



PODCAST

Ep. 13: Peter Hessler on ‘Other Rivers’

The bestselling author first taught in China in the late 1990s. In 2019, he went back. We caught up with him to ask what had changed, and if you can step into the same river twice.

PETER HESSLER — OCTOBER 1, 2024

SOCIETY

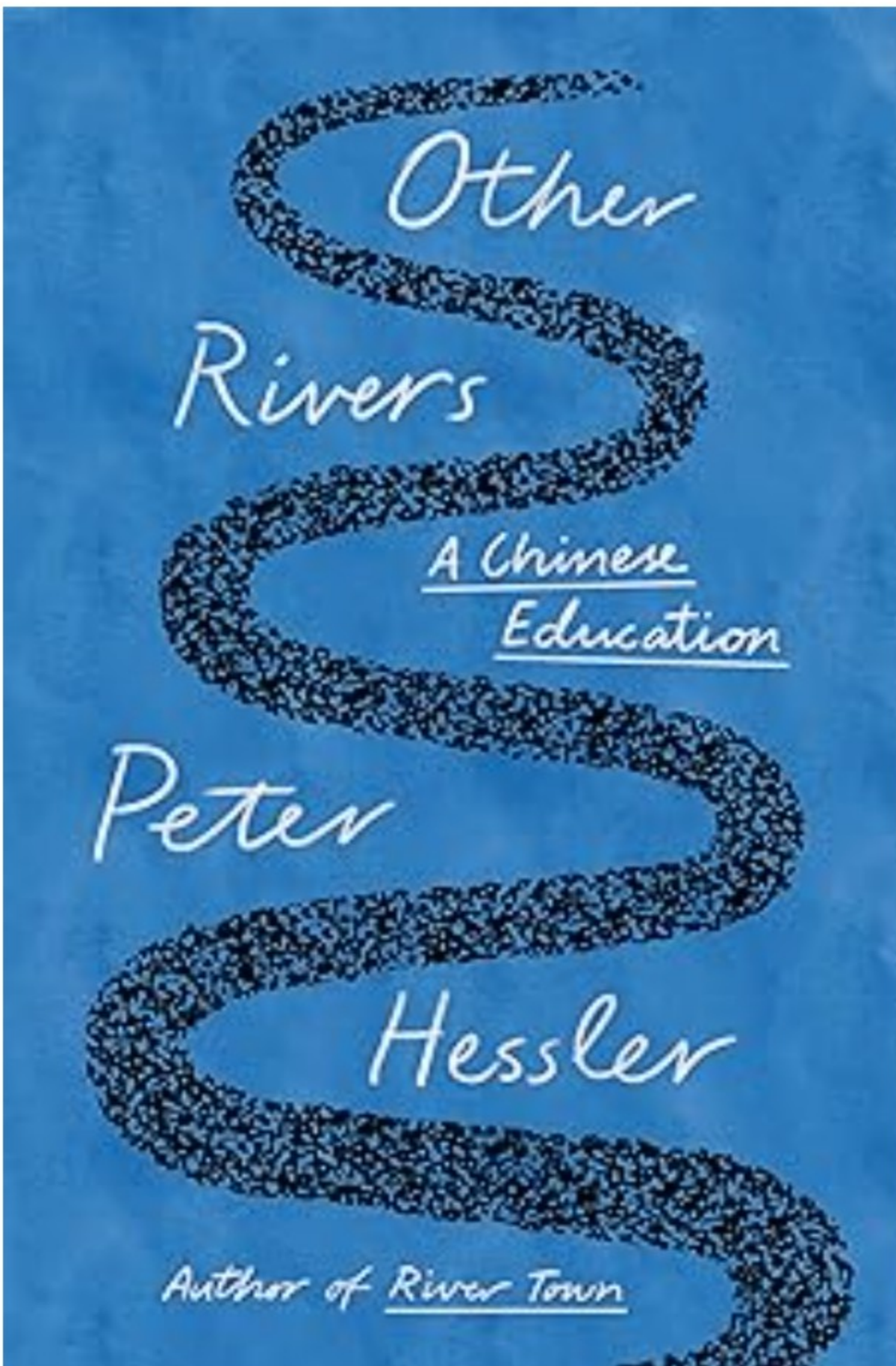


This is an episode of the China Books Podcast, from China Books Review. Subscribe at your favorite podcast platform, including [Apple Podcasts](#) and [Spotify](#), where a new episode lands early each month. Or listen right here, where you can also watch the video and browse our archive of [past episodes](#).



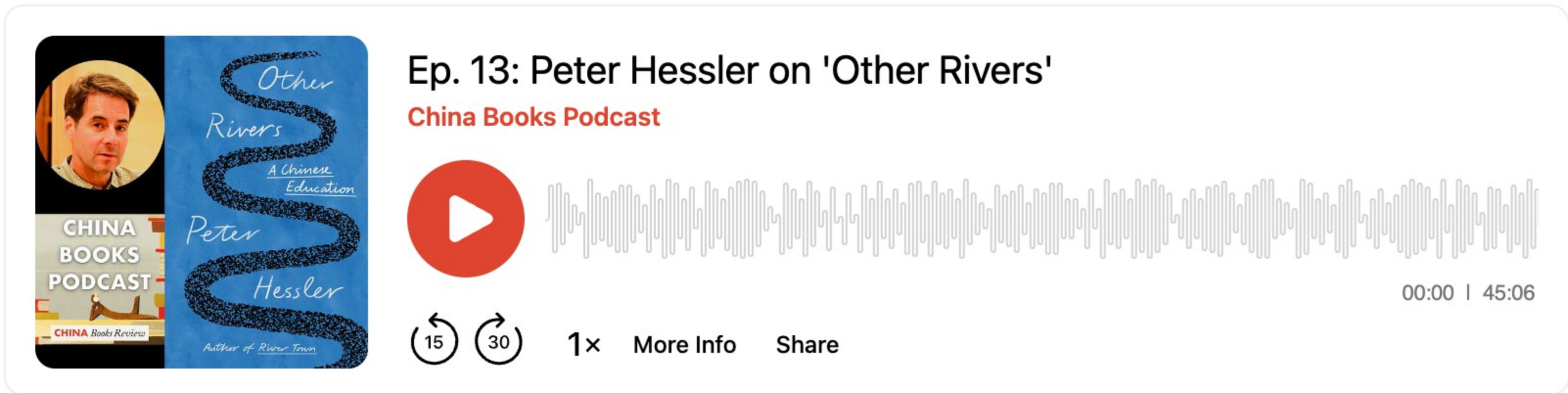
Welcome to season two of the China Books Podcast, a monthly interview series on all things China and bookish, hosted by editor Alec Ash and guests — stepping in for Mary Kay Magistad, who has wrapped up her [first season](#) of the podcast at a neat year of twelve episodes. We’re also celebrating the first year anniversary of *China Books Review*, which launched in October 2023. Since then we’ve published almost a hundred reviews, essays, excerpts, profiles, book lists and more, covering a smorgasbord of titles on or from China, ranging from weighty [tomes](#) on China’s maritime policy to [children’s books](#) about the Cultural Revolution.

Our guest this month is renowned writer Peter Hessler, a staff writer at *The New Yorker* and author of five books about China, most recently [Other Rivers: A Chinese Education](#), published earlier this year by Penguin Press. In the book, Hessler details his most recent stint living in China, teaching writing at Sichuan University in Chengdu from 2019 to 2021. Hessler talked to us about how the new generation of Chinese students differ from those he taught in the late 1990s; his experiences of Covid in 2020; the circumstances in which he left China in 2021; and the uncertain future of China writing.



Buy the book >

Watch the video interview, recorded at Asia Society in New York, or listen to the podcast:



“ [China writing] is narrowing. It’s becoming more political, more security focused. We’re losing the human element, and I really hope it changes. ”

— Peter Hessler

The video of this interview was also published at [Asia Society](#).



Peter Hessler is a writer and journalist, and staff writer at *The New Yorker*. He lived in China from 1996 to 2007, and then again from 2019 to 2021. He is the author of *River Town* (2001), winner of the Kiriyaama Book Prize; *Oracle Bones* (2007), finalist for the National Book Award; *Country Driving* (2011); and *Strange Stones* (2013). He won the 2008 National Magazine Award for excellence in reporting, and he was a MacArthur fellow in 2011. His most recent book is *Other Rivers* (2024).