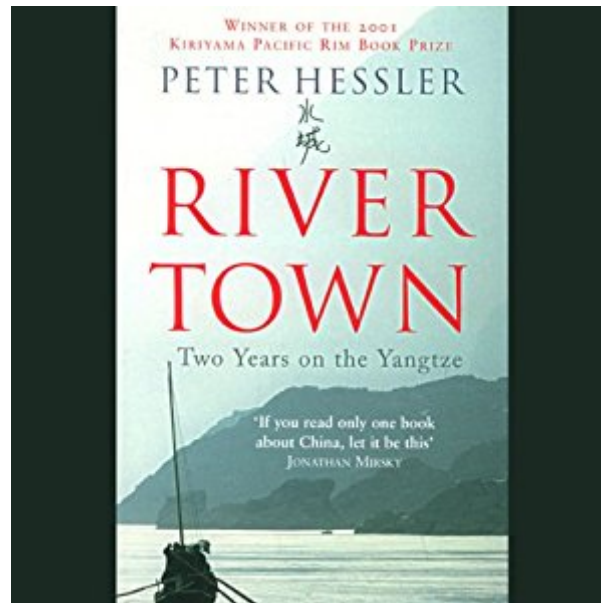




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River Town: Two Years On The Yangtze



Synopsis

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. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

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Customer Reviews

In his concluding remarks of *River Town: Two Years on the Yangtze*, Peter Hessler points us to the nub of his experience in China: "I had never had any idealistic illusions about my Peace Corps 'service' in China; I wasn't there to save anybody or leave an indelible mark on the town. If anything, I was glad that during my two years in Fuling I hadn't built anything, or organized anything, or made any great changes to the place. I had been a teacher, and in my spare time I had tried to learn as much as possible about the city and its people. That was the extent of my work, and I was comfortable with those roles and I recognized their limitations." In fall 1996, Peter Hessler, at the age of 26, took a Peace Corps assignment that relocated him to a small town in the Sichuan province of China. Many natives let alone a young American who made his inaugural entrance into the country did not know and hear of Fuling. It's a former coal-mining town that is bounded by the Yangtze and the Wu. Chongqing and the Three Gorges are just hours away by boats. The book chronicles, in a rather casual but detailed way, Peter's teaching experience at the Fuling Education College and his life and anecdotes in town. Interwoven into Peter's diary are descriptions of local landmarks and customs. This book is by far the most passionate and yet accurate and objective account written by any foreigners. Peter really does possess a keen sense of his surroundings. Throughout his crisp, interesting prose and attention to details, the Chinese 'laobaixing' (common people) become alive as if we are actually interacting with them. I am in awe of how far Peter has gone in making meticulous observations of the Chinese culture and its people. A lot of what he mentions in this book is often overlooked by foreigners.

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