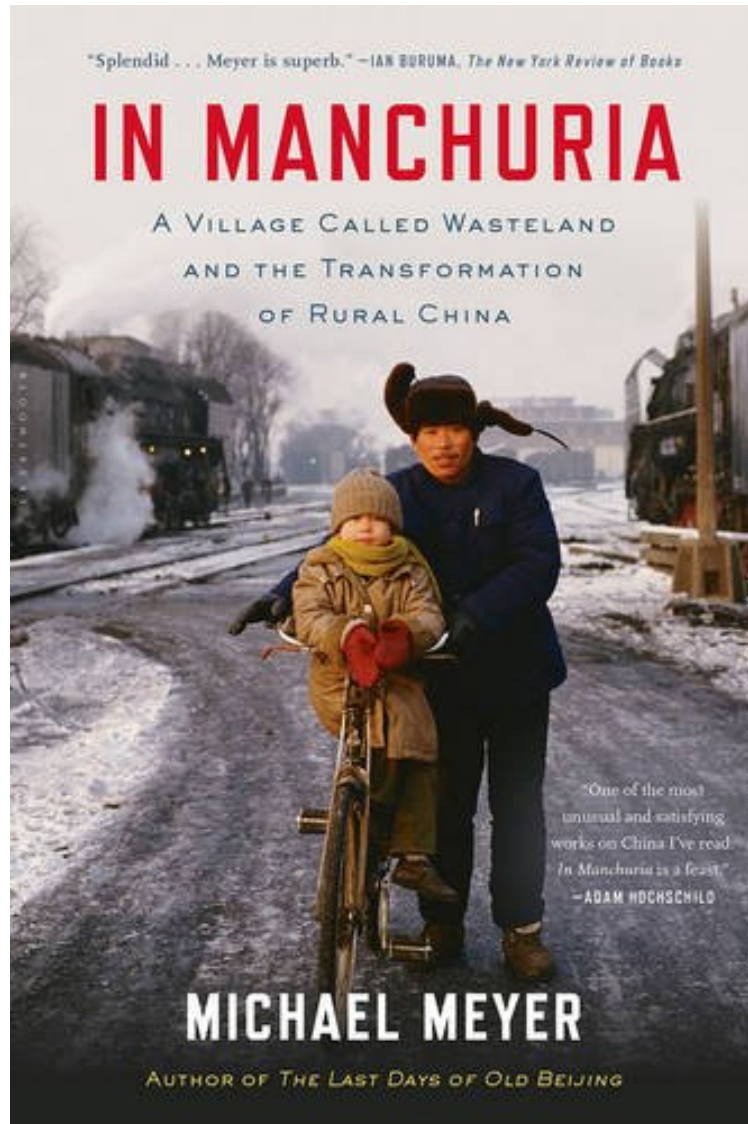


[Download free pdf] In Manchuria: A Village Called Wasteland and the Transformation of Rural China

In Manchuria: A Village Called Wasteland and the Transformation of Rural China

Michael Meyer

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Michael Meyer : In Manchuria: A Village Called Wasteland and the Transformation of Rural China before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised In Manchuria: A Village Called Wasteland and the Transformation of Rural China:

4 of 4 people found the following review helpful. Michael Meyer is a master storyteller and historianBy Dave Douglas"In Manchuria" tells the story of Meyer's in-law's village in the north of China; a village called "Wasteland"

that, with only a couple thousand inhabitants far from the economic and culture center of the rapidly developing country, is nondescript, ordinary and unremarkable--yet also beautiful, fascinating, and poignant. Meyer has crafted a work that appeals to many interests. If you have been waiting 30 years for a sequel to Paul Theroux's 1988 "Riding the Iron Rooster" you will find satisfaction here as the author explores the extent of China's far north by rail and introduces the reader to the passengers, stations and history of the region. Students, pensioners, taxi drivers, and "dancing girls" share their stories and bring to life the region that has been shaped by Manchus, Chinese, Russians, Japanese, missionaries, pioneers, exiles, soldiers, and farmers. Microhistory fans of the works of Simon Winchester and Erik Larson will be gripped by Meyer's account of the history of the village and the region which, unlike central and southern regions of China, was comparatively newly settled with an historical timeline comparable in scope to that of the United States. The Trans-Siberian Railroad, The Russo-Japanese War, The Last Emperor of China, The Second World War, Korea, The Cultural Revolution and the ongoing economic transformation of China are all woven into a compelling narrative peopled with witnesses and participants interviewed by Meyer, or unearthed through years of research at libraries around the world. Finally, and most significantly, the book appeals to those who cherish a true love story. Meyer's wife was raised in Wasteland and it was on visits to her family that he glimpsed the unique and untold story of the region and its people. The story of their meeting, courtship, marriage, and work-imposed separations (she skyping from a high-rise Hong Kong apartment and he from a bare Manchurian farmhouse lacking indoor plumbing and heated by burning rice straw) root the story and are never far from the history of the village and region. The love her family and the village have for her (as a child they all called her "The Princess") is the first thing that Meyer has in common with the people of Wasteland. After establishing this common ground he finds similarities with his Minnesota hometown, his family, his teaching philosophy, and his hopes for the future. None of which would have happened without the love story. The one complaint is that the story ends and leaves the reader wanting more updates on the fate of the village. Have more farmers signed on with the large farming conglomerate? Has the name of the village been changed? Has a new school been built? Hopefully Meyer will return for a follow up in the future.

2 of 2 people found the following review helpful. A provocative book
By wsmr
A Village Called Wasteland is an enjoyable read in many regards. It covers the forces at work on and in Manchuria in great historical detail as Michael Meyer was drawn to the area by personal involvement and decided to try and see it from the inside out starting in the locale of his wife's childhood. He writes with wit and charm about real contemporary residence, but also about those who had been buffeted by the wars and revolutions that have racked the region. China today is in a dramatic state of flux as the nation has moved up in the scale of international importance through its rapid development and there are grand plans being constructed regarding where it is headed next in terms of rural-urban composition that will affect millions of people, as well as the stability of its political structure. Meyer goes at these issues as if he were concerned about his own family's outcomes; in a sense he is. Living in China as an expatriate, he laid out for me what has been occurring in terms of changing legislation that show both progress made and stresses developing, and the hard choices that have to be made to move on from where people have arrived for themselves as well as for the policy makers he includes the current grand plans of Xi Jinping, President and Communist Party Grand Secretary. No other of the many books I have read on contemporary China does that nearly as well and I sense it is because he is concerned about real people, especially what he refers to as the Northeasterners, both driving and being driven by their environment; not what you generally find in an historical account. But if you simply wish to better understand the history of the region you will not be disappointed, richly researched scholarship. Both Meyer and Peter Hessler started as Peace Corps volunteers and stated on to learn the language and the people, and loved to run.

1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. Great history, great read
By Steve
While I sometimes labored through In Manchuria, it was more often due to a busy summer and a distracted mind. Make no mistake, writer Michael Meyer is gifted in making history engaging without being intellectually insulting no easy task. Obviously, in a project as all-encompassing as telling the transformation of rural China, some chapters are more interesting than others. Meyer not only tells the history of the region, but also describes his sojourn. I found the chapters dealing with the Japanese occupation and the puppet state of Manchukuo to be the most fascinating and revealing. My wife, like Meyer's, is from this area (his wife from the book's titular village Wasteland, mine from Harbin), and her unflagging dislike for the Japanese is understandable given the history. While Nanjing might have garnered the majority of sympathetic global press, Harbin and the northeast were also the settings for tragically little-known Japanese atrocities. I particularly appreciated Meyer's inclusive recollection. He tells the story as objectively as possible, referencing both Chinese and Japanese horrors from that terrible period, and there's certainly plenty of tragedy to spread around. As anyone familiar with China's last hundred years knows, China has inflicted plenty of pain and misery on her own people, and Meyer reminds us in various ways how there is still a paucity of complete information taught in China's schools. This doesn't help matters (my wife's deep-seated feelings bear this out), and it makes me sad that ignorance still holds reign when it comes to public education. Needless to say, it's a moving and riveting section of the book. There are local touchstones in two endearing Wasteland characters, Auntie Yi and Sang Jiu, to whom Meyer periodically returns and gains vital perspective and first-hand lessons in Chinese history. In telling the history of this particular region of China, he essentially reveals the chain of events for the entire nation. After all, Mao's vision was all about returning the country to the farmers. The culture of rural, farm-

centric China is the key player here, and Meyer reveals the shrinking position farming has in modern China and how that defines the transformation going on nationwide. Not only are the citizens eschewing farming for city jobs, but the farmers who do stay are constantly pressured to give in to big corporations and governmental bureaucrats with grandiose visions to alter the landscape of the entire country. The influence of Big Farming has done a number here at home, and clearly, its reach is global. *In Manchuria* is a well-written mash-up of history and journal, told by a man with a great deal of experience in the area, coupled with critical Mandarin chops, and a personal stake in the game. Instead of the run-of-the-mill cautionary tomes about the daunting growth of China and her increasing influence on the global stage (usually with the words dragon and/or red worked into the title for dramatic affect), Meyer offers this comfortable narrative filled with history, humor, and heart. Its a great history and a great read. 4.5 stars.

In the tradition of *In Patagonia* and *Great Plains*, Michael Meyer's *In Manchuria* is a scintillating combination of memoir, contemporary reporting, and historical research, presenting a unique profile of China's legendary northeast territory. For three years, Meyer rented a home in the rice-farming community of Wasteland, hometown to his wife's family. Their personal saga mirrors the tremendous change most of rural China is undergoing, in the form of a privately held rice company that has built new roads, introduced organic farming, and constructed high-rise apartments into which farmers can move in exchange for their land rights. Once a commune, Wasteland is now a company town, a phenomenon happening across China that Meyer documents for the first time; indeed, not since Pearl Buck wrote *The Good Earth* has anyone brought rural China to life as Meyer has here. Amplifying the story of family and Wasteland, Meyer takes us on a journey across Manchuria's past, a history that explains much about contemporary China--from the fall of the last emperor to Japanese occupation and Communist victory. Through vivid local characters, Meyer illuminates the remnants of the imperial Willow Palisade, Russian and Japanese colonial cities and railways, and the POW camp into which a young American sergeant parachuted to free survivors of the Bataan Death March. *In Manchuria* is a rich and original chronicle of contemporary China and its people.

Michael Meyer has a more refined sense of history and poetry, and with his new book *In Manchuria: A Village Called Wasteland and the Transformation of Rural China*, he seizes the opportunity to dig beneath the region's gritty surfaces . . . *In Manchuria* is the second book by Mr. Meyer, whose work has also appeared in magazines and newspapers, including *The New York Times*. His first was *The Last Days of Old Beijing* a well-received portrait of daily life in an ancient section of the city that is about to be razed in the run-up to the 2008 Olympics . . . Mr. Meyer also has a knack for noticing amusingly incongruous details, and he employs that talent to full effect to convey the contradictions of contemporary China. *New York Times* Meyer writes from the appealing perspective of an American outsider who can tell a Chinese story from the inside, as it were, by plunging into the private lives of people he came to know intimately . . . As an historian, and especially as a guide to Chinese museums, memorials, and monuments, Meyer is superb . . . [He] is not only a connoisseur of patriotic monuments, but also a wonderful explorer of the relics of a past that is rubbed out, overlooked, or largely forgotten. Ian Buruma, *New York of Books* *In Manchuria* is a bet that the desolate plains of northeast China will be more interesting to him and his readers than they are to most Chinese, and even to most residents of Manchuria. And Meyer wins that bet, offering readers a richly detailed, highly readable, and utterly enjoyable history of Manchuria (and Wasteland). *Los Angeles of Books* A fine book to lose yourself in on a winter's night . . . Meyer is a fine descriptive writer . . . he sketches his small cast of characters with simple grace . . . [His] memoir is most rewarding if read as a story about searching, about living, about exploring, in which the act of discovery is incidental. *Wall Street Journal* Michael Meyer combines an informative history of China's northeast region with a charming and at times sentimental account of the lives of the inhabitants of a rice-farming community that is about to become a company town. *Minneapolis Star Tribune* Michael Meyer's *In Manchuria: A Village Called Wasteland and the Transformation of Rural China* is a beautifully written blend of memoir, travel account, history and social commentary. . . . an engaging account of rural China poised on the brink of change. *Shelf Awareness* A satisfying, elegant personal journey in China's fabled Northeast . . . A work of enormous heart as well as research. starred review, *Kirkus* "This wonderfully written book is an intriguing blend of immersion journalism, history and a cross-cultural romance. Michael Meyer threw himself into China's fast-disappearing village culture that foreigners virtually never get to see. He has brought it to life with zest, humor and insatiable curiosity, in one of the most unusual and satisfying works on China I've read. Fittingly for a book centered on a farm, *In Manchuria* is a feast." Adam Hochschild, author of *KING LEOPOLD'S GHOST* and *TO END ALL WARS* "With *In Manchuria*, Michael Meyer has resurrected what was once a great literary tradition of books about the life and land of rural China. Over the past twenty years, writers have focused on the boom of urban China--overlooking the fact that today most Chinese still have ties to the countryside. Meyer's heartfelt book helps us remember. He tracks the lives of farmers in the vast northeast, and their uncertain transition to corporate agriculture, in a book as rich and deep as the earth of this storied region." Peter Hessler, author of *RIVER TOWN* and *ORACLE BONES* "Michael Meyer's exhilarating account of life on a Chinese rice farm, *In Manchuria*, takes a completely fresh look at contemporary China. A brilliant (and witty) reporter and writer, Meyer notices everything and deftly threads history, politics, people, and the rich textures of daily

life in the country's remote Northeast into a drama of change and loss, as Eastern Fortune Rice, a large government-sponsored business, turns a quiet village of farmers into a 'modern' company town." Jean Strouse, author of *MORGAN: AMERICAN FINANCIER* and *ALICE JAMES*"Michael Meyer takes a faraway village and creates from it a whole world. In Manchuria is part memoir, part portrait of a fascinating and important place, and a successor to Bruce Chatwin's *In Patagonia*. With an emotional understanding ignited by love and sharpened through long connection, Meyer combines incredible stories from Manchuria's past with here-and-now reporting, and in doing so, captures the brilliant tangle that is the new China." Amy Wilentz, author of *FAREWELL*, *FRED VOODOO* and *THE RAINY SEASON*Delightful character sketches and casual but sharp-eyed reporting . . . Meyer's entertaining mix of memoir, travelogue, and sociology yields a rich, insightful view of China in transition. Publishers WeeklyMeyer's book is a touching mixture of personal reminiscence and a primer on the history of one of China's significant regions . . . Meyer captures this fast-changing world with affection, but without sentimentality. The Telegraph"[Meyer's] graceful book is travel memoir and social history as he explores a fast-vanishing way of life in the village and beyond." Minneapolis Star Tribune, "Best of Non-Fiction"About the AuthorMichael Meyer first went to China in 1995 with the Peace Corps. The winner of a Lowell Thomas Award for travel writing, Meyer has also won a Whiting Writers' Award for nonfiction and a Guggenheim Fellowship. His stories have appeared in the New York Times, Time, Smithsonian, Sports Illustrated, Slate, the Financial Times, the Los Angeles Times, and the Chicago Tribune. He is the author of *The Last Days of Old Beijing*, which became a bestseller in China, and he divides his time between Pittsburgh and Singapore.