



ELLIE FOREMAN-PECK

BOOK LIST

What to Read in 2024

A few China titles we're excited to read in the year ahead – and deeper pickings to draw from in our comprehensive book listings project.

EDITORS — JANUARY 4, 2024

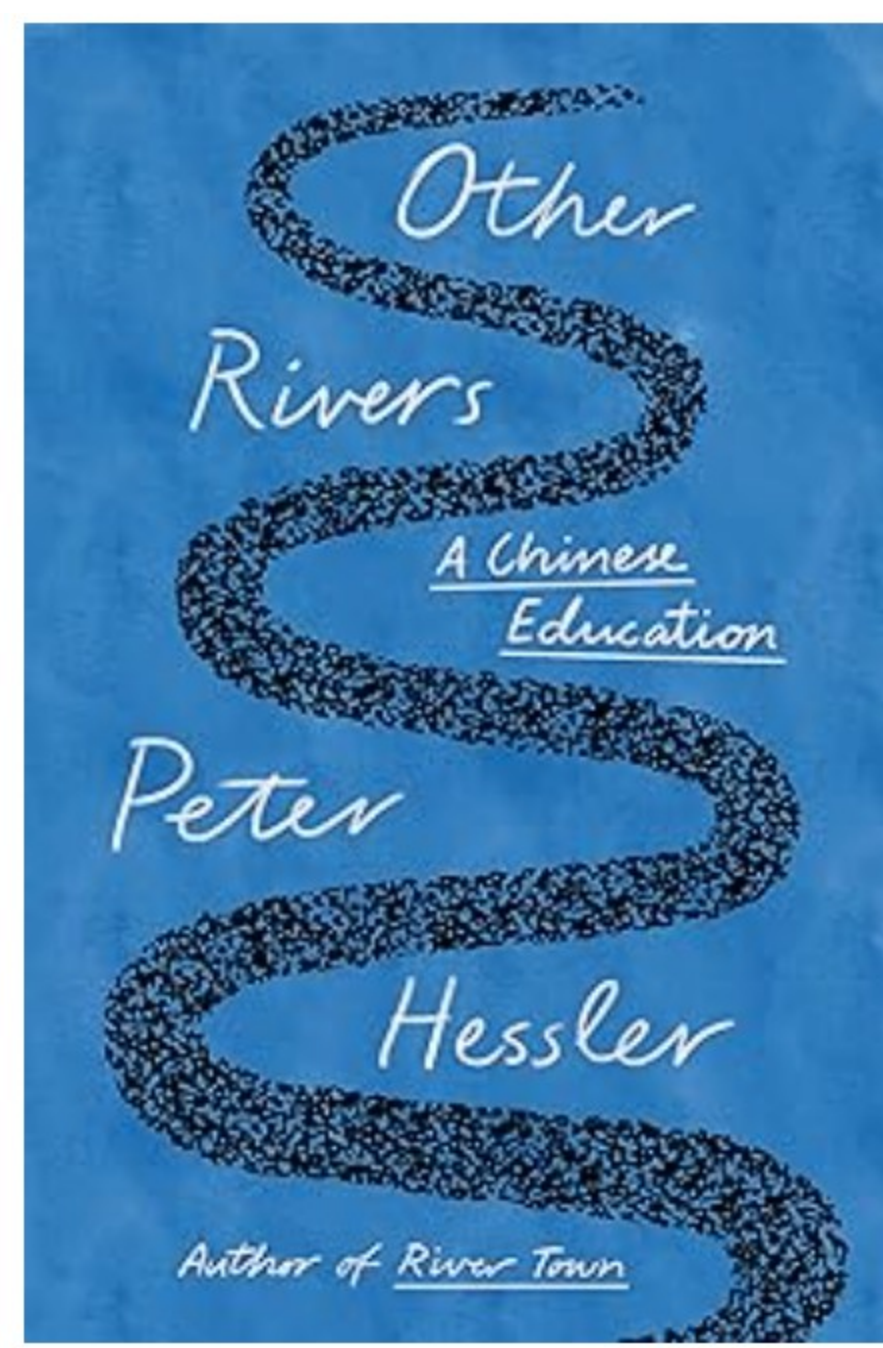
MISC.



May you live in interesting times, goes the apocryphal Chinese adage. The likely origins of the phrase have been [traced](#) back to 19th century British statesman Joseph Chamberlain, who in a 1898 speech connected the age's "interesting times" to "new objects for anxiety." In 1936, Chamberlain's son Austen — also a politician, and half-brother of British Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain — cited "May you live in an interesting age" in a stump speech as a "Chinese curse." (It is not; the closest idiom is 宁为太平，不做乱世人, "Better to live as a dog in a peaceful age than as a human in a chaotic age.") Recycling it in a 1966 speech, Robert F. Kennedy helped to popularize the maxim, which was also misquoted by the likes of Albert Camus, Arthur C. Clarke and, later, Hillary Clinton. Chiefly applied as a politician's scalpel to dissect the age they live it, the invented provenance of the "curse" is a classic case of the child's game of Telephone — appropriately known in England, where the phrase originated, as Chinese Whispers.

In 2024, we live in interesting times. The coming year will feature critical elections in Taiwan and the U.S., the continuation of war in Ukraine and the Middle East, and a variety of less tangible inflection points for humanity and the planet we live on. Though U.S.-China relations have seen signs of [rapprochement](#), this is a tempting illusion given the mercurial realities of U.S. politics — where Donald Trump has been [likened](#) to America's Mao — and the challenging realities faced by China, with calls for reunification with Taiwan and coded acknowledgement of economic slowdown in Xi Jinping's customary [new year's address](#). As ever, these twists and turns will be studied by the two co-publishers of the *China Books Review*: Asia Society's [Center on U.S.-China Relations](#) and [The Wire China](#) — as well as at the Review itself.

This year, we are looking forward to several titles which will put China, and its relationship with the world, in the fresh perspective that book-length works can afford. And so, just as we bookended 2023 with a round-up of editor and guest [recommendations](#) of books from that year, we see in 2024 with a few upcoming titles to look out for:



[Buy the book >](#)

Other Rivers

A Chinese Education

PETER HESSLER | JULY 9, 2024 | PENGUIN PRESS

Much awaited from the veteran nonfiction writer on China, Peter Hessler's forthcoming book will be an account of his return to teaching in Sichuan province, two decades after writing *River Town*. Chronicling the lives of two generations of Chinese students, we expect it to shed light on recent changes in the nation (including the outset of Covid, and new political atmosphere that eventually led to Hessler's expulsion) through the prism of education.

Edward Wong

At the Edge of Empire

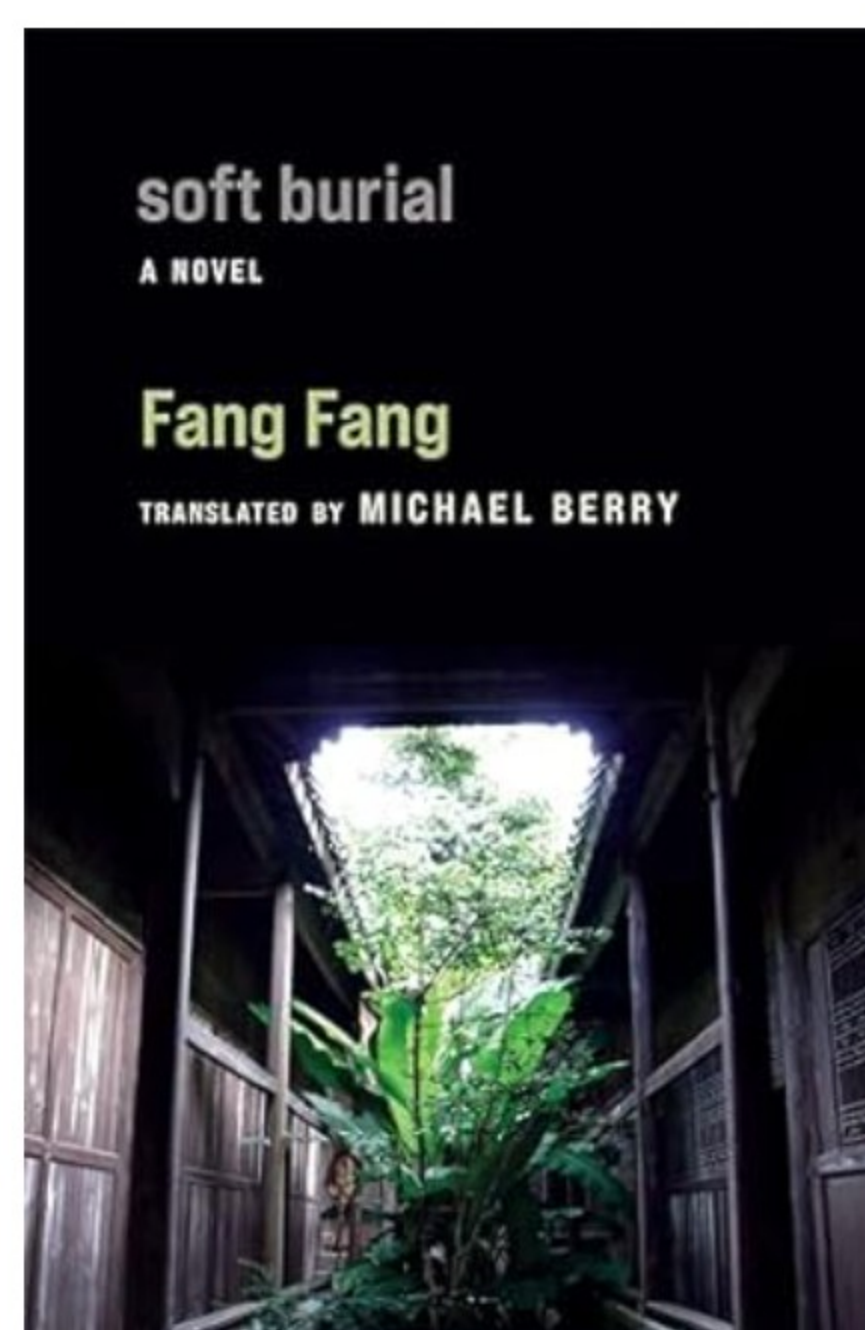
[Buy the book >](#)

At the Edge of Empire

A Family's Reckoning with the Fall and Rise of China

EDWARD WONG | MAY 28, 2024 | VIKING

We're looking forward to this "intergenerational family memoir" by the former *New York Times* Beijing bureau chief — and Chinese American son of two immigrants from Hong Kong — Edward Wong. Investigating the mystery of how his father fled to the U.S., presumably with the same incision with which Wong reported on China in the 2000s and 2010s, the book is set to provide an intriguing perspective across the sweep of 80 years of Chinese history.



[Buy the book >](#)

Soft Burial

A Novel

FANG FANG (TR. MICHAEL BERRY) | JULY 23, 2024 | COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY PRESS

Novels, and other translated Chinese-language titles, are very much on our radar. This work of fiction, by a popular but controversial Chinese author, promises to be an elliptical take on amnesia and historical trauma, through the unfolding mystery of an ailing protagonist. The book was first praised and later denounced on its publication in Chinese in 2016, and Fang Fang's previous release in English, *Wuhan Diary*, was mentioned alongside it in our recent [review-essay](#).

Yuan Yang

Private Revolutions

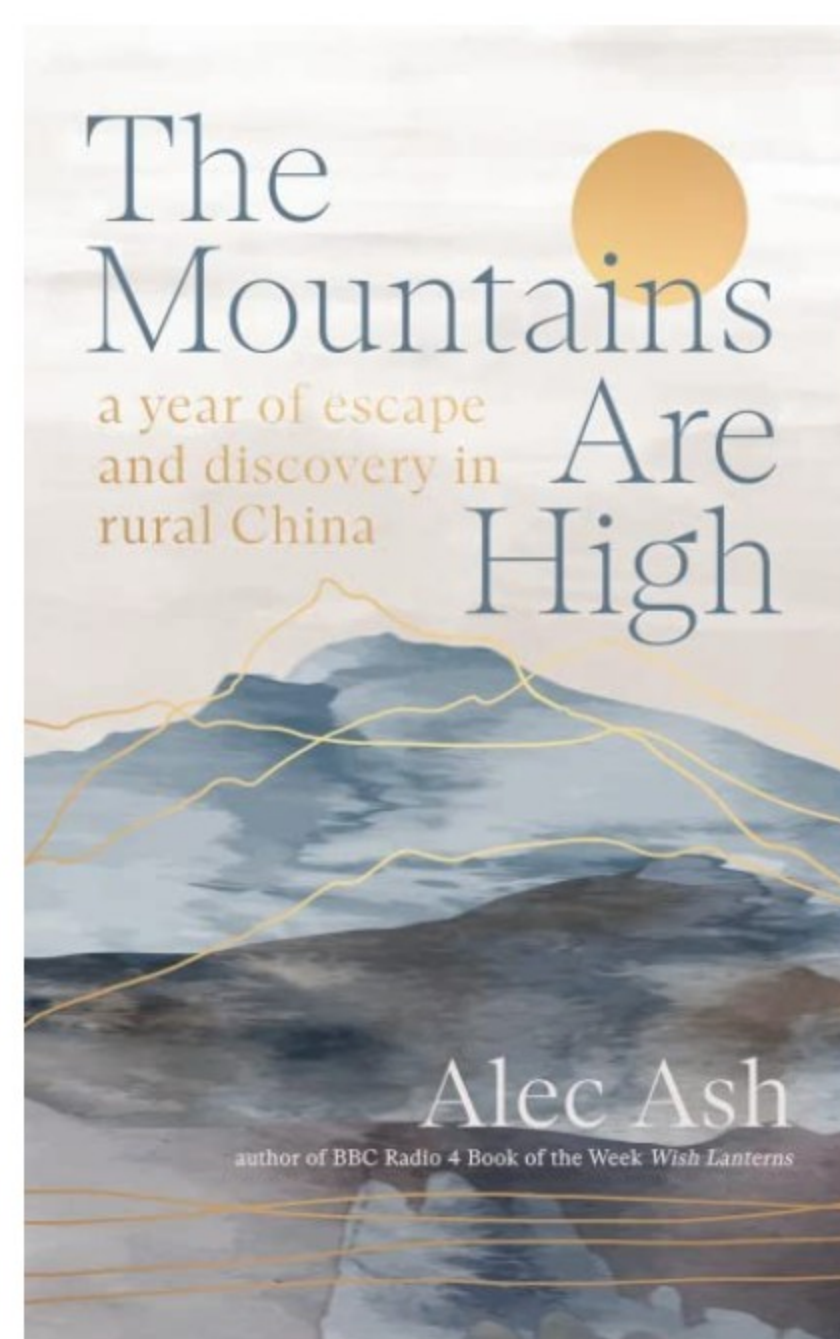
[Buy the book >](#)

Private Revolutions

How Ordinary Women Are Taking On China's New Social Order

YUAN YANG | JULY 2, 2024 | VIKING

While many Western journalists have left China (often [not by choice](#)), there are still books coming out from their time there. One such is *Financial Times* reporter Yuan Yang's upcoming portrait of four ordinary women in China. Another on our watch list is *NPR* China correspondent Emily's Feng's *Let Only Red Flowers Bloom*, [forthcoming](#) from Crown this year, about "those caught in the political fray" in Xi Jinping's China.



[Buy the book >](#)

The Mountains Are High

A Year of Escape and Discovery in Rural China

ALEC ASH | FEBRUARY 8, 2024 | SCRIBE

Our [team](#) at *China Books Review* not only covers books on and from China, but occasionally writes them as well. This reported memoir by editor Alec Ash, published next month, relates a year living in a rural village in Dali, southwest China, which has attracted a colorful panoply of escapees from the hustle and bustle of the city — seeking alternative ways of life in the hills, pursuing personal over economic development, and finding ways to feel free in an unfree country.

Other titles are expected this year, but without listed publication dates. Topping that pile for us is *Motherland* by Jiayang Fan, staff writer at *The New Yorker*, whose book was acquired by Farrar, Straus and Giroux. We expect it to expand on her *New Yorker* [personal essay](#) about her own migration to America as a child, paralleled by her mother's story.

As ever, we will run reviews, essays, excerpts and a variety of columns to cover these and more, including Chinese titles and archive picks, on top of our [podcast](#) and video book talks at Asia Society. If you haven't already, sign up for our free, biweekly [newsletter](#) to receive all new articles in your inbox, every other Thursday. And follow the site daily on [Twitter](#) (X), [Facebook](#) and [Instagram](#). (Or indeed [pitch](#) us at editor@chinabooksreview.com.)

But featured articles is only a part of the work we do at *China Books Review*. Behind the curtain, we compile all recent, upcoming and bestselling publications related to China, then present them across four dynamic listings pages. (For publishers or authors keen to see their titles included, please [contact](#) us at listings@chinabooksreview.com.) So, if the selections above whet a reader's appetite, we trust our comprehensive listings will satisfy it:

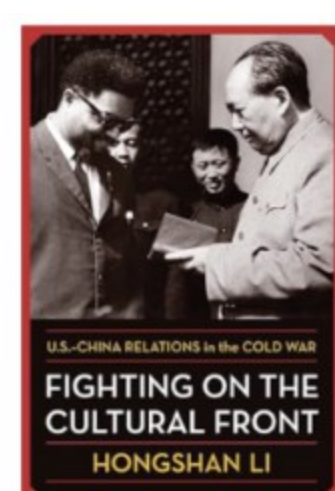


A fuller listing of [upcoming China books](#), defined broadly as any English-language book on or from China that is slated to be published in the next four months. Scrollable carousels are capped at 25 titles across five loose categories: coming soon (combined); politics; history; society/culture; fiction. We update this list every other Thursday.

Upcoming titles, as below and on our homepage, include a mix of genres and publishers as we have found through the listings project — with a heavy spattering of academic books, but also translated and historical fiction, reported nonfiction, the occasional photography, art or even children's book, and more:

COMING SOON

< | >



Fighting on the Cultural Front

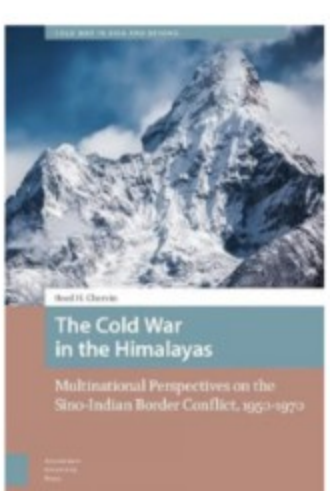
U.S.-China Relations in the Cold War

HONGSHAN LI

JANUARY 5, 2024
COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY PRESS

A historical account of the confrontation between the United States and the People's Republic of China on the Cold War's cultural front

[Buy >](#)



The Cold War in the Himalayas

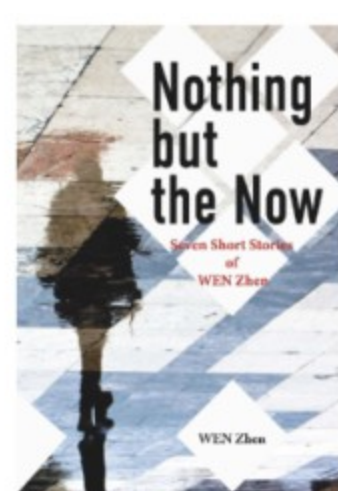
Multinational Perspectives on the Sino-Indian Border Conflict, 1950-1970

REED CHERVIN

JANUARY 5, 2023
AMSTERDAM UNIVERSITY PRESS

An examination of Sino-Indian border issues during the Cold War using multiple established analytical frameworks

[Buy >](#)



Nothing but the Now

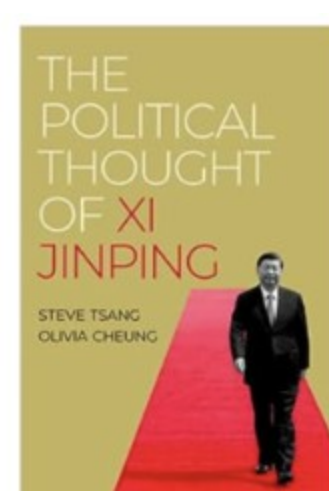
Seven Short Stories by Wen Zhen

WEN ZHEN (TR. DAVE HAYSOM)

JANUARY 7, 2024
BRIDGE 21

A collection of seven short stories that offer a look into various facets of contemporary life in China

[Buy >](#)



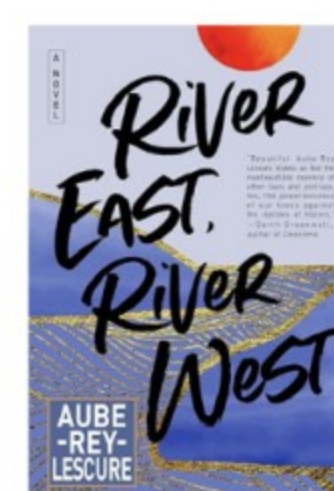
The Political Thought of Xi Jinping

STEVE TSANG, OLIVIA CHEUNG

JANUARY 9, 2024
OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS

An analysis of the ideological underpinnings and political philosophy of Xi Jinping, offering insights into the leadership and governing principles shaping China's contemporary political landscape

[Buy >](#)



River East, River West

AUBE REY LESCURÉ

JANUARY 9, 2024
DUCKWORTH BOOKS

A historical fiction book set against the backdrop of developing modern China that follows two generations searching for belonging and opportunity

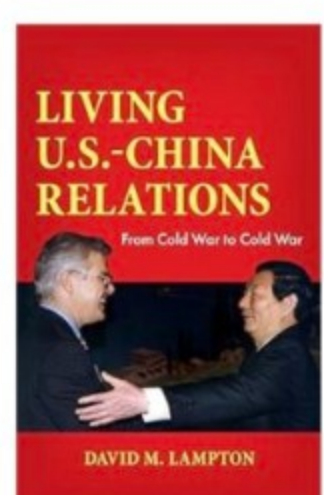
[Buy >](#)



For those books that you didn't get to last year, there is also our (much longer) listing of [recent China books](#), defined broadly as any English-language book on or from China that was published in the last year. Scrollable carousels are capped at 25 titles across the same five categories, and the list is also updated every other Thursday.

The most recent titles, as below, cover a spectrum of topics as would be expected, but with an especial focus on politics and foreign policy, an ever-present interest in Xi Jinping, but a variety of more specialist subjects in the long tail, such as books on Qing dynasty art and Taiwan's state-owned air carrier.

MOST RECENT



Living U.S.-China Relations

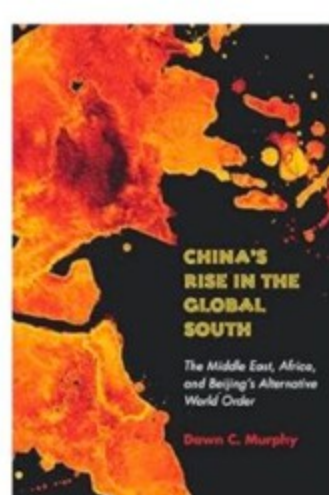
From Cold War to Cold War

DAVID LAMPTON

JANUARY 2, 2024
ROWMAN & LITTLEFIELD PUBLISHERS

A critical look at how the U.S.-China relationship has been managed, and at the story of U.S.-China ties as the relationship between two societies, not just two states

[Buy >](#)



China's Rise in the Global South

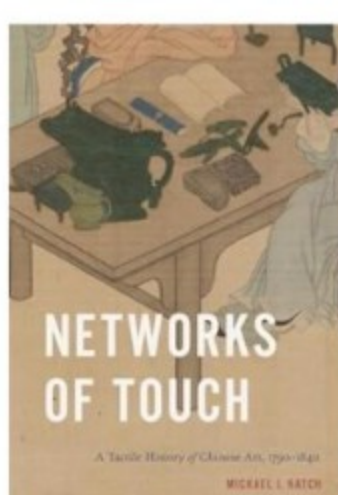
The Middle East, Africa, and Beijing's Alternative World Order

DAWN C. MURPHY

JANUARY 2, 2024
STANFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS

A comparison and analysis of thirty years of China's interactions with the Middle East and Africa across a range of functional areas

[Buy >](#)



Networks of Touch

A Tactile History of Chinese Art, 1790-1840

MICHAEL J. HATCH

JANUARY 2, 2023
PENN STATE UNIVERSITY PRESS

A volume that sheds light on a remarkable transformation that took place in the art world of early nineteenth-century China

[Buy >](#)



China Airlines

The Wings of Taiwan

JOZEF MOLS

JANUARY 1, 2024
KEY PUBLISHING

A history of China Airlines

[Buy >](#)



Pandemic Crossings

Digital Technology, Everyday Experience, and Governance in the COVID-19 Crisis

EDS, GUOBIN YANG, BINGCHUN MENG, ELAINE J. YUAN

JANUARY 1, 2024
MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY PRESS

A collection of studies on the interplay between digital technologies and state governance during the Covid-19 pandemic

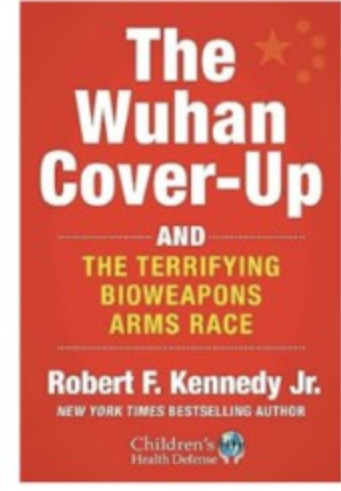
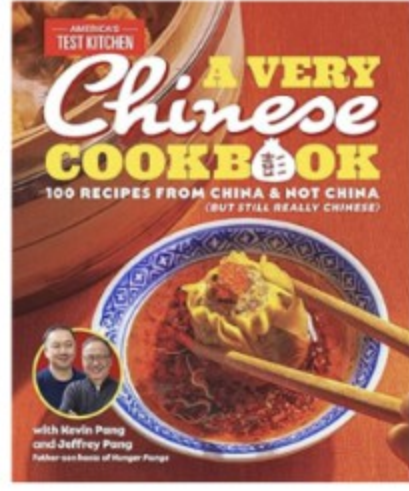
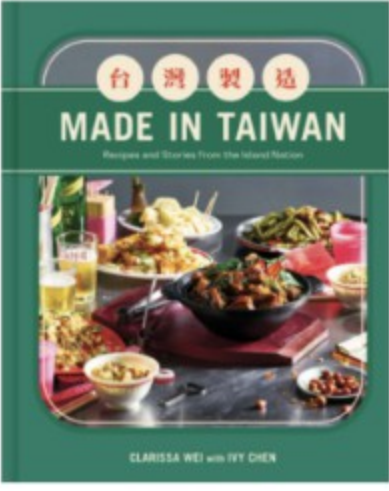
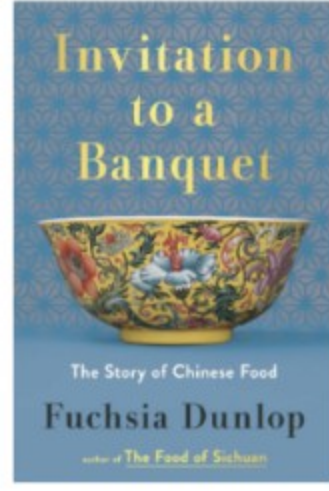
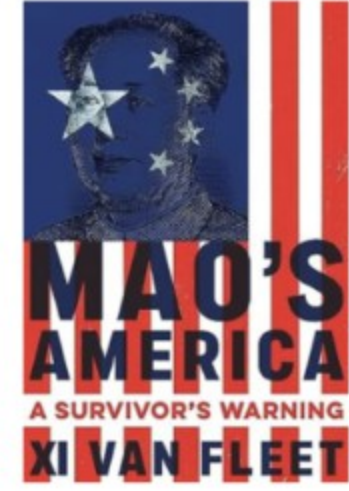
[Buy >](#)



If commercial performance is your standard of interest — or merely piques your interest — then browse our listing of [bestselling China books](#): the same five carousels, but ranked by the books overall bestseller rank on Amazon.com (note this does not incorporate other editions or point-of-sale purchases, so is not a final ranking). We update this list on the first Thursday of every month.

For overall bestsellers, as below, we found an interesting trend emerged for the first three months that we have been tracking the numbers. Namely, the best performing books fell into two categories: cookbooks (three of the top five), and political polemics (the other two, including Robert F. Kennedy Jr and a title [anti-recommended](#) by Assistant Editor Taili Ni). We shall see if this holds true.

OVERALL BESTSELLERS < | >

				
1. The Wuhan Cover-Up <i>And the Terrifying Bioweapons Arms Race</i>	2. A Very Chinese Cookbook <i>100 Recipes from China and Not China (But Still Really Chinese)</i>	3. Made in Taiwan <i>Recipes and Stories from the Island Nation</i>	4. Invitation to a Banquet <i>The Story of Chinese Food</i>	5. Mao's America <i>A Survivor's Warning</i>
ROBERT F. KENNEDY JR.	KEVIN PANG AND JEFFREY PANG	CLARISSA WEI	FUCHSIA DUNLOP	XI VAN FLEET
DECEMBER 5, 2023 SKYHORSE PUBLISHING	OCTOBER 24, 2023 AMERICA'S TEST KITCHEN	SEPTEMBER 19, 2023 SIMON & SCHUSTER	NOVEMBER 7, 2023 WW NORTON	OCTOBER 31, 2023 CENTER STREET
An argument about the origins of COVID-19	A cookbook showing the way to delicious Chinese cooking from the father and son hosts of the America's Test Kitchen series Hunger Pangs	An in-depth cookbook that celebrates Taiwan's unique culture and cuisine	An exploration of the history, cultural significance and irresistible flavors that define Chinese cuisine, by a chef trained in Sichuan province	A survivor of Mao's Cultural Revolution in China makes a case that history is repeating itself in the 'Woke Revolution' of America
Buy >	Buy >	Buy >	Buy >	Buy >



Finally, a much shorter list — this one selective, not comprehensive — intended to cut through the noise of the high volume of China-related books published each year (300+ by our counting). This listing presents our editors' picks of new China books, across five categories updated on a quarterly basis: nonfiction (selected by Alec Ash); translated fiction (selected by Jack Hargreaves); Chinese titles (selected by Na Zhong); memoir/biography; and academic books.

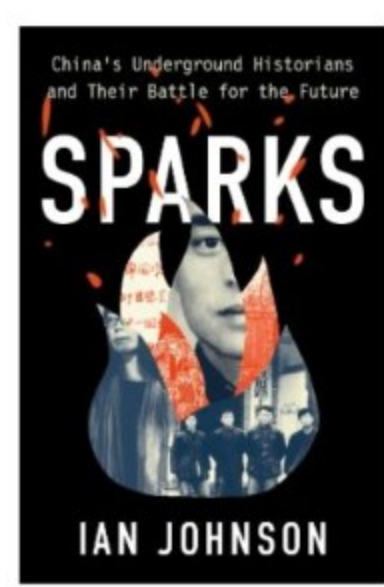
The first three categories are taken from our columnists' quarterly recommendations, with longer blurbs. New nonfiction titles as below, for example, were recommended in an October [round-up](#) when this magazine launched:

NEW NONFICTION



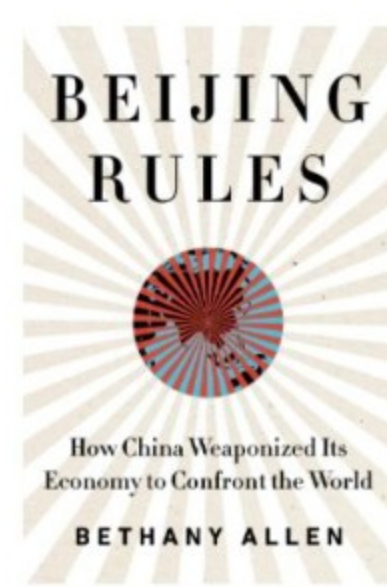
1. Party of One
The Rise of Xi Jinping and China's Superpower Future
 CHUN HAN WONG
 MAY 23, 2023
 AVID READER PRESS
 A journalistic work that narrates and analyzes the rise of Xi Jinping and China's superpower future

Buy >



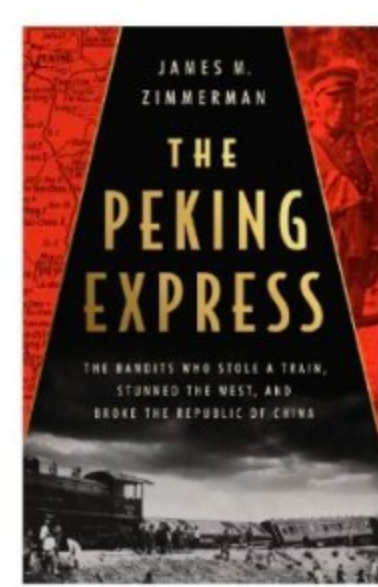
2. Sparks
China's Underground Historians and their Battle for the Future
 IAN JOHNSON
 SEPTEMBER 26, 2023
 OUP GLOBAL
 A history of the gripping struggles of 'underground historians' in China as they strive to preserve their nation's suppressed historical truths

Buy >



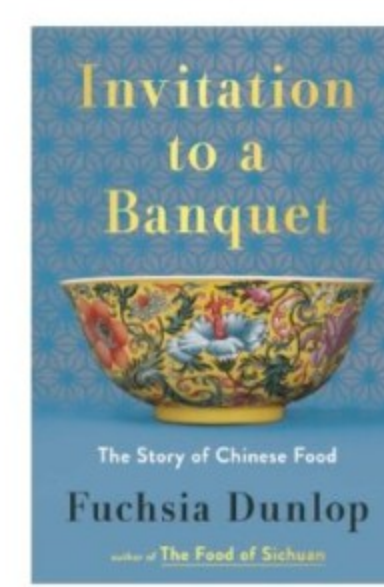
3. Beijing Rules
How China Weaponized Its Economy to Confront the World
 BETHANY ALLEN
 AUGUST 1, 2023
 HARPER COLLINS
 Nonfiction revealing the ways in which China has strategically wielded its economic power to assert dominance on the global stage

Buy >



4. The Peking Express
The Bandits Who Stole a Train, Stunned the West, and Broke the Republic of China
 JAMES ZIMMERMAN
 APRIL 1, 2023
 PUBLICAFFAIRS
 A true story that follows a group of bandits who stole a train, shocked the West, and disrupted the Republic of China

Buy >



5. Invitation to a Banquet
The Story of Chinese Food
 FUCHSIA DUNLOP
 NOVEMBER 7, 2023
 WW NORTON
 An exploration of the history, cultural significance and irresistible flavors that define Chinese cuisine, by a chef trained in Sichuan province

Buy >

With these wells to tap, we wish you happy reading in the year ahead — both of China books themselves, and of our reviews and general essays here, which resume from next week. May you live in interesting times. ■

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