



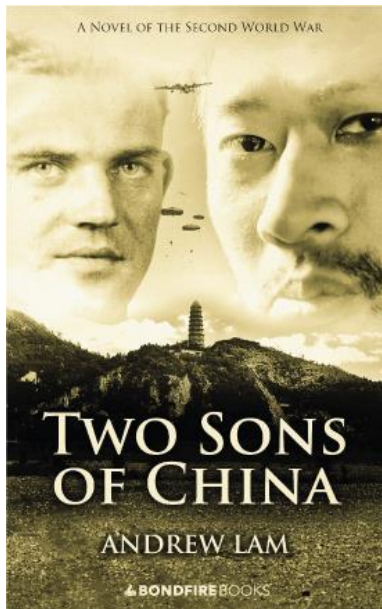
Chinese American Librarians Association

美国华人图书馆员协会

2014 CALA Best Book Award Winners

The 2014/2015 Chinese American Librarians Association (CALA) Best Book Award Committee is proud to present the winners of the 2014 CALA Best Books Awards. The CALA Best Book Award aims to promote awareness of the best books about Chinese topics or literature written by authors of Chinese descent, in English or in Chinese that have been published in North America. The awards are in four categories: "Fiction", "Nonfiction", "Juvenile Books (Age 12-18)" and "Children's Books (Age 12 and under)", and the winners are:

Fiction



Two Sons of China, by Andrew Lam (Bondfire Books)

Summary and Review from the Nominator:

"Two Sons of China is a sweeping epic of the Second World War in China—a theater of that conflict that many consider 'forgotten'. The story centers on an unlikely friendship that forms between two soldiers, one an American, the other a Chinese Communist, as they wage guerrilla war against the Japanese. The book is largely based on the little-known, real-life American Dixie Mission of 1944."

"Dr. Lam's meticulously researched historical saga is a fast-paced, emotional tale of loyalty, love, and betrayal that has introduced a new episode of American history to many readers. Its subject matter will be of great interest to Chinese American readers and we believe Dr. Lam is a remarkable Chinese American author worthy of recognition."

Review from the committee member(s):

"Based on the largely ignored American Dixie Mission of 1944, this book tells a compelling story of an American Soldier and a Chinese Communist as they engage the Japanese in guerrilla warfare. It gives nuances of their character on their journey to becoming 'heroes', as the American David wrestles with his opium addiction and struggles to survive the hardships of his march to the battle line with his small group. The Chinese Yuen fights to survive his patriotism, loyalty to the Communist Party and his self-conscience and growing doubts to the communist idealism. I deeply empathize with the dilemma of Yuen, his inner torment and bodily injuries and tortures. As David visits Yan'an as part of the Dixie Mission team, he accompanies Yuen and his team to the frontlines, a deep bond is formed between them that lasted a lifetime, although one was long dead for his heroism before the other receives the news decades later. A very touching, emotional and exciting gala. It also depicts various historical characters in a vivid and true way and brings us a magnificent historical picture of that time."



Decoded, by Mai Jia, translated by Olivia Milburn and Christopher Payne (Farrar, Straus and Giroux)

Summary and Review from the Nominator:

"In his gripping debut novel, Mai Jia reveals the mysterious world of Unit 701, a top-secret Chinese intelligence agency whose sole purpose is counterespionage and code breaking.

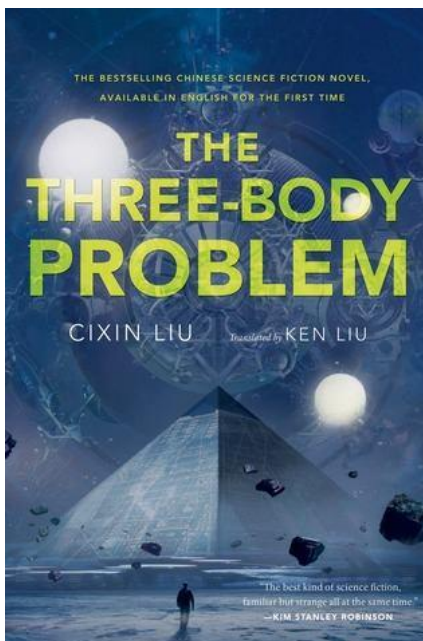
Rong Jinzhen, an autistic math genius with a past shrouded in myth, is forced to abandon his academic pursuits when he is recruited into Unit 701. As China's greatest cryptographer, Rong discovers that the mastermind behind the maddeningly difficult Purple Code is his former teacher and best friend, who is now working for China's enemy—but this is only the first of many betrayals.

Brilliantly combining the mystery and tension of a spy thriller with the psychological nuance of an intimate character study and the magical qualities of a Chinese fable, *Decoded* discovers in cryptography the key to the human heart. Both a riveting mystery and a metaphysical examination of the mind of an inspired genius, it is the first novel to be published in English by one of China's greatest and most popular contemporary writers."

"Mai Jia is one of China's bestselling novelist, but he is unknown here in America. It's time for his books to be read more widely in here and *Decoded*, an unusual literary thriller that takes us deep into the world of code breaking, is just the book to grab the attention of Americans."

Review from the committee member(s):

"This book is a decoding of the encoding. A decoding of the life of our hero Rong Jinzhen, and of the encoded universal question of life itself. The unique story telling style takes us through a family history to set up Jinzhen, being trained for the world of Chinese counter-espionage, he cracks Code Purple the uncrackable code that makes himself a state hero. The book explores his personal struggles, his restricted freedoms and the fine-line between genius and madness. In the end, he is driven to madness by the very ability that made him a hero."



The Three-Body Problem, by Cixin Liu, translated by Ken Liu (Tor Books)

Summary and Review from the Nominator:

"With the scope of *Dune* and the commercial action of *Independence Day*, this near-future trilogy is the first chance for English-speaking readers to experience this multiple-award-winning phenomenon from China's most beloved science fiction author.

Set against the backdrop of China's Cultural Revolution, a secret military project sends signals into space to establish contact with aliens. An alien civilization on the brink of destruction captures the signal and plans to invade Earth. Meanwhile, on Earth, different camps start forming, planning to either welcome the superior beings and help them take over a world seen as corrupt, or to fight against the invasion. The result is a science fiction masterpiece of enormous scope and vision."

"Cixin Liu is the most prolific and popular science fiction writer in the People's Republic of China. Liu is an eight-time winner of the Galaxy Award (the Chinese Hugo) and a winner of the Nebula Award. The *Three Body Problem* is China's most popular science fiction novel. More than 400,000 copies of the trilogy have been sold in China and it is considered an epic masterpiece in the history of Chinese SF. This ground-breaking publication is the first major Chinese SF novel to be translated into English."

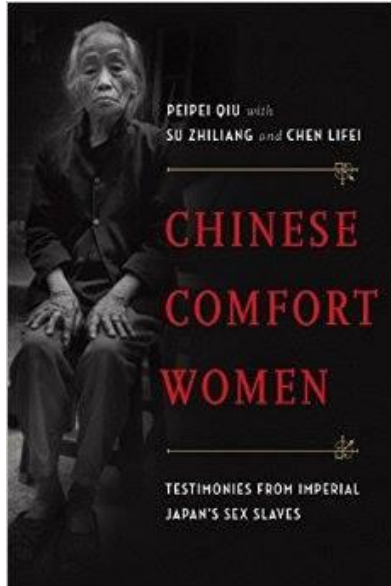
Reviews from the committee member(s):

"A science fiction novel set against the background of the Chinese Cultural Revolution. From its narratives, you can feel its power, the agony of that time period, and the struggles of the human heart. Our hero witnesses the torture that killed her father and then only finds disappointment in the life she is living; she is rescued to become an Astrophysicist working on a secret military project. She sends and responds to signals from another world which brings the impending invasion of the 'Trisolarans', and the danger of the destruction of earth's civilizations. Sides are drawn to either welcome the aliens or fight them. In the end, the group led by Ye fails and their base ship is destroyed, the invasion of the Trisolarans is still on..."

"Cixin Liu uses the 'three-body problem' of classical mechanics to ask some terrifying questions about human nature and what lies at the core of civilization."

"This is the first Chinese science fiction translated into English. The book explores the world of the Trisolarans, a race that is forced to adapt to life in a triple star system, on a planet whose gravity, heat, and orbit are in constant flux. Facing utter extinction, the Trisolarans plan to evacuate and conquer the nearest habitable planet, and finally intercept a message—from Earth. I feel the writing is bold, imaginative and exciting. I really enjoy reading it. Meanwhile the story linked China past and future. Beautiful translation!"

Non-Fiction



Chinese Comfort Women: Testimonies from Imperial Japan's Sex Slaves, by Peipei Qiu, with Su Zhiliang and Chen Lifei (Oxford University Press)

Summary and Review from the Nominator:

"Chinese Comfort Women: Testimonies from Japan's Imperial Sex Slaves features the personal narratives of twelve women forced into sexual slavery when the Japanese military occupied their hometowns."

"This is an important book on a little-discussed part of China's history. It is the first oral history of comfort women ever published and the first English-language account of these women's experiences. The book brings to light several previously hidden aspects of the comfort women system, ultimately exposing the full extent of the

injustices suffered and the conditions that caused them."

Review from the committee member(s):

"This is the first English-language monograph to record the memories of Chinese women who were detained by the Japanese military at 'comfort stations' during Japan's invasion of China (Introduction, p. 1). The accounts of Chinese comfort women presented in this book expose the multiple social, political, and cultural forces that played a part in their life-long suffering. Indeed, their plight must be considered not only in the context of the war but also in the contexts of history and culture.

This book includes 12 Chinese women's narratives about their experiences in the Japanese military 'comfort stations' and their continued suffering after the war. The research methods include field investigations and interviews. This study was supported by the Emily Abbey Fund and a class of 2005 gift fund from Vassar College, and the field research was partly funded by Shanghai Normal University. The publication of this book is supported by the Government of Canada (through the Canada Book Fund), the British Columbia Arts Council, and the Susan Turner Fund granted by Vassar College.

This book consists of three parts. Part 1 provides the historical background of the narratives. Part 2 presents the narratives of twelve comfort station survivors. Part 3 documents the survivors' postwar lives and the movement to support the former comfort women's redress in China.

It is sad and horrifying to read about those Chinese, Japanese, and Korean women who became sexual slavery in wartime. Many were even killed at the end of the war in order to conceal the secrets. It is a touching story."



Contemporary Chinese Art, by Wu Hung (Thames & Hudson)

Summary and Review from the Nominator:

"In this first systematic introduction to the topic, art historian and critic Wu Hung provides a much-needed narrative of the development of Chinese art across all media from the 1970s to the 2000s, a timespan characterized by radical social, political, and economic change in China.

This richly illustrated chronological volume examines contemporary Chinese art both in the context of China's specific historical experience and in the global arena. Wu Hung explores:

- the emergence of avant-garde or contemporary art—as opposed to officially sanctioned art—in the public sphere after

the Cultural Revolution;

- the mobilization by young artists and critics of a nationwide avant-garde movement in the mid-1980s;
- the re-emphasis on individual creativity in the late 1980s;
- the heightened spirit of experimentation of the 1990s;
- and the catapulting of contemporary Chinese art into the global arena from the 1990s onwards."

"Contemporary Chinese Art introduces readers to key art movements, styles and trends, important artists and art projects, experimental exhibitions and avant-garde publications, and China's growing number of new museums, galleries, and alternative art spaces. It is an indispensable resource to one of the most vital and exciting areas of international art practice today."

Reviews from the committee member(s):

"Contemporary Chinese Art is an indispensable resource today. It is the first book that systematically introduces contemporary Chinese art. It presents to the reader key art movements, styles and trends, important artists and art project, experimental exhibitions and advent-grade publications and China's growing number of new museums, galleries and alternative art spaces."

"Initially I was shocked by the dark images of this Contemporary Chinese Art book. While reading it through looking for answers of why this 'ugliness', I saw the meanings of the art works and the profoundness and depth this book contains. Art is an expression and art is always looking to break traditions and comfort zones. This book says it all and is a gem in the field of Chinese art history."



The People's Republic of Amnesia: Tiananmen Revisited, by Louisa Lim (Oxford University Press)

Summary and Review from the Nominator:

"In *The People's Republic of Amnesia: Tiananmen Revisited*, Louisa Lim, formerly a correspondent in Beijing for NPR and the BBC, and currently teaching journalism at the University of Michigan, revisits the 1989 crackdown on the democracy movement in China and traces its effects across a quarter of a century. Even after 25 years, the 'events of 1989' remain a closed subject in China. As Lim reveals, the extent to which the Communist Party has contained any reference to it exceeds even its efforts to deny the violence of the Cultural Revolution or the occupation of Tibet. Amnesia has become the official policy and this, in turn, has kept the country from facing up to its history and thus embracing the political and social change to match the rapid economic progress. As this book shows so compellingly, Tiananmen remains the country's great

unhealed wound.

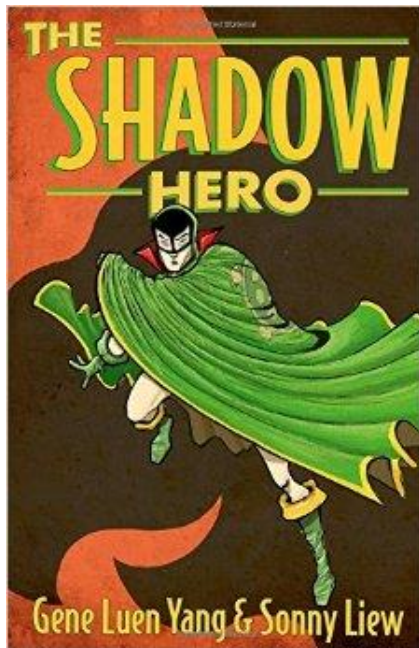
The book is based upon profiles of people directly involved with 1989 and whose lives were irrevocably changed by it. They agreed to talk to Lim, despite the risks to their livelihoods and even to their lives. Lim explores how Tiananmen shaped China's national identity, fostering a generation of nationalists who know little and care less about Tiananmen Square. She also uncovers, for the first time, the story of a brutal crackdown in a second Chinese city that until now has been a near-perfect case study in the state's ability to rewrite history by excising the most painful episodes. Ultimately what happened in Tiananmen in the spring of 1989 wasn't limited to Beijing. It was a country-wide movement with world-wide consequences."

"*The People's Republic of Amnesia* enhances the study of China and its history by shedding new light on a story that has remained untold for a quarter of a century. Through her brilliant and courageous investigative work, Lim reveals the irrevocable internal effects the events of 1989 have had on a nation that would rather forget them."

Review from the committee member(s):

"'No, not Tiananmen!' That's my honest and initial reaction to this book as a Chinese reader. I was reluctant to dive into this part of the history and the title 'The People's Republic of Amnesia' stung me. Only after a few weeks, I started to pick it up, it immediately caught my attention and I was drawn into the stories of those individuals whose lives have been impacted by the June 4th Incident. A very somber and objective observation based on the interviews of those people who were involved or witnessed the incident turned into the book's true and sympathetic narrative. The author reveals what has happened with facts and truthful story-telling. It is sharp, thought-provoking and touching. I am ashamed by my own denial, ignorance and apolitical attitude, and feel sorry that this 'amnesia' is a national symptom and a 'strategy' to avoid the pain and sensitivity of the subject."

Juvenile Books (Age 12-18)



The Shadow Hero, by Gene Luen Yang, illustrated by Sonny Liew (First Second)

Summary:

"In the comics boom of the 1940s, a legend was born: the Green Turtle. He solved crimes and fought injustice just like the other comics characters. But this mysterious masked crusader was hiding something more than your run-of-the-mill secret identity... The Green Turtle was the first Asian American super hero."

Review from the committee member(s):

"This charming comic book embraces a mixture of non-traditional Chinese comics and traditional Chinese elements. The typical Chinese motif of a mother's high expectations is intermingled with the more western theme of the realization of a 'superhero'. A rich display of Chinese heritage runs through the whole Chinatown gangster stories and the maturing of the hero. Vivid and interesting characters are typical but not stereotypical, and they make you

laugh heartily. You'll enjoy plenty of humor and bitter sweetness in this book, from the hero and from the secondary characters. The illustrations are inspired by the western comics and the Chinese spirit, and the use of red, green, yellow and gray colors seems to echo fight and charm, bravery and hope, power and humbleness and creates a very Chinese atmosphere."



Secrets of the Terra-Cotta Soldier, by Ying Chang Compestine and Vinson Compestine (Amulet Books, an imprint of ABRAMS)

Summary and Review from the Nominator:

"In this action-packed adventure and coming-of-age story that finely weaves fact and fiction, thirteen-year-old Ming lives in a small village in Maoist China in the 1970s. His father is convinced that Emperor Qin's tomb—and the life-size terra-cotta army created to serve and protect the emperor in the afterlife—lies hidden in the hills around them. But if Ming's father doesn't prove it soon, the town's Political Officer will condemn him to the brutal labor camps. From the stories of a terra-cotta soldier who has survived through the centuries, Ming learns the history of Emperor Qin, known for building the Great Wall of China, and how and why the terra-cotta soldiers came to be. As their unlikely friendship develops, Ming experiences the mysterious tomb firsthand,

braving deadly traps and witnessing the terra-cotta army in action. Most importantly, he comes to see

how he can save both the terra-cotta soldiers and his father from the corrupt Political Officer and his Communist cronies.

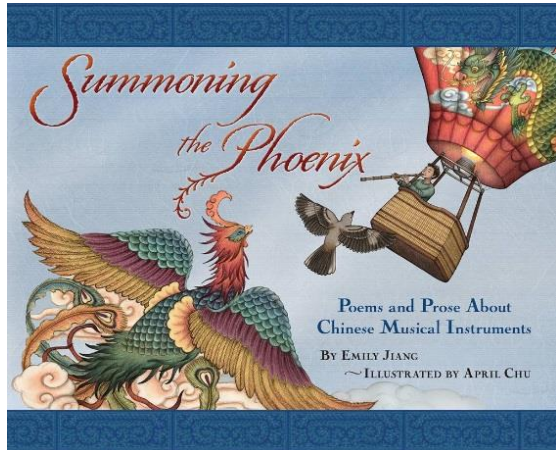
The book is illustrated with photographs of Communist Chinese village life in the 1970s, the Great Wall, and, of course, the excavated tomb with its many terra-cotta soldiers. It also features a special recipe from the story."

"Secrets of the Terra-Cotta soldier not only tells a wonderful story, but also incorporates true fact into the adventure, encouraging interest in both reading in general and the history of the culture depicted in the work. Entertaining enough to be a pleasure read for children, Secrets of the Terra-Cotta soldier is also chock full of additional materials that also make it great for the classroom."

Reviews from the committee member(s):

"An adventure that is set in time of Mao. This book is about a terra-cotta soldier coming to life and a village boy who has a strong interest in museum and artifacts, together they make a crime-fighting duo to protect Emperor Qin's tomb from the corrupted Political Officer. It is a wonderful read for older children. It will inspire their imagination and courage and allow them to experience the Chinese history of the ancient Qin Dynasty and that of Mao's time."

Children's Books (Age 11 and under)



Summoning the Phoenix: Poems and Prose About Chinese Musical Instruments, by Emily Jiang, illustrated by April Chu (Lee & Low Books)

Summary and Review from the Nominator:

"Every musician knows that learning to play an instrument has its challenges and its rewards. There's the embarrassing first day of rehearsal, but also the joy of making friends in the orchestra. There's dealing with slippery concert dress, or simply getting swept up in the music. The twelve children in this book are just like any other musicians practicing their instruments and

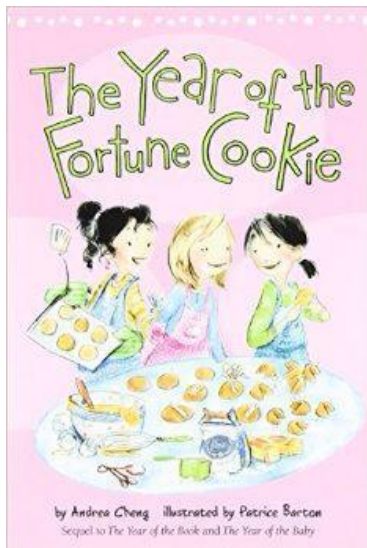
preparing for a concert. But what sets these music lovers apart is that they all play traditional Chinese musical instruments in a Chinese orchestra.

Including both flights of fancy and practical considerations, lively poems capture each child's musical experience with a different Chinese instrument, while sidebars provide more information about each one. Vivid illustrations depicting each fascinating instrument bring you along on this musical journey. And then you are invited to the grand finale!"

"SUMMONING THE PHOENIX, written by Emily Jiang and illustrated by April Chu follows a multicultural Chinese orchestra as they get ready to perform. Each traditional Chinese instrument is accompanied by a short poem and a description. The book has fanciful illustrations as well."

Reviews from the committee member(s):

"This book is about Chinese instruments being learned and played by children who are getting ready for an orchestra performance. It's beautifully written and illustrated with Chinese elegance. Each instrument is accompanied by a poem and description. It's ideal for children to learn about Chinese instruments and Chinese culture."



The Year of the Fortune Cookie, by Andrea Cheng, illustrated by Patrice Barton (Houghton Mifflin Harcourt)

Summary and Review from the Nominator:

"The third chapter book sequel to The Year of the Book and The Year of the Baby, eleven-year-old Anna takes a trip to China and learns more about herself and her Chinese heritage."

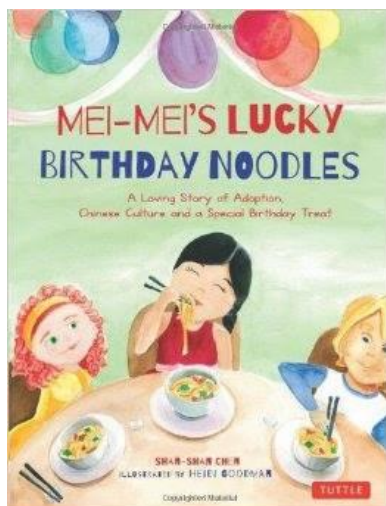
"This book focuses on the life on a Chinese family living in America with strong ties to Chinese culture and heritage. The main character is a young girl of Chinese decent and she takes a trip to China and learns more about herself and her Chinese heritage."

Reviews from the committee member(s):

"The book is about a sixth grade, Anna Wang, trying to find her own identity to answer the question whether she is more Chinese or more American. When Anna gets to travel to China to see the orphanage where her sister came from, she gets CAT (Community Action Team) involved in fundraising and knitting projects. Going to China changes Anna's perspective on what it means to be both Chinese and American, and she gains confidence and empathy as a result."

"The Year of the Fortune Cookie is an inspirational reading. The book focuses on Anna's questions about her Chinese heritage and the background of her adopted sister, who was left at a Chinese orphanage as a baby. Anna continues to question what it means to be Chinese-American and broadens her views in helping her community and making new friends. Through the trip, the book tells how Anna stays open-minded about her new experiences in China and learns a lot about herself as well as the country."

Honorable Mention



Mei-Mei's Lucky Birthday Noodles: A Loving Story of Adoption, Chinese Culture and a Special Birthday Treat, by Shan-Shan Chen, illustrated by Heidi Goodman (Tuttle Publishing).

Reached 1176 people in CALA Facebook by May 28, 2015.

Summary and Review from the Nominator:

"Mei-Mei is Chinese—but not Mom and Dad! When she was a baby, Mom and Dad flew all the way to the other side of the world to adopt her and bring her home. Lucky for Mei-Mei, her parents want her to know all about her roots in China's wonderful culture. That's why, on her birthday, her mom always makes her a traditional Chinese treat—long noodles, for a long and happy life. And this year, Mei-Mei is big enough to help her mom make them!

Through a simple story and bright illustrations, Mei-Mei's Lucky Birthday Noodles takes young readers through this special day, from the moment an excited Mei-Mei wakes up in the morning and puts on her favorite dress, through helping Mom measure water, clean veggies and rinse noodles, to a great birthday celebration with family and friends. After the story comes a kid-friendly recipe for this tasty traditional dish. Younger kids can help Mom or Dad—just like Mei-Mei—while older kids can make it themselves, with supervision."

"Written by a Chinese-American mom, this is a light-hearted story of adoption that references Chinese traditions and includes a kid-friendly recipe in the back."

Reviews from the committee member(s):

"The book tells the story of Mei-Mei, a Chinese American adoptee whose parents want her to value her Chinese roots. Each year on her birthday, her family has a tradition of preparing 'lucky birthday noodles', a traditional Chinese dish--a symbol of good luck given for special occasions in Chinese culture."

"I enjoyed how the story detailed of preparing the traditional dish--noodles. In subtle ways, the author weaves bits and pieces of Chinese culture throughout the book, sometimes using Chinese words or explaining Chinese traditions. I really appreciated the way that the author connects food so deeply and meaningfully with a country's culture root. The water-colored illustrations by Heidi Goodman are beautiful."

Information on more nominated titles have been posted to CALA Facebook in the whole month of May, 2015 (<https://www.facebook.com/pages/CALA-Chinese-American-Librarians-Association/281336511932864>).

The 2014/2015 CALA Best Book Award Committee

Sai Deng (co-chair) saideng@gmail.com

Jia Mi (co-chair) jmi@tcnj.edu

Judy Jeng jeng.judy@gmail.com

Haiying Qian QianH@lincolnu.edu

XiaoYan Zhou x.zhou@brooklynpublishing.org