



CHINA BOOK TALKS

BOOK TALK

Emily Feng on Identity in Xi Jinping's China

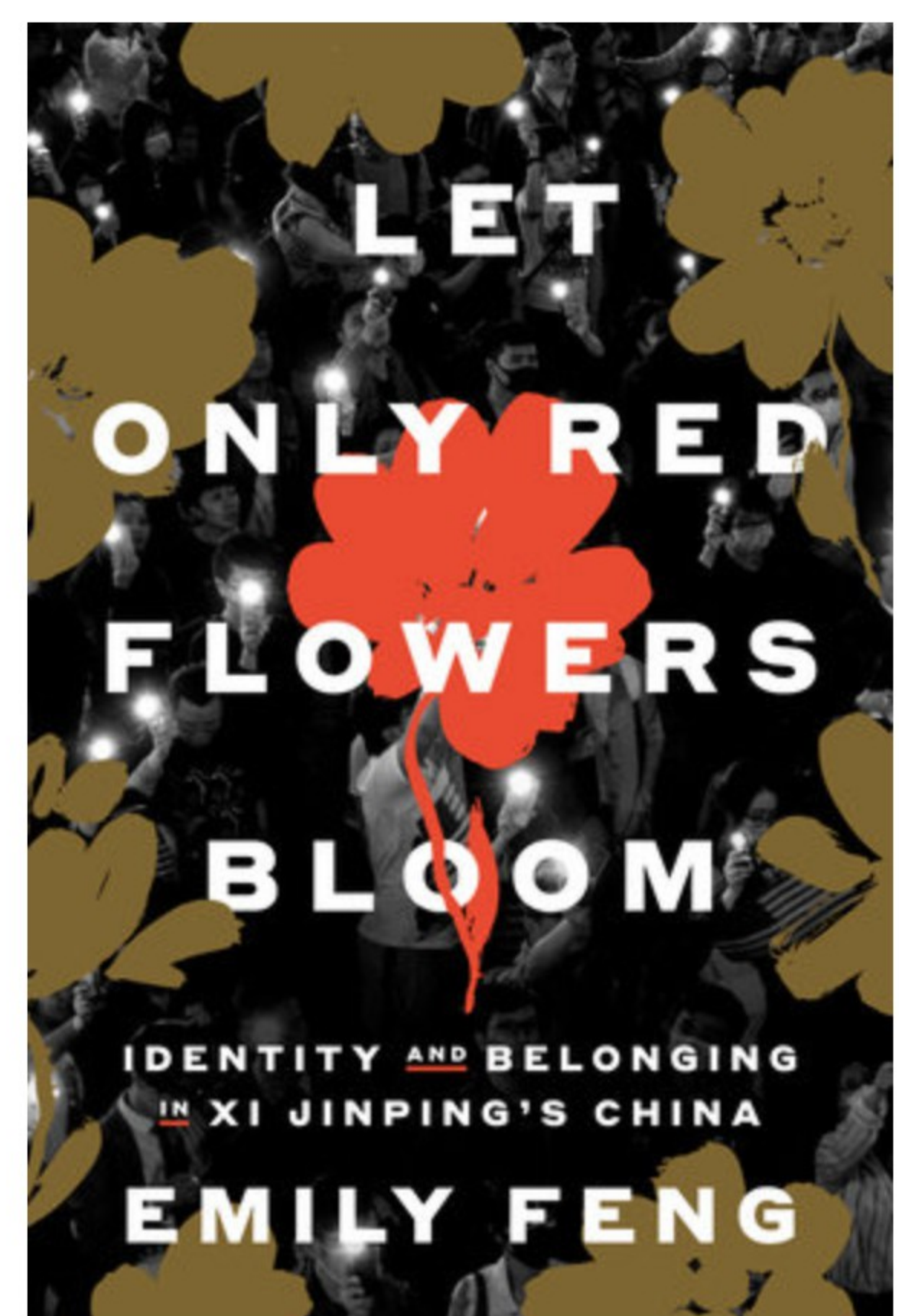
The award-winning NPR correspondent tells about her new book, the challenges of reporting in China, and what it means to be Chinese when the state cracks down on diversity.

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SOCIETY



Conformity is a prized commodity in the Xi Jinping era. For those who don't conform — to the Party narrative, or to a narrow definition of what it means to be “Chinese” — the state attempts to conform them, through pressure, censorship or detention. This battle over identity in China is the core theme of *Let Only Red Flowers Bloom: Identity and Belonging in Xi Jinping's China* (Crown, March 2025), a reported investigation of state oppression and grassroots push-back, from award-winning NPR correspondent Emily Feng. Based on her journalism on the ground, the book narrates the stories of varied individuals in China who run against the grain of society: a Uyghur family split apart by detention camps; human rights lawyers fighting to defend civil liberties; a teacher from Inner Mongolia fighting for his mother tongue; and a Hong Kong fugitive trying to find a new home. Last week, we published an [excerpt](#) of the book about a scooter thief, Zhou Liqi, who went viral on the Chinese internet.


[Buy the book >](#)

Earlier this week, we were delighted to welcome Emily Feng for a book event at Asia Society in New York to talk us through these stories, and the challenges she faced as a reporter to gather them — ultimately leading to her own expulsion from China in 2022 — in conversation with *China Books Review* editor Alec Ash:



“As someone who is Chinese-American, identity is something I think about a lot, and is one of the reasons I moved to China.”

— *Emily Feng*

Speakers



Emily Feng is an award-winning international correspondent for NPR covering China, Taiwan and beyond. Previously a foreign correspondent for *The Financial Times*, she lived in Beijing from 2015 to 2022, and then Taiwan from 2022 to 2024. Recipient of the Daniel Schorr Journalism Prize and the Shorenstein Journalism Award, Feng is the author of *Let Only Red Flowers Bloom* (Crown, 2025). She lives in Washington D.C.



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.

The video of this talk was also published at [Asia Society](#). ■