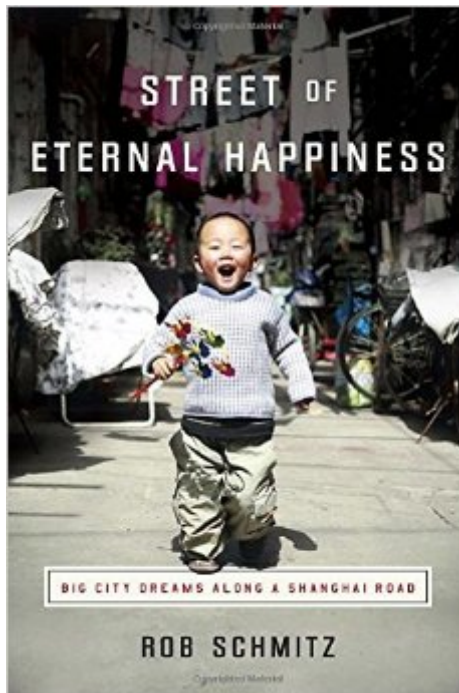


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# Street Of Eternal Happiness: Big City Dreams Along A Shanghai Road



## Synopsis

An unforgettable portrait of individuals who hope, struggle, and grow along a single street cutting through the heart of China's most exhilarating metropolis, from one of the most acclaimed broadcast journalists reporting on China today. *Modern Shanghai*: a global city in the midst of a renaissance, where dreamers arrive each day to partake in a mad torrent of capital, ideas, and opportunity. Marketplace's Rob Schmitz is one of them. He immerses himself in his neighborhood, forging deep relationships with ordinary people who see in the city's sleek skyline a brighter future, and a chance to rewrite their destinies. There's Zhao, whose path from factory floor to shopkeeper is sidetracked by her desperate measures to ensure a better future for her sons. Down the street lives Auntie Fu, a fervent capitalist forever trying to improve herself with religion and get-rich-quick schemes while keeping her skeptical husband at bay. Up a flight of stairs, musician and café owner CK sets up shop to attract young dreamers like himself, but learns he's searching for something more. As Schmitz becomes more involved in their lives, he makes surprising discoveries which untangle the complexities of modern China: A mysterious box of letters that serve as a portal to a family's " and country's " dark past, and an abandoned neighborhood where fates have been violently altered by unchecked power and greed. *A tale of 21st century China, Street of Eternal Happiness* profiles China's distinct generations through multifaceted characters who illuminate an enlightening, humorous, and at times heartrending journey along the winding road to the Chinese Dream. Each story adds another layer of humanity and texture to modern China, a tapestry also woven with Schmitz's insight as a foreign correspondent. The result is an intimate and surprising portrait that dispenses with the tired stereotypes of a country we think we know, immersing us instead in the vivid stories of the people who make up one of the world's most captivating cities.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Street of Eternal Happiness is a compelling and well-written study of modern China. Ex-pat author Rob Schmitz wields his guanxi with skill to ease back-stories out of a broad sampling of Shanghai's Chinese, all orbiting the eponymous thoroughfare. Over the course of fifteen chapters, Schmitz tells the story of life in today's Shanghai through the profound impact of China's governmental and economic policies. It's impossible to discuss modern China without all roads eventually leading back to Mao, and it's equally impossible for the lives of Chinese citizens to avoid his influence, even if they were born decades after his demise. While there are heartbreaking reminiscences from those who directly suffered during the Great Famine, the Great Leap, and the Cultural Revolution, the younger generations studied in this book were even more fascinating. As China has embraced capitalism and opened up to western-style consumerism, and generations exist never having had to live through the type of hardships of their parents or grandparents, the dynamic in China is moving away from the traditional and into something new. It will be interesting to watch China grow and evolve from the inevitable conflicts that will arise between a demanding class of consumer-driven if idealistic Gen Y and millennials, and the on-going suppression, unchecked greed, and corruption of the entrenched government. The author bounces in between the lives of a host of locals, starting with CK, a millennial hustling to nurture his restaurant and accordion sales jobs. Like many of his age, across generation after generation, CK is searching for something more than money and good times, something to feed his spiritual hunger. He seeks solace in the cranky wisdom of a monk running his nascent temple on the down low, due to China's tricky laws against religion. Auntie Fu and Uncle Feng, a bickering couple who operate a scallion pancake shop on the street. Feng serves the customers while his born-again Christian wife, hemorrhages money in one get rich quick scheme after another. Flower shop entrepreneur Zhao laments the meandering career paths of her two sons who are victims of the residential status laws that derailed her eldest son's chances at a successful life. Lastly, the displaced victims of Shanghai's building boom are represented in Mayor Chen and his wife and their pitiful experiences with the cruel and menacing land developers who stoop at nothing to get them out. This is the group of Shanghainese who represent the old, the new, the victims, the dreamers, and the schemers in modern China. Much like

last year's excellent *In Manchuria* by Michael Meyer, this is told by an American who has lived in China for some time, learned the language, and has made many connections and built trust with locals in order to obtain first hand information. While Meyer's was more of a folksy tale, Schmitz's has a lot more gritty realism, albeit couched in the author's wry humor. Schmitz has specialized in reporting on economics in China, and he weaves the individualized narratives into the larger economic framework, while he underscores the pragmatism of the Chinese, a people who have had many of their sufferings self-inflicted. The chapter that details Schmitz contacting one of the surviving children of a man who missed out on a critical portion of his life in a labor camp is particularly harrowing and unforgettable. There is humor, insight, heartbreak, and a universality that makes these people, living in this massive city half way around the world, seem as if they are people we can all relate to in some significant way. Schmitz reminds us of both our shared humanity as well as the fascinating differences in culture, economics, politics, love, and spirituality. I would love to read a book this well-written and endearing about America and her people, written by a foreigner with the breadth of Schmitz's experience and skill. Highly recommended for everyone who is curious about China and humanity in general.

Rob Schmitz is the long-time economic reporter for the radio show *Market Place* (which airs on NPR). I've been listening to his reporting for years, and I'm not surprised to see that now he has written a book on the big divides that exist in today's China. "*Street Of Eternal Happiness: Big City Dreams Along a Shanghai Road*" (2016 publication; 336 pages) is a non-fiction book that looks at one particular street in Shanghai, "Long Happiness Road" (which the author transposes to "Street of Eternal Happiness") and how it reflects what's going on in China today. The author's technique for bringing us these stories is as simple as it is effective: he meets people on that street (flower shop owner, sandwich shop owner, etc.), and starts recording their stories. And boy, the stories they have! In the opening chapter, he speaks with a sorta-homeless person who tells of how he and others in a certain block who refused to leave, were simply attacked and worse. The book is full of such 'facts are stranger than fiction' reporting. Then there is the story of the shoebox with letters written starting in the 50s that someone who knows he's a reporter gives him. Turns out the letters start in the late 50s when a 'rightist' man is sent to labor camp in the Great Leap Forward, and how he is separated from his wife and 7 children. The author becomes a sleuth and digs up the back story on these people (and along the way gives us a refresher course on the Great Famine, as if we need one). More recent trends also get plenty of coverage, such as the great demographical danger that undermines the principle that children care for their parents as they age, to the point that the

government has issued a new law trying to require it by law, the rampant Ponzi schemes that so many Chinese seem to keep falling for, the amazing high speed train network, etc. Along the way, the author remains very respectful of China and its people. To the extent that criticism is warranted, the facts speak for themselves without the author having to editorialize or add anything further. Bottom line: whether you've been to China or not, you can learn a lot from this book, and on top of that it makes for very entertaining reading. I've visited China and when people ask me "what's it like over there?", I always respond that it's impossible to convey that properly in words. I highly recommend visiting China if you can, to see what it's all about with your own eyes. Meanwhile, "Streets of Eternal Happiness" is HIGHLY RECOMMENDED!

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