

BOOK PRIZE

Nominations Open for 2027 Baifang Schell Book Prize

Our book prize returns in its third year, celebrating exceptional books on or from China and the Sinophone world, in nonfiction and fiction categories.

EDITORS — NOVEMBER 10, 2026

MISC.

At *China Books Review*, a digital magazine published by *The Wire China* and Asia Society's Center on U.S.-China Relations, we are proud to announce the return of the Baifang Schell Book Prize. The prize, held at Asia Society in New York, celebrates exceptional book-length works on or from China and the Sinophone world, published in English in the previous calendar year.

There are awards in two categories, each accompanied by a $10,000 prize:

- **Nonfiction** *(Award for Outstanding Nonfiction Book on China or the Sinophone World)*
- **Literature** *(Award for Outstanding Literature from or on China or the Sinophone World)*



These awards seek to recognize books that further our understanding of China and the broader region, and encourage future works of quality. The prize is named in honor of Liu Baifang Schell, who passed in 2021 after spending her life working to advance U.S.-China relations. It is administered by *China Books Review*, but the winners are chosen by two independent juries.

Last year, the juries selected Barbara Demick's *Daughters of the Bamboo Grove: From China to America, a True Story of Abduction, Adoption, and Separated Twins* (Random House, May 2025) as the nonfiction winner, and *The Running Flame: A Novel* (Columbia University Press, March 2025) by Fang Fang (author) and Michael Berry (translator) as the fiction winner. Both were celebrated at an awards ceremony at Asia Society in New York last June, along with the shortlisted titles and honorable mentions.



Jury chair Isabel Hilton (right) gives Barbara Demick (left) her award.

Nominations are now open for the 2027 awards, considering books published in 2026! To nominate up to two books per individual or publisher, just email *info[at]chinabooksreview.com*. See below for full details and an FAQ. The nomination period is open until December 10, and the shortlists, winners and honorable mentions will be announced next spring. Subscribe to our free newsletter to follow along with the process, and find out who won.

How to Nominate

The nomination period runs from November 1 to December 10. Nominations are open to the general public (with China experts invited in particular), subject to the following restrictions:

- Every **individual** can only nominate a maximum of *two books* across both award categories (e.g., one per category, or two nonfiction, or two fiction, or only one book).
- **Publishers** count as individuals. Each imprint can therefore also nominate a maximum of two books across both award categories, as nominated by a single representative.
- You cannot nominate your own book. But you can ask someone else, or your publisher, to do so for you.
- The first English-language edition of all books must be published between January 1, 2026, and December 31, 2026 (see below for full qualifying details in each category.)

To make a nomination, email *info[at]chinabooksreview* with:

- The **title** and **author** of the book(s) you are nominating. (Please check the publication date of the first English language edition to ensure that it is in the current calendar year.)
- Preferably, the award category (nonfiction or fiction) you are nominating each book for.
- Your publishing house or imprint if you are nominating as a publisher.

Please title your email "Book prize nomination" and keep it short. All nominations we receive count equally as one nomination for that book. We will disregard any value statements about the book(s), as we only log the nomination(s) to pass onto the juries.

FAQ

Why did you start these awards?

By our count, over 600 English-language books on or from China and the Sinophone world are published every year (a combination of trade, academic and fiction books), but only a tiny fraction of these titles are covered by the press. We believe that important work deserves real reward — not only to *recognize* the efforts of authors, but to *encourage* future work in a climate where there is not enough understanding of China, at a juncture of history when that understanding is more critical than ever, especially the in-depth research and storytelling that book-length works can afford.

What books qualify for consideration?

- Only books published in the English language will be considered.
- Only books published in print by a publishing house or imprint qualify (not self-published/KDP).
- The first English-language edition of the book must be published in the calendar year under consideration (not considering any original edition, if in translation).
- For the **nonfiction** award: Any nonfiction book written for the general adult reader whose subject or setting is China, the Sinophone world (including Taiwan) or the Chinese diaspora. Reference books, textbooks, travel guides, recipe books and how-to guides do not qualify. Academic titles do not qualify, but books written for the general reader and published by academic presses do.
- For the **literature** award: Any novel, novella, story collection, graphic novel, or work of drama or poetry (published as a book) for adults whose subject or setting is China, the Sinophone world (including Taiwan) or the Chinese diaspora. Anthologies with multiple authors do not qualify. Children's and YA books do not qualify, but fantasy/sci-fi and other genre fiction does.
- Authors employed by *China Books Review* or its publishers are disqualified (but not authors employed by other departments of Asia Society).

What are the criteria for selection of the winners?

The juries are fully independent, but are encouraged to reward books that carry forward the conversation on China or the Sinophone world — bringing new research, arguments or stories to light, in a compelling fashion, to further our understanding of the region in all its complexities.

The **nonfiction jury** is given the following broad criteria to reward in particular:

- *Quality*. Work that shines out for its assiduousness, ambition, clarity of thought and other measures of success, based on merit and disregarding of political stance.
- *Originality*. Whether through reporting, research or analysis, work that contributes something new to the conversation around greater China that has not been said before.
- *Readability*. Work that is easy for the general reader to follow without special prior knowledge, and whose writing and style is actively enjoyable.

The **literature jury** is given the following broad criteria to reward in particular:

- *Story*. The ability of plot, character, theme and perspective to engage the reader deeply, making them think or feel strongly.
- *Style*. The quality, originality and fluidity of language, as rendered into English if in translation (not considering the original).
- *Substance*. The skill with which themes and topics are examined (based on literary merit, not political or other viewpoint).

Who in on the juries?

This year, the nonfiction jury is: Jeffrey Wasserstrom (chair), Yangyang Cheng, Julian Gewirtz, Isabel Hilton, Andrew Nathan. The current fiction jury is: Megan Walsh (chair), Eric Abrahamsen, Jack Hargreaves, Nicky Harman.

What is your process?

This is the order of our process as administrators of the prize:

- Shortly after the nomination period opens, we post on the site and social media calling for nominations. We also email a list of respected China scholars, writers and experts asking them to send in nominations.
- After the nomination period ends, all nominated titles are collected and sent to the juries for their information. Judges are then able to nominate further titles to add to the list for their collective consideration (but do not send in nominations as part of the general public).
- The juries consider all nominated titles to come up with a shortlist of five books (which are published on the site with blurbs from the judges, in no particular order).
- From that shortlist, the juries decide the winners and honorable mentions (which are announced on the site and in a press release, with collective praise from the jury).
- The award winners are recognized at an invite-only awards ceremony at Asia Society in New York, with two mini-panels in conversation with judges. The video of this event is then posted to the site.

How do you ensure fairness?

The jury for each award has full independence to choose the shortlist, winner and honorable mention from all qualifying books. They are instructed to disclose relationships with authors and publishers under consideration, and can recuse themselves from those discussions. The criteria of selection for the winner are based on merit alone, not background or beliefs.

If the nomination period is in November, how are books published in December considered?

The nomination period is in November in order to give our juries maximum time for their reading. We take special effort to review our internal list of upcoming books to be published in December, bringing them to the jury's attention (ARCs or finished copies are generally available), so that they are not disadvantaged in receiving fewer public nominations. However, we will also accept late extra nominations (before January 1) from the public for books published in both November and December.

How is the prize money divided?

If a book has multiple authors, the cash award is divided equally among them (with editors counting as authors for edited collections with multiple contributors). If a book is translated, the cash award is split in half between the author(s) and translator(s) — that is, two translators of a winning novel would each receive $2,500. Each winner also receives a physical award.

Who funds the prize?

The prize is funded by a grant and individual donations; it's budget is separate to that of *China Books Review*.

I have another question.

For all other questions and media inquiries, please email *info[at]chinabooksreview.com*. ∎