



NEW CHINA BOOKS

BOOK LIST

China Books for the Holidays

Five recent titles bring mystery and magic to the season, from novels of split identity to a children's book about escaping over-protective parents.

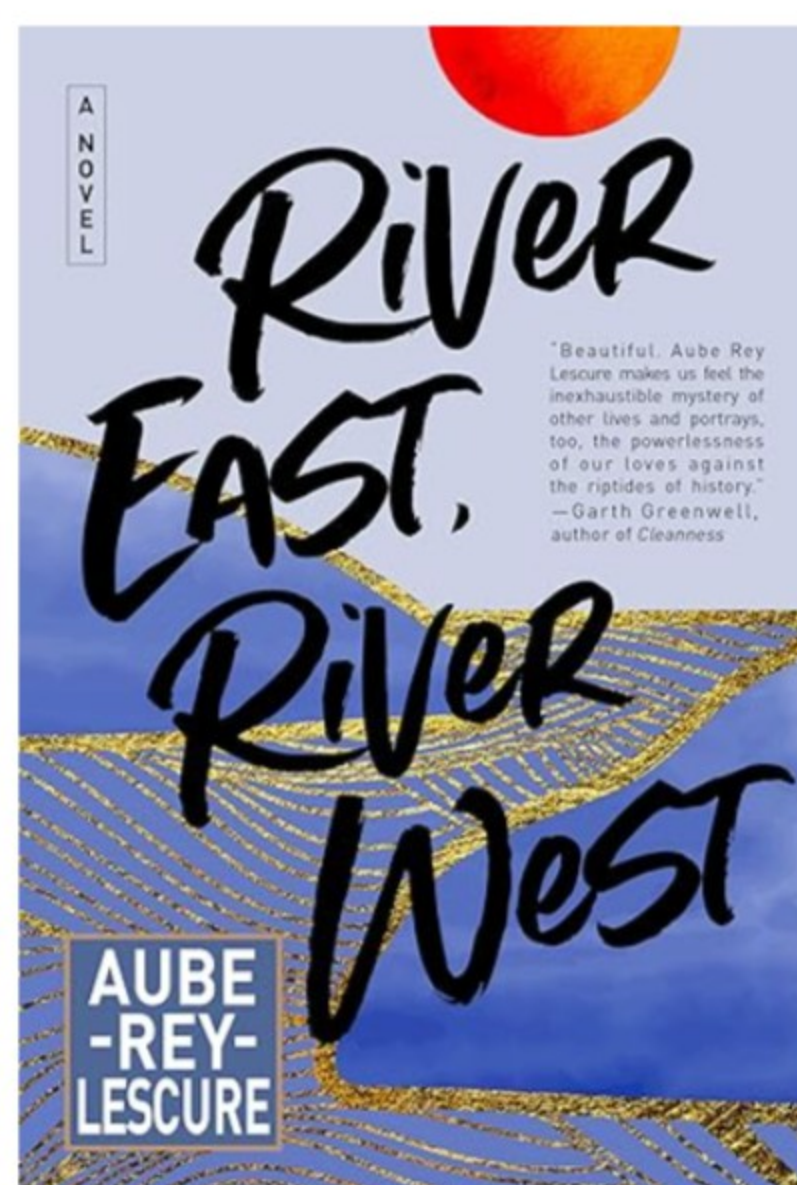
ALEC ASH — DECEMBER 17, 2024

MISC.



Christmas in China is a curious affair, in that most celebrating it (besides an estimated 100 million Christians) are simply curious about the Western holiday. Much as those in the West might go to a Chinese restaurant to mark the Lunar New Year, I've seen many friends in mainland China plump for steak, spaghetti or McDonald's for Christmas dinner. But curiosity about other cultures enriches the spirit of the holidays, whichever winter festival you celebrate.

In that spirit, as the year draws to a close, below are five books on or from China that would make for entertaining reads over the break, several of which showcase cultural differences. A longer round-up of recommended China titles from 2024 will drop soon. For now, here is a lighter list of holiday reads, mostly fiction. From two first novels and a collection of translated short fiction to a history of tea and a children's picture book, there's something here for everyone's stocking.



River East, River West

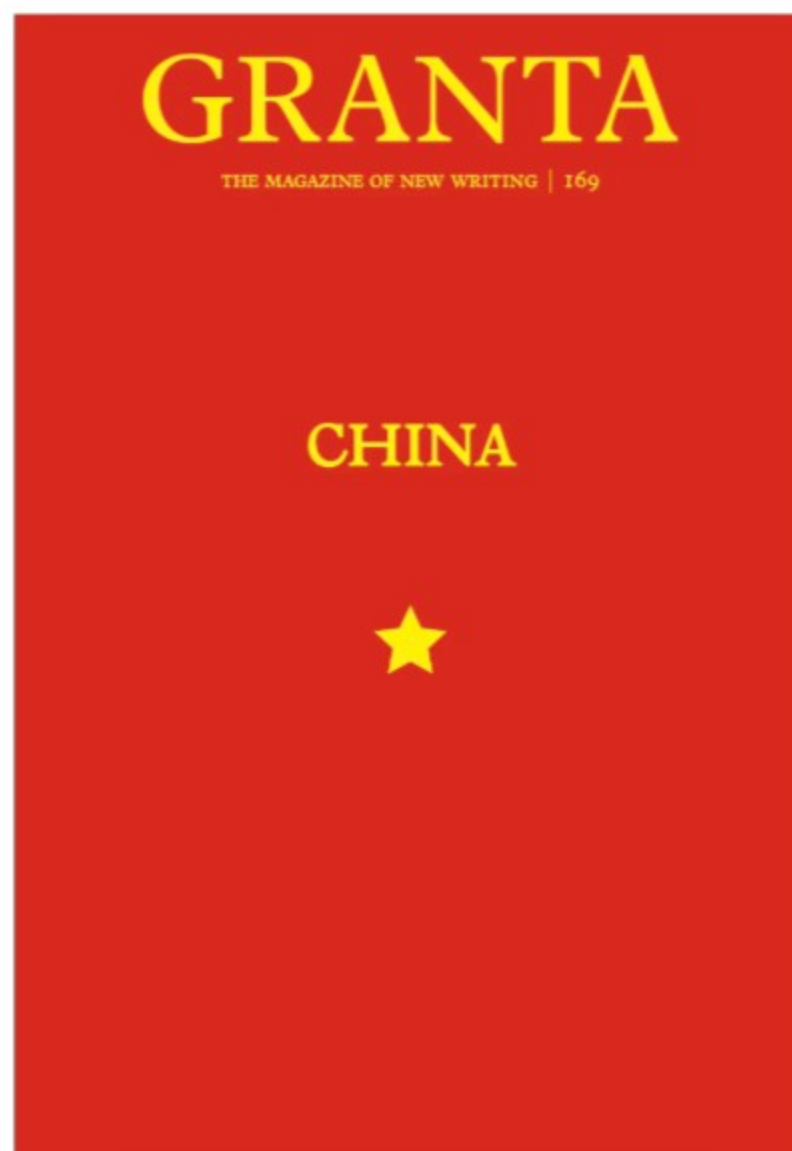
A Novel

AUBE REY LESQUIRE | JANUARY 9, 2024 | DUCKWORTH BOOKS

Shortlisted for the Women's Prize for Fiction 2024 and the Maya Angelou Book Award, this is an enjoyable debut novel from Aube Rey Lescure, a writer living in America who grew up between Provence, northern China and Shanghai. Set in Shanghai in 2007, we follow the tribulations of teenager Alva as she negotiates life in an expat school as a mixed-race child.

Buy the book >

The book then jumps back to 1985 in Qingdao, to tell the story of Lu Fang, the shipping yard clerk who eventually marries Alva's mother (with a 88,888-yuan luncheon wedding). The prose is lively, if speckled distractingly by unglossed Chinese characters ("He was a 囿, four borders enclosing him"; or a family being "not 人, not 从, but 众"). But this is forgivable in a coming of age tale that explores belonging and race, whether about foreigners feeling China is home, or Chinese following the American dream.



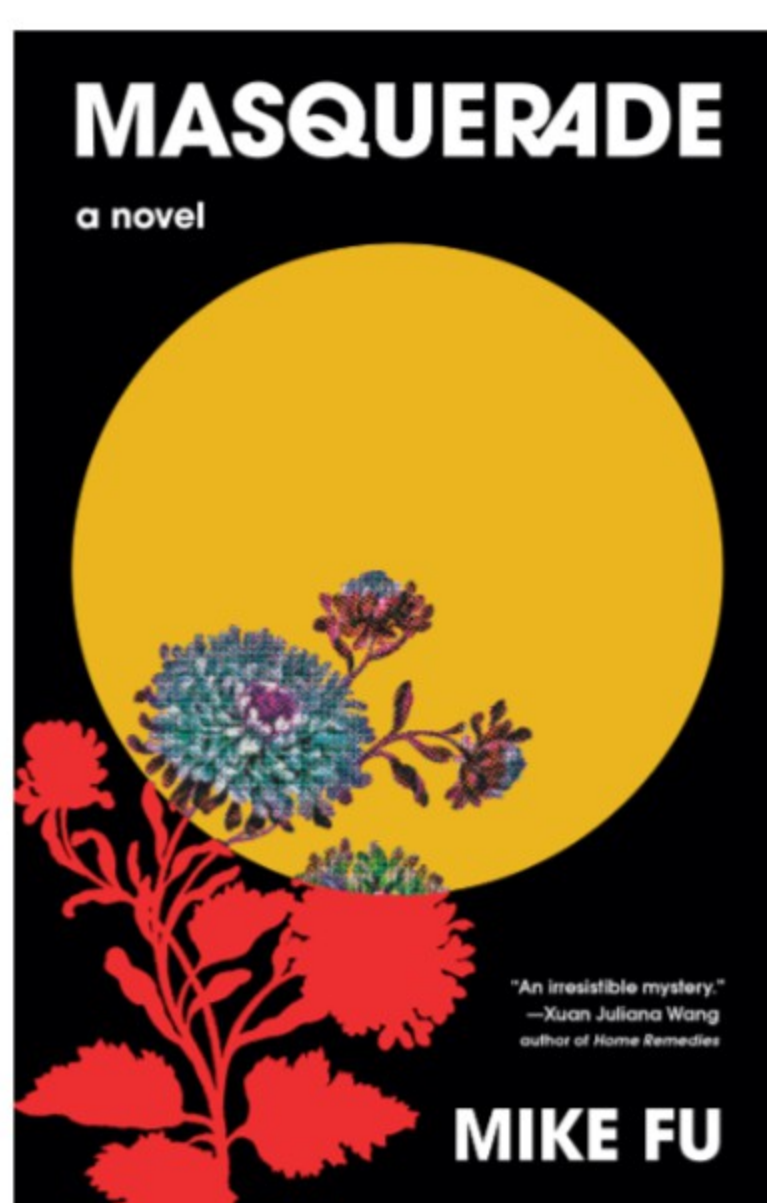
Buy the book >

Granta #169: China

The Magazine of New Writing

VARIOUS | NOVEMBER 12, 2024 | GRANTA

Each issue of *Granta* magazine — founded in 1889 by Cambridge students, reinvented in 1979 to become London's literary darling — is a book in its own right, and their latest codex collects some of the best new Chinese writing within red covers adorned by the obligatory yellow star. Some of China's biggest names are inside, with translated short fiction by Yu Hua, Mo Yan and Yan Lianke. But there are also younger writers who have made a name for themselves, such as Zhang Yueran, and most excitingly a smattering of fiction from the "Dongbei Renaissance," a new generation of writers from China's northeast including Shang Xuetao and Ban Yu. These stories are expertly rendered by a roll call of the best translators in the business, alongside a smattering of poetry, an interview with *One Way Street* editor Wu Qi, and a report by *China Books Review* contributor Han Zhang from the [Picun writers' collective](#). A delight.



Buy the book >

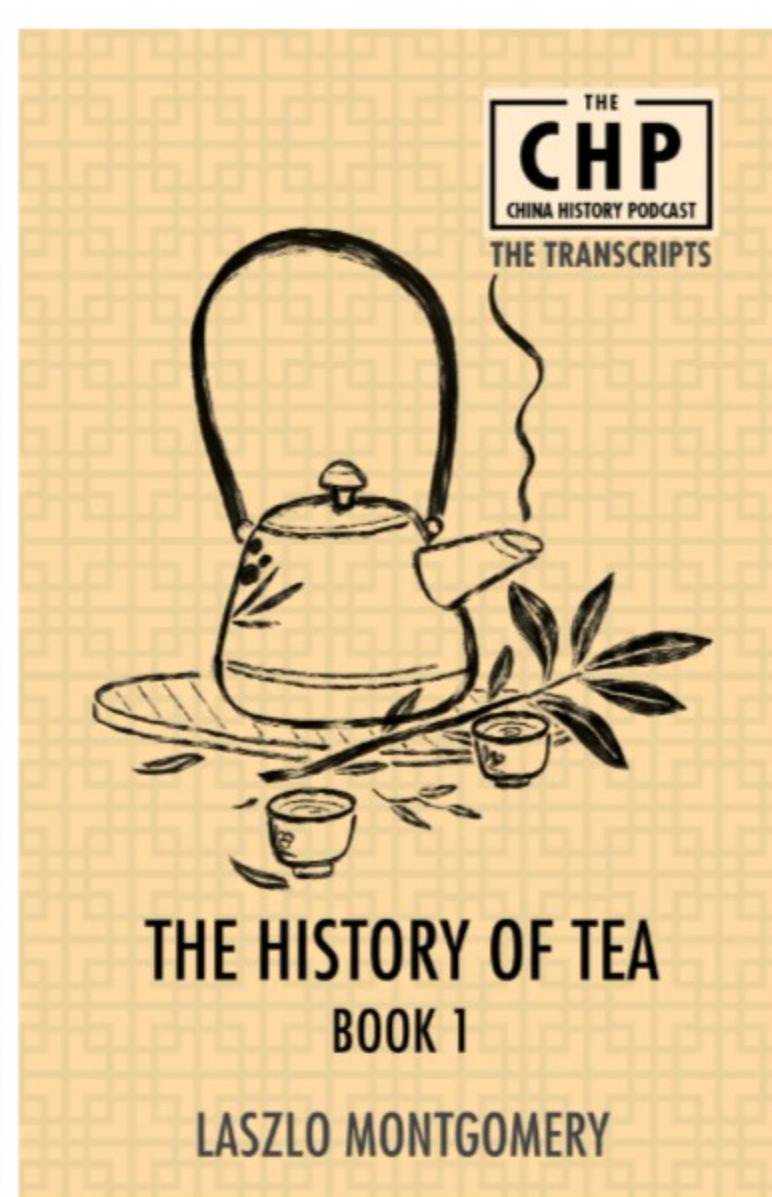
Masquerade

A Novel

MIKE FU | OCTOBER 29, 2024 | TIN HOUSE

We're familiar with Mike Fu's work as translator of Taiwanese writer San Mao in *Stories of the Sahara* (2020). Now, Fu has branched into fiction, with this compelling and complex novel. Described as a "queer coming-of-age mystery," the protagonist Meadow Liu is split between lives in New York and Shanghai. While house-sitting a friend's apartment, he finds a curious book called *The Masquerade* — a translated novel within the novel, set in 1930s Shanghai and penned by a writer with the same Chinese name as Meadow — which spurs him to unravel the mystery of the novel's origin and his friend's sudden disappearance. While the plot can be slow to gather steam, this adds to an atmosphere of blurred realities and identities that are part of the point. And the descriptions of

Shanghai new (“a sweltering continuum of neon and glass”) and antiquated (“The Pearl of the Orient ... emerged again like a defiant queen”) are an enjoyable contrast.



[Buy the book >](#)

The History of Tea

Book 1

LASZLO MONTGOMERY | JANUARY 23, 2024 | EARNSHAW BOOKS

Those who remember the delightfully meandering China History Podcast (later rebranded under [Teacup Media](#)) by the inimitable Laszlo Montgomery will be pleased to hear that Earnshaw Books in Shanghai has been releasing the transcripts of his most edifying series. The history of tea is our favorite (part two [here](#)), telling a story of *camellia sinensis* from the legend of its discovery by the divine farmer, Shen Nong, through how it reached Tibet and later the West, all the way to today. But for those who can look past their awkward, time-stamped format, there is also a gift box of other transcripts available, from [The History of Chinese Philosophy](#) to [Chinese Sayings](#), in addition to historical surveys such as [The Warlord Era](#). All perfectly paired with a steep from [Jesse's teahouse](#), who interviewed Montgomery [here](#).



[Buy the book >](#)

Be Careful, Xiao Xin!

小心小心!

ALICE PUNG (ILLUS. SHER RILL NG)

NOVEMBER 12, 2024

CROWN BOOKS FOR YOUNG READERS

As with our [summer round-up](#), we're ending with something for your kids, or your inner kid. This delightful picture book tells the story of a child called Xiao Xin (itself the phrase for “be careful”) whose parents are trying to protect him from the dangers of the adult world. But Xiao Xin knows he is a Red Fire Warrior, and needs to prove to them that he can handle it, while helping his little sister find her own bravery. Alice Pung's text is bilingual, so perfect for language learners, and flows as easily in both (although the pun of the title is lost in English). Sher Rill Ng's illustrations are soft and evocative, like remembering a dream. While the commentary on over-protective parenting in China is clear, this is a universal tale. “They call me Xiao Xin — Little Heart — because I am little on the outside. But inside ... I can do infinite things.” ■



Alec Ash is a writer focused on China, and editor of *China Books Review*. He is the author of [*Wish Lanterns*](#) (2016), following the lives of young Chinese in Beijing, and [*The Mountains Are High*](#) (2024) about city escapees in Dali, Yunnan. His articles have appeared in *The New York Review of Books*, *The Atlantic* and elsewhere. Born and educated in Oxford, England, he lived in China from 2008-2022, and is now based in New York.