



Trees Without Wind: A Novel (Weatherhead Books on Asia)

Rui Li

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Born in Beijing in 1950, the experimental writer Li Rui came of age in the thick of the Cultural Revolution. His experiences shaped not only his perception of China's unraveling but also his novelistic style. Combining the stylistic innovations of Modernist literature, particularly a Faulknerian play with dialogue and form, and content and language drawn from rural China, Li Rui's writing captures the harsh reality of a world turned upside down by ideological conflict.

Unfolding in the tense years of the Cultural Revolution (1966–1976), *Trees Without Wind* takes place in a remote Shanxi village in which a rare affliction has left the residents physically stunted. Director Liu, an older revolutionary and local commune head, becomes embroiled in a power struggle with Zhang Weiguo, a young ideologue who believes he is the model of a true revolutionary. Complicating matters is a woman named Nuanyu, who, like Zhang Weiguo and Director Liu, is an outsider untouched by the village's disease. "Wedded" to all of the male villagers, Nuanyu lives a polygamous lifestyle that is based on necessity and at odds with the puritanical idealism of the Cultural Revolution. The deformed villagers, representing the manipulated masses of China, become pawns in the Party representatives' factional infighting. Director Liu and Zhang Weiguo's explosive tug of war is part of a larger battle among politics, self-interest, and passion gripping a world undone by ideological extremism. A collectively-told narrative powered by distinctive subjectivities, *Trees Without Wind* is a milestone in the fictional treatment of this historical event.



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