Book prize



BOOK LIST

What China's Reading: Uncertain Times

China's economy is unsteady, its publishing industry facing hard times — yet interesting books continue to come out. Here are five of them, from psychotherapy to mountaineering.

NA ZHONG - MAY 20, 2025

SOCIETY

X f Q X S o far, it's been a turbulent spring. As China and the U.S. face off in yet another <u>trade war</u>, readers in America — still reeling from panic-buying eggs and doom-spending — are bracing themselves for the seismic shock of tariffs imposed, revoked, pending and paused. It's too early to tell where the relationship between the two countries will go, or how its ups and downs might shape American readers' curiosity about China. Now that many Americans are more acutely aware of how much of their daily lives are supported by the world's factory, will they also become more interested in what's being written, published and read in China?

The past few months haven't been smooth sailing for China, either. Consumer spending remains <u>sluggish</u>, youth unemployment is still <u>high</u>, and the publishing industry is facing <u>an</u> <u>existential crisis</u>. In this time of uncertainty, readers there are turning to books that don't shy away from darkness or ambiguity. The five recent Chinese titles selected below do exactly that. For the brave-hearted, two novels plunge into the biting chill of the darkest hour before dawn. For those feeling blue, a two-volume interview collection packed with invigorating conversations offers hope. For the adventurous or introspective, two nonfiction books will take you to the top of snow-capped mountains and deep into the recesses of the human mind.



Buy the book >

Expressions of the Mind 心的表达

LI QINYUN JANUARY 1, 2025 SHANGHAI ART & LITERATURE PUBLISHING HOUSE

Psychological illnesses have long been stigmatized in Chinese society. Those affected often avoid seeking help from specialists or feel ashamed to speak about their struggles. Yet in recent years — especially since the pandemic and accompanying lockdowns — there has been a growing interest in mental wellbeing and psychoanalysis as a discipline within China. Li Qinyun, a Chinese psychotherapist practicing in the U.S., responds to this growing interest with her first essay collection, Expressions of the Mind. Drawing from years of study and practice, she shares anecdotes and reflections as both a provider and recipient of professional help. A Buddhist, first-generation immigrant and mother of two, Li draws meaningful connections between her multiple identities. How does one initiate deep communication in a second language? How can one bridge the divides of culture, gender, race and religion? Written with candor and generosity, Li's book is timely fare for readers in China still recovering from experiences that are difficult to express.



Buy the book >

2. Spring Will Never Fall *白露春分*

LIAO JING SEPTEMBER 3, 2024 THINKINGDOM

Spring Will Never Fall is an elegy for a fictional family's slow unraveling. It begins with the decline in health of Xiumei, a 75year-old widowed mother of two sons and a daughter. As she approaches the final stage of her life, none of her family members — except for her granddaughter Jiayue — offer the love and care she so deeply needs. At the center of this dysfunctional family lie memories of past abuse inflicted on Xiumei and her children by her late husband. The novel filters trips, gatherings and hospital visits through Jiayue's eyes as she quietly measures her life against that of her overachieving cousin Jiayuan (who, as it turns out, is leading a double life). The author of two short story collections and a novel, Liao Jing is known for her ability to build tension in domestic scenes and her controlled yet supple prose. This well-paced, quietly observant family tale cements her as one of the finest storytellers of her generation.



Buy the book >

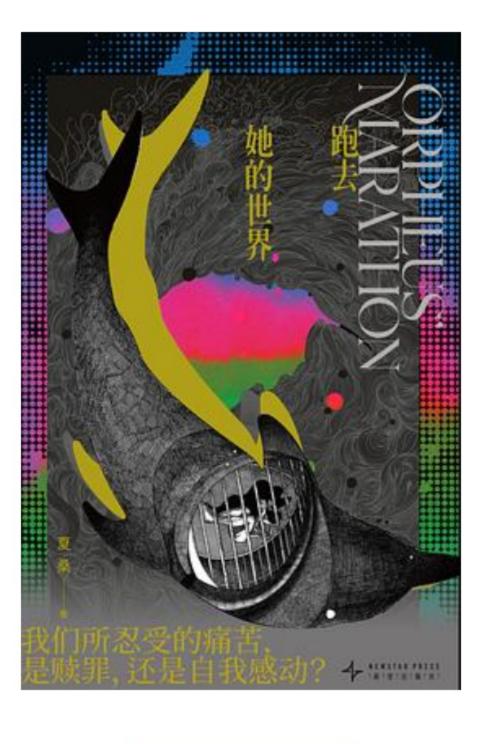
3. In Praise of Non-Silence *赞美不沉默*

ZHANG ZHIQI, FU SHIYE, LENG JIANGUO, ET APRIL 1, AL. 2025

NEW STAR

PRESS

The second part of a two-volume interview collection, following <u>Gender: Female</u> (性别: 女), this work offers insight into the zeitgeist of contemporary Chinese society and how young women navigate their place within it. The collection features selected transcripts from one of the most popular Mandarin Chinese podcasts, <u>Stochastic Volatility</u> (随机波动), itself a reincarnation of an earlier podcast that was banned by authorities. Founded in 2019 by three women with news backgrounds, the podcast featured in-depth interviews with impactful voices across diverse fields, such as the painter Chen Danging and the scholar David Der-wei Wang. The podcast responds to pressing social and cultural phenomena — from reflections on the post-pandemic "new normal" to challenges faced by female stand-up comedians — driving conversations around gender equality, civic responsibility, work and parenting. Now published in book form for the first time, these handpicked dialogues offer a vivid snapshot of the intellectuals shaping China's public discourse.



Buy the book >

4. Orpheus' Marathon 跑去她的世界

XIA SANG AUGUST 1, 2024 NEW STAR PRESS

We meet the hero of this speculative novel, Shen Yuming, at the lowest point of his life. A DNF (did not finish) in a high-profile marathon leaves him with a severe knee injury and deep depression. Just as he begins to recover, his wife and son are killed in an accident. To help him cope with suicidal thoughts, his best friend offers him an experimental drug that can activate "temporal entanglement" once certain conditions are met, allowing the user to travel through time. Through running, Shen discovers he can re-experience his past — where his wife and son are still alive — with a sensory clarity indistinguishable from the present. Desperate to linger in those moments and eventually replace his former self, he keeps running, only to find this illusory world haunted by nightmares and uncertainty. Drawing on physics, psychology and religion, *Orpheus*'

Marathon, the second book from sci-fi editor Xia Sang, is a brilliantly imagined novel about the pain of loss, trauma and rebirth.



5. Higher than Mountains 比山更高

SONG MINGWEI JUNE 1, 2024 SHANGHAI ART & LITERATURE PUBLISHING HOUSE

Historically, Chinese mountaineering followed a Soviet-style expedition model: large support teams and Party-state financial backing. Over the past 20 years, however, a new generation of independent alpine-style climbers has emerged. Inspired by international climbing philosophies, they form smaller teams, carry minimal gear, and aim for fast, self-sufficient ascents. According to *Higher than Mountains*, there are only a few hundred climbers in China engaged in this dangerous outdoor sport. In their pursuit of the mountains, many have given up college degrees, lucrative careers, and the possibility of a conventional life. What have they gained? What first drew them to the mountains? Through interviews with trailblazers in the field, and first-hand reporting from climbing expeditions, Song Mingwei pieces together a compelling portrait of China's growing alpine mountaineering scene and situates it within a changing Chinese society, from the 2008 Beijing Olympics to the rise of social media. A captivating read for anyone fascinated by the risks mountaineers are willing to take to transcend themselves.



Hailing from Chengdu, Na Zhong is a New York-based fiction writer and literary translator. Her work has appeared in *Guernica*, *A Public Space*, *Lit Hub* and others. She co-founded the bilingual creative community, <u>Accent Society</u>, and co-hosts the Mandarin literary podcast <u>謝島FM</u>. Na is a 2021-2022 Center for Fiction Emerging Writers Fellow, and a 2023 MacDowell Fellow.