conclusions? What are their fears and hopes?

It can be difficult to answer these questions in a vacuum; therefore, this paper will attempt to answer these questions comparatively, using a so-called keyhole comparison:

In the “lens” (or “keyhole”) comparison, in which you weight A less heavily than B, you use A as a lens through which to view B. Just as looking through a pair of glasses changes the way you see an object, using A as a framework

for understanding B changes the way you see B.¹

When employing this technique, I will compare what is read in China to what is read in the USA—the only country with an economy bigger than China—because US culture is perhaps more familiar to a “Western” reader (however one chooses to define this nebulous term). This comparative technique will allow me to probe into relevant questions: do Chinese and American managers read similar books? Do Chinese and American economists face similar problems? Are their books very similar, and if so, how? What differences can I observe concerning their style, prose, methodology and worldview?

These questions coalesce into the overarching research question of this paper: what are similarities and dissimilarities between popular business literature in China and the United States?

When answering this question, it is important to remember that analyzing the US books has no intrinsic value if we want to understand the Chinese business landscape. As mentioned in the quote above, I will “weight A less heavily than B”, because US books are incorporated only to assist in illuminating the Chinese books. My conclusions will maintain principle focus on the books that are popular in China—particularly books by Chinese authors (we will later discover that many of the books that are popular in China are written by non-Chinese authors).

1.3. State of Research

To date, I am unaware of any study that answers my research question, or even any similar question. There are, however, many examples of studies looking at popular business literature. One such study can be found in *Trender og translasjoner* in which Kjell Arne Røvik tries to map out which management ideas have been popular over time, using three different approaches.² Firstly, he looks at the management of some of Norway's largest corporations; because he argues that huge corporations are like sponges

¹ Kerry Walk, "How to Write a Comparative Analysis," accessed July 14, 2014, <http://writingcenter.fas.harvard.edu/pages/how-write-comparative-analysis>

² Kjell Arne Røvik, *Trender Og Translasjoner: Ideer Som Former Det 21. Århundredets Organisasjon* (Oslo: Universitetsforl, 2007), 90-99.

that will inevitably “soak up”³ popular ideas. Secondly, he interviews management consultants (again, with the aim of unearthing popular management ideas). Thirdly, he does a two-part “publication study”⁴. In the first part he skims every *Harvard Business Review* article from a five year period (520 articles), and in the second part he skims all books on the management best-seller list on the website Amazon.com. The ideas he finds in these books are then compiled and codified so they can be analyzed quantitatively.

Rövik's third approach (studying literature popular on Amazon) has similarities to the paper you are holding in your hand.

2. Methodology

2.1. Arriving at Useful Data

Inspired by Rövik, I will look at the 25 most popular business books on the Chinese version of Amazon, and try to deepen my understanding of them, by comparing them to the 25 most popular business books on the US version of Amazon.

2.1.1. Why the Amazon Best-Seller Lists?

While it is popular to map out sales of most culture products, book sales are notoriously opaque.⁵ In China, the movie *Bring Happiness Home* grossed 153.67 million CNY in the first three months of 2013, thus making it the fifth highest grossing domestically produced movie in the Chinese box office during that quarter.⁶ Beyoncé's second studio album *B'Day* sold 2 010 311 copies in the United States during 2006, thus rendering it the seventh best-selling album of the year in that country.⁷ This very exact data can be found through a simple Google search, but for *book sales* such data does not

³ Rövik, *Trender Og Translasjoner*, 94, author translation.

⁴ Rövik, *Trender Og Translasjoner*, 97, author translation.

⁵ Daniel Gross, "Why writers never reveal how many books their buddies have sold," Slate, accessed February 20, 2014. http://www.slate.com/articles/business/moneybox/2006/06/book_clubbed.html

⁶ "2013 Nian Di Yi Ji Du Quan Guo Dian Ying Pian Fang Tong Ji," accessed August 10, 2014, <http://dy.chinasarft.gov.cn/html/www/article/2013/013e3482875749b9402881a73db09ef3.html>

⁷ "Nielsen Music 2006 Year-End Music Industry Report," accessed August 10, 2014. <http://www.longtail.com/Nielsen.doc>.

exist publicly. Each publishing house knows how many copies of their titles that have been sold to wholesalers and retailers, but these numbers don't become public.

In the US, the most authoritative list might be the *New York Times* Bestseller List—this list is a “weighted” ranking based on phone calls to booksellers (though the exact weighting formula is an industry secret)⁸. But this list has no counterpart in China, so it cannot be used for a comparative study. This brings us to the so-called *world's largest online retailer*: Amazon. Using Amazon, bestseller lists can be found both on the US-based Amazon.com and on the China-based Amazon.cn. However, like all other lists in the book industry, the methodology of these lists are shrouded in a veil of mystery:

Please keep in mind that our sales rank figures are simply meant to be a guide of general interest for the customer and not definitive sales information for publishers—we assume you have this information regularly from your distribution sources.⁹

Having accepted that scientifically exact rankings are unavailable, “a guide of general interest” is deemed adequate for the purposes of this survey. I am assuming that the methodology for compiling these lists is at least roughly similar between Amazon websites in different countries.

2.1.2. How do we define Business Literature?

Amazon's online bookstores contain a retinue of categories and subcategories—each with its own corresponding list containing 100 bestselling titles. Unfortunately, the taxonomies of the US store and the Chinese store are not identical, and neither store has a category explicitly called “business literature.” Therefore I will clarify a working definition of business literature for use in this study.

The Chinese bookstore has 42 main categories. I define business literature in the Chinese store as *all books included in the Economics & Management category and the Economic Literature¹⁰ category*.

⁸ Edwin Diamond, *Behind the Times: Inside the New New York Times* (Chicago: University Of Chicago Press, 1995), 364.

⁹ "Frequently Asked Questions about Amazon.com," accessed October 11, 2014, <http://www.amazon.com/gp/help/customer/display.html?nodeId=14101911>

¹⁰ A closer look reveals that books included in *Economic Literature* are also included in the *Economics &*

American Amazon has only 36 book categories. Here, I define business literature as *all books included in the Business & Investing¹¹ categories*.

There are further differences in the fully exploded subcategories (and sub-subcategories) of these two business sections¹², but a quick scan reveals very similar themes: accounting and taxation, finance and investing, biographies of business icons, industry specific reading materials (Real Estate and Marketing, for example), literature educating skills that are valuable to most business people (Negotiation and Time Management, for example), and much more. For a full visual presentation of all relevant categories on both websites, please visit appendix 1A and 1B.

2.1.3. On Categorization

In the Amazon bookstore, a book can be tagged for inclusion in several categories. Popular books are usually tagged for 3-7 categories. Self-help books for business people, for example, feature both in the self-help section and in the business section. But not all books are categorized identically on the US and Chinese websites, which complicates the project of compiling comparable lists. I want to study differences of what is popular in the two groups. If differences between the business bestseller lists can simply be ascribed to the Chinese and American *Amazon employees* categorizing titles differently, then comparative conclusions are nearly meaningless. Therefore I went through the 25 highest ranking books in each store, and checked their metadata in the opposing store, to confirm that they were universally included in the business sections. No book featured on both lists, and I wanted to verify that this was due to each title *only being popular in one market*, not due to different categorization.

In this verification process,¹³ I found one book that was excluded from the Chinese list because of “incorrect” categorization. In a bout of blatant sexism, Sheryl

Management section, thus making it a de facto subcategory.

¹¹ This category has since been renamed *Business & Money*.

¹² The American business category has 21 subcategories, and these, in turn, have a total of 144 sub-subcategories. The Chinese business category has 21 subcategories, and 126 sub-subcategories.

¹³ During this verification process it quickly became apparent that books that sell poorly, not even ranking in the top 100 000, have very sparse information and are not tagged in any categories at all. For example, *Currency Wars 5* by Song Hongbing is ranked 8 on the Chinese list, but it is ranked approximately #2 500 000 in the US, and consequently it has very little metadata and is not tagged for any categories. This is not a problem, because we can assume that if this book started selling well, more information would be filled in and it would be inserted into the *Business & Investing* category.

Sandberg's feminist business epic *Lean In: Women, Work, and the Will to Lead*, is, in the Chinese store, only categorized as a self-help book and as a biography (it is ranked #1 in both of these categories). Not as a business book. Because of its gratuitous exclusion from the Chinese top list, this title has to be omitted from my survey. *Positioning: The Battle for Your Mind* was therefore included as #25 on the US list. Aside from this anomaly, Amazon categorization has produced two lists of high instrumental value.

2.1.4. The Lists

Having arrived at a working definition of business literature, and having verified categorization of all titles, on January 31, 2014 I took a snapshot of the 25 highest ranked titles of business literature on both websites, thus creating the two lists that will form the foundation of this study. On the Chinese list below, English titles can be found in parentheses after the author's name. Titles translated by me are demarked by an asterisk (most books by Chinese authors did not have English titles). For clarity, in subsequent sections, I will use the English title; furthermore, I will annotate each book title with information clarifying which store the book belongs to, and its rank, demarked by parentheses. For example, the eighth most popular book on the Chinese list, *Currency Wars 5*, will subsequently be referred to as *Currency Wars 5* (CN, 8). The lists are as follows:

The Chinese list

1. *Xiang Jian Die Yi Yang Si Kao* by J. C. Carleson (*Work Like a Spy*)
2. *Da Shu Ju Shi Dai* by Viktor Mayer-Schönberger & Kenneth Cukier (*Big Data*)
3. *Gei Ni Yige Tuandui, Ni Neng Zenme Guan?* by Zhao Wei (*How Will You Manage Your Team?**)
4. *Wo Dun Shang Xue Yuan Zui Shou Huan Ying De Tan Pan Ke* by Stuart Diamond (*Getting More*)
5. *Fu Ba Ba Qiong Ba Ba* by Robert T. Kiyosaki (*Rich Dad Poor Dad*)
6. *Ni Buli Cai, Cai Buli Ni* by Zhao Fanyu (*Ignore Wealth, and Wealth Will Ignore You**)
7. *Gaige De Luoji* by Zhou Qiren (*The Logic of Reform**)
8. *Huobi Zhanzheng 5: Shanyuyulai* by Song Hongbing (*Currency Wars 5: Mountain*)

*Rain Heralds a Storm**)

9. *Kandong Caijing Xinwen De Di Yi Ben Shu* by Chen Sijin & Jin Beilei (*Learn How to Understand Finance News**)

10. *Jin Zi Ta Yuan Li* by Barbara Minto (*The Minto Pyramid Principle*)

11. *Chuangye Shi, Women Zai Zhihu Liao Shenme?* by Zhihu (*Zhihu Discussions on Entrepreneurship**)

12. *Yi Ge Ren Yu Zhege Shidai* by Zou Yu (*Alone in This Era**)

13. *Mai Ken Xi Jiao Wo De Si Kao Wu Qi* by Kazuto Ataka (*Issue-Driven*)

14. *Ba Shijian Dangzuo Pengyou: Yunyong Xinzhi Huode Jiefang* by Li Xiaolai (*Make Time Your Friend**)

15. *Yi Wang Da Jin* by Brad Stone (*The Everything Store: Jeff Bezos and the Age of Amazon*)

16. *Jue Sheng Yi Duan Zhong Duan* by Chuck Martin (*Mobile Influence*)

17. *Bian Gan Bian Xue Zuo Laoban* by Huang Zhongqiang (*Life as a Manager: Practice & Theory**)

18. *Shi Han Bing Shuo* by Shi Hanbing (*The Grand Trends*)

19. *Lidai Jingji Biange Deshi* by Wu Xiaobo (*Economic Reform through the Ages**)

20. *Huobi De Luoji: Renren Dou Bixu Dudong De Huobi Changshi* by Pang Zhongjia & Chen Sijin (*The Logic of Currency: Essential Knowledge for Everyone**)

21. *Lang Xianping Shuo: Gai Ge Ruhe Zai Chufa* by Lang Xianping (*Lang Xianping on Reform**)

22. *Fan Cui Ruo* by Nassim Nicholas Taleb (*Antifragile: Things That Gain from Disorder*)

23. *Jing Ji Xue Yuan Li* by N. Gregory Mankiw (*Principles of Economics*)

24. *Yici Duwan 30 Ben Jingjixue Jingdian* by Tian Qi (*30 Economics Classic: A Short Guide**)

25. *Ding Wei* by Al Ries & Jack Trout (*Positioning*)

The US list

1. *Banish Clutter Forever* by Sheila Chandra

2. *Getting Things Done* by David Allen

3. *The Price of Inequality* by Joseph E. Stiglitz
4. *StrengthsFinder 2.0* by Tom Rath
5. *Thinking, Fast and Slow* by Daniel Kahneman
6. *Jim Cramer's Get Rich Carefully* by James J. Cramer
7. *The Wolf of Wall Street* by Jordan Belfort
8. *How To Win Friends and Influence People* by Dale Carnegie
9. *Outliers* by Malcolm Gladwell
10. *Leaders Eat Last* by Simon Sinek
11. *They Say, I Say* by Gerald Graff & Cathy Birkenstein
12. *Mindset* by Carol Dweck
13. *Good to Great* by Jim Collins
14. *The Power of Habit* by Charles Duhigg
15. *The Art of Public Speaking* by Stephen Lucas
16. *Manage Your Day-to-Day* by Jocelyn K. Glei
17. *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People* by Stephen R. Covey
18. *A Guide to the Project Management Body of Knowledge* by Project Management Institute
19. *Shark Tank: Jump Start Your Business* by Michael Parrish DuDell, Mark Cuban, Barbara Corcoran, Lori Greiner, Robert Herjavec, John Daymond, and Kevin O'Leary
20. *The Demographic Cliff* by Harry S. Dent Jr.
21. *Capital in the Twenty-First Century* by Thomas Piketty
22. *The Five Dysfunctions of a Team* by Patrick Lencioni
23. *Epic Content Marketing* by Joe Pulizzi
24. *The Paradox of Choice* by Barry Schwartz
25. *The Intelligent Investor* by Benjamin Graham

2.2. Validity & Reliability

Below, we will discuss some challenges to the reliability and validity of this methodology.

2.2.1. What is Geography to a Website?

Let us consider the first glaring problem with using these two lists to compare preferences of business people in America and China: a customer is not completely bound to buying books only on the Amazon website based in her own country. It is often (but not always) possible for an American to go Amazon.cn, purchase Chinese books, and have them shipped from China to America.

Still, we have to assume that the occurrence of this is negligible. The same version of the same book costs roughly the same in both stores, and hefty international shipping fees ought to goad a customer to her locally based website.

Also, we can assume that Amazon.com is serving mostly the US-population, because most English-speaking countries have their own iterations of the website.¹⁴

2.2.2. Are All Chinese People Criminals?

Another disrupting factor worth mentioning is the dismal state of intellectual property rights in China. Some researchers suggest that China is lodged in a state of de facto “copyright anarchy”, noting that the music industry has taken refuge in “alternative revenue streams such as advertising, merchandizing and live performance”.¹⁵

In 2008, China’s piracy levels were called “among the world’s highest”, with estimates of 80%-95% of media being illegally purchased.¹⁶ Specific data for the book industry does not exist, but electronic versions (so-called Kindle versions) of many books on the above list can be legally purchased for as little as 0.1 CNY—this race to the bottom suggests that Chinese publishers are desperate to lure at least a few readers away from illegal downloading.

This suggests that any bestseller list is only measuring a fraction of what’s being consumed, possibly causing a huge error margin. But again, no better method is available. This survey only needs a general idea of which books are popular.

¹⁴ Amazon.co.uk, amazon.au, amazon.ca etc.

¹⁵ Jiarui Liu, “The Tough Reality of Copyright Piracy: A Case Study of the Music Industry in China,” *Cardozo Arts & Entertainment Law Journal*, Vol. 27 (2010): 621.

¹⁶ “International Intellectual Property Alliance 2008 Special 301 Report.” Accessed January 10, 2015. <http://www.iipa.com/rbc/2008/2008SPEC301PRC.pdf>

2.2.3. His Free Speech & Her Free Speech

Article 35. Citizens of the People's Republic of China enjoy freedom of speech, of the press, of assembly, of association, of procession and of demonstration.¹⁷

In the surveyed literature, economists often make highly political arguments and put forth suggestions for political reform. We must be careful before we infer anything about the differences in how political thought is presented on the two lists. We need to remember that these two readerships live in different societies and enjoy different levels of freedom of expression. Having said that, I think it is easy for us to incorrectly assume that Chinese writers have no freedom at all to express their political opinions. Because of this prejudice, I think many average Western readers would be quite flummoxed by the amount of harsh criticism leveled against China's ruling political party in the books that we will discuss below.

The censorship and (probably more importantly) self-censorship of Chinese political discourse is a very thorny topic, but it is relevant to note that “[in] China, newspapers and magazines are censored much more heavily than books”¹⁸, which certainly contributes to the surprising sense of boldness amongst Chinese authors.

2.3. Structure & Presentation

In short, I have skimmed all 50 books for topics and conclusions. I have read more than half of the books from cover to cover, and in the books that I did not fully read, I read samples at random to check for method, structure of argument, tone, pace, and other stylistic choices. The Data section will quickly present the books arranged by subject matter. After this, the treatment of these books will be presented in three sections:

First, the quantitative analysis of the books will be presented using graphs,

¹⁷ "Constitution of the People's Republic of China," accessed on January 15, 2015, <http://en.people.cn/constitution/constitution.html>

¹⁸ Peter Hessler, "Travels with My Censor," *New Yorker*, March 9, 2015, 38.

explanatory text and reasoning, in the Quantitative Observations section. The four parameters used to analyze the books quantitatively are: author nationality, author gender, year of publication, and list price.

Second, I will analyze the books more freely in the Qualitative Observations section. An infinite number of comparative aspects can be imagined when qualitatively analyzing these books, but in this study we will limit ourselves to six questions, arranged under a simple “sender-message-receiver” tripartite.

- **Sender: What can we infer about the authors?**
 - How hopeful are the authors?
 - How ambitious are the authors?
- **Message: What can we infer about the context of the books?**
 - How do the books relate to management history?
 - How do the books relate to political history?
- **Receiver: What can we infer about the intended reader?**
 - How educated is the intended reader?
 - Who is the intended reader?

After having defined these six questions, it is important to recognize that there are countless ways to answer these questions, and my answers will by no means be exhaustive. If anything, my conclusions are a series of wide-ranging comparative observations. When answering a question, I will consider the books as a whole (again, giving most focus to books on the Chinese list written by Chinese authors), and then I will mention books (using quotes and summaries) that I find representative. This means that I will not discuss all 50 books by name, naught-withstanding, all books have been considered.

Third, conclusions based on the observations will be summarized and expanded upon in the Conclusion & Discussion section.

3. Data

In this data section, we will sweepingly define the books by subject matter—to give you a sense of the general nature of the books. Sometimes defining the subject matter requires a fair amount of interpretation, because some eclectic titles cover multiple subjects. Certain books are easily defined: *How Will You Manage Your Team?* (CN, 3) is about (team) management, and little else. *Big Data* (CN, 2), however, describes a future where data-mining will influence all aspects of our lives—is this a book for a manager, an economist or a sales person? I am choosing to categorize it primarily as a management book, because most of its examples of applications are from the realm of management.

3.1. Economics & Politics

This category contains 14 titles (9 on Chinese list, 4 on US list), and is thereby the largest category. Most of these books employ economic reasoning to promote a political viewpoint, but some books (*Principles of Economics* (CN, 23) and *30 Economics Classic: A Short Guide* (CN, 24)) are textbooks that attempt to be apolitical. Many of these books also rub up against ideas that are helpful to a person seeking investment advice, but none of these books teach investing outright.

3.2. Management Studies

This category contains 12 titles (6 on each list). Almost all of these books are very clearly written for a manager. It is interesting to note that 3 books on the Chinese list are explicitly written for an entrepreneur-type manager of a small company (*How Will You Manage Your Team* (CN, 3), *Zhihu Discussions on Entrepreneurship* (CN, 11) and *Life as a Manager* (CN, 17)), but on the US list only one book is for entrepreneurs (*Shark Tank* (US, 19)).

3.3. Productivity & Life Management

This category contains 7 titles (1 on Chinese list, 6 on US list). These books attempt to help a business person in more peripheral aspects of life—mainly how to be more organized and avoid procrastination. The only Chinese book in this section is the time-management book *Make Time Your Friend* (CN, 14) by Li Xiaolai.

3.4. Logic & Decision Theory

This category contains 5 titles (2 on Chinese list, 3 on US list). This category is rather wide and encompasses logic studies, decision theory and psychology applied to a wide range of topics, ranging from how to write logical business memos to how to avoid logical fallacies in life.

3.5. Investment Theory

This category contains 4 titles (2 on Chinese list, 2 on US list). This category is narrow and clear: all 4 titles focus on assisting the reader with long-term growth of economic assets.

3.6. Biographies

This category contains 3 titles (2 on Chinese list, 1 on US list). These are biographies and autobiographies of and by famous business people.

3.7. Marketing

This category contains 3 titles (2 on Chinese list, 1 on US list). These books specifically teach marketing.

3.8. Specific Skills

This category contains 3 titles (1 on Chinese list, 2 on US list). These books contain lessons on miscellaneous specific skills: negotiation, public speaking and human resources.

4. Quantitative Observations

A full spreadsheet of data for all books can be found in appendix 2.

4.1. Author Nationality

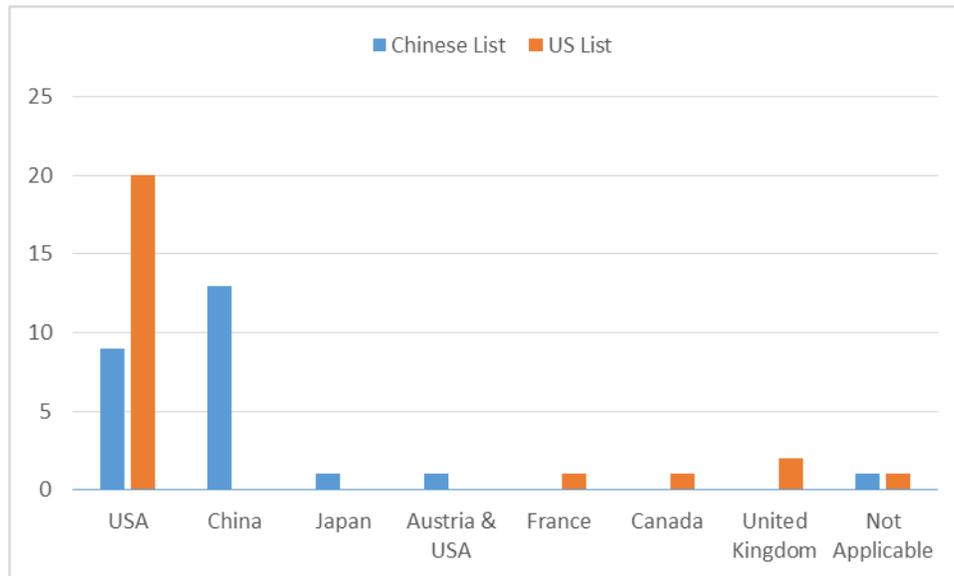


Figure 1

On the American list, 20 authors are American. On the Chinese list, only 13 authors are Chinese. Whereas the American readership is extremely “americentric”, the Chinese readership is instead more *outward-looking*—less sino-centric—with 8 authors from the US¹⁹, 1 from Japan, and 1 book co-written by an Austrian and an American. The heritage of non-native authors has no overlap: non-native authors on the American list are mostly from European countries.

Both lists have one book where “nationality” is not fully applicable. On the Chinese list, the book *Zhihu Discussions on Entrepreneurship* (CN, 11) was crowd-sourced, meaning that it was written by the online community that inhabits the questions-and-answer website *Zhihu.com*. On the American list, the book *A Guide to the Project Management Body of Knowledge* (US, 18) is written and published by the Project

¹⁹ It is interesting to note that several books on the Chinese list by US authors enjoy a form of the “Big in Japan” phenomenon (a popular phrase to describe Western musical acts that fail in their home countries but attain success in Japan). For example, Barbara Minto, an American, is #10 in China, but #19 569 in the US.

Management Institute.

4.2. Author Gender

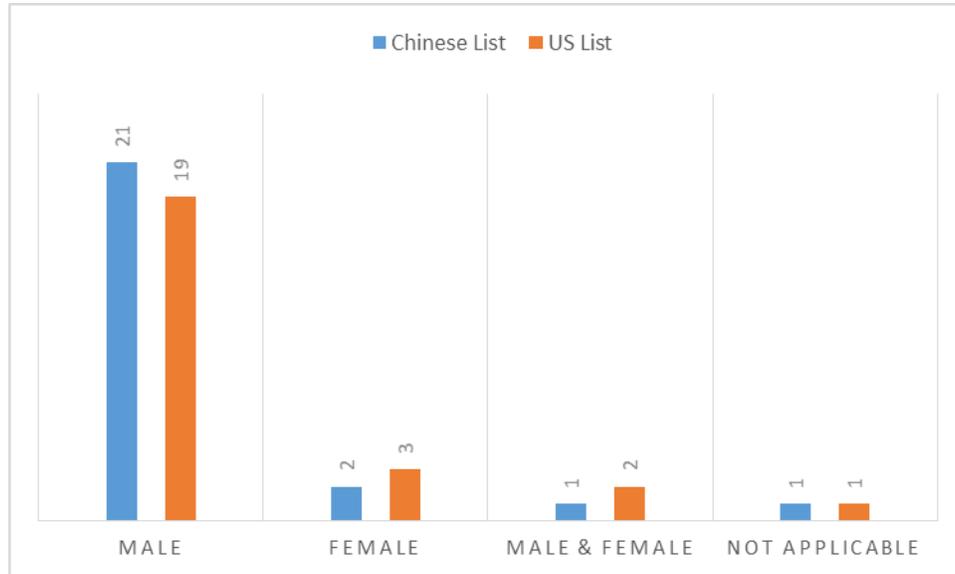


Figure 2

Both lists are hopelessly crowded by male authors. The American list slightly less so, but only slightly. A grand total of five books were written by women, and three books were written by multiple authors with at least one woman.

As with the preceding metric, the Zhihu.com community and the Project Management Institute cannot be classified in terms of gender.

4.3. Year of Publication

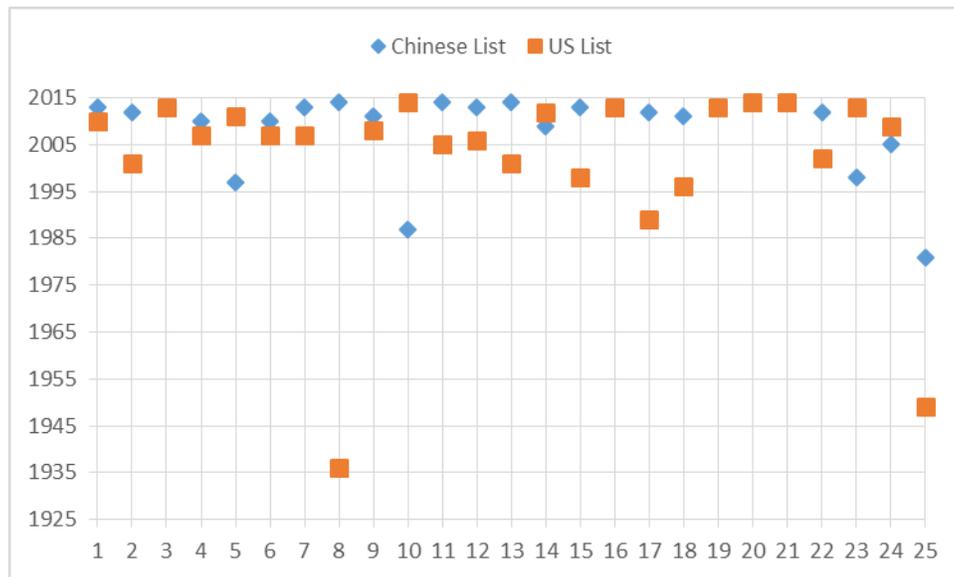


Figure 3

The horizontal axis shows book ranking and the vertical axis shows year of publication. Most books were published fairly recently, but the American books are noticeably older. Average year of publication on the Chinese is around mid-2008, while the American average is late 2001, in large part because the American list contains classics like Benjamin Graham's *Intelligent Investor* (US, 25) from 1946, and Dale Carnegie's *How To Win Friends and Influence People* (US, 8) from 1936. On the Chinese list, only 4 of the 25 books were published before 2010. The oldest book on the Chinese list is *Positioning* (CN, 25) from 1981, written by Al Ries and Jack Trout. The oldest book written by a Chinese author is Qi Tian's *30 Economics Classic: A Short Guide* (CN, 24). This book was published in 2005. This book has since been recalled, probably due to copyright infringement. Thereby making *Make Time Your Friend* (CN, 14) the oldest available book written by a Chinese author, and this book was published as late as 2009.

This lack of older books by Chinese authors is symptomatic of how starkly fresh capitalism is on the Chinese mainland. Later in our treatment of these books, this will materialize in a number of ways.

4.4. List Price

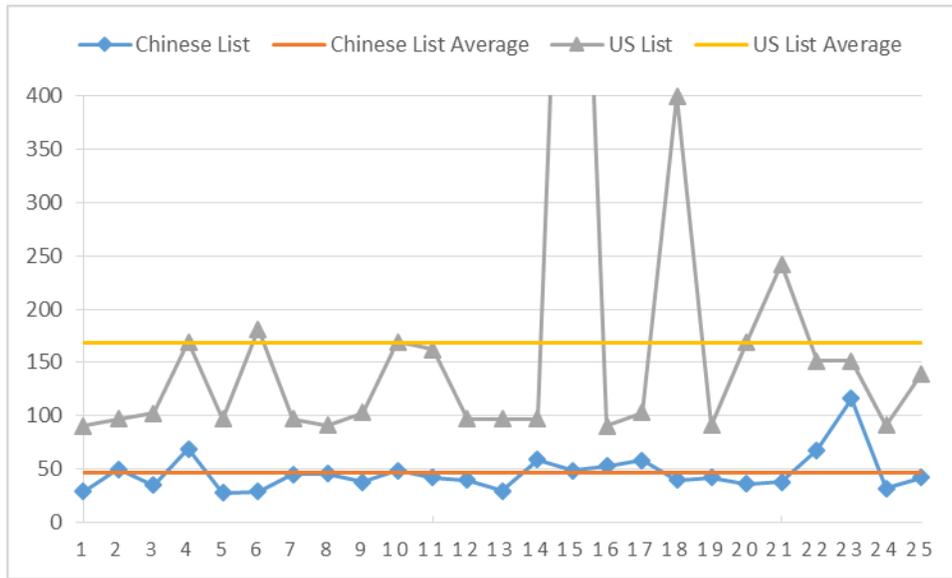


Figure 4

The horizontal axis shows book ranking and the vertical axis shows list price given by publisher.²⁰ All prices are expressed in Chinese Yuan, converted using the exchange rate from the day of list collection: 1 USD = 6.0610 CNY on January 31, 2014.²¹

The American books differ widely in price with an average of 168 CNY. The prices of the Chinese books are lower and vary less, with an average of 46 CNY.

The most expensive American book, *The Art of Public Speaking* (US, 15), clocks in at a whopping 927 CNY (off the scale on the chart above). Unsurprisingly, this is a university textbook. Prices on many textbook markets are pushed upward by a principal–agent dilemma: the agent choosing the literature (the course teacher) is separated from the principal who has to pay (the student taking the course).²² Interestingly the Chinese textbook market has not veered as strongly in this direction. The Chinese language version of *Principles of Economics* (CN, 23), a widely used textbook, is listed at a mere

²⁰ List prices found on each respective book's Amazon page.

²¹ "USD to CNY exchange rate for January 31, 2014," accessed on September 14, 2014, <http://www.exchange-rates.org/Rate/USD/CNY/1-31-2014>

²² David Kestenbaum and Jacob Goldstein, "Why Textbook Prices Keep Climbing", Episode 573, Planet Money, National Public Radio, Podcast, <http://www.npr.org/blogs/money/2014/10/03/353300404/episode-573-why-textbook-prices-keep-climbing>

116 CNY in China.²³ I assume that this is partly because China lacks appropriate protection of intellectual property, as already mentioned.

5. Qualitative Observations

5.1. Sender: What can we infer about the authors?

5.1.1. How hopeful are the authors?

The best-selling English edition of *Rickshaw* was given an upbeat, romantic ending by its translator, without Lao She's permission. The original Chinese novel ending with a pessimistic view of the future.²⁴

Introduction. In this section I will discuss economics books²⁵ and the hope expressed by their authors. Without getting bogged down in a discussion on the psychology of hope, I will simply use dictionary.com's definition of hope: "the feeling that what is wanted can be had or that events will turn out for the best."

Here, we will clearly see that US economists are unfailingly hopeful—they believe that the mathematic puzzle of macroeconomics has a solution, and that it is probable that an adequate interpretation of this solution will be implemented. Meanwhile, Chinese economists sometimes feel hopeful and oftentimes see both problems and clear solution, but they are also prone to see the government as a *perhaps* immovable obstacle, and they are less sure that the mathematics will work out.

Hope in America. Economists on the US list often describe the current economy as a near-hopeless situation—as we will note you are told to worry about a whole host of things. But, in the end, these authors always end on a hopeful note.

For example, *The Price of Inequality* (US, 3) is a very somber book. Utilizing

²³ Compared to the English-language version with an American list price of 2194 CNY (\$361.95)

²⁴ Jonathan D. Spence, *The Search for Modern China*, (New York: Norton, 1990), 564.

²⁵ Here, I define economics books as titles from the 3.1. Economics & Politics category in the Data section. 26 of the 50 books fit comfortably into either the Economics & Politics category or the Management Studies category, therefore my analysis will constantly orbit either economics books or management books.

broad economic data, Joseph Stiglitz argues for hundreds of pages that special-interest groups are ruining the American and Western European economies. A few ultra-wealthy individuals are pouring fortunes into lobbying, resulting in these individuals *getting a larger slice of the cake*, even though it shrinks the *overall size of the cake*.²⁶ The financial crisis of 2007–2008 is Stiglitz’s foremost example of this: a few people increased their own wealth, and subsequently the entire economy contracted. But after a long and depressing exposition, the entire last chapter is still a hopeful battle-cry where Stiglitz shows that he believes that things can be fixed. He believes his suggested series of reforms, and a more progressive tax code, will balance the American economy: “I believe it is still not too late for this country to change course, and to recover the fundamental principles of fairness and opportunity on which it was founded.”²⁷

Similarly, in *Capital in the 21st Century* (US, 21), Thomas Piketty spends most of his book explaining the grim state of things: how incredibly unequal distribution of wealth has become and how America and Western-European countries have developed in a wrong direction for decades. But the last part is still an up-lifting message of hope, split into four chapters, that discusses all the needed reforms and how the humanistic spirit will prevail.

In *Get Rich Carefully* (US, 6), Jim Cramer laments the *terrible* policies of President Obama, and how they will destroy the US economy:

Given that Washington’s going to be wrangling about matters that directly impact your portfolio for years to come, let me share some tips gleaned from what has worked each time these hideous inter-changes have occurred so that you can survive—and possibly even thrive—through the partisan pulverizing that Washington is now guaranteed to do to your savings.²⁸

The message is clear—there is hope—read Jim Cramer’s book and you can still make money.

Stiglitz and Piketty have written books that can be described as “left of center” on

²⁶ Joseph E. Stiglitz, *The Price of Inequality: How Today's Divided Society Endangers Our Future* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2012), section: The Rising Tide That Didn’t Lift All Boats.

²⁷ Stiglitz, *The Price of Inequality*, section: Is There Hope?.

²⁸ Jim Cramer, *Jim Cramer's Get Rich Carefully*, (New York: Plume, 2014), Author’s Note.

the American political spectrum (they argue for higher government involvement in markets, more regulation, more social welfare programs, etc.), while Jim Cramer's book is “right of center” (all policies that don't help the stock market are bad). But, interestingly, regardless of political affiliation, hope is never lost.

Hope in China. In contrast, books on the Chinese list range from hopeful to hopeless. On the hopeful end of the scale, we find books such as: *Learn How To Understand Finance News* (CN, 9). In this book, Chen Sijin & Jin Beilei warn of the many problems facing China (inflation is out of control, normal people only have unsafe investment alternatives, the country is riddled with real estate market bubbles, etc.). But in the end, much like the books on the US list, this book is hopeful. Both on a personal level (there are a few good investment tactics even for the little person) and on a macro level (there is hope for China's economy). Toward the end of the book, the authors argue that the American economic model will not work long-term. They warn that Chinese economists must stop trying to catch up with America by copying America.²⁹ It is a dead-end. Instead, China must try to redefine itself. This message of optimism is presented in the last chapter called *Where is the Hope?*: “Luckily, on this earth, the Scandinavian Model shines like a last bright light in the dark. This can show us the way forward.”³⁰ The “Scandinavian Model” is described as an ideal where a free market is balanced against a government safety net: the power of the free market is harnessed fully through balanced regulation. This message of hope is delivered in a style reminiscent of the books on the US list—hopeful and grandiose.

But on the other end of hope-scale we find books like *The Grand Trends* (CN, 18). Here, Shi Hanbing presents pessimistic news about a retinue of topics and the tacit message is always that *things are worse than you think*. Shi argues that China's looming demographic problems are bigger than you think; the current financial systems are more unstable than you think and inflation will get worse than you think; natural resources are more than scarce than you think; China has less power on the global political stage than you think; China's national debt problem is bigger than you think.

²⁹ Chen Sijin and Jin Beilei, *Kan Dong Cai Jing Xin Wen De Di Yi Ben Shu* (Hangzhou: Zhejiang Ren Min Chu Ban She, 2011), 228-235.

³⁰ Chen and Jin, *Kan Dong Cai Jing Xin Wen*, 229, author translation.

After 340 pages of grumbling, Shi presents the reader with a chapter called “What can we do about it?”. In this chapter he emphasizes the importance of mineral rights and control of resources. He calls this ideology *Resources are King*.³¹ Basically, this is a rehash of China's already widely implemented policy of using its trade surplus to purchase mineral rights in Africa, South American and other regions. Shi suggests that this *Resources is King* strategy is suitable for guiding widely different things: public policy, corporate management and private investment. While China will surely reap huge benefits of its mineral rights in the decades to come, this does not come off as a solution proportionate to the problems at hand after hundreds of pages of telling the reader that all problems are much worse than we think. Also, while discussing the benefits of access to natural resources, he does not forget to mention that government corruption always has the power to nullify any positive effect. He illustrates this by using examples from sub-Saharan African countries where local warlords subverted any public gain from natural resources.³² He sternly implies that China is at risk for going a similar path where implementation of superficial reform can be thwarted by systemic corruption.

After 35 vaguely hopeful pages about the glory of resources, Shi snaps back into his pessimistic self in the book's last chapter that concerns the economic effects of the earthquake that hit Japan in 2011, as well as broader comparisons to Japan (a country that enjoyed strong export-led growth in the postwar years, but later stagnated and has now been plagued by weak growth for more than two decades). Again, the implication is that China might suffer a similar fate and be plagued by weakened growth in the decades to come. In all, this book can hardly be called hopeful.

Similarly, *Currency Wars 5* (CN, 8) is a book that waffles between halfhearted brainstorming of solutions, and exasperated frustration over mounting problems—hardly hopeful (for more on this book, see section 5.3.1. and 5.3.2.).

As a fourth and last example, let me mention *Lang Xianping on Reform* (CN, 21). In this book, economist Lang Xianping analyzes the Chinese economy in general and the third plenary session of the 18th CPC central committee in particular. Like books we've already discussed, he analyses problems and discusses possible solutions. Problems

³¹ Shi Hanbing, *Shi Han Bing Shuo: Jing Ji Da Qi Ju, Wo Men Zen Me Ban* (Shanghai: Shang Hai Cai Jing Da Xue Chu Ban She, 2011), 344-352.

³² Shi, *Shi Han Bing Shuo*, 345.

include stalled health care reform, demography issues, tax-burden issues, and many others. But, like many other authors, Lang emphasizes that systematic government corruption can undo any reforms aimed at solving specific problems.

His look at the anatomy of modern Chinese corruption is detailed, dark and fascinating. He argues that it has three traits that are similar to French corruption during the period preceding the French revolution. First, government spending is filtered through corrupt departments, and funds are therefore constantly sifted off. Second, many types of projects in China need to be approved by a centralized authority, bribing officials to get permits is consequently a source of huge overhead costs. For example, Lang describes a small power plant that cost 20 million CNY in bribes to acquire all permits. Third, government positions are bought and sold for money. This happens even on higher levels, as proved by the widely publicized Liu Zhijun case (where illegal purchases included even representative posts in the National People's Congress and posts in the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference).³³ But according to Lang, the buying of government positions is worst on the local level:

In July 2013 it was revealed that party secretary Luo Yinguo of Maoming city openly advertised how he auctioned off government positions. If you wanted Liu Zhijun to promote you, at least you had to visit him in person and get to know him a little bit—only then would he accept your money and make you an official. At least you had to go through the motions. But Luo Yinguo would let anyone participate in the auctions, and in the final investigation 303 officials had connections to him and were implicated. So how much did government posts cost? Section level cadre: 200 000 CNY. Department level cadre: 2 million CNY. Deputy bureau director or deputy bureau level cadre: 10 million CNY. And for his own post you would have to pay about 100 million CNY.³⁴

He continues to argue that these structures resemble those of greedy French officials immediately before the French revolution. He only vaguely brushes up against the logical result of this comparison (a pitchforked and blood-spattered coup d'état?).

³³ Lang Xianping, *Lang Xian Ping Shuo: Gai Ge Ru He Zai Chu Fa* (Beijing: Dong Fang Chu Ban She, 2014), 45-54.

³⁴ Lang, *Lang Xian Ping Shuo: Gai Ge Ru He Zai Chu Fa*, 53-54, author translation.

Lang does not say that China will fail to reform peacefully, but he also does not present a message of hope. Instead he ends the chapter with a blunt message: “the government needs to solve this.”³⁵ His continued interpretations of the prospects of the 2013 third plenary are modest at best.

In conclusion, the tone of the Chinese economics books cannot live up the undying hopefulness of the books on the US list. Upon realizing this, it is easy to resort to question like: *Why do the Chinese suffer from such fundamental hopelessness?* But maybe it is equally apt to invert the question and ask: *Why are the Americans so hopeful?*³⁶

It is also interesting to ponder that China’s booming economy is seen as such as success story *from the outside*, while so many economists on the inside are losing sleep over the current direction of development.

5.1.2. How ambitious are the authors?

The authors have slightly different ways of describing their own aspirations and the impact they are hoping to have on the reader. On the US list, several authors claim to have unearthed a conclusion that will trigger a total paradigm shift for the reader, but on the Chinese list, authors are more modest.

On the US list, claims are sometimes tongue-in-cheek, like the tag-line of *Banish Clutter Forever* (US, 1) (“How the toothbrush principle will change your life”). But many of these claims sound deadpan serious. Note the following three quotes, all taken from early sections of books on the US list. First up, Harry S. Dent Jr. believes that his book will revolutionize the way you see the world:

At Dent Research we have a not-so-secret weapon: *demographics*. It is the ultimate indicator that allows you to see around corners, to predict that most fundamental economic trends not just years but decades in advance. Demographic data can help identify macro and micro trends. On the small side, I can tell you when people spend the most on potato chips—age forty-two. Thinking bigger, I can point

³⁵ Lang, *Lang Xian Ping Shuo: Gai Ge Ru He Zai Chu Fa*, 54, author translation.

³⁶ Please note that Piketty is French, not American, so it is hard to decide what to make of this.

out to you how our economy has boomed and gone bust on a forty-six-year lag tied to the birth index for peak spending of the average family since 1983.³⁷

Carol Dweck is hoping to change your life by helping you take control of your life, by teaching you about how to change your “mindset”:

In this book, you'll learn how a simple belief about yourself—a belief we discovered in our research—guides a large part of your life. In fact, I permeates *every* part of your life. Much of what you think of as your personality actually grows out of this “mindset.”³⁸

Charles Duhigg also hopes to change your life by letting you control it for the first time, but he wants you to do it through teaching you about “habits”:

One paper published by a Duke University researcher in 2006 found that more than 40 percent of the actions people performed each day weren't actual decisions, but habits. [...] We understand how to make people eat less, exercise more, work more efficiently, and live healthier lives. Transforming a habit isn't necessarily easy or quick. It isn't always simple. But it is possible. And now we understand how.³⁹

Each author has their own brand of a “This Changes Everything” realization, be it a focus on demography, mindset or habit. After this base realization has been firmly explained, these authors attempt to view disparate phenomena through the lens of their conclusion. This is arguably done to boost the relevance of their own findings. When reading some of these often convoluted and far-fetched applications it easy to feel that authors are suffering from tunnel vision or some other cognitive bias. In short, authors on the US list think a lot of themselves.

On the Chinese list, four books (*Big Data* (CN, 2), *Getting More* (CN, 4), *Antifragile* (CN, 22) and *Work Like A Spy* (CN, 1)) also begin with similar grandiose statements that they will, in some way, change your life. But, these four books are all

³⁷ Harry S. Dent, *The Demographic Cliff: How to Survive and Prosper during the Great Deflation of 2014-2019* (New York: Portfolio, 2014), Introduction.

³⁸ Carol S. Dweck, *Mindset: The New Psychology of Success* (New York: Random House, 2006), Introduction.

³⁹ Charles Duhigg, *The Power of Habit: Why We Do What We Do in Life and Business*, (New York: Random House, 2012), section: The Habit Cure.

written by non-Chinese authors.

When comparing the aforementioned works to the 13 books by Chinese authors, we eventually notice that the Chinese authors never make claims of such magnitude. During opening chapters, they rarely linger on the question of *what this book will do to your life*. Surely, their ideas are large, and the problems and solutions explained within their books are pressing, but this is rarely said outright during the opening pages. Therefore, by comparison, I perceive the Chinese authors as humble.

There is one notable exception: *Make Time Your Friend* (CN, 14). In the preface of this time-management book, Li Xiaolai explains that he has read countless time management books, and now he thinks that “time management” is a ridiculous term, because time just keeps on moving regardless of what people do!⁴⁰ Instead, readers need to understand that it is themselves that they need to manage and change. According to Li, it is only after having clarified this we can change our lives: “Now that we’ve found the real source of the problem, now there is hope.”⁴¹ This preface is imbued with a tone of overt self-importance that is similar to many books by US authors.⁴²

Perhaps the implication of this is that Chinese authors have not fully grasped the importance of the first page or two. These pages are probably read by the potential book buyer while standing in the bookstore—weighing the idea of buying the book—and will greatly impact book sales. Or perhaps Chinese readers are less swayed by such silly antics, and even books without a “this book will change your life” preface can climb the bestseller lists.

⁴⁰ Li Xiaolai, *Ba Shi Jian Dang Zuo Peng You: Yun Yong Xin Zhi Huo De Jie Fang* (Beijing: Dian Zi Gong Ye Chu Ban She, 2010), Preface I.

⁴¹ Li, *Ba Shi Jian Dang Zuo Peng You*, Preface II, author translation.

⁴² Moreover, it is interesting to note that Chinese authors have a different way of underlining their own importance: Books are often orbiting the author, instead of orbiting a specific subject or perspective. This is especially true for books in the economics field. A good example is *The Grand Trends*, where Shi Hanbing lays out his expert advice on the North & South Korea stalemate; Chinese foreign policy toward Russia; why Chinese state-owned enterprises are struggling; how problems in the Chinese farmland can be solved to avoid a coming era of grain deficits; why the Chinese middle-class has lost its moral values; what American businesses need to focus on in the short to mid-term; why the American war for independence was so important. These topics have no obvious connection to each other. This can be perceived as self-aggrandizing in a different manner, since we are supposed to believe that Shi Hanbing is a first-string expert in such greatly disparate fields. *Logic of Reform*, *Currency Wars 5*, and *Lang Xianping on Reform* are all author-focused books of this type.

5.2. Message: What can we infer about the context of the books?

5.2.1. How do the books relate to management history?

Introduction. In this section I will first quickly outline the history of Anglophone management literature, and then draw parallels between points in this history and ideas in the management literature on the current Chinese list. China has a very short history of “market economy” style management with goals of maximizing productivity, and an even shorter history of business schools. After bursting onto the scene, some Chinese managers seem to have invented philosophies for themselves, and others have perhaps imported perspectives from the Anglophone sphere. A consequence of this is that management ideas in Chinese-language literature have not followed the same developmental sequence as in the English-language literature. In relation to English-language literature, some Chinese authors echo very old ideas that are now seen as entirely unfashionable, while other Chinese authors are refreshingly up-to-date and attempt to push the envelope in a modern way.

Historical background. In the English-speaking sphere, the history of management studies began with Frederick Taylor's “Scientific Management” in the 1880s.⁴³ This school of thought emerged in the wake of mass-production and industrialism, and lacked the humanism of modern management.

Later, in the first half of the 20th century, the focus of management research shifted toward the character of the leader. It was believed that only people with suitable traits should be given leadership positions. This perspective was called the Traits Theory, and was influenced by the Great Man Theory from the field of anthropology: “Great man theory of leadership proposes that certain men are born to lead and when crises arise these men step up to take their natural place.”⁴⁴

After the 1970s and 1980s, management theory became more convoluted, and

⁴³ A. Gregory Stone and Kathleen Patterson, “The History of Leadership Focus,” *Servant Leadership Research Roundtable* August (2005): 2.

⁴⁴ “The History of Leadership Studies and Evolution of Leadership Theories,” Hubpages.com, accessed October 10, 2014, <http://ecoggins.hubpages.com/hub/The-History-of-Leadership-Studies-and-Evolution-of-Leadership-Theories>

countless parallel perspectives started competing for space in the noisy world of management literature and business academia. Modern management studies usually has a larger focus on organic and social leadership, some of these include participatory leadership, transformational leadership, transactional leadership, and situational leadership.⁴⁵

Taylorism. As a first example, let us draw parallels between *Life as a Manager* (CN, 17) by Huang Zhongqiang and the works of Frederick Taylor.

In Taylor's 1911 epic *The Principles of Scientific Management*, Taylor explains that factories need to research the perfect process for performing a task, and then force all workers to do said task this exact way. Taylor wanted to meticulously control every part of the work environment. He methodically took notes on how many minutes different workers were allowed to rest—hoping to develop the perfect work schedule. Today, his mechanistic way of looking at workers is seen as extremely condescending. This is how he describes his disappointment with the average worker:

Whenever an American workman plays baseball, or an English workman plays cricket, it is safe to say that he strains every nerve to secure victory for his side. [...] When the same workman returns to work on the following day, instead of using every effort to turn out the largest possible amount of work, in a majority of the cases this man deliberately plans to do as little as he safely can to turn out far less work than he is well able to do in many instances to do not more than one-third to one-half of a proper day's work. And in fact if he were to do his best to turn out his largest possible day's work, he would be abused by his fellow-workers for so doing, even more than if he had proved himself a "quitter" in sport.⁴⁶

Compare Taylor's sweeping generalizations to this paragraph from *Life as a Manager* (CN, 17), note how they experience similar feelings of disappointment, and both seem to feel that their employees are *all too human*:

⁴⁵ “The History of Leadership Studies and Evolution of Leadership Theories.”

⁴⁶ Frederick Winslow Taylor, *The Principles of Scientific Management* (New York: Norton, 1967): section: Fundamentals of Scientific Management.

In the last few years, more and more people born in the 1980s have joined the white-collar labor force. They are basically all products of the one-child policy, but they are very different from other only-children that were born in the 1970s and 1960s. Instead, these employees are quick to respond to commands, they are enthusiastic and flexible in handling problems. But on the other hand, they are also relatively egoistical and self-centered. They lack loyalty and are often negligent. When they are unhappy, they don't express this with their mouths, instead they express it with their feet. Frequently, if you criticize someone, he will not show up to work the next day. Instead, he will just resign. And employees born in the 1980s are often more abrasive.⁴⁷

Huang later marvels at how his hopeless 1980s employees “have no qualms about expressing their own opinions,”⁴⁸ while strongly implying that this is a bad thing. Like Taylor, Huang sees his employees as deeply flawed; perhaps both authors would much prefer to staff their firms with robots. Both of these writers spend pages and pages languishing the current state of wastefulness. Huang, much like Taylor, seeks to develop the perfect structure for imperfect subjects. Today, in Europe and America, few researchers would echo Taylor's cold mechanistic view of the worker—it is extremely unfashionable to write books where you describe your workers are simple drones.

It is interesting to note that in the preface to *Life as a Manager* (CN, 17), Huang admits to never having formally studied management, which might explain why his writing is so detached from modern management research.

Traits Theory. As a second example, let us consider *Zhihu Discussions on Entrepreneurship* (CN, 11) and its similarities to the Traits Theory. Industrialists in 1950s America believed that all men were born with rigid traits, some were born to be leaders and some were born to be followers. The goal of the corporate pyramid was to sift out the born leaders. In a 1974 meta-study of 163 studies that perpetuated the Traits Theory, R.M. Stogdill identified ten inherit traits that were often suggested as important for a leader. Some of these were “venturesomeness and originality in problem-solving”, “drive

⁴⁷ Huang Zhongqiang, *Bian Gan Bian Xue Zuo Lao Ban: Yi Ge Xiao Gong Si Lao Ban De Ri Chang Guan Li* (Nanchang: Jiangxi Ren Min Chu Ban She, 2012): 29, author translation.

⁴⁸ Huang, *Bian Gan Bian Xue Zuo Lao Ban*, 29, author translation.

for responsibility and task completion”, “willingness to tolerate frustration and delay” and “self-confidence and sense of personal identity.”⁴⁹

In *Zhihu Discussions on Entrepreneurship* (CN, 11) we read that everyone who is considering starting a company (specifically a social media-type technology company), must ask themselves if they are fit to be a leader and an entrepreneur. To determine this, they must search inside of themselves for the following four prerequisites:

1. More outstanding logic capabilities than your peers.
2. Drive and perseverance.
3. Courage and confidence.
4. A business idea that works in the current market (good timing).⁵⁰

The fourth is an external prerequisite, and not a trait, but the first three resemble traits identified by Stogdill. The next section in *Zhihu Discussions on Entrepreneurship* (CN, 11) divides people into categories and subcategories, and also concludes that only certain categories of people are suitable for leadership and entrepreneurship.

It is true that modern management utilizes a plethora of personality tests (most famous, perhaps, the Myers–Briggs Personality Test), but these tests hardly imply that only certain people are fit to lead. In fact, no modern perspectives retain the premise that only some people can be leaders. I would argue that this rigid worldview is seen as somewhat chauvinistic in mainstream English-language research.

Transactional Leadership. As a third example, let us look at *How Will You Manage Your Team?* (CN, 3) and how similar it is to modern American management literature. In this book, Zhao Wei discusses the true definition of leadership within an organization:

A good leader is not necessarily the person with special authority or a high position. In reality, when looking inside of modern corporations, we will find that many people with high positions and special authority actually don't have any

⁴⁹ R.M. Stogdill, *Handbook of leadership: A survey of theory and research* (New York: The Free Press, 1974): 87.

⁵⁰ Zhi Hu, *Chuan Ye Shi, Wo Men Zai Zhi Hu Liao Shen Me?* (Beijing: Zhong Xin Chu Ban She, 2014): section: Shen Shi Zi Ji, author translation.

power. They are powerful in name only. (This phenomenon is more and more obvious, and it has even become a management trend).⁵¹

Zhao then goes on to explain that real leadership comes from personal relationships and showing that you can actually solve problems. This discussion is similar to the modern view put forth, for example, in the management textbook *Cases in Leadership* from 2011:

While there are different kinds of power, in organizations, we consider two kinds of power—position power and personal power. Position power is that power that comes from holding a particular office, position, or rank in an organization (Daft, 2005)⁵². A university president has more power than a dean of a business school, but they both have formal power.

Personal power is the capacity to influence that comes from being viewed as knowledgeable and likable by followers. It is power that derives from the interpersonal relationships that leaders develop with followers (Yukl, 2006).⁵³

Zhao also repeatedly emphasizes the idea that real leaders put the needs of other team members above their own. This is an echo of the main point of *Leaders Eat Last* (US, 10) on the US list. Thus, *How Will You Manage Your Team?* (CN, 3) is much more synchronized with the American books.

Conclusion. The books on the US list are products of almost a century and a half of writing management books, and this makes one aspect of them homogenous: they all take certain humanistic and enlightened values for granted. But others aspects of them are not homogenous: they do not assume that there is a single best way for managing people, rather they all purport different solutions. Chinese authors, on the other hand, are more fully heterogeneous. Some books on the Chinese list echo the basic values of the US

⁵¹ Zhao Wei, *Gei Ni Yi Ge Tuan Dui, Ni Neng Zen Me Guan?* (Nanjing: Jiangsu Wen Yi Chu Ban She, 2013): section: Ni Shi Guan Li Zhe Hai Shi Ling Dao Ren?, author translation.

⁵² Please note that the two books referred to inside of the quote are Daft's *The Leadership Experience* and Yukl's *Leadership in organizations*. For more information, see bibliography.

⁵³ W. Glenn Rowe, *Cases in Leadership* (Los Angeles: SAGE Publications, 2007): chapter: Leadership: What is it?

books, but others don't. And there is absolutely no consensus on what is the best way to manage people.

5.2.2. How do the books relate to political history?

In the economics and politics category, books on both lists proudly analyze and draw lessons from political thinkers and political leaders—especially historical leaders. For example, *Economic Reform through the Ages* (CN, 19) by Wu Xiaobo is a search through the eons of Chinese political history for useful reform ideas. The book begins with a look at successful political reforms implemented by Guan Zhong—described by Wu as a man who “lived during the 7th century BC, when the overwhelming majority of earth's people still lived like barbarians. Even at this time, China could produce this caliber of economic genius. [...] After a close reading of Guan Zhong, we discover that his ideology supported government interference in market behaviors. Because of this, we might as well call him the John Maynard Keynes of ancient China.”⁵⁴

Here, we can clearly see that Chinese economists are proud of their political heritage. (But not always, *30 Economics Classic: A Short Guide* (CN, 24) contains dozen-page summaries of the 30 most important economics classics from the last few hundred years, and not one of the included *classics* is written by a Chinese author). Similar (but arguably more subtle) examples of pride can be found on the US list.

In the management section, on the other hand, Chinese writers seem to almost ignore their own political history. US authors utilize plenty of references to political leaders for tips on time management, investing, life management, organization theory and other business-related skills. When Dale Carnegie (author of *How To Win Friends and Influence People* (US, 8)) wants to lend credibility to his second principle of success (always remember people's names), he does this by using anecdotes about Franklin D. Roosevelt's amazing ability to remember names.⁵⁵ Moreover, the anecdotes of Dale Carnegie feature almost every president up to the point of his book's writing—perhaps

⁵⁴ Wu Xiaobo, *Li Dai Jing Ji Bian Ge De Shi* (Hangzhou: Zhe Jiang Da Xue Chu Ban She, 2013): 26, author translation.

⁵⁵ Dale Carnegie, *How to Win Friends and Influence People* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1981): chapter: Do this and you'll Be Welcome Anywhere.

the 1930 was a time of early nostalgia in American industrialism.

But on the Chinese list, management books do not look to the great principles and work ethics of Chinese political leaders for lessons.⁵⁶

Where are the novel applications of neoconfucianism to organization theory and how company hierarchies can be set up? Where are the lessons (underpinned by anecdotes) drawn from the fabled negotiation virtuoso of Zhou Enlai? Where are strategy lessons drawn from the military victories of Zhu De? When teaching how to develop a corporate identity that will electrify your employees, where are the recipes based on the routines of Chairman Mao Zedong?

Instead, Chinese management discourse is forward-looking. It does not dwell on the past. It does not concern itself with former Chinese arrangements of the market, or earlier corporate forms, not even the Township and Village Enterprises that gradually took over the Commune and Brigade Enterprises in the 1980s. No one discusses the successes, failures or lessons from this time. In Chinese management history, history began in the 1990s. Compounded with the already established fact that all the Chinese books were published fairly recently: The Chinese management books feel eerily devoid of history.

5.3. Receiver: What can we infer about the intended reader?

5.3.1. How educated is the intended reader?

Both lists primarily consist of books that are written for a general public. These books require no industry-specific knowledge and no formal education in management, economics, political science or other related topics. But there are interesting exceptions, all of which come from the Chinese list.

Naturally, it is hard to objectively evaluate if a book could be understood by the general public, or if it demands education-specific knowledge and is written for people with a specific background. This is hard to judge, partly because each country has a unique “general public” with culturally specific “common knowledge”. In the following

⁵⁶ It remains possible that I have overlooked subtle political references in these texts, but, overall, I noticed a trend of absence.

section I strive to clarify the difference between books that require culture-specific knowledge, and books that require this education-specific knowledge.⁵⁷ After this clarifying section, I will review a handful of books in terms of how much education-specific knowledge they require, and draw certain conclusions from this. It might seem esoteric to try to evaluate this, but as we will see, it has clear instrumental value for our conclusion.

What is education-specific knowledge? Let us first look at *Currency Wars 5* (CN, 8). On the back of the paperback, we find the following two blurbs in bold red letters:

- ***What were the shady back deals during the “4•12” Gold Massacre?***
- ***Can the Chinese Dama get revenge on Wall Street?***

To understand this, we need to know that twice in 2013 throngs of middle-aged Chinese women stormed Chinese jewelry stores because the price of gold had plummeted. These flashes of buyers were so huge that they caused quick reversals of the price drops, and periods of huge unpredictable price fluctuation followed. A Chinese-American reporter at *The Wall Street Journal* published a story on these women, terming them “Chinese Dama” (*Dama*, in Chinese, being an affectionate name for an older woman).⁵⁸ In China, the first occurrence of this price fluctuation is referred to simply as “4•12” (because it happened on April 12).

If you don’t know about the “gold massacre” in 2013, these blurbs will not entice you. Also, the book will not make sense to you until you search online and read the original news articles about the event. These events were not widely publicized in the US⁵⁹, but were given a lot of attention in China. After reading samples of the book, we discover that economic concepts are always explained methodically and clearly. How the price fluctuations were influenced by stock market history and future trading is explained with simple language. Thus, we can assume that this book is written for any member of

⁵⁷ Please note that both of these ways of being demanding are different from a book being “difficult to understand in a general way”. Judging that objectively would be even harder, since, as a European, I would have an unavoidable bias against the Chinese books, because of *language*.

⁵⁸ Chuin-Wei Yap, “China’s Consumers Show Growing Influence in Gold Market,” *Wall Street Journal* (New York City, New York), Aug. 12, 2013, <http://on.wsj.com/1w4E4Ve>.

⁵⁹ An online search for the term “Chinese Dama” will almost exclusively garner hits from English-language Chinese news sources.

the Chinese general public who follows the news. It does not require education-specific knowledge, but it does demand a lot of culture-specific knowledge.

To illustrate what I mean by challenging in terms of education-specific knowledge, let us contrast this with *The Logic of Reform* (CN, 7). Early in this book, Zhou Qiren describes his first encounter with the ideas of Nobel Prize-winning economist Ronald Coase. Any student of university-level economics will eventually study Coase, but for readers without a formal education in economics, Coase's theories are hardly common knowledge. In the following quote, note how Zhou does not actually introduce Coase and does not explain any of his work, instead he tacitly assumes that the reader is already familiar with it:

The first time I saw Ronald Coase's name was in a small book. It was the summer of 1985, and a friend of mine at the Beijing Sitong Company quietly gave me two books. I looked them over, it was Zhang Wuchang's *The Future of China* and *The Future of China 2*. They were published by the Hong Kong Economic Journal, but the copies I held in my hand were obviously counterfeit. The books were very small, the paper quality was very poor and they had noticeable black marks from being photocopied. No words were printed on the cover, only on the inside.

On page 148 of *The Future of China*, Zhang Wuchang wrote the following: "Coase has a completely unprecedented understanding of the inner workings of economics. He also shows great care in analyzing the economic future of China." The book also presented Coase's two biggest works, and used his concepts of property rights⁶⁰ and transaction cost⁶¹ to elucidate Coase's theory of systems and systematic change. At that time I didn't know very much about market transfers, therefore I didn't really understand what "transaction costs" were, it was especially hard for me to understand Coase's theorem on zero transaction costs. But when I came to his theory on delineation of rights⁶², I immediately felt that Coase was a great thinker.⁶³

Instead of introducing any of these theories, Zhou expects the reader to identify

⁶⁰ Chinese original text provides parenthetical with English translation of this word.

⁶¹ Chinese original text provides parenthetical with English translation of this word.

⁶² Chinese original text provides parenthetical with English translation of this word.

⁶³ Zhou Qiren, *Gai Ge De Luo Ji* (Beijing: Zhong Xin Chu Ban She, 2013), 6, author translation.

with his nostalgia pertaining to his younger days when he was *just an ignorant little boy* who didn't know about Coase's theorem on zero transaction costs. He does not even name Coase's two biggest works, instead he assumes that everyone knows that he's talking about the 1937 paper "The Nature of the Firm" and the 1960 paper "The Problem of Social Cost." After this section, Zhou proceeds to apply Coase's theories analytically (still without explaining them) to reforms in 1980s China—when agricultural production shifted away from strongly egalitarian distribution toward Deng Xiaoping's system where increased output meant increased economic reward.

Amongst economists, it is natural to assume knowledge of Coase, who became a scholar in the 1930s and published his last book, *How China Became Capitalist*, in 2012 at the ripe young age of 102. But for a general audience, *The Logic of Reform* (CN, 7) must be perceived as very perplexing. An uninitiated reader will quickly feel either frustration or boredom when the basics of the transaction cost theory are never explained. In later sections, while delving deeper into analyzing the 1980s household-responsibility system that transitioned into larger and larger economic reforms, Zhou routinely assumes that the reader is profoundly familiar with these reforms, therefore we can conclude that this book requires both a thorough understanding of Chinese modern history (culture-specific knowledge) and a good grasp of economics (education-specific knowledge).

Below, I will make further comparisons regarding requirements of education-specific knowledge, and try to disregard requirements of culture-specific knowledge. These comparisons are broken down by category.

Entrepreneurship. In the management section, both lists consist of only books that are approachable by basically anyone. No difficult insider-language is used to alienate readers, and new concepts are generally explained for the uninitiated.

Sometimes, the management books on the two lists are fascinatingly similar in their approachability. *Zhihu Discussions on Entrepreneurship* (CN, 11) is about basic issues a manager might face during a company's start-up phase: *How do you pick a direction? How do you find a business partner? How do you build a team?* These are laid out in a questions-and-answers format. In an almost identical way, *Shark Tank* (US, 19) (a book co-written by 7 successful American business leaders) poses a multitude of

questions with similar-length answers. These questions are also focused on the start-up phase: *How do you formulate your business idea? How do you build a team? How do you finance your idea?*

A conspicuous format similarity is that most articles are appended with a colorful text box containing glib and encouraging factoids about finding your way as an entrepreneur. From a blue-bordered box in the Zhihu book:

When is it time to start a business? Perhaps this “right time” will not fit your life situation. Because whatever time it is, as long as you want it, the reason to start a business could be sometime as simple as thinking: “This year will be my lucky year.” If you don’t really want it, then your reason to refrain could be something as simple as thinking: “The weather isn’t good today.” Therefore, it is important to take a clearheaded look at both yourself and your external situation. When it is time, do it.⁶⁴

From a grey text box in *Shark Tank* (US, 19):

You should never worry about the economic timing when starting a new business. When the economy is slow, it means bigger companies are reducing their investments and cutting back, which opens the door to innovation. When the economy is good, companies often rest on their laurels. It’s always a good time to start a business in America.⁶⁵

Note the slight difference in message (in China, you need to think twice before starting a company, and the first step is personal soul-searching, in America, it’s always time to be an entrepreneur), but the similarity in patronizing tone. In conclusion, entrepreneur books on both lists are written for a general public without *any* education-specific knowledge.

Team Management. In the team management category, we encounter more similarities between books on both lists. Both *How Will You Manage Your Team?* (CN, 3) by Zhao Wei, and *The Five Dysfunctions of a Team* (US, 22) by Patrick Lencioni, are

⁶⁴ Zhi Hu, *Chuan Ye Shi, Wo Men Zai Zhi Hu Liao Shen Me?* (Beijing: Zhong Xin Chu Ban She, 2014): 26, author translation.

⁶⁵ Michael Parrish DuDell and Mark Cuban, *Shark Tank Jump Start Your Business: How to Grow a Business from Concept to Cash* (New York: Hyperion, 2013): chapter 1.

beginner-friendly and approachable in content and treatment. They both stay very closely grounded in practical examples. In Lencioni’s case, advice is explained using a fictitious case study (sometimes referred to as a “business fable”) lasting almost the entire book. Lessons are drawn from the situations and problems that the “employee characters” end up in. In Zhao’s case, advice is explained through the lens of Zhao’s own career as a manager of a people. Similar questions and problems are discussed (such as conflict resolution, team cohesion etc.), in a comparable format. These books never demand any education-specific knowledge.

Economics. In the economics section, the difference between the lists is fairly large. The US books are all lodged in mid-section of the difficulty-scale. Some are slightly “lighter” reads (*Outliers* (US, 9), *The Demographic Cliff* (US, 20)), and some are slightly heavier and academic—starting out simple enough and then building toward fairly academic and complex conclusions (*The Price of Inequality* (US, 3), *Capital in the Twenty-First Century* (US, 21))—perhaps suggesting an audience of educated non-economists. But, essentially, they are all written for a general audience.

On the Chinese list, the spread of difficulty-levels is much wider, and thus this list contains both the easiest and the most challenging economics books, the easiest book being *Learn How To Understand Finance News* (CN, 9). This book is written in plain language, in an almost condescending tone, trying to answer questions that a complete layman might have about today’s global economy: *Why is the American dollar so cool? When will the next financial crisis happen? What is a land tax?*

In the mid-section of the difficulty scale (still in the economics section of the Chinese list), we find *The Logic of Currency* (CN, 20), written by Pang Zhongjia and Chen Sijin (who also wrote *Learn How To Understand Finance News* (CN, 9)). This book covers the history of currency in China, starting with the sea shells used for barter-trading 5000 years ago, to ancient boat-shaped silver ingots, to Tang emperor Xuanzong’s round coins with square holes, to the huge paper bills of Yuan dynasty, and ending with the silver coins of the Qing dynasty. The authors then connect this history to descriptions of modern financial institutions. The authors stay very close to the difficulty-level [and also style] of most economics books on the US list: fairly sophisticated descriptions of

China’s modern financial markets are mixed with interesting factoids, and facts are often woven into anecdotes to give it a more engaging and less academic air. I would describe this book as being in the easier part of the mid-section of the difficulty scale, similar to *Outliers* (US, 9) and *The Demographic Cliff* (US, 20). This book could appeal to anyone with a bit of intellectual curiosity, regardless of professional background.

In a slightly more challenging corner of the mid-section, we find *The Grand Trends* (CN, 18). This book starts from the beginning—explaining concepts one by one—then eventually reaches fairly academic conclusions. For example, in chapter 4, Lang Xianping looks at the China’s M2 money pool, questions all of the official statistics regarding China’s GDP growth, and finally concludes that China is heading toward a deep stagflation.⁶⁶ These concepts are complicated, but have all been explained in prior chapters. He does not hold back and “dumb it down”, but he also does not assume that the reader is familiar with all definitions of GDP growth. This style and difficulty is very similar to *The Price of Inequality* (US, 3) and *Capital in the Twenty-First Century* (US, 21)—these author attempt to migrate their ideas from the academic world to the general population.

The most demanding book is probably the *The Logic of Reform* (CN, 7), with its aforementioned references to Coase and the like. This book has a difficulty which, in my opinion, is unparalleled on the US list. It assumes that the reader already possess a foundation of formal education. Conclusively, we can identify a difference between the management books and economics books. Management books are universally very approachable and written for anyone, regardless of background—the reader is perhaps someone who was just promoted and suddenly has employees to manage, or perhaps someone who wants to start their own business. Meanwhile, economics books on the US list are similarly written for anyone, regardless of background. These “pop-economics” books are light reads and try to stay fun and interesting. The Chinese list also has books on this level, but it also has books that are much more academic. Does this mean that China has a larger group of people who arduously worked their way toward a more thorough understand of economics? Perhaps.

⁶⁶ Shi, *Shi Han Bing Shuo*, 344-352.

5.3.2. Who is the intended reader?

A common arrangement for economics books is that the beginning of the book will give background and foreshadow the larger conclusion of the entire book, then most of the book will rely heavily on economic analysis, mixed with some political policy suggestions, and then the last chapter(s) will sum up these suggestions and expand on them. On the US list, this format is closely followed by Stiglitz and Piketty (authors of *The Price of Inequality* (US, 3) and *Capital in the Twenty-First Century* (US, 21), respectively). On the Chinese list, this format is vaguely followed by most economics books, but the authors will often skip around from topic to topic, introducing new economic data almost until the last page.

In the final chapters of policy suggestions, a difference can be identified between the two lists. In the US books, suggestions for policy change are written in a clear voice speaking to a voting public. In the Chinese books, policy suggestions are often written with a less clarity of intended reader. This difference can probably be attributed to different levels of participation in Chinese and US governance.

Below, this difference will be illustrated with two simple examples.

As noted earlier, *The Price of Inequality* (US, 3) argues that growing inequality is hurting many economies around the world, but Stiglitz still ends the book with a message of hope. Here we will observe that this message is not only hopeful, it is also participatory. His suggestions for reform are framed by the idea that it is “we” that can change the world. In the last chapter he opines:

Another world is possible. We can achieve a society more in accord with our fundamental values, with more opportunity, a higher total national income, a stronger democracy, and higher living standards for most people. [...] There are some market forces pulling us the other way. Those market forces are shaped by politics, by the rules and regulations that we as a society adopt, by the way of our institutions (like the Federal Reserve, our central bank, and other regulatory agencies) behave.⁶⁷

This is a voice speaking to all people, asking every citizen to fundamentally

⁶⁷ Stiglitz, *The Price of Inequality*, section: The Way Forward.

rethink their society and their institutions.

By contrast, in *Currency Wars 5* (CN, 8) by Song Hongbing, the intended reader is careening from *powerless fellow citizen* to *high-level political leader*, and then back again. A main point of this book is that the Chinese economy will suffer enormously in the future if the over-urbanization continues. Song's argument can be summarized as follows: the difference in resource allocation for urban and rural land motivates corrupt county- and province-level officials to "relabel" rural land as urban land. They do this by initiating partnerships with investors and real estate companies, bulldozing villages and farmland to build high-rises. Song argues that building cities could be a positive development, but it is happening too fast and in too many places at once. In reality, this trend is replacing functioning village economies with empty residential high-rises and empty office spaces. According to Song, the Chinese government is meddling with the market and creating a housing bubble, and not balancing the meddling with anti-corruption measures or high taxes on short-term profits in the real estate industry: "The government must do its utmost to not meddle with the free market, but it must forcefully safeguard principles of wealth distribution."⁶⁸

Here, it is almost as if Song is speaking directly to leaders in the central government.

He believes that the excess construction would be dampened if the government would publish data on how much of China's excess real estate lays vacant (whole cities of empty real estate are sometimes referred to as "ghost cities"), but "the statistics department suddenly will not reveal how much real estate remains idle! 15%? 20%? 30%? Only heaven knows!"⁶⁹ He goes on to say that Chinese national statistics are deliberately muddled by special-interest groups. Here, Song sounds like a powerless observer speaking to a powerless fellow citizen.

In the beginning of his last chapter, entitled "What isn't the Chinese Dream?", we find Song's most fiery political statements. His apophatic method for defining the Chinese dream reveals that he sees China as a thoroughly mismanaged country:

⁶⁸ Song Hongbing, *Huo Bi Zhan Zheng 5: Shan Yu Yu Lai*, (Beijing: Chang Jiang Wen Yi Chu Ban She, 2014), chapter: Shenme Bu Shi "Zhongguo Meng"?, author translation.

⁶⁹ Song, *Huo Bi Zhan Zheng 5*, chapter: Shenme Bu Shi "Zhongguo Meng"?, author translation.

A society ruled by despots and a greedy elite cannot be the Chinese Dream!

A society with huge wealth disparities cannot be the Chinese Dream!

A society riddled with unjust taxation and exhausted public finances cannot be the Chinese Dream!

A society with rampant currency devaluation and property inflation cannot be the Chinese Dream!

A society where the people's strength is perpetually exhausted, and both domestic and international affairs are in disorder, cannot be “the Chinese Dream”!⁷⁰

Here, it seems like Song is desperately hoping that someone in the central government will listen—this is a helpless voice spoken from the top of the barricades. However, could it be that he is also speaking to his powerless fellow citizens? (It is also interesting to ask: Would this text have been censored if it was published in a newspaper or magazine? The answer probably depends on timing and political climate, but I definitely regard some of these statements as *almost* crossing the line.)

Not all economics books on the Chinese list sound this helpless, but many of them do lack clarity of intended reader. Again it is fascinating to note that analysts inside of China see the country as highly troubled—a point overlooked by outside observers who fear that *China will take over the world*.

⁷⁰ Song, *Huo Bi Zhan Zheng* 5, chapter: Shenme Bu Shi “Zhongguo Meng”?, author translation.

6. Conclusion & Discussion

6.1 Understanding the hard data

The Chinese books are cheaper, younger, worldlier, and the Chinese world of authors is even more male-dominated than the American one. In large part, these observations are unsurprising. It is very natural that the US *isn't* very outward-looking, because the US remains the world's principal epicenter of cultural and intellectual soft power. The modern Chinese economy, though a behemoth in size, is still young and dynamic in nature. Things are quickly changing and developing. And in this rapidly changing climate, old books age quickly. A hurried scan of the bestseller lists at the time of writing (January 2015—a year after the lists were collected) shows that around half of the books on the US list remain in the top 25. Old adages stay true. Meanwhile on the Chinese list, only four books remain on the list a year later. In China, things change. A decade from now, the Chinese economy might be the world's biggest economy, and the journey to that point will undoubtedly see the rules change again and again.

6.2 Understanding the soft data

6.2.1 Managers & Economists

As noted, Chinese management books are very heterogeneous. Some authors seem to have read non-Chinese literature, and thereby they latch onto conversations in global academia. Other authors start from the beginning and ponder the same things that the first American management thinkers were pondering 130 years ago. It is almost as if China is simultaneously entertaining several parallel timelines of development. Will the field of management studies in China coalesce and ultimately converge with global management trends, or will the Chinese invent their “own thing”? We cannot answer this question yet, but I would argue that today's “management with Chinese characteristics”, i.e. a unique management-style put forth in China, is nothing more than the heavy-handed attitudes advanced by European managers more than a century ago.

As inferred in the *How educated is the intended reader?* section, popular Chinese management writers are *less* academic than their US counterparts, while (most) popular Chinese economists are *more* academic than their US counterparts, but this does not exactly explain why Chinese economists embrace Chinese political history (modern and pre-modern), while history seems a moot point to Chinese management writers. Sure, China was lodged in a near-perpetual state of national degradation from the opium wars of the mid-19th century to the end of the Cultural Revolution in the 1970s, but I don't think it is fair to say that Chinese management writers are repressing their past. Instead, I think it just isn't relevant. It was not a success story and therefore few lessons can be drawn from it (sure, we are supposed to *learn from our mistakes*, but maybe the Great Leap Forward wasn't the type of mistake that modern managers can learn very much from). All in all, this study paints a clear picture of the Chinese management writer: She is very matter-of-fact. She does not dwell on the past. She does not care about political correctness. She does not value academic schooling. Instead, she cares about *results*, and her own experiences, her own observations, her own world. She does not brag and begin her book by saying, *My research will make your company go from "Good to Great!"*, Instead she tells you what she has realized, and now it is up to you, the reader, to take it or leave it.

The picture of the Chinese economist is less clear, because it is a more heterogeneous bunch: think-tank occupants and university professors, the autodidact and the “haigui”—speaking to anyone that will listen: the curious public, fellow economists, and reluctant public policy makers. The more academic angle of the Chinese economists also explains the lack of bragging. Few tracts that revolutionized an entire academic field began with the author openly proclaiming *I will now revolutionize my entire academic field!*

6.2.2 The Politics of Politics

Economists and political thinkers on the two lists are concerned with wildly different things. American books are focused on rampant wealth inequality, and how the mega-wealthy have been allowed to hijack American politics. Meanwhile, the Chinese authors, while raising concerns over a host of problems facing China, are chiefly worried

about institutionalized government corruption. It is the most fundamental problem facing China today, and it relates to all other problems. If, for example, a series of reforms are implemented that set up an marvelous pension system for China's growing population of retirees, then that system is at risk of failing if it is controlled by the same corrupt officials that control everything else. Without checks and balances, corruption could hollow it out. An anti-corruption campaign has therefore been the centerpiece of Xi Jinping's administration since his rise to power in the fall of 2013. But authors on the Chinese list doubt that the problem can be solved through a *campaign*, as opposed to actual political reform that guarantees *transparency* and *accountability*. Because of this, Xi's administrations is attempting to push a narrative that describes the anti-corruption campaign as a "New Normal", as opposed to a temporary campaign. The effects of this have yet to fully pan out.

It is fascinating to note that the underlying problem discussed by both Chinese and US economists and political thinkers has considerable overlap. In America, political thinkers pose this question: If the only way into public office is political campaigns that costs millions of dollars, and most of that money is donated by corporations, don't you think those corporations will have power over public policy?

This predicament echoes across the Pacific: where Lang Xianping meticulously describes how huge sums of Chinese Yuan can make anyone a government official. Then he asks (*paraphrasing*): Don't you think that means that being an official is a very lucrative job?

These two questions are not that different. Huge sums of money are being poured into politics. And the implication for both countries can be elucidated by asking the following question: Don't you think the people paying all that money are expecting something in return?

The answer is, of course, that this system forces government officials to prioritize money over the plights of average citizens. They spent money to get into politics, and now they have to make the money back.

Here, the similarities end. In the US, the problem is not transparency. Instead, everyone can clearly see the problem. Corporations are buying politicians. The necessary

solution is a concerted effort by a voting populace to implement campaign finance reform or some other measure that will limit the influence of the so-called “1%”.

In China, the populace is at the mercy of the supposed *benevolence* of the party, but the real crux of the problem cannot be remedied without the ruling party voluntarily giving up *some of its absolute power*. This does not happen every day. It happened in the 1980s in South Korea and in Taiwan, but both countries were under heavy pressure from the United States—so it is questionable if these developments were truly *voluntary*. Today, China is in a very different situation. No outside country can exert comparable influence on China. Perhaps the hopeless tone of economists on the Chinese list implies that the Communist Party of China is strong enough to stay in power for decades to come—without truly reforming. They never openly say that things won’t change, but it is the implication of their hopelessness.

How can they be so sure? In China, things change.

7. Appendices

Appendix 1A

The books department of the US-based Amazon.com has 36 main categories. My study will focus on books in *Business & Investing* (bolded below). This category has 21 sub-categories, and 126 sub-subcategories.

Books Department

Arts & Photography
 Audible Audiobooks
 Biographies & Memoirs
 Books on CD
Business & Investing
 Calendars
 Children's Books
 Christian Books & Bibles
 Comics & Graphic Novels
 Computers & Technology
 Cookbooks, Food & Wine
 Crafts, Hobbies & Home
 Deals in Books
 Education & Reference
 Engineering &
 Transportation
 Gay & Lesbian
 Health, Fitness & Dieting
 History
 Humor & Entertainment
 Large Print
 Law
 Libros en español
 Literature & Fiction
 Medical Books
 Mystery, Thriller &
 Suspense

Parenting & Relationships
 Politics & Social Sciences
 Religion & Spirituality
 Romance
 Science & Math
 Science Fiction & Fantasy
 Self-Help
 Sports & Outdoors
 Teens
 Textbooks
 Travel

Business & Investing, all categories

Accounting
 Auditing
 Financial
 Governmental
 International
 Managerial
 Standards
 Biography & History
 Captains of Industry
 Company Profiles
 Business Life
 Ethics
 Etiquette
 Fashion & Image
 Health & Stress

Motivation & Self-Improvement
 Work Life Balance
 Economics
 Commerce
 Comparative
 Development & Growth
 Econometrics
 Economic Conditions
 Economic History
 Economic Policy & Development
 Environmental Economics
 Free Enterprise
 Labor & Industrial Relations
 Macroeconomics
 Microeconomics
 Money & Monetary Policy
 Public Finance
 Theory
 Unemployment
 Urban & Regional
 Finance (no subcategories)
 Green Business (no subcategories)
 Industries & Professions
 Agriculture
 Banks & Banking
 Computers & Technology
 Consulting
 Customer Service

E-commerce	Vocational Guidance	Credit Ratings & Repair
Hospitality, Travel & Tourism	Volunteer Work	Retirement Planning
Human Resources & Personnel Management	Management & Leadership	Popular Economics (no subcategories)
Industrial Relations	Business Ethics	Real Estate
Information Management	Consolidation & Merger	Buying & Selling Homes
Insurance	Decision-Making & Problem Solving	Investments
Nonprofit Organizations & Charities	Distribution & Warehouse Management	Law
Oil & Energy	Industrial	Mortgages
Performing Arts	Information Management	Sales
Purchasing & Buying	Leadership	Reference (no subcategories)
Restaurant & Food	Management	Skills
Retailing	Management Science	Business Writing
Service	Motivational	Communications
Sports & Entertainment	Negotiating	Business Mathematics
Transportation	Operations Research	Negotiating
International	Planning & Forecasting	Office Automation
Economics	Pricing	Project Management
Exports & Imports	Production & Operations	Running Meetings & Presentations
Foreign Exchange	Project Management	Secretarial Aids & Training
Global Marketing	Quality Control	Time Management
Investing	Strategy & Competition	Training
Bonds	Systems & Planning	Small Business & Entrepreneurship
Commodities	Teams	Entrepreneurship
Futures	Total Quality Management	Home Based
Introduction	Training	Marketing
Mutual Funds	Marketing & Sales	New Business Enterprises
Options	Advertising	Taxation
Stocks	Consumer Behavior	Corporate
Job Hunting & Careers	Customer Service	International
Business School Guides	Marketing	Personal
GMAT	Public Relations	Small Business
Guides	Sales & Selling	Women & Business (no subcategories)
Interviewing	Organizational Behavior	
Job Hunting	Personal Finance	
Job Markets & Advice	Budgeting & Money Management	
Resumes	College & Education Costs	

Appendix 1B

The books department of the China-based Amazon.cn has 42 main categories. My study will focus on books in *Economics & Management* (bolded below). This category has 18 sub-categories, and 144 sub-subcategories. Please note that all books in the *Economics* main category are automatically included in the *Economics & Management*.

<u>Books Department</u>	Math & Computers	Captains of Industry
	Medical Books	Reading Materials
Advance Sale	Novels	Publications & Collected Works
Architecture	Online Trial	
Art	Parenting	Management Studies
Biography	Periodicals	Management Theory
Children's Books	Philosophy	Theory and Methodology
Chinese National Culture	Politics & Military	Organization Theory
Comics & Graphic Novels	Psychology	Decision Theory
Dictionaries & Reference	Science & Nature	Cross-Scientific Management Studies
Economics & Management	Science & Technology	
Education	Self-Help	Corporate Management
Education & Reference	Sports	Operations Research
Electrical Engineering	Testing	Teams
Electronics & Communication	Travel	Production & Operations
English and Foreign Language	<u>Economics & Management, all categories</u>	Financial Management
Entertainment & Hobbies		Project Management
Fashion	Economics: Theory & Reading Materials	Human Research Management
Food & Drink	Introduction	Distribution & Warehouse Management
Health & Fitness	History of economic ideas	Corporate Culture
History	Political History	Initial Public Offering
Home	Western Economics	Multinationals
Home-schooling	Macro-Economics	Small and Medium Enterprise
Humanities and Social Sciences	Micro-Economics	Modern Corporate Systems
Imported Books	Econometrics	Consolidation & Merger
Law	Economic Methodology	Organization Design
Literature	Public Finance	
Marriage & Relationships		

Information System Management	Municipal Administration	Government Bonds, Debentures & International Loans
Chinese Business Management	Transportation	Regional Public Finance
International Business Management	Postal Services & Telecommunication	Chinese Public Finance
Business Ethics	Information Industry	International Public Finance
Strategic Management	E-Commerce	Finance
Investing	Hospitality & Tourism	Banking Theory
Stocks & Negotiable Securities	Computer & Technology Service	Financial Market Management
Commodities	Manufacturing	International Finance
Futures	Light Industry	Chinese Financial Banking
Insurance	Marketing & Sales	International Financial Banking
Foreign Exchange	Marketing: Theory & Practice	Currency & Inflation Banking
Taxes	Marketing Case Studies	Credit Management
Gold	Marketing Management	World Economy
Lottery	Marketplace	Global Economic Theory
Finance Techniques	Consumer Behavior	Chinese Economy
Real Estate	Pricing	US Economy
Accounting	Product Management	Japanese Economy
Introduction	Brand Management	European Economy
Method & Practice	Customer Management	Asian Economy
Standards	Public Relations & Crisis Management	African Economy
International	Advertisement Management	Other Regional Economies
Managerial	Trade	WTO
Financial	Commodity Economy	Economic Globalization
Manufacturing	Domestic Trade	Economy History
Industries	International Trade	Skills
Cashier	WTO	Negotiation
Auditing	Public Finance & Taxation	Public Speaking
Industries & Professions	Public Finance Theory	Etiquette
Heavy Industry	Public Finance Systems	Professional Training
Agriculture	Public Forecasting & Budget	Business Writing
Trade	Public Income & Spending	Business Language Studies
Water & Electricity	Taxation	
Metal & Energy		
Real Estate & Construction		

Negotiation Studies (no
subcategories)
Statistics
Methodology
Various Statistics
Annual Report Statistics
Leadership Studies
Leadership Theory
Art & Practice
Leadership Strength
The Manager's
Bookshelf

Execution
People Management
Team Management
Management
Communication
Authorization
Motivation
Decision-Making
Popular Economics
Big Talk Management
Business World Art
Business Commentary

Corporate History
Biography
Reference
Dictionary
Handbook
Catalog
Statistics Resource
Photo Books and English
Language (no
subcategories)

Appendix 2A

The Chinese list

Rank	Book Title	Author(s)	Nationality	Gender	Year	Price
1	<i>Work Like a Spy</i>	J. C. Carleson	U.S.A.	Female	2013	¥29.00
2	<i>Big Data</i>	Viktor Mayer-Schönberger & Kenneth Cukier	Austria & U.S.A.	Male	2012	¥49.90
3	<i>How Will You Manage Your Team?</i>	Zhao Wei	China	Male	2013	¥35.00
4	<i>Getting More</i>	Stuart Diamond	U.S.A.	Male	2010	¥69.00
5	<i>Rich Dad Poor Dad</i>	Robert T. Kiyosaki	U.S.A.	Male	1997	¥28.00
6	<i>Ignore Wealth</i>	Zhao Fanyu	China	Male	2010	¥29.00
7	<i>Logic of Reform</i>	Zhou Qiren	China	Male	2013	¥45.00
8	<i>Currency Wars 5</i>	Song Hongbing	China	Male	2014	¥46.00
9	<i>Learn How to Understand Finance News</i>	Chen Sijin & Jin Beilei	China	Male & Female	2011	¥38.00
10	<i>Minto Pyramid Principle</i>	Barbara Minto	U.S.A.	Female	1987	¥49.00
11	<i>Zhihu Discussions on Entrepreneurship</i>	Zhihu	N/A	N/A	2014	¥42.00
12	<i>Alone in This Era</i>	Zou Yu	China	Male	2013	¥39.80
13	<i>Issue-Driven</i>	Kazuto Ataka	Japan	Male	2014	¥29.80
14	<i>Make Time Your Friend</i>	Li Xiaolai	China	Male	2009	¥59.00
15	<i>The Everything Store</i>	Brad Stone	U.S.A.	Male	2013	¥49.00
16	<i>Mobile Influence</i>	Chuck Martin	U.S.A.	Male	2013	¥52.90
17	<i>Life as a Manager</i>	Huang Zhongqiang	China	Male	2012	¥58.00
18	<i>The Grand Trends</i>	Shi Hanbing	China	Male	2011	¥39.90
19	<i>Economic Reform through the Ages</i>	Wu Xiaobo	China	Male	2013	¥42.00
20	<i>Logic of Currency</i>	Pang Zhongjia	China	Male	2014	¥36.00
21	<i>Lang Xianping on Reform</i>	Lang Xianping	China	Male	2014	¥38.00
22	<i>Antifragile</i>	Nassim Nicholas Taleb	U.S.A.	Male	2012	¥68.00
23	<i>Principles of Economics</i>	N. Gregory Mankiw	U.S.A.	Male	1998	¥116.00
24	<i>30 Economics Classic</i>	Tian Qi	China	Male	2005	¥32.00
25	<i>Positioning</i>	Al Ries & Jack Trout	U.S.A.	Male	1981	¥42.00

Appendix 2B

The US list

Rank	Title	Author(s)	Nationality	Gender	Year	Price
1	<i>Banish Clutter Forever</i>	Sheila Chandra	U.K.	Female	2010	¥90.61
2	<i>Getting Things Done</i>	David Allen	U.S.A	Male	2001	¥96.98
3	<i>Price of Inequality</i>	Joseph E. Stiglitz	U.S.A	Male	2013	¥102.73
4	<i>StrengthsFinder 2.0</i>	Tom Rath	U.S.A	Male	2007	¥169.40
5	<i>Thinking, Fast and Slow</i>	Daniel Kahneman	U.S.A	Male	2011	¥96.98
6	<i>Get Rich Carefully</i>	James J. Cramer	U.S.A	Male	2007	¥181.53
7	<i>The Wolf of Wall Street</i>	Jordan Belfort	U.S.A	Male	2007	¥96.98
8	<i>How To Win Friends</i>	Dale Carnegie	U.S.A	Male	1936	¥90.85
9	<i>Outliers</i>	Malcolm Gladwell	Canada	Male	2008	¥102.98
10	<i>Leaders Eat Last</i>	Simon Sinek	U.K.	Male	2014	¥169.40
11	<i>They Say, I Say</i>	Gerald Graff & Cathy Birkenstein	U.S.A	Male & Female	2005	¥162.13
12	<i>Mindset</i>	Carol Dweck	U.S.A.	Female	2006	¥96.98
13	<i>Good to Great</i>	Jim Collins	U.S.A.	Male	2001	¥96.98
14	<i>The Power of Habit</i>	Charles Duhigg	U.S.A	Male	2012	¥96.98
15	<i>Art of Public Speaking</i>	Stephen Lucas	U.S.A	Male	1998	¥927.03
16	<i>Manage Your Day-to-Day</i>	Jocelyn K. Gleib	U.S.A	Female	2013	¥90.61
17	<i>The 7 Habits</i>	Stephen R. Covey	U.S.A	Male	1989	¥103.04
18	<i>PMBOK</i>	Project Management Institute	N/A	N/A	1996	¥399.72
19	<i>Shark Tank</i>	Michael Parrish DuDell & others	U.S.A	Male & Female	2013	¥90.85
20	<i>Demographic Cliff</i>	Harry S. Dent Jr.	U.S.A	Male	2014	¥169.40
21	<i>Capital in the 21th Century</i>	Thomas Piketty	France	Male	2014	¥242.14
22	<i>The 5 Dysfunctions</i>	Patrick Lencioni	U.S.A	Male	2002	¥151.22
23	<i>Epic Content Marketing</i>	Joe Pulizzi	U.S.A	Male	2013	¥151.53
24	<i>The Paradox of Choice</i>	Barry Schwartz	U.S.A	Male	2009	¥90.85
25	<i>The Intelligent Investor</i>	Benjamin Graham	U.S.A	Male	1949	¥139.34

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