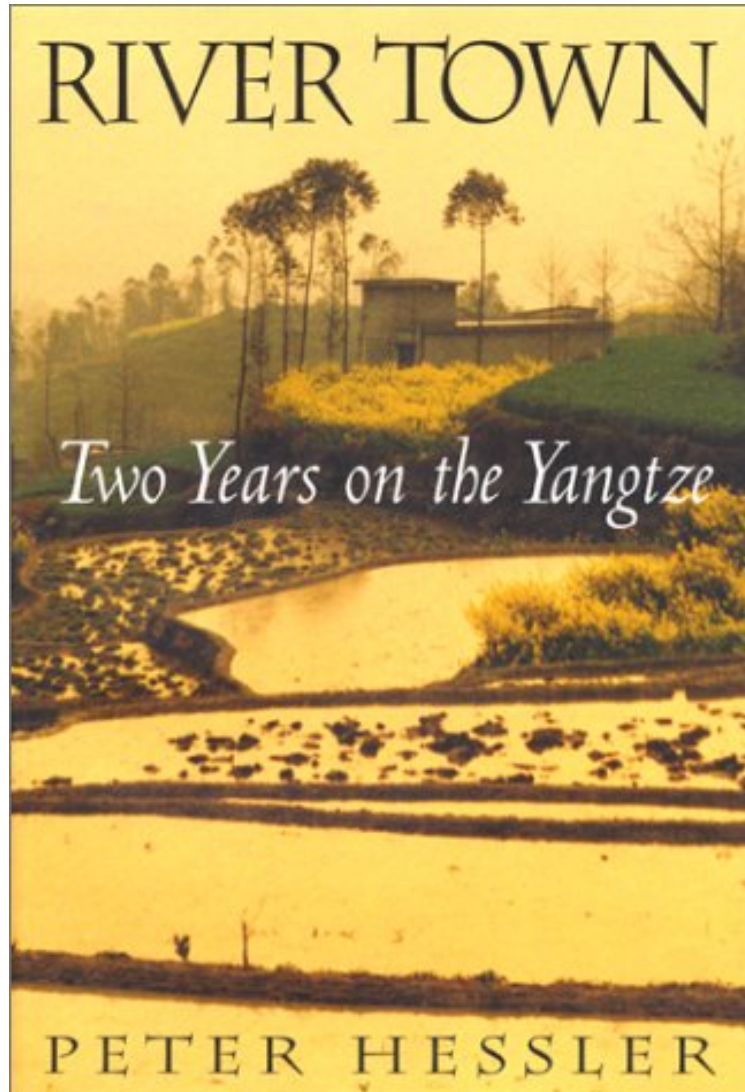


(Read free) River Town: Two Years On The Yangtze

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Peter Hessler

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#391897 in Books 2001-01-23 2001-01-23 Format: Deckle Edge Original language: English PDF # 1 9.25 x 1.29 x 6.251, #File Name: 0060195444416 pages | File size: 28.Mb

Peter Hessler : River Town: Two Years On The Yangtze before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised River Town: Two Years On The Yangtze:

1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. Excellent recollections of a Peace Corps volunteer in China By F. Moyer This book covers the author's (Peter Hessler) experiences during the two years he spent as a Peace Corps volunteer teaching English American Literature in Fuling, China (population: about 200,000) from 1996 to 1998. So it's not a book about touring China; it's a book about LIVING in China as a foreigner. The author learned to speak and read Chinese well enough to visit with the town's inhabitants (and some of the people outside of the city as well). The author clearly gained considerable knowledge of the great changes undergone by the Chinese society -- especially

since the end of World War II. More importantly, the author's day-to-day contact with Chinese individuals allowed him the chance to gain an insight and understanding of many of the philosophical differences of the Chinese as compared to his own American upbringing. This book is an interesting -- and also intensely personal -- account of living in China. I was sorry to have the book come to its end. 5 stars. 2 of 2 people found the following review helpful. To bad it had to end. By Nature Traveler I didn't want this book to end. It was a wonderful trip to a river town in China. Peter Hessler was venturesome and open to learning the culture, language and people in this remote community. It was delightful to read of his new found friends in town and hikes into the hills and encounters with the peasants. His new friends in the community added a rich view into family life and the culture. He spent two years as a teacher and committed fully to making the most of it. And his readers gained a window into this unique experience. 0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. I heard of this book on the Yangtze. By Squeeky Wheel and I am fascinated by China. As a sometime teacher of English literature, I knew the basic problems the author faced in the classroom, but could not imagine the difficulty of doing it with Chinese students. Turns out that teaching lit was probably the least difficult thing confronting him: learning the language was more difficult and learning the culture more difficult still. The Chinese are still native lovers of poetry in ways Americans are not, so his students grooved on the stuff in ways a class of us never would. I can only suppose Mr. Hessler is brighter and more dedicated than I am: in his second year in country, he was daily conversing and reading newspapers in Chinese as a result of his private efforts, his regular classes with two tutors, and his daily practice with *Old Hundred Names*, the people at the bottom of the Chinese socio-economic scale. They were willing--even eager--to talk with the strange-looking foreigner, and they had a great stock of concrete knowledge of the way the country worked. It was from *Old Hundred Names* that Mr. Hessler got his basic anthropological understanding of the country, from the particular cast of mind shared by Chinese individuals, through the assumptions and taboos all societies possess, to the conditions imposed by Socialism with Chinese Characteristics permeating the society at all levels. I am not yet done with this book; I shall be sorry to finish it.

In the heart of Chia's Sichuan province lies the small city of Fuling. Surrounded by the terraced hills of the Yangtze River valley, Fuling has long been a place of continuity, far from the bustling political centers of Beijing and Shanghai. But now Fuling is heading down a new path, and gradually, along with scores of other towns in this vast and ever-evolving country, it is becoming a place of change and vitality, tension and reform, disruption and growth. As the people of Fuling hold on to the China they know, they are also opening up and struggling to adapt to a world in which their fate is uncertain. Fuling's position at the crossroads came into remarkably sharp focus when Peter Hessler arrived as a Peace Corps volunteer in 1996, marking the first time in more than half a century that the city had an American resident. He found himself teaching English and American literature at the local college, discovering how Shakespeare and other classics look when seen through the eyes of students who have been raised in the Sichuan countryside and educated in Communist Party doctrine. His students, though, are the ones who taught him about the ways of Fuling -- and about the complex process of understanding that takes place when one is immersed in a radically different society. As he learns the language and comes to know the people, Hessler begins to see that it is indeed a unique moment for Fuling. In its past is Communist China's troubled history -- the struggles of land reform, the decades of misguided economic policies, and the unthinkable damage of the Cultural Revolution -- and in the future is the Three Gorges Dam, which upon completion will partly flood the city and force the resettlement of more than a million people. Making his way in the city and traveling by boat and train throughout Sichuan province and beyond, Hessler offers vivid descriptions of the people he meets, from priests to prostitutes and peasants to professors, and gives voice to their views. This is both an intimate personal story of his life in Fuling and a colorful, beautifully written account of the surrounding landscape and its history. Imaginative, poignant, funny, and utterly compelling, *River Town* is an unforgettable portrait of a city that, much like China itself, is seeking to understand both what it was and what it someday will be.

.com In 1996, 26-year-old Peter Hessler arrived in Fuling, a town on China's Yangtze River, to begin a two-year Peace Corps stint as a teacher at the local college. Along with fellow teacher Adam Meier, the two are the first foreigners to be in this part of the Sichuan province for 50 years. Expecting a calm couple of years, Hessler at first does not realize the social, cultural, and personal implications of being thrust into a such radically different society. In *River Town: Two Years on the Yangtze*, Hessler tells of his experience with the citizens of Fuling, the political and historical climate, and the feel of the city itself. "Few passengers disembark at Fuling ... and so Fuling appears like a break in a dream--the quiet river, the cabins full of travelers drifting off to sleep, the lights of the city rising from the blackness of the Yangtze," says Hessler. A poor city by Chinese standards, the students at the college are mainly from small villages and are considered very lucky to be continuing their education. As an English teacher, Hessler is delighted with his students' fresh reactions to classic literature. One student says of Hamlet, "I don't admire him and I dislike him. I think he is too sensitive and conservative and selfish." Hessler marvels, "You couldn't have said something like that at Oxford. You couldn't simply say: I don't like Hamlet because I think he's a lousy person. Everything had to be more clever than that ... you had to dismantle it ... not just the play itself but everything that had ever been written

about it. Over the course of two years, Hessler and Meier learn more they ever guessed about the lives, dreams, and expectations of the Fuling people. Hessler's writing is lovely. His observations are evocative, insightful, and often poignant--and just as often, funny. It's a pleasure to read of his (mis)adventures. Hessler returned to the U.S. with a new perspective on modern China and its people. After reading *River Town*, you'll have one, too. --Dana Van Nest
From Publishers Weekly
In China, the year 1997 was marked by two momentous events: the death of Deng Xiaoping, the country's leader for two decades, and the return of Hong Kong after a century and a half of British rule. A young American who spent two years teaching English literature in a small town on the Yangtze, Hessler observed these events through two sets of eyes: his own and those of his alter ego, Ho Wei. Hessler sees China's politics and ceremony with the detachment of a foreigner, noting how grand political events affect the lives of ordinary people. The passing of Deng, for example, provokes a handful of thoughtful and unexpected essays from Hessler's students. The departure of the British from Hong Kong sparks a conversational "Opium War" between him and his nationalist Chinese tutor. Meanwhile, Ho Wei, as Hessler is known to most of the townspeople, adopts a friendly and unsophisticated persona that allows him to learn the language and culture of his surroundings even as Hessler's Western self remains estranged. The author conceives this memoir of his time in China as the collaborative effort of his double identity. "Ho Wei," he writes, "left his notebooks on the desk of Peter Hessler, who typed everything into his computer. The notebooks were the only thing they truly shared." Yet it's clear that, for Hessler, Ho Wei is more than a literary device: to live in China, he felt compelled to subjugate his real identity to a character role. Hessler has already been assured the approval of a select audience thanks to the *New Yorker's* recent publication of an excerpt. (Feb.) Copyright 2000 Reed Business Information, Inc.
From Library Journal
This moving, mesmerizing memoir recounts Hessler's two years as a Peace Corps volunteer teaching English in the city of Fuling, located in the heart of China. Before Hessler's arrival, no one in Fuling had seen a foreigner for 50 years. Hessler was rudely thrust into this forbidden land, completely isolated from the world as we know it. Armed with astute powers of observation, acute sensitivity to cultural differences, and a good command of Chinese, he explores the culture, politics, traditions, and ideas of a people completely unknown and mysterious to the Western World. Hessler also watches as the city
Torn between tradition and the onslaught of modern times
Dreacts to the death of Deng Xiaoping, the return of Hong Kong to the mainland, and the inevitable construction of the Three Gorges Dam on its beloved, and sacred, Yangtze River. This touching memoir of an American dropped into the center of China transcends the boundaries of the travel genre and will appeal to anyone wanting to learn more about the heart and soul of the Chinese people. Highly recommended.-
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