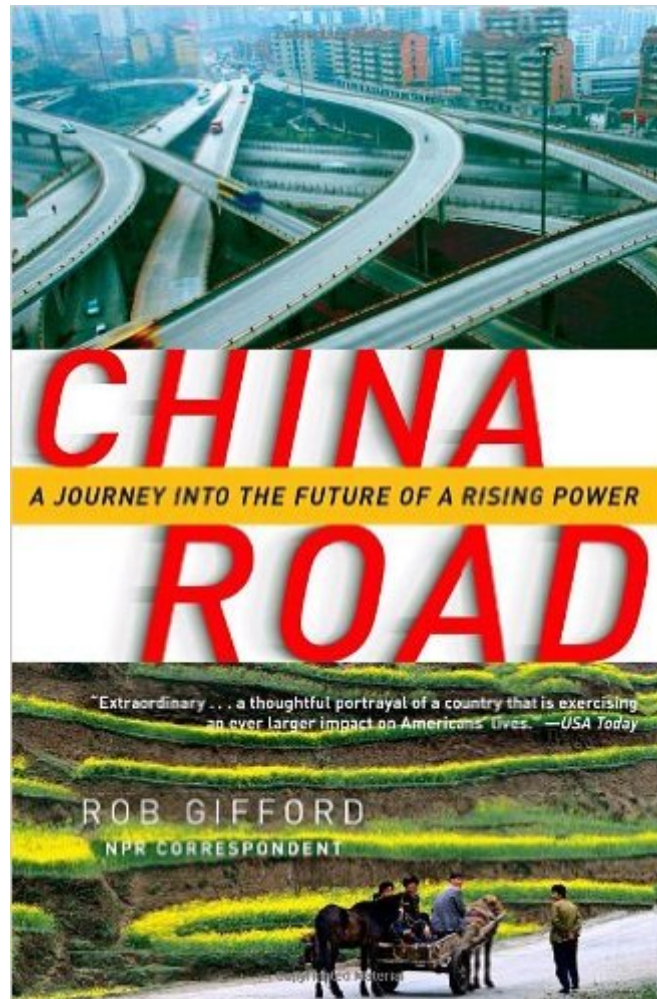


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# China Road: A Journey Into The Future Of A Rising Power



## 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.

## Book Information

Paperback: 352 pages

Publisher: Random House Trade Paperbacks; Reprint edition (June 3, 2008)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0812975243

ISBN-13: 978-0812975246

Product Dimensions: 5.1 x 0.8 x 8 inches

Shipping Weight: 9.9 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.5 out of 5 stars Â Â See all reviewsÂ (194 customer reviews)

Best Sellers Rank: #187,358 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #103 inÂ Books > Travel > Asia > China > General #293 inÂ Books > Business & Money > International > Economics #295 inÂ Books > Politics & Social Sciences > Politics & Government > Specific Topics > Political Economy

## Customer Reviews

I have been reading quite a few books on China, as I am fascinated with and intrigued by the country's amazing economic transformation, and the potential consequences elsewhere in the world, including here in the US. (Among the better ones are China Shakes the World by James Kygny as well as The Elephant and the Dragon by Robyn Meredith). If you listen regularly to NPR Morning Edition and All Things Considered, Rob Gifford will be a familiar voice. In "China Road: A Journey Into the Future of a Rising Power" (344 pages), Gifford, who has had a lifelong fascination with China and speaks Mandarin fluently, takes us on a journey across China on Road 312, the Chinese equivalent of our Route 66. Starting in Shanghai and working his way west, Gifford meets ordinary and not-so-ordinary Chinese and simply lets them do the talking. It makes for compelling reading. Talking to a well-known radio talk-show host in Shanghai, the host remarks that "morality--a sense of what's right and wrong--doesn't matter anymore". At some point in his journey Gifford runs into a man holding a big sign that reads ANTICORRUPTION JOURNEY ACROSS CHINA. The man tells Gifford that "You see, in the West, people have a moral standard that is inside them. It is built into them. Chinese people do not have that moral standard within them. If there is nothing external stopping them, they just do whatever they want for themselves, regardless of right and wrong". When Gifford runs into an Indian national, he hopes to have a discussion about how things are evolving in India versus in China, but the man is not interested in having the discussion.

Rob Gifford has written this book in a remarkably honest and lucid manner. He strikes a balance between the details he describes and the broader issues that relate to those details. He tries to look beyond the narrow focus on China's stunning economic development that many authors take. He makes abundant mention of the signs of the Chinese economic miracle that he sees on his

3000-mile journey across the country. But he has also tried to present the opinions of ordinary Chinese people ("old hundred names") as well as his own analysis of their problems, hopes, and future. He highlights the severe problem of pollution in Chinese cities. He mentions the ubiquitous sex-trade that employs 10-20 million women. He mentions the severe shortage of marriage-age women in many areas. He mentions the problem of official corruption. And he highlights the severe political repression and colonization of Muslim Uighurs and Buddhist Tibetans by the Han Chinese. He mentions his talk with a "family planning" doctor and learns that it is her job to go around in the villages and enforce the one-child policy. This means persuading pregnant women who already have a child to undergo abortion. Sometimes she has to abort 8-month old fetuses, sometimes kill them with lethal injection, and, if a baby still manages to be born alive, to kill it after birth. He contrasts Hui Muslims in Gansu province with Uighur Muslims of Xinjiang. The Hui Muslims are loyal Chinese citizens, who don't like American and British policy and wars in the Muslim countries, and admire Osama bin Laden.

I am very glad that I read China Road before the recent earthquake because the background that the book gave me on Chinese culture and politics has helped me better understand the news coverage of the disaster. This is the mark of a book that is truly worth reading, in that it helps the reader deduce meaning from world events. The premise and structure of the book are appealing. The author, Rob Gifford, an American journalist, hitchhikes across China on Route 312, China's equivalent of the US's Route 66, and writes about the places he visits and the people he meets. Along the way, he muses about China's history, its current building boom, its social structures and traditions, its problems related to its emergence as a global economy and its likely future as a world power. This makes for fascinating reading and, certainly for me, an entertaining way of getting to know a nation and a people who are increasingly affecting the lives of everyone on Earth. As soon as I heard about the collapse of school buildings in the poorer provinces of China during last month's earthquake, I realized that many parents would have just lost their only child due to China's one-child policy. This, it seemed to me, would be one of the things more likely to create the kind of anger and dissatisfaction that the government will be unable to buy off by putting more consumer goods into the hands of China's growing middle-class. Sure enough. The news continues to be full of stories about the anger and resentment felt by many lower middle class parents whose children died in poorly constructed schools while the children of the wealthy survived because they attended well-built schools that did not fall during the quake.

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