

PUBLISHING ACTIVITIES IN HO CHI MINH CITY: CURRENT SITUATION AND SOLUTIONS

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With the orientation of developing publishing as a field of sharp ideological operation of the Party, State and People, an important part of advanced Vietnamese culture, imbued with national identity, publishing, printing and distribution activities of Ho Chi Minh City in recent times have always focused on serving the tasks of propaganda, political and ideological education, improving knowledge in all fields, meeting the reading needs of the people and implementing well the business tasks. Clearly defining the specific coordination tasks of party organizations and relevant agencies in the role of directing and managing publishing activities, managing the publisher's governing body and publishing house, and facilitating publishing activities to promote their position as an ideological and cultural field has the task of disseminating spiritual values, contributing to raising people's knowledge, developing culture and social science; building ethics, lifestyle and comprehensively developing the personality of people in Ho Chi Minh City. The article uses analytical and synthetic research methods and secondary data collection methods to clarify the current status of publishing activities in Ho Chi Minh City and propose solutions to improve the quality of publishing activities in the City in the coming time.

Keywords: Publishing activities; reality; solutions; Ho Chi Minh City.

1. Introduction

Publishing activities include the fields of publishing, printing and distributing publications. Publishing activities in the field of culture and ideology aim to disseminate and introduce knowledge in all fields of social life, national cultural values and the quintessence of human culture, meet the spiritual life needs of the people, improve people's knowledge, build good ethics and lifestyles of Vietnamese people, expand cultural exchanges with other countries, develop the socio-economy, fight against all ideologies and behaviors that harm national interests, contribute to the cause of building and defending the socialist Vietnamese Fatherland (Article 3, Publishing Law No. 19/2012/QH13). Ho Chi Minh City is an economic, cultural and scientific center of the whole country. This is

a locality that concentrates a large number of publishing and distribution units. The city has many programs and activities to develop reading culture and build Ho Chi Minh City into one of the largest publishing markets and reading culture exchange locations in the country. In 2020 and 2021, the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic in the City has greatly affected the production and business activities of enterprises, in the context of the general impact of the economy facing many difficulties, challenges and consequences due to the COVID-19 pandemic, but the City's publishing industry has constantly made efforts, tried to promote traditions, made development steps, performed well political tasks, maintained production and business efficiency stably in publishing activities; the direction and management of publishing activities achieved outstanding results. The digital transformation period is strongly affecting all areas of the life, e-publishing is strongly developing along with new forms of publishing business such as: online book business and publishing via the internet. Accordingly, the requirement for the publishing industry in Ho Chi Minh City is to continue to innovate the content and methods of publishing, diversify publications associated with perfecting and improving the capacity of the publishing team, proactively integrating, promoting the application of technology, and innovating to bring the publishing industry to a new level in the digital age of the times.

2. Current status of publishing activities in Ho Chi Minh City

Publishing activities in Ho Chi Minh City have undergone significant positive changes, characterized by rapid development in scale and quantity, alongside improved publication quality. These advancements have contributed to the effective implementation of political tasks, programs, and plans aimed at fostering the City's economic, cultural, and social development. City leaders have consistently prioritized guiding, directing, and shaping the enhancement of the publishing sector's overall quality in alignment with Directive No. 42-CT/TW, dated August 25, 2004, issued by the Central Party Secretariat.

Prior to 2004, Ho Chi Minh City hosted three publishing houses (City General Publishing House, Youth Publishing House, and City Literature - Arts Publishing House), 72 printing establishments, and six book distribution companies. In 2005, the City established the Saigon Culture Publishing House. By 2010, the Culture - Arts Publishing House was reorganized through the merger of the City Literature - Arts Publishing House and Saigon Culture Publishing House. In 2021, the City further consolidated its publishing entities by merging the City General Publishing House with the City Culture - Arts Publishing House to form the Ho Chi Minh City General Publishing House. This restructuring maintained the principles, purposes, functions, and tasks as outlined in the Operating License of the Ho Chi Minh City General Publishing House.

Currently, the City oversees two publishing houses (Ho Chi Minh City General Publishing House and Tre Publishing House Co., Ltd.) and four university-affiliated publishing houses (Vietnam National University, Ho Chi Minh City; University of Economics Ho Chi Minh City; Industrial University of Ho Chi Minh City; and Ho Chi Minh City University of Education). Additionally, there are four representative offices of foreign publishing houses and 28 branches of central and local publishing houses operating within the City. The City is also home to 1,360 printing enterprises, accounting for nearly two-thirds of the total number of printing enterprises nationwide. Of these, approximately

700 printing establishments are officially licensed and certified by the Department of Information and Communications for printing activities, as detailed in Report No. 688-BC/TU, dated July 9, 2024, summarizing 20 years of implementing Directive No. 42-CT/TW.

In recent years, the Ho Chi Minh City government has made significant efforts to strengthen its relationship with residents by actively fostering a model of a “Friendly Government”. The government apparatus has progressively implemented substantial innovations in the working styles and attitudes of officials and civil servants at all levels. These efforts have helped to fortify the bond between the government and the people, enhance the efficiency of state agencies, and successfully fulfill the City’s socio-economic development goals.

One of the key highlights has been the promotion and development of a reading culture, which the City has prioritized and invested in for many years. Initiatives to cultivate reading habits and nurture a reading culture, particularly among the youth, have become increasingly diverse and engaging. Signature events like the Lunar New Year Book Street Festival (held annually since 2000), the Ho Chi Minh City Book Fair, the Children's Book Fair, and Book and Reading Culture Day attract hundreds of thousands of participants each year, celebrating and honoring the culture of reading.

The “Mobile Book Cart” program, which serves residents in remote and suburban areas, exemplifies not only a political commitment but also the dedication of publishers and the adaptability of the City's library and publishing systems. Since 2022, the City has organized Vietnam Book and Reading Culture Day annually, featuring large-scale activities that draw widespread public participation.

In 2023, Ho Chi Minh City became the first locality in the country to launch the Ho Chi Minh City Children's Book Award. This initiative aims to discover new book writers, foster an environment that nurtures authors specializing in children's literature, and stimulate the production of higher-quality and more diverse books for young readers. These efforts have garnered high praise, drawing large audiences and contributing to significant book sales.

Furthermore, the City has engaged prominent individuals from various fields - including researchers, authors, journalists, students, singers, and actors - to serve as Reading Culture Ambassadors for annual terms. These ambassadors play a crucial role in promoting reading culture, encouraging the spirit of learning, and spreading the invaluable messages that books bring to society.

The book distribution system in Ho Chi Minh City is rapidly evolving, fulfilling its role as a vital bridge between books and readers. Prominent companies like Fahasa, Phuong Nam, Thoi Dai, Tiki, and Vinabook continue to play pivotal roles in the City's distribution network. The comprehensive development of the City's book distribution system has significantly contributed to advancing ideological, educational, and cultural movements, enriching public knowledge and enhancing the spiritual life of residents.

The City General Publishing House and the Youth Publishing House are leading pioneers in e-book publishing in Vietnam. Currently, over 3,000 e-book titles are available on platforms such as Sachweb.vn and Sachso.com.vn. These platforms are widely utilized by university libraries, research institutes, and provincial and municipal libraries. The creative and proactive application of technology in leadership and management was particularly evident during the City's response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Additionally, the City's publishing and distribution units have expanded branch networks and book distribution stores, becoming more dynamic in distribution activities. Embracing the digital transformation trend, they have boldly invested in modern technologies, applying IT to manage publishing processes, develop e-publishing, facilitate online distribution, and integrate e-commerce applications. These innovations have enabled publishing units to achieve notable business successes, signaling a positive shift in the operational strategies of the modern publishing market.

Publishing houses have also excelled in fostering internal cohesion through Party and union initiatives, leveraging the role of youth and trade unions to launch creative programs that inspire solidarity and motivate staff. They have strictly adhered to copyright and intellectual property laws, actively cooperating with the Department of Publishing, Printing and Distribution and relevant authorities to combat copyright infringements, pirated materials, and counterfeit books.

The Ho Chi Minh City General Science Library, as the central hub of a network of 22 district libraries and Thu Duc City Library, boasts a collection of 3,210,093 documents spanning various scientific fields and languages, including over 6,000 rare Han-Nom texts. The library has also digitized more than 6,000,000 pages of documents.

Innovative initiatives in book space development have created new sources of inspiration for publishers and readers alike. Events like the Ho Chi Minh City Book Street and Thu Duc City Book Street Festivals have established unique cultural venues showcasing and promoting books. These spaces foster professional exchanges among publishing houses, associations, and the global publishing industry, while providing vibrant cultural hubs for residents and tourists.

The book street model and associated activities have garnered significant attention and support from sectoral and local leaders, encouraging the creation of more innovative approaches and solutions. Publishing houses and book distributors have collaborated with local authorities to implement flexible initiatives aimed at nurturing a reading culture. They continue to promote traditional distribution methods while actively expanding their presence on technology platforms, marking a robust and adaptable publishing ecosystem in the City.

According to data from the Ho Chi Minh City Printing Association, the number of orders at printing enterprises in the City decreased by an average of 30% during the first six months of 2023 compared to the same period in 2022. The average monthly income per capita at 30 typical printing enterprises was 10.5 million VND, with the lowest at 7 million VND. Large-scale packaging and export-focused printing enterprises, especially those with foreign investment or sizable domestic operations, account for a significant share of output and revenue in the City. In contrast, most other enterprises are small and medium-sized businesses.

Despite these challenges, the City's printing industry has made efforts to overcome difficulties, achieving encouraging results in production and business activities. The system of printing facilities has been maintained, with some facilities expanding and modernizing their operations to enhance production capacity. These improvements have enabled them to meet domestic demand while achieving publication quality and designs comparable to foreign products. Additionally, certain printing facilities have entered the export market.

Digital printing is experiencing rapid growth, with investments in high-speed, large-format equipment to meet evolving market demands. Many small and medium-sized printing enterprises have continued to invest in upgrading equipment, focusing on post-production processes and incorporating automatic-generation printing machines to boost productivity and expedite product delivery. These enterprises, primarily engaged in processing, have displayed sensitivity and flexibility in navigating competition. Investment in digital printing technology and hybrid methods such as offset and flexo printing continues to attract interest. Some facilities have also enhanced their capabilities by integrating advanced printing equipment with post-production finishing tools.

The governing bodies of publishing houses under the City Party Committee have consistently directed these organizations to align closely with political tasks and adhere to their principles and goals. Support in the form of improved infrastructure and human resources has facilitated publishing houses in fulfilling their mandates and enhancing the quality of publishing activities. Efforts have also been made to address challenges, oversee compliance with editing, publishing, and joint-publishing processes, and ensure careful evaluation of manuscripts for sensitive or significant content.

Publishing houses are encouraged to focus on creating independent publications and acquiring valuable manuscripts, particularly research on the politics, history, culture, and people of Ho Chi Minh City. The pursuit of profit is balanced with maintaining high standards, as poor-quality manuscripts are rejected outright. Governance structures emphasize democratic, transparent, and efficient management, with Party Committees and organizational leadership playing a pivotal role. This includes promoting the personal responsibility of civil servants and staff, especially key personnel, to uphold exemplary standards.

In alignment with the City's comprehensive development goals, publishing activities in Ho Chi Minh City have achieved significant progress. Efforts are directed at promoting propaganda to highlight achievements, encourage innovative and exemplary contributions, and disseminate positive information. These activities support the Party's ideological foundation, counter hostile perspectives, and present unique aspects of the City to domestic and international audiences.

Publishing activities play a crucial role in advancing the City's broader development goals as outlined in the documents of the 11th Congress of Delegates for the 2020-2025 term: transforming Ho Chi Minh City into a modern service and industrial hub, a leader in culture, the digital economy, and digital society, with an average GRDP per capita of approximately \$13,000. By 2030, the City aims to solidify its position as the economic, financial, commercial, scientific-technological, and cultural center of Southeast Asia.

However, publishing activities in Ho Chi Minh City still face limitations and shortcomings in leadership, direction, and state management, which have not kept pace with the sector's development. The quality of publications does not fully meet the demands of the industrialization and modernization era, nor does it align with the requirements of proactive international integration. There are few books addressing the fight against incorrect and hostile viewpoints or the prevention of corruption and negativity. Distribution remains ineffective, and disparities persist in fostering reading culture between inner-city and suburban districts.

A portion of the publishing workforce lacks a comprehensive understanding of the importance and role of publishing activities, demonstrating slow adaptation in mindset and skill development. Language and cultural barriers hinder access to the international publishing market. Insufficient responsiveness to market dynamics, limited understanding of readers' preferences, and a lack of long-term strategic vision have constrained efforts to expand into potential markets. Furthermore, the sector has not fully leveraged diplomatic and economic support to enhance international cooperation.

Printing enterprises in the City continue to grapple with challenges stemming from the global economic downturn in 2023, following the COVID-19 pandemic's impacts in 2021-2022. A decline in orders has narrowed consumption and export markets. Simultaneously, increased costs of raw materials, shipping, and post-printing processing have forced several small printing enterprises with limited competitiveness and capital reserves to suspend operations.

The rise of information technology, the internet, and social media has significantly impacted traditional printed products, such as books, newspapers, and magazines, leading to seasonal shortages and reduced efficiency in production and business. In 2023, printing textbooks encountered difficulties due to delayed bidding, slow supply chains, and payment and delivery issues, further challenging certain publishing and printing establishments.

The capacity for innovation, facility upgrades, and modernization of publishing technologies remains limited and does not meet current practical requirements. Leadership in publishing, printing, and distribution units has not adequately prioritized human resource planning or improving workforce quality and quantity. Development strategies often lack clarity and breakthrough initiatives. Moreover, administrative violations in the sector negatively affect brands, causing significant harm to publishing houses and the publishing and distribution market.

Key reasons for these limitations:

Rapid technological advancements: The global publishing industry's swift evolution, particularly in information and communication technology, presents challenges.

Piracy and counterfeiting: Publishers and regulatory bodies have not implemented robust measures to combat the sale of pirated and counterfeit books on e-commerce platforms like Facebook and TikTok. Local authorities lack the mechanisms to strictly regulate pricing on online platforms, and public awareness campaigns against pirated and counterfeit books remain inadequate.

Coordination gaps: The communication and coordination mechanisms between governing agencies, publishers, printers, and distributors are irregular and insufficient. Meetings to align strategies and address challenges are not fully implemented as per regulations.

Publishing plan oversight: The absence of mandatory appraisal by competent authorities for publishing plans gives publishers more autonomy to meet reader needs but complicates oversight, particularly for sensitive or complex content.

Leadership training challenges: Developing publishing leaders with sufficient expertise, professionalism, and industry experience remains difficult, leading to leadership gaps when appointments are necessary.

Political theory training: Party development efforts and political theory training for editors and staff in publishing have not met expectations. The participation rate in such courses is low, hindering efforts to improve overall publishing quality.

Dependence on partnerships: Some publishing houses rely heavily on affiliated partners, particularly university publishers dependent on their schools' faculties and institutes. This reliance limits the production of books aligned with academic programs and undermines proactive distribution efforts.

Technological limitations: Innovation and modernization of facilities, techniques, and publishing technologies are insufficient, failing to meet practical needs and industry standards.

Addressing these issues requires a comprehensive and coordinated approach, focusing on improving leadership, investing in human resources, modernizing technologies, and strengthening state management and oversight mechanisms.

3. Solutions of improving the quality of publishing activities in Ho Chi Minh City

The 13th National Party Congress emphasized “Organizing the publishing, printing, and distribution industry towards streamlining, quality, and modernization. Strengthening the management and development of all types of media and information on the Internet. Resolutely fighting and eliminating toxic, distorted, and reactionary products and information that negatively affect political and social stability as well as good customs and traditions” (*Documents of the 13th National Party Congress - Volume 1, Truth National Political Publishing House, Hanoi, p.146*).

The Fourth Industrial Revolution and the ongoing digital transformation in information and communication present both opportunities and challenges for contemporary publishing. The trend of increasing the application of information technology in publishing is becoming more pronounced. To enhance the quality of publishing activities and meet new requirements in Ho Chi Minh City, the following specific solutions should be implemented:

3.1. Strengthen management of publishing activities

- Ensure publishing houses, distribution units, and book publishing entities operate in compliance with legal regulations, Party directives, and align closely with political tasks in the respective industries, fields, and localities.

- Collaborate with governing bodies to monitor publishing activities, promptly address violations, and particularly strengthen oversight of publication content to minimize breaches.

- Effectively balance the relationship between fulfilling political tasks and achieving economic development in publishing houses in a harmonious and efficient manner.

- Guide and support publishing houses in planning and selecting content for political, economic, and social events, as well as major holidays, ensuring that published works are ideologically sound, scientifically grounded, diverse, and appealing to readers.

- Aim to produce many outstanding books that serve the needs of readers while addressing critical socio-political and cultural issues.

- Provide direction, orientation, and support for publishing houses in Ho Chi Minh City to evolve into key entities with sufficient capacity to lead the market.

3.2. Enhance state management effectiveness

- Strengthen inspection and examination processes to promptly detect and strictly handle copyright violations in publishing activities.

- Increase the efficiency and transparency of state management in overseeing the industry, ensuring adherence to ethical and professional standards.

3.3. Foster reading culture development

- Implement the City's Reading Culture Development Plan for 2020-2030 in a manner that encourages social participation and engagement.

- Promote diverse communication strategies and innovative forms of book promotion to attract a wider audience and build a sustainable reading culture.

By addressing these areas, Ho Chi Minh City can not only align its publishing industry with the priorities of the 13th National Party Congress but also adapt effectively to the challenges and opportunities of the digital age, ensuring sustainable growth and cultural enrichment.

3.4. Strengthening and building resources for publishing houses

Focus on consolidating and enhancing resources for publishing houses. Begin by completing the strategic orientation and planning of operational models and organizational structures. Address existing shortcomings within publishing houses, fostering conditions for them to fully develop their internal strengths. Enhance resources and working capabilities, especially regarding financial mechanisms (as stipulated by the *Publishing Law 2012*), to ensure sustainable development.

Strengthen coordination mechanisms with directing and management agencies, promoting the effectiveness of leadership regulations and periodic work processes with publishing units. Conduct inspections and supervision of political tasks and business activities.

In terms of human resources, prioritize the rapid improvement of leadership personnel in publishing houses. Enhance training and capacity-building for leadership teams, editors, and workers to ensure both quality and quantity align with new task requirements. Focus on building Party organizations within units, developing Party membership, and offering in-depth professional training alongside political theory education.

Collaborate with relevant departments, agencies, and sectors to review and plan a system of local publishing houses that balances quantity with quality, aligning with development demands. Evaluate publishing houses based on the principles of "streamlining," "quality," and "modernization," directing the development of publishing activities and preparing to establish key publishing houses in Ho Chi Minh City.

3.5. Developing medium- and long-term plans

Create medium- and long-term strategies aligned with the goals of Directive No. 42-CT/TW to support the robust growth of publishing houses. Build teams that prioritize high connectivity, professionalism, and initiative in production and business activities.

Leadership boards and Party committees must prioritize personnel development, drafting training and development plans for human resources, particularly for leaders and editors who are politically stable and professionally skilled. Foster a strong organizational culture, enhance the role of Party organizations and unions, and improve workers' material and spiritual well-being. Cultivate dynamism, creativity, and dedication within the workforce.

Develop publishing plans that incorporate market forecasts, regulate print quantities to avoid waste from unsold inventory, and invest in equipment and facilities. Embrace information technology and raise awareness of digital transformation within publishing activities. These efforts contribute to achieving the 11th Congress of the Ho Chi Minh City Party Committee's goal for 2020-2025: *“Strongly developing information and communication, building smart cities: applying information-communication technology and data scientific methods to improve the quality of statistical activities and socio-economic forecasting during the 2020-2025 period.”*

3.6. Diversifying publishing methods and book genres

Expand the diversity of book genres and publishing methods, with a particular focus on e-books and online publications. Strengthen the promotion and introduction of books via mass media, the Internet, and local propaganda teams. Promote cooperation and exchanges of publications and experiences with international publishers.

Develop a national database encompassing various types of books, ensuring a unified system across the country and within the City. Provide information services for accessing the content of political books online.

Amend and supplement the *Publishing Law 2012* promptly to address emerging challenges. Refine mechanisms and policies to foster development alongside effective governance and direction.

The publishing industry in Ho Chi Minh City must embrace digital transformation, innovating content and methods while diversifying activities to suit the context of the 4.0 era. This will contribute to the successful and efficient implementation of political tasks and the City's socio-economic and cultural development programs, fulfilling the goals for the 2020-2025 period and the vision for 2030.

4. Conclusion

The publishing, printing, and distribution activities in Ho Chi Minh City have consistently prioritized serving the tasks of propaganda, political and ideological education, and enhancing knowledge across various fields to meet the public's reading demands while effectively fulfilling business objectives. Clear roles and coordination

mechanisms have been established among Party organizations and related agencies in directing and managing publishing activities, supervising publishing houses, and fostering conditions for the industry to thrive. These efforts underscore the publishing sector's role as a cultural-ideological domain tasked with spreading spiritual values, contributing to raising intellectual standards, and promoting cultural and scientific development in society, while shaping ethics, lifestyles, and comprehensive human development in Ho Chi Minh City. The article analyzes the current state of publishing activities in Ho Chi Minh City and proposes seven key groups of solutions to improve the quality of publishing activities in the future.

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TÓM TẮT

HOẠT ĐỘNG XUẤT BẢN TẠI THÀNH PHỐ HỒ CHÍ MINH: THỰC TRẠNG VÀ GIẢI PHÁP

Nguyễn Lê Vân

Sở Thông tin và Truyền thông Thành phố Hồ Chí Minh, Việt Nam

Ngày nhận bài 22/10/2024, ngày nhận đăng 12/12/2024

Với định hướng phát triển sự nghiệp xuất bản là lĩnh vực hoạt động tư tưởng sắc bén của Đảng, Nhà nước và Nhân dân, là một bộ phận quan trọng của nền văn hóa Việt Nam tiên tiến, đậm đà bản sắc dân tộc; hoạt động xuất bản, in, phát hành của Thành phố Hồ Chí Minh trong thời gian qua luôn coi trọng việc phục vụ nhiệm vụ tuyên truyền, giáo dục chính trị, tư tưởng, nâng cao kiến thức trên các lĩnh vực, đáp ứng nhu cầu đọc của Nhân dân và việc thực hiện tốt nhiệm vụ kinh doanh. Xác định rõ nhiệm vụ phối hợp cụ thể của các tổ chức đảng, các cơ quan có liên quan trong vai trò chỉ đạo, quản lý hoạt động xuất bản, chủ quản nhà xuất bản và các nhà xuất bản, tạo điều kiện để hoạt động xuất bản phát huy vị thế là lĩnh vực tư tưởng - văn hóa, có nhiệm vụ truyền bá các giá trị tinh thần, góp phần nâng cao dân trí, phát triển văn hóa và khoa học của xã hội; xây dựng đạo đức, lối sống và phát triển toàn diện nhân cách con người Thành phố Hồ Chí Minh. Bài viết sử dụng các phương pháp nghiên cứu phân tích và tổng hợp; Phương pháp thu thập dữ liệu thứ cấp để làm rõ thực trạng hoạt động xuất bản ở Thành phố Hồ Chí Minh và đề xuất giải pháp nâng cao chất lượng hoạt động xuất bản ở Thành phố trong thời gian tới.

Từ khóa: Hoạt động xuất bản; thực trạng; giải pháp; Thành phố Hồ Chí Minh.