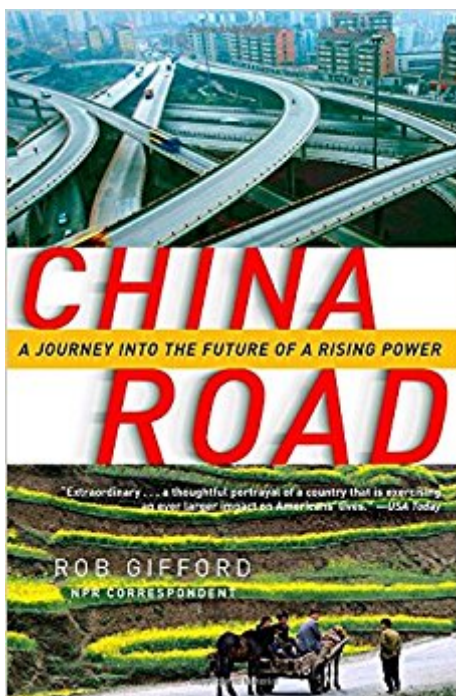


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China Road: A Journey Into The Future Of A Rising Power



Synopsis

Route 312 is the Chinese Route 66. It flows three thousand miles from east to west, passing through the factory towns of the coastal areas, through the rural heart of China, then up into the Gobi Desert, where it merges with the Old Silk Road. The highway witnesses every part of the social and economic revolution that is turning China upside down. In this utterly surprising and deeply personal book, acclaimed National Public Radio reporter Rob Gifford, a fluent Mandarin speaker, takes the dramatic journey along Route 312 from its start in the boomtown of Shanghai to its end on the border with Kazakhstan. Gifford reveals the rich mosaic of modern Chinese life in all its contradictions, as he poses the crucial questions that all of us are asking about China: Will it really be the next global superpower? Is it as solid and as powerful as it looks from the outside? And who are the ordinary Chinese people, to whom the twenty-first century is supposed to belong? Gifford is not alone on his journey. The largest migration in human history is taking place along highways such as Route 312, as tens of millions of people leave their homes in search of work. He sees signs of the booming urban economy everywhere, but he also uncovers many of the country's frailties, and some of the deep-seated problems that could derail China's rise. The whole compelling adventure is told through the cast of colorful characters Gifford meets: garrulous talk-show hosts and ambitious yuppies, impoverished peasants and tragic prostitutes, cell-phone salesmen, AIDS patients, and Tibetan monks. He rides with members of a Shanghai jeep club, hitchhikes across the Gobi desert, and sings karaoke with migrant workers at truck stops along the way. As he recounts his travels along Route 312, Rob Gifford gives a face to what has historically, for Westerners, been a faceless country and breathes life into a nation that is so often reduced to economic statistics. Finally, he sounds a warning that all is not well in the Chinese heartlands, that serious problems lie ahead, and that the future of the West has become inextricably linked with the fate of 1.3 billion Chinese people. "Informative, delightful, and powerfully moving . . . Rob Gifford's acute powers of observation, his sense of humor and adventure, and his determination to explore the wrenching dilemmas of China's explosive development open readers' eyes and reward their minds." —Robert A. Kapp, president, U.S.-China Business Council, 1994-2004 From the Hardcover edition.

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Customer Reviews

National Public Radio China correspondent Gifford journeyed for six weeks on China's Mother Road, Route 312, from its beginning in Shanghai for nearly 3,000 miles to a tiny town in what used to be known as Turkestan. The route picks up the old Silk Road, which runs through the Gobi Desert to Central Asia to Persia and on to Europe. Along the way, Gifford meets entrepreneurs hoping to cash in on China's growing economy, citizens angry and frustrated with government corruption, older people alarmed at changes in Chinese culture and morality, and young people uncertain and excited about the future. Gifford profiles ordinary Chinese people coping with tumultuous change as development and commerce shrink a vast geography, bringing teeming cities and tiny towns into closer commercial and cultural proximity; the lure of wealth is changing the Chinese character and sense of shared experience, even if it was common poverty. Gifford notes an aggressive sense of competition in the man-eat-man atmosphere of a nation that is likely to be the next global superpower. Vanessa BushCopyright © American Library Association. All rights reserved --This text refers to the Hardcover edition.

Advance praise for *China Road* "How I envy Rob Gifford and his journey along China Road. How grateful I am to him for allowing me to share the trip through his vivid writing and his deep knowledge of and great love for China. As vicarious enjoyment goes, this one's a ten." --Ted Koppel, managing editor, Discovery Channel "Rob Gifford has found the perfect road trip. His years in China have given him a keen eye and a deep understanding of the country's contradictions; he's the perfect guide to this magnificent road from Shanghai to the Kazakhstan border." --Peter Hassler, author of *River Town* and *Oracle Bones* "My gosh, I loved Rob Gifford's book. His journey along Route 312 is a great road story -- from Hooters in Shanghai to the Iron House of Confucianism.

China Road is insightful, funny, analytical, anecdotal, full of humble humor and magnificent discoveries. — Scott Simon, host of NPR's Weekend Edition and author of *Pretty Birds* — "Here is China end to end, told from its equivalent of Route 66 as Gifford journeys from Shanghai to the distant west, talking to truck drivers, merchants, hermits, and whores. Gifford portrays China with affection and humor, in all its complexity, energy, hopefulness, and risk. — Andrew J. Nathan, Class of 1919 Professor of Political Science, Columbia University — "Equal parts Bill Bryson and Jonathan Spence. Gifford is great company and great fun, and *China Road* is a terrific, highly readable book. — Jim Yardley, Pulitzer Prize-winning New York Times Beijing correspondent — "A great book, a terrific read. Rob Gifford's story is as engaging as any travel writing, but it is equally full of historical and philosophical wisdom about the future of the world's largest country. — Joseph S. Nye, Jr., former assistant secretary of defense, Distinguished Service Professor, Harvard University — "After six years in Beijing, NPR's Rob Gifford has written a wonderfully reflective but also well-informed account of his road trip across China. His knowledge and insight about China's past and present do a marvelous job in helping the reader understand all the challenges that confront this very dynamic country's future. — Orville Schell, director, the Asia Society's Center on U.S.-China Relations

From the Hardcover edition.

Friends who planned to visit China for the first time asked me to recommend a book about modern China, and this is it. It's about ten years out-of-date now, but former NPR correspondent Rob Gifford takes us along on a fascinating journey across China, showing us the best and the worst of what modernity has brought. He brings China to life by telling stories of individual Chinese people, showing us the country from the inside in a way only a journalist fluent in Chinese could. If you read through to the end, you'll get his very fair assessment of China today - from a western journalist's perspective.

Rob Gifford, after working in China for some years, takes a journey out into the far west of China. I learnt so much about China from this book and feel confident that the techniques Gifford used — travelling on public transport to speak to ordinary people, following up any connection to people in far-away cities or to journalists and experts, speaking the language himself — have meant it is a fairly accurate glimpse of what China is like now, what is needed in the future, and what extraordinary changes have been made in the last 30 years. Gifford

writes with clarity, detail and wit, but in a light readable style, as if speaking to the reader. This makes the coverage of so much information palatable. The content is exceptional; I made hundreds of reference points.

“Existentially, however, being Chinese is far more problematic, for now it is as much a quest as it is a condition.

“In traditional China, people were taught *zenme zuo ren*, how to be a person. In fact, we emphasized it too much. The morality, the rituals, the ethics. Now it isn’t emphasized enough. No one knows how to be a person anymore. We are training technicians. We are not training people.

Gifford raises many questions about where China will go; he lists positives, problems and conflicts. While not providing definitive answers he makes a clear analysis of the complex factors and suggests possibilities. In China the speed of development, construction, commercial change and social change is amazing, as is the contrast with those still citizens left behind in another century. The colonisation of minorities, including Tibet, is very worrying, although there are benefits for them. More worrying is the lack of human rights and the exacerbation of this by corruption and arbitrary application of old and new rules. This is related to the most astonishing question – how will China move from a rigid one-party system to a more democratic society without breaking down as China has done in the past, and the U.S.S.R recently has. Gifford also asks what such rapid and breathtaking developments will mean for the West, and suggests how the West must respond, or at least, what not to do.

“..the language [can become] too emotional and politicized (as it sometimes does in the US), there is a danger of creating a self-fulfilling prophecy of animosity beyond the inevitable friction caused by China’s development. To allow the problems in the relationship to define our whole China policy is simplistic and dangerous, because so much of the Western economic boom of the 1990s and into the new century has been driven by China.

We need to get out of the friend or foe line of questioning [We need] a complex and nuanced foreign policy that looks to protect Western economic interests as much as possible, but also avoids the descent into overly emotional demagoguery.

Looking at the events of 2013 and how these have been influenced by petty internal politics and bravado, this seems to call for statesmanship beyond most leaders.

China Road gives the reader a beautifully written tour of the author’s 3000 mile trek across China. I finished with a better idea of who the Chinese people are in their broad diversity. The author’s grasp of the language, culture, and politics sprinkles the story with plenty of insights on this massive land. Highly recommended.

I was pulled into this book almost immediately and enjoyed the stories. Rob Gifford was the Beijing correspondent for NPR for six years. He knows China and speaks Chinese. I mention this because most of his stories would not be possible if he could not communicate with the people he encounters along his journey. The book chronicles his trip (actually a couple trips) along the entire length of State Route 312 from Shanghai to the border of Xinjiang and Kazakhstan. He travels by taxi, public bus, hitches rides with truckers, and occasionally rides in a private car. His purpose is two-fold: one, to meet common people along the way, particularly those that live in out of the way places, and two, to explore the impact this modern highway has had on the development and modernization of the regions in which it passes. I especially liked his stories about meeting common everyday folk, like long haul truckers. It is always interesting to see how "normal" people live. His stories bring out the warmth and sometimes complexity of common Chinese people. He describes the people, the harsh landscape of Western China, and the small towns along the way. Some of the towns have prospered with the coming of the highway, and some towns not directly on the route have languished. Overall, I highly recommend the book. Gifford is personable and knowledgeable without being pretentious.

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