



Beijing Bastard: Into the Wilds of a Changing China

Val Wang

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A humorous and moving coming-of-age story that brings a unique, not-quite-outsider's perspective to China's shift from ancient empire to modern superpower

Raised in a strict Chinese-American household in the suburbs, Val Wang dutifully got good grades, took piano lessons, and performed in a Chinese dance troupe—until she shaved her head and became a leftist, the stuff of many teenage rebellions. But Val's true mutiny was when she moved to China, the land her parents had fled before the Communist takeover in 1949.

Val arrives in Beijing in 1998 expecting to find freedom but instead lives in the old city with her traditional relatives, who wake her at dawn with the sound of a state-run television program playing next to her cot, make a running joke of how much she eats, and monitor her every move. But outside, she soon discovers a city rebelling against its roots just as she is, struggling too to find a new, modern identity. Rickshaws make way for taxicabs, skyscrapers replace *hutong* courtyard houses, and Beijing prepares to make its debut on the world stage with the 2008 Olympics. And in the gritty outskirts of the city where she moves, a thriving avant-garde subculture is making art out of the chaos. Val plunges into the city's dizzying culture and nightlife and begins shooting a documentary, about a Peking Opera family who is witnessing the death of their traditional art.

Brilliantly observed and winningly told, *Beijing Bastard* is a compelling story of a young woman finding her place in the world and of China, as its ancient past gives way to a dazzling but uncertain future.

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