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Empowering the Publishing Industry: A Study on Paradigm Reconstruction and Human-Machine Collaboration Paths of Content Production Driven by AI Agents

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Abstract

Against the backdrop of deep mediatization and industrial digital transformation, the rapidly evolving generative AI agent technology has created a significant technological gap with the traditional linear content production model of the publishing industry, and simultaneously pushed the sector into a critical stage of digital-intelligent upgrading. Starting from the realistic dilemmas and transformation drivers of traditional publishing, this paper clarifies the conceptual connotation and three practical forms of publishing agents, proposes the paradigm reconstruction path of content production under human-machine collaboration from the two dimensions of macro ecological construction and micro process empowerment, and puts forward optimization strategies from four dimensions: institutional guarantee, technological optimization, talent cultivation and ecological coordination in response to current challenges including policy lag, capital constraints, technical bottlenecks and talent gaps. The study concludes that the publishing industry should adhere to the core position of content value, realize the dual goals of efficiency improvement and value creation through the in-depth application of AI agents, and build a new publishing ecology featuring "technology empowerment + humanistic leadership".

Keywords

AI agents, human-machine collaboration, content production, paradigm reconstruction, digital publishing

1. Introduction

The new generation of artificial intelligence technology centered on large language models is accelerating its penetration into the cultural industry. Evolving from auxiliary production tools to AI agents with autonomous perception, planning & decision-making, and tool invocation capabilities, it is driving the systematic transformation of production paradigms across all industries. As the core carrier of content production and dissemination, the publishing industry has natural adaptability with artificial intelligence technology (Li, 2024). On the one hand, AI's capabilities in data mining and content generation can effectively address pain points such as low efficiency and insufficient accuracy in traditional publishing processes; on the other hand, readers' escalating demand for personalized, multimodal and interactive content also compels publishing institutions to explore new production and service models.

At the policy level, the Implementation Opinions on Promoting the In-depth Integrated Development of Publishing has made corresponding arrangements for cutting-edge technology application and the construction of scientific and technological innovation systems (2022). In 2025, the Opinions on In-depth Implementation of the "AI Plus" Action issued by the State Council further provides guidance for the digital-intelligent transformation of the publishing industry. Against this background, domestic publishing institutions have rolled out AI agent applications one after another, with technology penetration covering the entire process from topic planning, proofreading and quality inspection to marketing and reader services. However, the industry still faces problems such as insufficient technical adaptability, ambiguous copyright ownership and mismatched talent capabilities, and a mature human-machine collaborative production paradigm has not yet taken shape.

Existing studies mostly discuss the tool value of AIGC from a single link, or focus on the industrial impact of technology application. Systematic research on the overall paradigm reconstruction of publishing content production and the full-link implementation path of agents under the human-machine collaboration framework still needs to be deepened (Xu & Zhu, 2025). On this basis, combined with current industry practices, this paper systematically sorts out the logical framework and practical paths of AI agents empowering publishing content production, analyzes realistic challenges and proposes countermeasures, so as to provide theoretical reference and practical guidance for the digital-intelligent transformation of the publishing industry.

2. Realistic Dilemmas and Transformation Drivers of Traditional Publishing Content Production

2.1 Realistic Dilemmas of the Traditional Linear Production Model

After long-term development, the traditional publishing industry has formed a linear production logic of "topic planning—content creation—proofreading & quality inspection—marketing promotion".

While ensuring controllable content quality, its limitations have become increasingly prominent under the impact of digital technology, which are concentrated in three major efficiency bottlenecks.

First, empirical dependence in front-end decision-making. Topic approval in traditional publishing relies heavily on editors' personal industry experience and resource accumulation, and information collection is mostly limited to fixed channels such as offline research and industry conferences, making it difficult to track dynamic changes in reader demand in real time, which directly leads to a noticeable misalignment between topic positioning and real market demand. For the industry as a whole, the experience-oriented topic mechanism generally suffers from long market response cycles and insufficient excavation of segmented tracks, which has become the core bottleneck restricting front-end publishing capacity (Wang & Lu, 2024). According to 2023 internal statistics of a local publishing house in China, less than 40% of annual topic proposals were finally approved, and more than half were eliminated due to biased market positioning and low matching with audience needs (Wang & Li, 2025).

Second, efficiency shortcomings in mid-process production. Traditional content production is dominated by a single text form. The average creation cycle of a 400,000-word textbook can reach 1.5 years, making it difficult to respond quickly to knowledge updates and market hotspots; multimodal content collaboration requires cross-team coordination, with high costs and low efficiency (Zhou & Sun, 2024). Meanwhile, manual proofreading is limited by capacity and fatigue, and the error rate rises significantly with working hours. 2023 quality inspection data from a university press shows that editing errors caused by manual omissions account for 27%, and the efficiency bottleneck has constrained capacity improvement (Huang, 2024).

Third, low conversion efficiency in back-end operations. Traditional publishing marketing mostly adopts a "wide-cast net" model, and offline channel reader conversion rates are generally less than 5%; in digital transformation, most institutions only operate online stores and official account posts, lacking in-depth mining of reader portraits (He & Bai, 2025). In 2023, the online promotion of a science fiction novel by a literature publishing house failed to target core audiences, resulting in an actual purchase conversion rate of only 1.2% and a severely imbalanced input-output ratio of marketing resources (Wang & Li, 2025).

2.2 Core Drivers of Paradigm Transformation

The inherent limitations of the traditional production model and external technological changes have formed a joint force, driving the publishing industry to shift from passive technology adaptation to active production paradigm reconstruction. The core driving forces come from three dimensions.

Technology-driven: AI tools reshape the entire production chain. Generative AI has gone beyond the primary stage of auxiliary tools. General large language models can shorten the production cycle of a single book by 30% to 50%, and vertical large models in fields such as law and medicine have

significantly improved the accuracy of professional content output through training on professional knowledge bases (Zhou & Sun, 2024). For example, after People's Medical Publishing House introduced "Yidian AI", the revision efficiency of medical textbooks increased by 70% with 99.6% terminology consistency, demonstrating a remarkable leveraging effect of technology on production efficiency (Wang & Li, 2025).

Demand-driven: Reader consumption upgrades toward personalization and service orientation. Digital native readers are gradually becoming the main consumer group. About 70% of readers expect books to dynamically adjust content depth according to personal interests, and about 60% require "access to electronic versions within 24 hours of ordering" (Wang & Li, 2025). The traditional mass production and one-way communication model can no longer meet demand. AI technology can realize on-demand production through a "demand—generation—feedback" closed loop, promoting the publishing industry to transform from content supply to knowledge services (Kuang & Cao, 2024).

Regulation-guided: Policy and ethics jointly promote mechanism innovation. The national level continues to release policy dividends. The "AI + Publishing" pilot projects provide financial subsidies for technology applications such as intelligent proofreading and multimodal production, accelerating technology implementation (2022). Meanwhile, risks brought by AI application such as copyright disputes and content homogeneity also require the industry to improve governance mechanisms simultaneously (Wang & Zhang, 2023). For example, when introducing AI-assisted ancient book collation, Zhonghua Book Company simultaneously developed a blockchain system for version traceability, setting an example of "technology + ethics" collaborative transformation for the industry (Wang & Li, 2025).

3. Conceptual Evolution and Practical Forms of Publishing Agents

3.1 Core Concepts and Technical Logic

It is widely recognized in the current publishing industry that an AI agent is an intelligent system driven by a large language model, capable of autonomous environment perception, planning & decision-making, memory and tool invocation to achieve specific goals. Compared with the passive response function of traditional AI tools, agents can actively break down steps and invoke external tools according to task objectives to realize automated execution of complex tasks (Yang, Di, Chen et al., 2026).

Publishing agents are vertical applications of AI agent technology in the publishing field. They refer to intelligent systems that act on specific publishing scenarios, perceive publishing business processes and environments, and independently or semi-independently complete core industrial chain tasks by invoking specialized tools, in forms including functional plug-ins, knowledge service platforms and digital human products (Yang, Di, Chen et al., 2026). Its technical logic follows the working

framework of "environment perception—planning & decision-making—tool use", which is highly compatible with publishing workflows such as information collection, topic evaluation, editing and processing, and marketing & distribution: the perception link extends editors' information reach, the decision-making link strengthens editors' decision support, and the tool use link replaces repetitive labor, systematically improving overall process efficiency (Liu, 2025).

3.2 Three Progressive Practical Forms

From the perspective of functional positioning and value orientation, agent applications in China's publishing industry have formed a three-level progressive implementation system, corresponding to the transformation path of the publishing industry from internal efficiency improvement to product value addition and then to business format expansion.

First, process efficiency-oriented agents, focusing on internal cost reduction and efficiency improvement of publishing institutions. Such agents focus on highly standardized production links such as topic selection, proofreading and typesetting, replacing mechanical labor and allowing editors to shift energy to high-value links such as content creativity and quality control. For example, "Shumai", an AI super agent built by Shuchuan Group, deeply integrates AI into the entire production process to systematically improve content quality and production efficiency while ensuring data security, making it the most widely used agent type in the industry (Yang, Di, Chen et al., 2026).

Second, supporting value-added agents, focusing on value upgrading of individual publications. Deeply bound with specific books, such agents transform static paper content into interactive and updatable digital service portals, mainly applied to categories such as textbooks, children's picture books and professional reference books. For example, the supporting agent developed by Tsinghua University Press for College Physics (4th ed.) provides six functions including free Q&A, intelligent question setting and interactive models, transforming books from "commodities" into "service interfaces" and effectively improving publication added value and user stickiness (Yang, Di, Chen et al., 2026).

Third, knowledge operation agents, focusing on expanding the business boundaries of publishing institutions. Relying on vertical content resources accumulated by publishing institutions, such agents break through the limitation of single-book carriers and provide users with scenario-based knowledge Q&A, consulting advice and other services, promoting publishing institutions to transform from content producers to knowledge service providers. For example, Zhonghua Book Company's "Chinese Sages Digital Human" agent and MedSci's "Meisi Xiaozhi" agent have formed differentiated competitiveness in vertical fields (Yang, Di, Chen et al., 2026). In the field of science and technology publishing, China Machine Press launched the "Jigong Zhida" knowledge service agent based on its industrial science and technology content resources, integrating thousands of science and technology books and industry standard databases to provide accurate and traceable technical solutions for manufacturing practitioners, realizing the business expansion from book sales to knowledge services.

4. Paradigm Reconstruction of Publishing Content Production Under Human-Machine Collaboration

4.1 Macro Dimension: Construction of an Open and Collaborative Industrial Ecology

The traditional closed publishing production system can no longer adapt to the efficiency requirements of the AI era. It is necessary to build an open and collaborative ecology of "technology enterprises developing AI platforms + publishing institutions deploying AI agents + editors improving collaboration capabilities" by integrating social technological resources, strengthening the core capabilities of publishing institutions, and improving practitioners' digital literacy.

Technology enterprises develop specialized technology platforms oriented to industry demands. With R&D advantages, technology enterprises serve as the core suppliers of AI technology for the publishing industry, and should develop differentiated tools targeting industry pain points. On one hand, they focus on accurate demand insight: for example, Openbook's book retail market observation system covers omni-channel sales and reader feedback data, helping editors identify market blue oceans. On the other hand, they promote lightweight production processes: for example, Tencent Hunyuan Large Model can automatically complete full-process tasks including topic proposal, outline construction and content generation, greatly shortening the book planning cycle (Wang & Li, 2025).

Publishing institutions deploy dedicated agents based on their own business characteristics. At present, AI applications of leading domestic publishing groups are gradually upgrading from "external tool procurement" to "in-house capacity building", and building differentiated competitive barriers by developing exclusive agents for vertical fields. Compared with general-purpose tools, vertical publishing agents have two core advantages: first, systematic accumulation of professional knowledge, which far outperforms general large models in terms of professional terminology accuracy and content compliance; second, in-depth adaptation to business scenarios, which can be customized according to the publishing institution's own editing and proofreading workflows and marketing systems to realize seamless integration of technology and business. For the vast number of small and medium-sized publishing houses, a lightweight SaaS service model is more suitable: they can invoke third-party AI capabilities on demand to reduce upfront investment, and carry out scenario-based fine-tuning combined with their own characteristic categories to avoid the competitive dilemma of technological homogenization (Yang, Di, Chen et al., 2026).

Editors enhance human-machine collaboration capabilities around value upgrading. AI agents do not weaken the core value of editors; instead, they promote the transformation of editors' role from content processors to intelligent decision-makers. This process is essentially the reconstruction and upgrading of editorial competence in the digital-intelligent era (Cui & Wang, 2024). Under the human-machine collaboration paradigm, editors need to focus on cultivating three core competencies: first, data insight, which means analyzing market data and reader feedback with AI tools; second, collaborative judgment,

which means accurately distinguishing normative errors from creative expressions in the proofreading process; third, creative leadership, which means dominating the value orientation of content and the design of creative frameworks in multimodal publications (Wang & Li, 2025).

4.2 Micro Dimension: Model Innovation of Full-Process Human-Machine Collaboration

By deeply embedding AI agents into all links of publishing content production, it can be integrated into three modules: front-end production, quality control and operation services, realizing whole-chain model innovation.

4.2.1 Front-End Production: Data-Driven Topic Selection and Multimodal Content Co-Creation

Traditional experience-oriented topic planning is gradually being replaced by the "data + algorithm" model. AI agents can capture real-time online hotspots, sales data and reader comments, automatically generate topic evaluation reports covering market popularity, competition saturation and author matching degree, assist editors in quickly judging topic value, and further realize real-time linkage of "demand—creation—feedback" by inviting readers to participate in topic voting, thus improving market adaptability. For example, the "Phoenix Zhiling" platform developed by Phoenix Media can automatically generate multi-dimensional topic evaluation reports and accurately identify demand growth in segmented fields (Wang & Li, 2025).

In terms of content creation, AI agents break the limitation of single text form and promote the popularization of the human-machine collaborative multimodal co-creation model. Large models can automatically generate illustrations, soundtracks and interactive animations based on text descriptions, and quickly package them into multimodal e-books. In the children's picture book project Dunhuang Fantasy Night, AI generated 60 mural-style illustrations and ensured artistic unity through style transfer, reducing illustration production costs by 80% (Wang & Li, 2025); in professional publishing, AI can also assist authors in literature sorting, draft writing and data visualization, greatly shortening the creation cycle.

4.2.2 Quality Control: Full-Process Intelligent Quality Inspection and Human-Machine Review Mechanism

AI agent-based proofreading systems are transforming from "error correction tools" to "full-process quality stewards". In addition to basic character, word and sentence error detection, they can cover multiple dimensions such as noun unification, publishing norms and content risks. For example, the "Yuncong Ancient Book OCR Proofreading and Editing System" automatically generates collation marks by comparing variant texts of different ancient book editions, increasing ancient book revision efficiency by 3 times (Wang & Li, 2025).

The core mechanism is to advance the quality inspection link and embed the proofreading system into the author's creation process, forming a "creation—quality inspection—revision" closed loop to improve manuscript quality from the source. Meanwhile, a collaborative mechanism of "AI primary

screening + manual review" is established: AI handles standardized errors, while manual work takes charge of value judgment and complex problem handling, achieving dual improvement of quality and efficiency (He & Bai, 2025). For example, the intelligent agent for ancient TCM book collation built by China Press of Traditional Chinese Medicine, relying on its self-built knowledge base of ancient TCM literature, can automatically complete variant character recognition, edition variant comparison and citation tracing. In pilot applications, it covers about 70% of basic verification work, shortening the collation cycle of a single ancient book by 40% and greatly reducing the omission rate of manual collation.

4.2.3 Operation Services: Precision Marketing Reach and Personalized Reading Experience

The reader portrait system driven by AI agents is reshaping publishing marketing logic. By analyzing readers' behavioral data such as reading duration, annotated notes, social sharing and purchase records, a three-dimensional reader portrait covering content preference, purchasing power level and social influence can be constructed to realize personalized precise recommendation. In the marketing of Variable 6, the intelligent recommendation system targeted high-value readers, making the book's first-month sales reach 320,000 copies, an increase of 40% compared with the previous work (Wang & Li, 2025). On this basis, refined operation strategies such as scenario-based recommendation and dynamic pricing can be implemented to promote the transformation of publishing marketing from traffic thinking to user thinking.

In terms of reader experience, the publishing industry is accelerating the transformation from "one-way content communication" to "interactive knowledge service", and AI agents provide technical support for personalized experience upgrading. For example, AR interactive textbooks can present 3D knowledge models and support interactive operations, greatly improving learning experience; intelligent reading software can provide immersive reading and in-depth emotional interaction, with reader completion rates significantly higher than traditional e-books (Wang & Li, 2025). In the future, with the development of AR/VR technology, publishing content will further break through the limitations of physical carriers and build an integrated new cultural consumption scenario.

5. Current Bottlenecks and Optimization Paths

5.1 Core Current Bottlenecks

Although AI agents bring significant opportunities for the transformation of the publishing industry, they still face multi-dimensional constraints in practical application, and it is necessary to guard against systemic risks caused by "technological supremacy" (Kuang & Cao, 2024).

First, lagging institutional supply with ambiguous copyright and liability definitions. Current publishing management regulations have not yet clarified the copyright ownership and liability subject of AI-generated content. There is no unified consensus in academic and practical circles on whether

AI-generated content constitutes a work and how to divide liabilities in case of errors or infringements; issues such as the copyright compliance of AI training data and content ethical review standards also need to be standardized, which restricts the large-scale application of agent technology to a certain extent (Yang, Di, Chen et al., 2026).

Second, imbalanced input-output ratio with capital pressure restricting popularization. The implementation and iteration of agent technology require continuous investment in capital, computing power and manpower, which poses a considerable challenge to the cost-bearing capacity of the publishing industry. Although leading publishing groups have the strength to deploy self-developed projects, constrained by short-term revenue assessment, they generally have concerns about input-output ratio and find it difficult to make long-term, large-scale technological investments; small and medium-sized publishing houses are limited by revenue scale, and most cannot afford the development and operation costs of customized agents. Industry survey data shows that less than 10% of provincial-level publishing units in China have an annual special AI R&D investment of more than 5 million yuan. Most institutions rely on special financial subsidies and third-party standardized tools for technology application, and have not yet formed a sustainable commercial profit model, with obviously insufficient endogenous motivation for technological investment (Wang & Li, 2025).

Third, insufficient technical adaptability with reliability and professionalism to be improved. General large models have shortcomings in adaptability to the vertical publishing field, and the accuracy of professional terminology and compliance with industry norms are difficult to meet the requirements of professional publishing; agents generally have the "hallucination" problem, and the interpretability and traceability of the decision-making process are insufficient, which conflicts inherently with the strict quality control requirements of "three reviews and three proofreads" in the publishing industry (Yang, Di, Chen et al., 2026). In addition, problems such as insufficient professional corpus accumulation and uneven data quality also restrict the output effect of agents.

Fourth, talent capacity gap with an unformed collaborative culture. The industry generally faces a shortage of compound talents where "traditional editors do not understand technology, and technical talents do not understand publishing". The deeper contradiction lies in organizational inertia: some senior editors resist AI tools, believing that "machines interfere with professional judgment", resulting in low utilization of systems such as intelligent proofreading (Huang, 2024); meanwhile, excessive reliance on AI tools may also lead to the degradation of editors' professional skills and affect their ability to judge complex content (Chen, 2024).

5.2 Implementation Paths for Optimized Development

To break the bottleneck of AI agents empowering the publishing industry, it is necessary to build a four-in-one solution of "institutional guarantee—technological optimization—talent

upgrading—ecological collaboration", and promote technology application from "tool substitution" to "ecological reconstruction" (Wang & Li, 2025).

First, improve institutional norms and clarify rights and responsibility boundaries. It is recommended that relevant national departments take the lead in formulating administrative measures for AI-generated publications, clarifying the copyright ownership of AI-assisted manually generated content and the primary quality responsibility of publishing institutions and editors, and drawing ethical red lines for content creation and dissemination. Industry associations should cooperate with technology enterprises to formulate application specifications for AI tools in the publishing industry, and unify industry standards for links such as data collection, model training and content review (Yang, Di, Chen et al., 2026); publishing institutions should establish internal AI content review and traceability mechanisms to ensure controllable content quality and traceable responsibilities.

Second, optimize investment models and promote technology implementation at different levels. Implement differentiated implementation paths for publishing institutions of different scales: leading institutions take the lead in forming industry technology alliances, and cooperate with technology enterprises and universities to develop basic vertical large models to share R&D costs and technological achievements; small and medium-sized institutions prioritize AI tool application in highly standardized links such as proofreading and marketing, and gradually expand the application scope. Meanwhile, actively strive for policy subsidies and special fund support, explore commercial profit models for AI applications, and realize a virtuous cycle of technological investment.

Third, deepen vertical technology and strengthen the human-machine collaboration mechanism. Promote the development of publishing large models toward specialization and lightweight design. Publishing institutions cooperate with technology enterprises to train vertical dedicated agents based on their own content resources, so as to improve the accuracy and compliance of professional content output. Build a technical architecture of "central cloud brain + edge computing", where publishing groups uniformly develop core algorithms and subordinate units customize lightweight application modules (Wang & Li, 2025). At the same time, establish a strict human-machine collaborative review mechanism, clarify the auxiliary positioning of AI and the final review responsibility of manual work, and ensure content quality and prevent technical risks through complementary advantages of human and machine.

Fourth, cultivate compound talents and build an open and collaborative ecology. University publishing majors add courses such as data literacy and AI tool application to cultivate compound talents from the source; publishing institutions set up "human-machine collaboration studios", cultivate cross-field talents through project practice, carry out hierarchical and classified skill training to help traditional editors master AI tools and change technical cognition, and foster a corporate culture of "technology empowerment, humanistic leadership" (Cui & Wang, 2024). Meanwhile, promote multi-party

collaboration among publishing institutions, technology enterprises and university research institutions, promote technological innovation by co-building laboratories and sharing industry corpus, and leading institutions should play a leading role in transforming from "technology recipients" to "ecological builders", driving the overall transformation and upgrading of the industry (Yang, Di, Chen et al., 2026).

6. Conclusion

AI agent technology provides a historic opportunity for the publishing industry to break through the limitations of traditional production paradigms and realize digital-intelligent transformation. The shift from the linear traditional production model to the new human-machine collaborative publishing paradigm is not only an upgrade of production tools, but also a systematic reconstruction of production logic, business models and industry values. The in-depth application of agent technology in the future will push the publishing industry into a new stage of autonomous intelligence and become a new type of infrastructure for reconstructing the publishing value chain (Yang, Di, Chen et al., 2026).

In the process of promoting technology application, the publishing industry must always adhere to the core position of content value and avoid falling into the misunderstanding of "technology supremacy". Only through two-level promotion of macro ecological construction and micro process empowerment, and collaboratively solving realistic dilemmas at the institutional, capital, technical and talent levels, can we truly achieve the dual goals of efficiency improvement and value creation, and inject new momentum into cultural inheritance and knowledge dissemination.

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