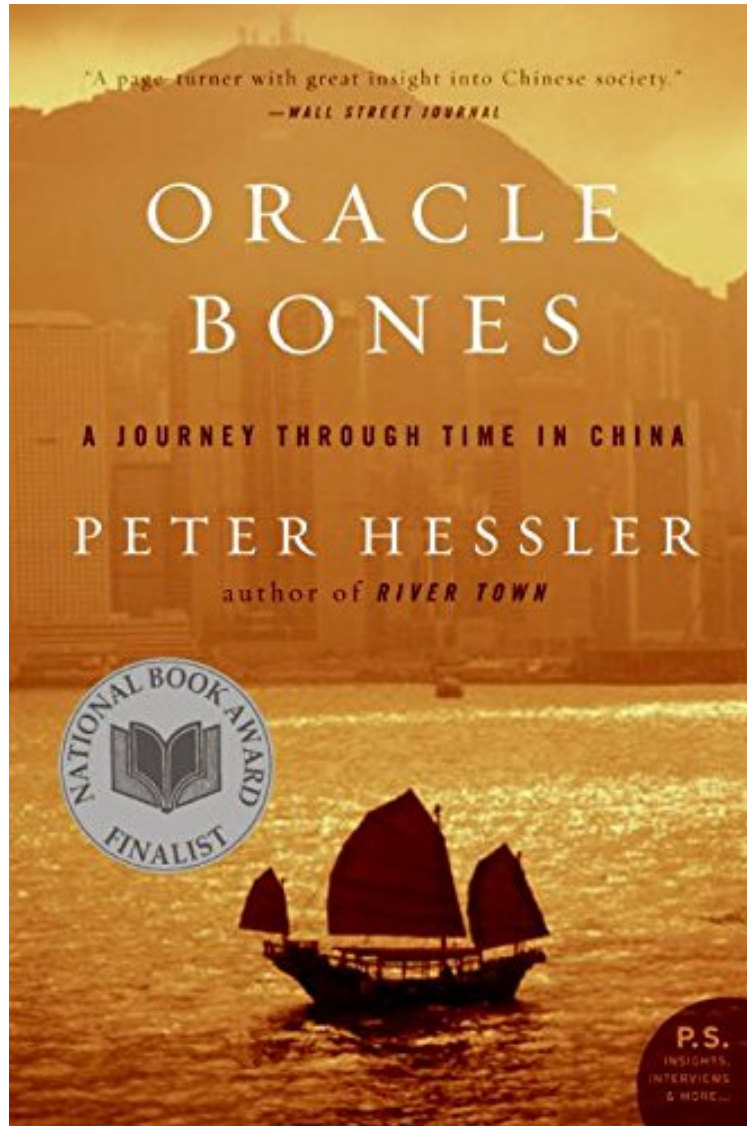


[Download free pdf] Oracle Bones: A Journey Through Time in China

Oracle Bones: A Journey Through Time in China

Peter Hessler

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#185583 in Books Peter Hessler 2007-05-08 2007-05-08 Original language: English PDF # 1 8.00 x 1.19 x 5.311, .90 #File Name: 0060826592528 pages Oracle Bones A Journey Through Time in China P S Series | File size: 65.Mb

Peter Hessler : Oracle Bones: A Journey Through Time in China before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Oracle Bones: A Journey Through Time in China:

3 of 3 people found the following review helpful. Another good book in a long list of people who discover China for themselves. By Leib Gershon Mitchell Who might it be for? 1. People who are going to China for the first time and want an introduction to some aspects of the place and a taste of the history. 2. People who have already lived there before

(like the present reviewer-- for 11 years) and experienced it as a great time in life and want to keep the memories of that time alive. There are a number of other books in this genre that I have read (i. *Factory Girls: From Village to City in a Changing China*; ii. *The Chinese*; iii. *Unsavoury Elements: Stories of Foreigners on the Loose in China*; iv. *China Cuckoo: How I Lost a Fortune and Found a Life in China*; v. *Iron and Silk*), and this book distinguishes itself from among those other books in several ways:

1. The person who wrote this book actually had something on the ball-- a journalism career that he was getting off the ground instead of someone who washed out of their career in whatever Western country they were from or just never got one started to begin with;
2. The book is organized (loosely) around historical artifacts recovered from excavations;
3. There is discussion (sympathetic) of several groups of people, and the author shows us these groups of people as they see themselves and also through the eyes of other:
 - i. Uighurs. Very few Western people even know about them, and they are often portrayed as thieves of Muslim terrorists. This author describes them as people who make a living on the margins and as middlemen-- and who have been that for a very long time (p. 28);
 - ii. Migrant workers-- especially from Sichuan. He describes the scorn with which these Han Chinese people are viewed by other people because they have the misfortune to be born in a poor, rural part of China.
4. The tone of the author:
 - i. The observations of the people that he met were perceptive;
 - ii. Said observations were also objective and non judgmental;
 - iii. The author had verbal dexterity that made him a delight to read.

There are a couple of things that could have been fixed:

1. The titles of the Chinese characters were often nowhere near the same thing as the topic of the chapter. One chapter was titled "Stalin" in Chinese characters, and if I had not been able to read Chinese, that joke (is that what it was?) would have flown right over my head. Ditto with almost all of the other titles in Chinese.
2. There is one person that he spent a lot of time worrying about, and that is/ was Chen Mengjia. The author accidentally ends up writing a book about existentialist musings. Hessler goes to many places trying to find out about the man who knew more than anyone about Oracle bones (which very few people know anything about today) and finds that even just a few decades after his death, there is no one who can clearly say what happened to him and all the people who do remember are at the very end of their lives and want to forget. One person invested a whole lot of time trying to recover a forgotten society and then he dies and he is forgotten in the same way that they were/ are.

Verdict: Worth the time and worth the secondhand purchase price.

4 of 4 people found the following review helpful. Put it on your list

By JC Davenport
This is Hessler's second China book but I read his books out of order so it was my third. I was thinking this would be the book that I finally get an understanding of China . . . after all "Oracle Bones" sounds like maybe you're gonna get the answers to the big questions . . . Yes and no. Mostly no. I must say the book really doesn't have a plot. It meanders along with the author through China, following leads . . . excavations . . . old folks who have lived through the hell of China past and young folks who are turning the wheels of China future . . . You get a feel for the oppression and the freedom . . . the astonishing history and the astonishing disregard of history . . . you get free lessons in Chinese language, history and sociology . . . and you get no easy answers. No easy answers about economics, no obvious bad guys or good guys. What you get is like letters home from one of your family . . . total believability and realism. I would also say Hessler's rare reflection of his own original thoughts on the similarities of the U.S. and China on page 439-440 are pretty darn profound.

6 of 6 people found the following review helpful. You can do better

By Rotpeter
This is a difficult book to review because it's remarkably uneven. The author lived as a reporter in Beijing and first came to China as an English teacher with the Peace Corps. Here he relates modern-day episodes from China interspersed with chapters on the so-called "oracle bones," which are 3000+ year-old relics from the Shang Dynasty. It seems the ambition was to juxtapose these things - the current with the ancient, individual lives with broad-brush history - in order to give the reader a more complete view of today's China. The book fails in that goal, first because the method seems more and more dubious as you read through, and also because the author didn't organize the text in any coherent way. This is a shame, because he appears to enjoy a good grasp of Mandarin and has a keen eye in observing the details of everyday life in China. The problem is, there seems to be too much observation at the expense of reflection. Everything reads as if it's set up like an exercise for a creative writing workshop, where the priority is for style to pull reality up to its level. For example, a chapter on a visit to a starch factory is, as you might imagine, objectively uneventful, but has to be spiced up with tales of an enormous pile of corn and a company executive who punctuates his interview with giggles. The descriptions ring false in a way that never really goes away; the author can't let insignificance just be. Later, the author quotes one of his own press dispatches he wrote when covering Beijing's Olympics bid; his report on a meaningless meeting, which was then distributed to other journalists for their own articles, ends with "It was a fine day with clear blue skies and the wind came hard from the north." It's a funny line until you concede that he probably wasn't being ironic. What is ironic is, the author repeatedly derides a speaking style called "Special English," a streamlined grammar that he encountered with the Peace Corps, but himself writes things like, "One patch led to an abandoned village. It stood at the edge of the steep slopes; the trees were spindly and stunted. A pebbled creek lay as dry as a bone." Mostly, though, the writing workshop is in session, and we get lines like this: "[The Olympic Committee tour guide's] spoken English was poor but he handled that phrase perfectly, lingering on the last word like a weightlifter with the bar raised above his head." Not bad for a journalist's notebook dump.

Grade: A-
If all this seems harsh, it's because Oracle Bones was a missed opportunity. The sections covering the author's former students are genuinely moving, because he gathers up a good deal of detail on their lives.

But there's too little effort to connect these particular stories to any broader reflection on where China's headed, what opportunities remain to be seized, what might go right/wrong, what that means for the world. Each person that passes through the book - maybe even China itself - ultimately comes to feel like an assignment, raw materials to be transformed by A Real Writer. There are hints of insight here and there, but somehow the whole actually amounts to less than the sum of its parts. For better works that take somewhat similar, but more effective approaches to understanding China, I'd go instead with *Chinese Lessons: Five Classmates and the Story of the New China* or *Postcards from Tomorrow Square: Reports from China* (Vintage). Both of these books are by people who also spent a good amount of time in the country and have a reporter's eye. These authors are invested more in understanding China than in constantly proving themselves. Both are eager to grapple with China's future in a way that I'd hoped Oracle Bones would as well, but didn't.

A century ago, outsiders saw China as a place where nothing ever changes. Today the country has become one of the most dynamic regions on earth. In *Oracle Bones*, Peter Hessler explores the human side of China's transformation, viewing modern-day China and its growing links to the Western world through the lives of a handful of ordinary people. In a narrative that gracefully moves between the ancient and the present, the East and the West, Hessler captures the soul of a country that is undergoing a momentous change before our eyes.

From Publishers Weekly Starred . Hessler, who first wrote about China in his 2001 bestseller, *River Town*, a portrait of his Peace Corps years in Fuling, continues his conflicted affair with that complex country in a second book that reflects the maturity of time and experience. Having lived in China for a decade now, fluent in Mandarin and working as a correspondent in Beijing, Hessler displays impressive knowledge, research and personal encounters as he brings the country's peoples, foibles and history into sharp focus. He frames his narrative with short chapters about Chinese artifacts: the underground city being excavated at Anyang; the oracle bones of the title ("inscriptions on shell and bone" considered the earliest known writing in East Asia); and he pays particular attention to how language affects culture, often using Chinese characters and symbols to make a point. A talented writer and journalist, Hessler has courage—he's undercover at the Falun Gong demonstrations in Tiananmen Square and in the middle of anti-American protests in Nanjing after the Chinese embassy bombings in Belgrade and a sense of humor (the Nanjing rioters attack a statue of Ronald McDonald since Nanjing has no embassies). The tales of his Fuling students' adventures in the new China's boom towns; the Uighur trader, an ethnic minority from China's western border, who gets asylum after entering the U.S. with jade (false) documents; the oracle bones scholar Chen Mengjia, who committed suicide during the Cultural Revolution all add a seductive element of human interest. There's little information available in China, we learn, but Hessler gets the stories that no one talks about and delivers them in a personal study that informs, entertains and mesmerizes. Everyone in the Western world should read this book. (May) Copyright Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. From Bookmarks Magazine Hessler, Beijing correspondent for the *New Yorker*, freelance journalist, and the author of *River Town: Two Years on the Yangtze* (2001), a memoir of his experiences as an English teacher for the Peace Corps in China's Sichuan Province, describes a world closed to most Westerners. The writing is smart and engaging, and Hessler uses an archaeological framework (chapters on the past, for instance, are deemed "Artifacts") to organize his narrative, a hook that reminds the reader always of the past's influence on the present. The reconciliation between old and new will likely never be absolute. Critics agree, however, that Hessler skillfully interweaves the two temporal threads to create a portrait of a China struggling to define itself in the global community. Copyright 2004 Phillips Nelson Media, Inc. From Booklist Hessler, who has lived in China for the past nine years and is the Beijing correspondent for the *New Yorker*, has written a fascinating and frequently moving account of life in modern China as seen through the eyes of an eclectic group of people, including a minority Uighur, who operates on the fringe of legality, a factory worker, a teacher, a film director, and a scholar who was destroyed by the Cultural Revolution. All of them seem to function as outsiders as they struggle to cope with a nation that is undergoing monumental change. Hessler seamlessly interweaves their stories with the broader context of Chinese contemporary events, and he ties those events effectively with examinations of history, archaeological excavations, and the Chinese struggle to redefine national identity. This is an important and informative work offering a unique perspective on where China may be headed. Jay Freeman Copyright American Library Association. All rights reserved