



CIT's 2011 Holiday Shopping Guide for China-Themed Gifts

As the season of giving, the holidays are a time of joy. But when you can't think of good gift ideas for your loved ones, it can also be a time of frustration. We'd like to help you avoid that frustration by offering our gift suggestions for people who have an interest in China or China-related products. We hope you enjoy our first annual holiday shopping guide.

Since our clients are located all over the United States and even outside the country, this list focuses on online stores rather than local stores, though we certainly encourage you to support local businesses when possible! Please [contact us](#) if you have a suggestion to add to this list or have information to share about one of the products or retailers on this list.

Please note that CIT has no affiliation whatsoever with any of these companies or products (other than our own, of course). We are promoting them only because we think you may find this information helpful.

The Ultimate Gift: A China Tour Package

Take advantage of CIT's **Early Bird Special discount**: \$100 off the price of a standard tour package (CIT001 – CIT011) for clients who book and pay for a 2012 tour no later than January 31. See our full list of tours on our [Mainland China Tours](#) page. (As always, we'll also be glad to put together a custom tour package to take you anywhere in China you'd like to go.) *Please note that this offer may not be combined with any other offer.*

Wild China DVD or Blu-ray Set

An acclaimed documentary produced by the BBC, [Wild China](#) focuses on a side of China that doesn't get a lot of coverage in the Western media: stunningly beautiful natural areas like Zhangjiajie, Xianggelila, Guilin, and Huangshan (Yellow Mountain). The 6-episode series is narrated by Bernard Hill (King Theoden in the *Lord of the Rings* movies) and contains spectacular footage of remote places that are rarely seen, as well as places that are easily accessible to tourists but no less beautiful. It also gives fascinating insights into the lives of the people living in such areas, especially their relationship with the land and its wildlife. If you enjoyed *Planet Earth* and you're interested in China, you'll love *Wild China*. The higher-definition [Blu-ray version](#) is highly recommended in order to fully enjoy the magnificent footage captured in the series.

Note: Netflix and Amazon Prime customers can stream *Wild China* in high definition for free!

If after watching *Wild China* you feel a sudden urge to visit the incomparably beautiful places it documents, take a look at our [tour packages](#). Our [Yunnan Highlands](#) and [Majestic Scenery](#) tours, in particular, highlight these destinations. You might also consider arranging a custom tour to visit a unique combination of scenic areas.

Other DVDs and Blu-rays

Here are a few other Chinese or China-related movies that we think you or your loved ones may enjoy. Many more films will be highlighted in future blog posts and shopping guides, as China has produced a number of the world's greatest films over the last twenty years.

[Infernal Affairs – Blu-ray](#) (無間道): The acclaimed Hong Kong thriller that inspired *The Departed*, featuring Andy Lau, Tony Leung, and other stars of HK cinema. *Note that the [DVD version available on Amazon](#) is (probably inaccurately) described as being dubbed in French.*

[Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon – Blu-ray](#) (臥虎藏龍): Though the new version of the film's English subtitles has received some criticism, this new Blu-ray presentation is stunningly beautiful. Relive this contemporary classic in high-definition glory. (And if you'd like to visit the lovely [Hong Village](#), where



some of the scenes were filmed, take a look at CIT's [Jiangnan Gourmet Cuisine/Yellow Mountain 10-Day Tour!](#))

[Red Cliff \(International Version\) – Blu-ray](#) (赤壁): Director John Woo's uncut, 288-minute adaptation of the Chinese literary classic *Romance of the Three Kingdoms* is another film that has achieved both critical acclaim and great popularity. It features some of the most ambitious battle scenes ever filmed. See them in high definition on this Blu-ray release.

[Shower](#) (洗澡): A contemporary Chinese family drama involving the conflict between the traditional and modern worlds. A materialistic "prodigal son" with a successful career in Shenzhen, whose family runs a bathhouse in Beijing, returns home to visit his aging father and mentally challenged brother. There he finds himself slowly drawn into the traditional world he had left behind. A touching film that laments the precious, human things lost in the fast-paced lifestyle and relentless change of the modern world.

[Last Train Home](#) (归于列车): A moving documentary directed by Yixin Fan that candidly reveals the challenges faced by a rural family. Like many of China's 130 million migrant workers, the Zhangs have had to leave their children in their home village while they pursue more lucrative work in the hope of giving their children a chance at a better life. Raw and tough-provoking, but also beautiful and sometimes funny, the film presents their experiences in a way that is universally understandable.

[China from the Inside](#): In the U.S. media, we are often exposed to a very narrowly Western perspective on China. As its title suggests, the 2007 PBS documentary series *China from the Inside* makes a genuine effort to present representative opinions from many Chinese citizens, scholars, and government officials on some of the major issues and challenges in contemporary Chinese society. The producers of the series had unprecedented access to places and activities that could not be easily seen by foreigners, and many of the people interviewed speak with refreshing candor. Through its objective but sensitive portrayal of the lives of ordinary citizens, the film makes contemporary China comprehensible even to Westerners not already familiar with it. The major topics covered in the four-part series are the status of women, the Communist Party, environmental challenges, and justice and freedom. Highly recommended to anyone who wants to gain real insight into Chinese society.

China-Related Books

[China Books](#) (originally known as China Books and Periodicals), founded in 1960 and now located in South San Francisco, has some good deals in the "bargain bin" and "clearance" sections of its website.

Books About Chinese Art, Literature, and Philosophy

[Art in China \(Oxford History of Art\)](#) (Craig Clunas): This comprehensive introduction to China's 5,000 years of **visual arts** is an expanded 2009 edition of the [highly rated first edition published in 1997](#). Available for Kindle.

Highly rated books that focus on the **architectural wonders and other important sites in China** include [China's Sacred Sites](#) by Professor Nan Shunxun and Beverly Foit-Albert, which features photographs of not only temples and other important architecture but also the stunning landscapes that they adorn; [Chinese Houses: The Architectural Heritage of a Nation](#) by Ronald G. Knapp, Jonathan Spence, and A. Chester Ong; and Yale University Press's voluminous [Chinese Architecture](#), the third volume in a planned 75-volume series on Chinese culture, which boasts contributions from six leading historians of Chinese architecture.

For people interested in **Taoist philosophy**, there are a wide range of English texts to choose from. Here is a brief guide to the most acclaimed English editions of the Tao Te Ching (道德經, or Dao De Jing):

- [David Hinton's translation](#) is critically acclaimed for its poetic beauty as well as its linguistic and philosophical accuracy. Although it is currently not in stock at Amazon, it can be purchased through one of the many booksellers listed under "[more buying choices](#)."



- [The Vintage translation by Gia-Fu Feng and Jane English](#), long prized for its poetic evocation of Lao Tzu's style, has recently been republished in a new edition. Like the popular original, it is an oversized book (10.9 x 8.4 inches) enhanced with meditative photos and a calligraphic version of the Chinese text. (There is also a smaller edition available, so take care when ordering.) *Available for Kindle and iBooks on January 4, 2012.*
- [Red Pine's spare and elegant translation](#) is acclaimed as a faithful rendering of the original. Envisioned as "a discussion between Lao Tzu and a group of people who have thought deeply about his text," this edition is also unique in providing selections from the many commentaries produced over more than two thousand years by Chinese thinkers to complement the text and give deeper insight into its meaning.
- The audaciously titled [Tao Te Ching: The Definitive Edition](#), translated and compiled by Jonathan Star, is a useful resource for anyone who wants to take a scholarly, in-depth approach to reading the text. In addition to his literary translation, it features a literal, line-by-line translation, as well as notes on the possible meanings and connotations of each character.
- [Tao: The Way \(The Sayings of Lao Tzu, Chuang Tzu, and Lieh Tzu\)](#) includes revised versions of the classic translations by the scholars Lionel and Herbert Giles, presented in a unique format. Rather than separating the three texts, it combines selections from each text in topical sections like "Tao as a Moral Principle, or Virtue" and "The Doctrine of Inaction." For someone interested in a philosophy-oriented survey of Taoism, this is an especially useful book. *Available for Kindle.*

As an introduction to **Chinese poetry** in translation, David Hinton's [Classical Chinese Poetry: An Anthology](#) is a perfect gift. More than simply providing a faithful and pleasant translation, Hinton's ear for verse gives these poems an added power that makes them worth reading as works of English literature too. Writer Bei Dao (Zhao Zhenkai) gave Hinton's translations just about the highest praise possible: "Given the magnitude of his ability and his overall project, Hinton is creating nothing less than a new literary tradition in English, an event of truly major importance not only to English literature but also to the literature of my own language. I cannot recommend the value of his work too highly."

Books About Chinese Society

[China: Portrait of a People](#) (Tom Carter): The photos in this book were taken during a two-year journey taken by the author through all of China's 33 provinces. Despite the fact that it is no longer easily available and is being sold by many retailers for more than the cover price, it is highly recommended for its stunning photos, which are both beautiful and truly representative of China's many ethnic groups—you can see several sample photos on the book's Amazon page, and there is also a ["book trailer" on YouTube](#) with an array of architecture-oriented photos from the book. *Note: Look carefully at current shipping information before ordering directly from Amazon; items that are not currently in stock are sometimes never again available. Instead, look at the ["more buying choices"](#) options.*

[Wild Swans: Three Daughters of China](#) (Jung Chang): This powerful book tells the story of three women whose lives span the tumultuous changes in Chinese society over the course of the 20th century: Chang's grandmother, her mother, and Chang herself. Both critically acclaimed and popular, *Wild Swans* is featured in many university and high school courses. *Available for iBooks.*

[Factory Girls: From Village to City in a Changing China](#) (Leslie Chang): Written by a former Beijing correspondent for the *Wall Street Journal*, *Factory Girls* focuses on the lives of young women in southern China who have left home to take assembly-line work in search of a better future. In intimate detail, it reveals the intense, fast-paced world of migrant workers that is experienced by 130 million people in China but glimpsed by few outsiders. *Available for Kindle and iBooks.*

[Country Driving: A Journey Through China from Farm to Factory](#) (Peter Hessler): Hessler, a Mandarin-speaking American (and husband of Leslie Chang) who has spent years living and traveling in China, is a sharp, sympathetic, and dauntless observer and explorer with a gift for drawing you into his experiences. *Country Driving*, as its title suggests, covers his extensive road trips through northern China, as well as the time he spent living in a village outside Beijing and visiting factories in southern China. Moving, fascinating, and funny, it is highly recommended for anyone who is interested in understanding the effects



that China's rapid changes have had on its people. Hessler has also written two other well-received books about his time in China: [*River Town: Two Years on the Yangtze*](#) and [*Oracle Bones*](#). Available for Kindle and iBooks.

[*This Is China: The First 5,000 Years*](#) (Haiwang Yuan): This introduction to China and its history draws from [*The Berkshire Encyclopedia of China*](#) to give readers a concise but comprehensive overview of China. Available for Kindle.

[*China \(DK Eyewitness Books\)*](#) (Hugh Sebag-Montefiore): This book provides a great introduction to contemporary China for children, with a wealth of photos and information. DK's [*Ancient China*](#) (by Arthur Cotterell) provides a complementary overview of China's long history.

Chinese Language-Related Books

[*Niubi: The Real Chinese You Were Never Taught in School*](#) (Eveline Chao): One fascinating effect of China's continuing growth and modernization on its popular culture is the explosion in slang expressions that has occurred in recent years, in large part because of the use of the Internet by ever-larger numbers of Chinese citizens. As in the United States, wildly creative, funny, and vulgar new slang can become popular overnight as a result of mass exposure online. Many now-common colloquialisms are given a clear and thorough explanation in this book. For anyone who wants to really speak like a native and have fun with the dynamic, living language that is contemporary Mandarin, this book is a great resource. Available for iBooks.

[*Modern Mandarin Chinese Grammar: A Practical Guide*](#) (Claudia Ross and Jing-heng Sheng Ma): For the serious student of Mandarin, this 432-page guide presents detailed, comprehensive information about contemporary grammar and usage. To make the book as useful and relevant as possible, its authors favor the practical over the obscure.

[*Learning Chinese Characters, Vol. 1: A Revolutionary New Way to Learn and Remember the 800 Most Basic Chinese Characters*](#) (Alison Matthews, Laurence Matthews): Most helpful for beginners but also a good reference tool for more advanced learners, this book uses a cartoon-based mnemonic approach to aid in memorization. It presents the characters in a logical order that also makes them easier to memorize, and it also contains useful information about each character.

[*Schaum's Outline of Chinese Vocabulary*](#) (Yanping Xie and Duan-Duan Li): For intermediate-level students, this book contains a well-designed course of 200 exercises to help students understand and memorize practical vocabulary, including topics like computer terminology that are neglected in many other Mandarin sources.

[*Chinese \(Mandarin\), Conversational: Learn to Speak and Understand Mandarin Chinese with Pimsleur Language Programs \(Pimsleur Instant Conversation\)*](#): This well-reviewed audiobook (CD) conversational Mandarin course of 16 half-hour lessons is based on the Pimsleur Method. There is also a much more expensive [*30-lesson version*](#) available.

Chinese Language Educational Software

[*Multimedia Learning Suite Chinese Characters Memory Lifter*](#): Presented in a convenient "plug and play" USB stick format, this program uses multimedia flashcards organized by subject to help you memorize 3,000 Chinese words. Its useful features include a variety of learning modes, the ability to track your learning progress, statistical feedback on your performance, the ability to edit and expand vocabulary sets with your own data, and the ability to print flashcards. The package also includes a study guide, introductory videos, MP3 audiobooks for playback on portable listening devices, and a "Learn to Learn" booklet to help you get the most out of the system.

[*Fluency Version F2: Mandarin 1+2+3 with supplemental Audio CDs and Podcasts*](#): A well-reviewed (but expensive) 3-disc, 75-lesson CD-ROM set with two audio CDs and supplemental podcasts. Since this



course uses pinyin (romanized Chinese) only without Chinese characters, it is appropriate for those who are only interested in learning to speak the language or who want to use this course as a supplement to other materials. The developers of this course describe it as a teacher-oriented approach, with each lesson led by a tutor. They emphasize that in contrast to other learning systems that focus on mimicking patterns, their course involves explanations of grammar and sentence structure to build clear, conscious understanding. *For both PC and Mac operating systems, though Mac OS X users should be aware that as of three months ago, the program would not run properly on Lion.*

Tea and Teaware

Good information about tea and teaware can be found on the discussion boards at [TeaChat](#).

Yixing zisha (“purple clay”) teapots are prized for both their beauty and the added richness they impart to the flavor of tea. Although there are apparently a number of English-language retail websites that sell authentic Yixing teapots, my research suggests that the sites introduced below may be the best places to purchase them. However, to ensure faster shipping for Christmas, you might also consider purchasing a pot directly from the [Yixing teapots page](#) on the U.S.-based website of Yunnan Sourcing.

- [Chinese Shouzhen Zisha Teapots](#): The family of Cheng Shouzhen, makers of traditional handcrafted zisha teapots, sell their wares directly through this site. Although some people have complained about their customer service (in particular, inaccuracies in the size of the teapots, which are often larger than their descriptions on the website suggest), the quality of their products is high.
- [Wan Ling Tea House](#): With a tea shop in Shanghai and other operations based in the U.K., Wan Ling Tea House is a great source for both tea leaves and tea accessories, including Yixing teapots.
- [Chinese Tea Culture](#): This site is operated by a Mandarin-speaking American living in China who is able to ensure the quality of the products he sells (tea leaves, Yixing teapots, and other tea accessories) by getting them directly from producers.

[Teavana Yixing Travel Tea Tumbler](#): Although for this price it may not contain true high-quality zisha, this stainless-steel, clay-lined thermal tumbler provides an inexpensive and practical way to add a traditional twist to your daily tea drinking experience.

The following books would make great gifts for anyone interested in learning more about tea culture and the complexities of tea itself:

- [The Tea Drinker's Handbook](#) (Francois-xavier Delmas, Mathias Minet, and Christine Barbaste): Written in clear English by the co-directors of France's Le Palais des Thés (“Palace of Tea”) retail chain, this well-designed, accurate, and comprehensive book goes beyond many other books about tea in giving detailed information about tea bushes and the cultivation of tea. It also features 200 full-color photographs and illustrations.
- [The Tea Enthusiast's Handbook: A Guide to Enjoying the World's Best Teas](#) and [The Story of Tea: A Cultural History & Drinking Guide](#) (Mary Lou Heiss and Robert J. Heiss): Written by the founders of [Tea Trekker](#), these books have received a great deal of critical praise and high marks from readers. The *Handbook* is a “pocket guide” (for a large pocket) that focuses on practical buying, brewing, and tasting advice; *The Story of Tea* is a more comprehensive tea tome augmented by 150 full-color photographs. *Both books are also available on Amazon, though the Handbook is currently not in stock.*

Chinese Cuisine

[Easy Chinese Recipes: Family Favorites From Dim Sum to Kung Pao](#) (Bee Yinn Low) and [The Steamy Kitchen Cookbook: 101 Asian Recipes Simple Enough for Tonight's Dinner](#) (Jaden Hair): Two very highly rated cookbooks covering the spectrum of Chinese cuisine, with an emphasis on convenient recipes that use ingredients available at American supermarkets.

[Joyce Chen 10-Inch Bamboo Steamer Set](#) and [Joyce Chen Parchment Steamer Liners, 10 in. \(50 Count\)](#): A set of two stackable bamboo steaming baskets, along with convenient paper liners fitted to the baskets.



[14-Inch Traditional Cast Iron Wok Set](#): A perfect gift for the budding Chinese cook who wants to cook the traditional way, this is an “old-school” wok (without teflon) that has received rave reviews on Amazon. It includes five pieces: the wok, an aluminum lid, a stainless steel spatula, a ring, and a bamboo cleaning whisk. For a high-quality teflon-coated wok, consider [this 14-inch wok from T-Fal](#).

Chinese Art and Calligraphy

Mystic East Art’s website, chinesepaintings.com, has a good reputation and features beautiful Chinese-style paintings—original paintings only, not prints. [Oriental Furniture](#) is a highly rated seller with a broader selection of Chinese and Asian furniture, art, and decorative accessories.

[Oriental Art Supply](#) and [Asian Art Mall](#) are two reputable online retailers that offer a huge selection of calligraphy- and art-related supplies and products. Oriental Art Supply is owned by the family of [Dr. Ning Yeh](#), an accomplished painter.

Here are a few art-related gift ideas available on Amazon:

[Chinese calligraphy writing and brush painting set](#) (by [Reorient](#)) with 5 brushes, an ink stick, an inkstone, signing ink, a water well, a brush rest, and a stone chop. Although this product is highly rated, be aware that the brushes are quite small and may be unsuitable for people with larger hands. Reorient, which sells through Amazon, is a highly rated merchant with a wide variety of products.

[Chinese Calligraphy Made Easy: A Structured Course in Creating Beautiful Brush Lettering](#) (Rebecca Yue): A well-reviewed book for beginning practitioners of Chinese calligraphy.

[Hanshi rice paper, 100 loose sheets](#): Used for Chinese and Japanese calligraphy and brush painting. Note the shipping charge of \$5.95.

Kung Fu and Martial Arts

[The Martial Arts Store](#) has an incredible selection of martial arts-related goods.

[Feiyue martial arts shoes](#): These shoes are apparently the kind worn by Shaolin monks during training. Flexible, padded, and light, they are ideal for martial arts and similar activities. One drawback is that the shoes’ rubbery soles have a strong smell at first that diminishes over time. Note that these shoes are different (lighter, for martial arts practice) than the shoes sold on the official Feiyue website based in France, which are more fashion-oriented shoes.

[The Way of Energy: Mastering the Chinese Art of Internal Strength with Chi Kung Exercise](#) (Master Lam Kam-Chuen): An introduction to zhan zhuang (站桩), a basic but powerful form of qigong/chi kung (氣功) that involves standing still in various postures and can be done by people of all ages. This book is very highly regarded for its lucid explanations of qigong concepts and its easy-to-follow instructions, augmented by more than 100 drawings and photographs. Complementary video clips by the author can be found on the [StandStillBeFit channel](#) on YouTube.