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Foreign Babes In Beijing: Behind The Scenes Of A New China



Synopsis

For a real insider's look at life in modern China, readers should turn to Rachel DeWoskin. Sophie Beach, *The Economist* Determined to broaden her cultural horizons and live a fiery life, twenty-one-year-old Rachel DeWoskin hops on a plane to Beijing to work for an American PR firm based in the busy capital. Before she knows it, she is not just exploring Chinese culture but also creating it as the sexy, aggressive, fearless Jiexi, the starring femme fatale in a wildly successful Chinese soap opera. Experiencing the cultural clashes in real life while performing a fictional version onscreen, DeWoskin forms a group of friends with whom she witnesses the vast changes sweeping through China as the country pursues the new maxim, to get rich is glorious. In only a few years, China's capital is transformed. With considerable cultural and linguistic resources (*The New Yorker*), DeWoskin captures Beijing at this pivotal juncture in her intelligent, funny memoir (*People*), and readers will feel lucky to have sharp-eyed, yet sisterly, DeWoskin sitting in the driver's seat (*Elle*).

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Having lived for much of the period from 2001 - 2004 in Suzhou, (about 50 miles west of Shanghai), I can categorically say that Rachel DeWoskin's new book, *FOREIGN BABES IN CHINA*, gets nearly everything right when it comes to Chinese culture and interpersonal relations. Her book is a fascinating account of a city, a country, and a culture in transition. The people around her, and she herself, suffer the contradictions of tradition versus modernity, socialism versus entrepreneurial capitalism, blind patriotism versus Westernization, and government control versus individual

freedom, yet everyone zooms ahead to find their own way even as the book's timeline approaches the millennium. Ms. DeWoskin arrives in Beijing on something of a lark, a college grad with an English degree, a little Mandarin, and a desire for something adventurous. She has taken a position with the Beijing office of an international public relations firm (we later learn that "P.R." sounds uncomfortably like the Chinese word for an unflattering body part) but quickly finds the work empty of content. She unexpectedly gets offered a spot as one of the two foreign female leads in a new Chinese soap opera entitled "Yang Niu Zai Beijing," or "Foreign Babes in Beijing." She is duped into signing a contract for far less than she's worth to the producers (there are still relatively few attractive young Western women in Beijing in 1995), and a series of acting misadventures and cast romances ensue. DeWoskin can barely separate her real-life feelings for her hunky co-star Wang Ling from their respective romantic roles in the soap opera. In the end, "Foreign Babes" is a huge success throughout China, and Ms.

Rachel DeWoskin spent a great part of the 1990s in Beijing, China first as a post-college lost soul looking for a good job opportunity, and finally becoming a national soap opera star and remaining within the powerful and frustrating lure that China holds over many Western expats. I myself spent the year 2000 in Beijing as a study-abroad from college and a part-time English teacher. I gobbled up "Foreign Babes" as soon as I read the review in EW magazine. I can categorically say, as a relatively kindred spirit to Ms. DeWoskin in many respects, that she nailed Beijing in every possible aspect 100% correctly. I usually refrain from overgeneralizations, but let me put it this way: my personal journal from my time in China reads almost exactly like this book. There is a bizarre love-hate that most Americans in China have with their host country. At once exotic, larger-than-life, enormous, confining, frustrating, ancient, ultra-modern and flagrantly obsessed with Western imports the China of DeWoskin's pages is the China that anyone who up and goes to Beijing right now will find. She even hits on and offers some fascinating analysis on the difference between Chinese and Western patriotism, linguistic nuances that make intimate communication nearly unattainable between the two cultures, and delivers beautiful character studies of wily Western expats and locals from all walks of life. Her characterizations of the people that populated her dusty, seamy Beijing are so honest and human that I could swear I've met them (in some cases I probably have, of course). Oh, and she's right about the ease of attaining celebrity in China.

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