12-19-2008

Last Minute Gifts: China Books

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So you’ve put off holiday shopping until now. If you’d like to share your love of China this year, here are a few recommendations for old classics and more recent releases for the recipients on your list. All these books are widely available and relatively affordable.

1. *Fortress Besieged*, by Qian Zhongshu

*For: The Literature Lover*

We’ve written about this 1947 novel at China Beat before. It is a classic of Chinese literature, but not particularly well known in the West, making it the perfect gift for a well-read friend or relative.


*For: The Europhile*

In John Hu, a Chinese convert brought to Paris by a French Jesuit in 1722, Spence found a lively and affecting example of the confusion of cross-cultural interactions.

3. *The Story of the Stone (Hongloumeng)*, by Cao Xueqin (trans. by David Hawkes)

*For: Jane Austen Fans*

“Dream of the Red Mansion,” in this version translated as “Story of the Stone,” is the most important of Chinese novels, telling the story of the inner life of two elite Manchu families. David Hawkes’s translation puts the Qing novel into the language of the English aristocracy (in five volumes; we’ve linked to Volume 1 above).
4. The Man Awakened From Dreams: One Man’s Life in a North China Village, 1857-1942, Henrietta Harrison
   
   For: The Sinophile
   
   Liu Dapeng’s life straddled China’s wrenching transition to modernity. In this book, Harrison tells that story through one man’s life in rural Shanxi.

5. China: Fragile Superpower, Susan Shirk
   
   For: The Policy Wonk
   
   Of the many books available on “understanding” China and its political relationships to the US, this is one of the best and most readable. Read an earlier China Beat review of it here.