

BESTSELLERS

SCMP & DYMCKS BOOKSELLERS

NON-FICTION

1. DAVID AND GOLIATH by Malcolm Gladwell
The author of *The Tipping Point* and *Outliers* examines the concepts of "advantage" and "disadvantage", and shows how underdogs can also win.

2. EMPRESS DOWAGER CIXI by Jung Chang
A fascinating study of possibly the most important woman in China's history and her efforts to push the country into the modern era.

3. IN THE CITY OF DRAGONS by Mike Smith
More tales from the shady side of Hong Kong.

4. IN THE SHADOW OF THE NOONDAY GUN by Mike Smith
The author's first book on life, crime and big business in colonial Hong Kong's final decades.

5. THINK LIKE A FREAK by Stephen J. Dubner and Steven D. Levitt
The duo behind *Freakonomics* offer a blueprint for a new way to solve problems.

FICTION

1. THE GOLDFINCH by Donna Tartt
Aged 13, Theo Decker, son of a devoted mother and a reckless, largely absent father, survives an accident that tears his life apart.

2. AND THE MOUNTAINS ECHOED by Khaled Hosseini
Abdullah and Pari are a brother and sister growing up in an Afghan village.

3. INFERNO by Dan Brown
The latest Robert Langdon mystery takes Dante's *Inferno* as inspiration.

4. FIFTY SHADES OF GREY by E.L. James
When literature student Anastasia Steele goes to interview young businessman Christian Grey, she discovers he is good-looking, brilliant and intimidating.

5. THE GIRL WHO SAVED THE KING OF SWEDEN by Jonas Jonasson
In his second novel, the author of *The 100-Year-Old Man Who Climbed Out the Window and Disappeared* shows how one person's actions can have far-reaching consequences.

Hong Kong bestsellers, August 9

MCCLATCHY-TRIBUNE

NON-FICTION

1. UNBROKEN by Laura Hillenbrand
The story of Louis Zamperini, an Olympian who fought in the second world war and was a prisoner of war.

2. HARD CHOICES by Hillary Rodham Clinton
A detailed chronicle of the former US first lady's time as secretary of state.

3. MINECRAFT: REDSTONE HANDBOOK

RELATIONSHIPS



Good Chinese Wife: A Love Affair with China Gone Wrong
by Susan Blumberg-Kason
Sourcebooks
★★★★☆
Charmaine Chan

When Susan Blumberg-Kason sought legal help in the US to leave her Chinese husband of five years, she was told to explain the reasons for the marriage breakdown and events leading to her flight from their San Francisco home with their toddler. Her narrative covered 67 handwritten sheets of lined paper.

Those memories are fleshed out in a bittersweet memoir set mostly in the US and Hong Kong that raises questions about whether "culture" can ever be an excuse for bad behaviour.

Differences between American and Chinese ways of living fill many pages, but in the author's summation of the "shameful events" that caused the split, most cannot be blamed on a clash of cultures. They include infidelity on the part of her mainland-born husband, Cai. His threats of physical violence and silent treatment do not help. Neither does his handling of their baby: he once dangles him over a second-floor staircase to stop him crying.

"When I read about [the events] on paper, I wept not because they'd happened," Blumberg-Kason writes, "but because I'd allowed them to happen."

That she condones Cai's behaviour for so long is perhaps understandable after Jake is born because, she thinks, he needs a father. But even before they become parents, her husband exhibits Jekyll-and-Hyde personalities: open and loving one minute; cold and callous the next.

Perhaps Blumberg-Kason's crush on Cai, an ethnomusicologist, while both are students at the Chinese University of Hong Kong in the 1990s, is the reason she is blind to their doomed relationship. Before they share a single kiss, he proposes, explaining: "In China, couples traditionally date only if they plan to marry." So on the same night she agrees to go out with him, he sets a date for their wedding.

By this early stage, the author's blinkered optimism will be obvious to most. A "painfully shy Midwestern wallflower", she is attracted to his movie-star qualities and self-assurance. She also likes that he considers her "a traditional Chinese woman". Then there is the novelty factor. After visiting Cai's parents in his hometown near Wuhan, she writes: "I did relish the idea of being known to strangers as the only American in Hidden River. It made me feel like a pioneer, like someone special."

Hidden River is, however, a grimy city in the middle of nowhere; and "mama" and "baba" want to raise the baby in China "for several years".



Susan Blumberg-Kason at Victoria Harbour in 2012; she and her mainland-born husband Cai both studied at the Chinese University in the 1990s.

When Blumberg-Kason and Cai leave Hong Kong for San Francisco, where Jake is born, he brings up the subject again. The situation only worsens when his parents "visit" for a year and they start arguing about Jake's feeding habits, clothing and even whether he should cry.

Things come to a head when Cai, frustrated by his inability to find well-paid work in the US, plans to take Jake to China for a holiday. Believing they might never return, Blumberg-Kason seeks legal advice, which leads to her decision to flee, with their baby, to her parents' home in Chicago.

It is in these chapters that Blumberg-Kason's writing takes the form of a thriller and readers will find themselves crossing their fingers as she makes her escape. Despite the tension and dramatic qualities, however, the story never feels false or embellished.

Towards the end, the author admits to a question many will have asked early on: was Cai's unkindness a product of his Chinese upbringing? "Was it a cultural difference or a personality one?"

SOCIETY



The Invisible Citizens of Hong Kong: Art and Stories of Vietnamese Boatpeople
by Sophia Law Suk-mun
Chinese University Press
★★★★☆
Amy Russell

The power of collective memory has long provided insight into historical events, and perhaps nowhere is this better expressed than through art and narrative. Where crisis and trauma have been experienced, artworks and stories find power. Through art, the unspeakable is given voice.

In Sophia Law's new book, the history of the Vietnamese boatpeople who migrated to Hong Kong in the 1970s is brought to life. It balances historical detail and creative talent, allowing readers to gain an understanding of the context and experiences of this population of people, while seeing and feeling these experiences more acutely.

The first chapters of the book draw a timeline of events, describing policies, the reasons behind the migrations, the journeys that were made and the changes that took place in Hong Kong as a result of the exodus. There follows an exploration of life inside the camps – not just physical conditions, but the emotions and psychological traumas felt by their inhabitants.

Law, an associate professor at Lingnan University, examines not only the complex history and status of refugees but also, lastly, artworks from a collection of more than 600 pieces by the inmates of the refugee detention centres. They were collected between 1988 and 1991 as part of a project called Art in the Camps run by UN-funded non-profit Garden Streams.

Art, here, is a process that allows refugees to deal with what they have experienced, creating a vivid collective history of tragedy and trauma. Law writes in her introduction: "The process of visualising abstract pain through

HUMAN RIGHTS



The Slaughter

apparently lose their "retail organs"

For *The Slaughter: Mass Killings*,