



Yangtze Remembered: The River Beneath the Lake

Linda Butler

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In June 2003, the Three Gorges Dam opened and a reservoir the size of lake Superior began to form, inundating 372 miles of China's Yangtze River Valley. As 1,500 cities, towns and villages disappeared beneath the dark waters, more than a million people were being moved. Around the reservoir, huge construction projects are still transforming the landscape; mighty dikes, long bridges, apartment towers, and sprawling cities are springing up.

Between 2000 and 2003 Linda Butler made eight trips to the Yangtze to photograph the people, the human environment, and the natural landscape before, during, and after these changes. She spent long weeks in the busy cities and remote villages. Lyrical photographs of dramatic vistas are paired with images showing the ravages visited on this region by coal mining and erosion. Intimate shots of interiors reveal the contents of homes and stores, a table set for an impromptu meal, or a shop counter scattered with seed packets and posters of Mao. Informal portraits of local inhabitants preserve a record of the people as they carry pigs to market, load all their household furnishings onto a boat, or play badminton on a village street.

Accompanying the images is the photographer's travel commentary, which reads like a dynamic series of short stories. Butler's words reveal the invisible stories of the common people as they struggle to come to terms with the destruction of their homes and lives. Since ancient times, the Yangtze River itself has been like an unpredictable neighbor—sometimes generous, but at other times wreaking havoc on the lives of others. Perhaps because the river people have lived near such volatility they have developed a profound resilience in the face of adversity.

Yangtze Remembered is both a measured and a passionate book. The powerful images reveal much that we have never seen before and cannot ever see again.

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