

CHINA *Books Review*

LETTER

Welcome to the China Books Review

Introducing a new hub for intelligent commentary on all things China and bookish, publishing reviews, essays, lists and more

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GENERAL



There are wayfinders along the stream of history that mark the rise and fall of its peoples, nations and empires. Civilizations reach high watermarks, then are swept away in the flood once more. Sometimes the transfer of power is a glacial flow; othertimes it is a sudden torrent. Great powers repeat themselves, though it is never the same river twice.

China is one such case. The contemporary phrase “rise of China” is misleading: Chinese dynasties held half of the world’s strength and riches for millennia before their fall from power led to a nadir from which the nation could return to prominence. Over the course of history, China has bounced back time and again. Its trajectory over the last three decades — the economic boom and political clout that led to the epithet “rising” — is undeniable, if increasingly faltering.

We believe that the story of China — both today and in context of its past — is one of the most critical narratives of the world we live in. Without a nuanced understanding of China, you will not be fully informed on global affairs. Even now, the average educated Chinese reader knows far more about America and Europe than the equivalent Western reader does of China. Without language skills or time spent there, the knowledge barrier is high. But fortunately, there is an abundance of Anglophone writing about it.

At the *China Books Review*, we aspire to showcase the best of that writing, as well as to connect readers to books where they can find more of it. We are a new digital magazine, publishing essays about — and reviews of the literature on and from — China. We will also post excerpts, profiles, dispatches, archive picks, a books podcast, videos of book talks, and a variety of book lists, both curated and comprehensive, so you’ll never be short of something to read.

“ Books on China have for too long comprised what Sun Yatsen called ‘a plate of loose sand.’ With the launch of the *China Books Review*, we hope to create a harbor of refuge for authors of such works. ”

— Orville Schell (*co-publisher, Asia Society*)

This endeavour, publishing twice weekly and fully ungated online, is brought to you by Asia Society's [Center on U.S.-China Relations](#) and [The Wire China](#). Our publishers are the veteran China writer Orville Schell and the Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist David Barboza. Our editor is [Alec Ash](#), an author of multiple China books and former China Channel editor at the *Los Angeles Review of Books*. We are based out of Asia Society's headquarters in New York, and operate as a non-profit. For more information, see [about us](#).

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We are a space for China bookworms, but also for any general reader with a passing interest in China. Our working remit for “China” is broad, including not just the People's Republic of China — for which the term is shorthand — but also Taiwan, the Chinese diaspora and the greater Sinophone world. Our definition of “China books” is equally wide: any English-language book written on or from China, including translated Chinese authors. While our focus is anglophone, we also review and list some untranslated Chinese books.

We have no political agenda, and aspire to publish reasonable opinions from all sides of the debate. We believe it is critical for any China-oriented publication to feel comfortable calling Beijing out on its policies that breach clear political norms and human rights. We also believe that criticism must exist within a framework of open communication and dialogue: that alarmism and demonization are counter-productive, and that essentializing or racializing have no place in the discourse.

Above all, we aspire to feature voices that add to the greater conversation on China, and to expand that conversation beyond its current scope. There is plenty of commentary on politics and policy when it comes to China, but we also hope to fill in the white space around the edges, with more content on culture, society and history. We are committed to publishing diverse voices, from all backgrounds, and welcome any and all readers.

“ Our goal is simple: to deliver the finest coverage of books about China, and to produce a digital publication that can help deepen our understanding of a complex and magical part of the world. ”

— David Barboza (*co-publisher, The Wire China*)

In our inaugural issue, we have a cornucopia of delights for you to sample. Our cover essay features Perry Link [reflecting](#) on six decades of China watching and writing, arguing that it is disingenuous to compare Xi's China to Mao's. Zheng Churan, one of the “Feminist Five” detained for her activism, [reviews](#) a banned Chinese book about female factory workers. Orville Schell kicks off our monthly My China Bookshelf column with five historical titles from his [shelf](#). We also republish a classic 1966 [essay](#) by sinologist John King Fairbank on the historical undercurrents of the Chinese revolution. Your humble editor [rounds up](#) the

latest China nonfiction books worth your time. And novelist Xiaolu Guo writes on culture shock as a Chinese arrival in New York, in an [excerpt](#) from her new memoir.

Also don't miss our dynamic book lists, that keep you up to date with what's [upcoming](#), [recent](#) and [bestselling](#), alongside [editors' picks](#) from the pack. Dropping next Tuesday, October 10, is the first episode of our monthly [China Books podcast](#), hosted by Mary Kay Magistad, former China correspondent for NPR. Follow the podcast now, to not miss a beat!

Finally, if you are in New York, do come to our [launch event](#) next Thursday, October 12, 6:30pm at Asia Society. The theme is "Three Generations of China Writers", in which we convene three pairings of mini-interviews that take us from the 1950s through to today: Jianying Zha with Orville Schell and Winston Lord; David Barboza with Ian Johnson; and Jiayang Fan with Yangyang Cheng. Registration is required.

Thank you for reading us. May your shelves be strong, and your books well-thumbed. ■

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Oct 12, 6:30pm

Come to our launch!

Join us at Asia Society in New York next Thursday, to celebrate our launch. "Three Generations of China Writers" will be on stage, to talk about how the nation has changed from the 1960s to today: Zha Jianying interviews Orville Schell and Winston Lord; David Barboza interviews Ian Johnson; and Jiayang Fan interviews Yangyang Cheng; followed by Q&A and cocktail reception. Registration is required, [click for more information](#)

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