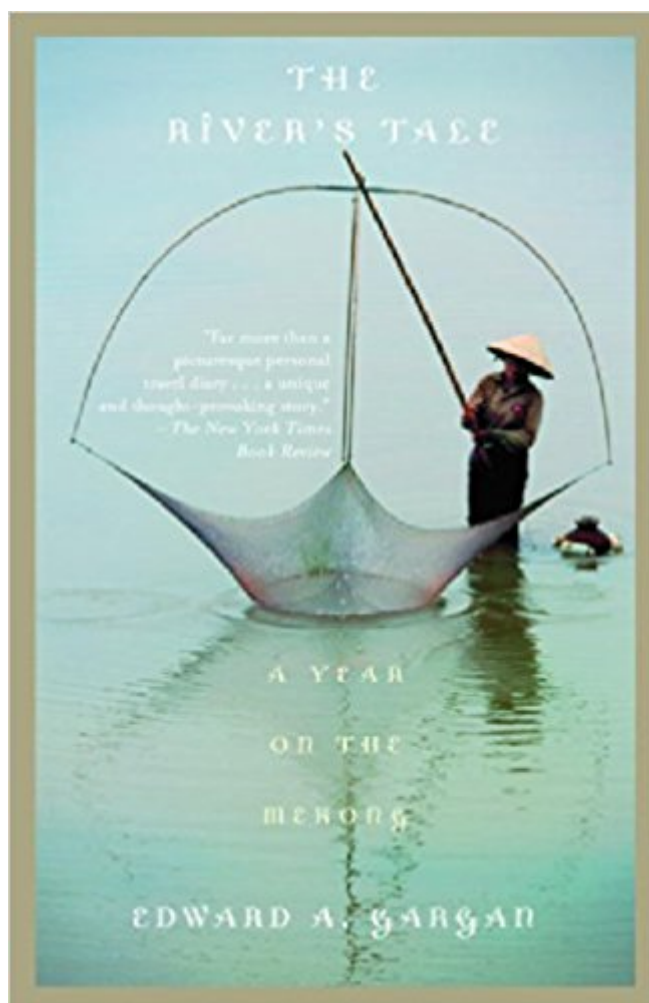


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# The River's Tale: A Year On The Mekong



## Synopsis

Along the Mekong, from northern Tibet to Lijiang, from Luang Prabang to Phnom Penh to Can Lo, I moved from one world to another, among cultural islands often ignorant of each other's presence. Yet each island, as if built on shifting sands and eroded and reshaped by a universal sea, was re-forming itself, or was being remolded, was expanding its horizons or sinking under the rising waters of a cultural global warming. It was a journey between worlds, worlds fragiley conjoined by a river both ominous and luminescent, muscular and bosomy, harsh and sensuous. From windswept plateaus to the South China Sea, the Mekong flows for three thousand miles, snaking its way through Southeast Asia. Long fascinated with this part of the world, former New York Times correspondent Edward Gargan embarked on an ambitious exploration of the Mekong and those living within its watershed. *The River's Tale* is a rare and profound book that delivers more than a correspondent's account of a place. It is a seminal examination of the Mekong and its people, a testament to their struggles, their defeats and their victories.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

"The Mekong scours some of the saddest history of recent years," writes Edward A. Gargan in this richly described and melancholic tale of his journey through Tibet, China, Laos, Cambodia, and Vietnam. Thirty years after landing in jail for refusing to register for the draft, the war-protester-turned-foreign-correspondent decided to see for himself how these countries have brought themselves back from the brink, and how their myriad cultures are struggling to preserve themselves. Beginning at the source of the Mekong River, near a camp of nomads high on the

Tibetan plateau, he followed the 3,000 mile-long waterway through the heart of some of Asia's most complex and wounded societies. While the first half of Gargan's story, which focuses on China's demolition of Tibetan and other minority cultures, is interesting, it becomes gripping in the claustrophobic paranoia of Laos and post-Pol Pot Cambodia. Ultimately it becomes clear that while America lost the war in Vietnam, it has never left the region--lingering in the scars of war and inversely the creeping acceptance, if not embrace, of all things American. --Lesley Reed --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

A chronicle of a year-long journey along the nearly 3,000 miles of the Mekong River as it descends from the Tibetan plateau through southern Asia, Gargan's book is a vivid look at the disparate peoples settled the length of the river's path. As the living is often hard on the river, so too is the journey for Gargan (*China's Fate*), a former New York Times correspondent in Asia: he finds himself sleeping on floors, stranded on rutted highways and arguing with fickle boatmen over the course of his travels. But his own misadventures don't overshadow the larger story of the region, a story of the tension between tradition and modernity in an area long accustomed to the influences of outside forces: "Tibetan Khamba horsemen lathered in yak butter... gallop across endless grasslands rising from the river's pebbled shores, herding yaks as their ancestors did; while two thousand miles to the south, Vietnamese cosmetics salesmen... scoot about on Hondas... hawking American beauty shampoos and face soaps." Gargan's passion for the subject makes him acutely sensitive to the rhythms and details of the communities he visits; it also makes his prose slightly purple. At times so many faces and facts are packed in that they blur as if Gargan were traveling by train instead of the various rickety contraptions he does take. Still, it's an absorbing and informative read for anyone interested in the region. Copyright 2001 Cahners Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Having been to Vietnam, I was anxious to read Edward Gargan's book about the Mekong. I was expecting a book about his travels on the Mekong, but it is ever so much more than that. I enjoyed Gargan's intimate look at the people, politics, history, and culture of the countries that the Mekong flows through is educational as well as entertaining. His travels through Tibet, Laos, Myanmar, Cambodia and Vietnam brings you straight to the heart of these countries. The section on Cambodia is heart wrenching as Gargan reveals the gruesome past of the 'killing fields' and Cambodia's struggle to move forward from its horrendous past. Well written and worth the read if you have any interest in understanding Southeast Asia.

Such a rich account of the authors journey. I was able to read this book while traveling through Laos and Thailand. I wished that I could have retraced his steps from the start. You wont be disappointed in this book.

This river journey was extremely informative, very interesting and eloquently written with fine detail to the surroundings in the author's focus, thus making this river trek a top preference of mine. It would be of great interest to anyone who wants a book embarking upon the grounds of sociology, expats, social anthropology, personal travel, our own personal American history in these areas, or learning more about the Mekong and the ways of which it flows. Most of the countries which inhabit the Mekong are State ruled...Communist run countries, so interviews with people were not always conveniently easy. As well, many changes to ruins of war were either fixed and furthered by the State, unless it had personal or religious precedence to the past; thus the ruins lay there at rest. This book does not throw you directly into each of the country's wars, but the author does give us their histories and their aftermaths from interviewees those who lived through such beastly times and were willing to share their personal stories with him. His interest of people, their living conditions, their survival techniques, and their devoted strength in Buddhism is explored. Though Buddhism and it's teachings run rampant throughout the Mekong, you have to remember again, that these are State run countries and religion is not acceptable, and so much is explained to him from interviewing an informative monk. It is inevitable what the hands of time has done to people in the Mekong's regions, to date, via the outcome of previous wars (some historical, other's secretive), and the outcomes do show heavily on the people who lived them. We here in the U.S.A. can't even begin to imagine having experienced the perils or the aftermath having foreigners invading our country for on-going (numerous) years, had it happened to us on our own home soil. As the author traveled from area to area, his creative writing makes very clear settings. It's a great book.

An engaging tale, skillfully told. Whoever enjoys travel narratives, will enjoy this one; and it should be of interest to anyone curious about South-East Asia.

This book tells the eventful story of long time Asia hand Edward Gargan's epic journey following the Mekong River from it's source in Tibet to it's end in the South China Sea. His excellent style gives the reader insightful views into the cultural, political & geographical terrain that he traversed in his year long adventure. This book ranks up there with others such as "Facing the Congo" by Jeffrey

Taylor & "The Shadow of the Sun" by Ryszard Kapuscinski. It's a must read for the arm chair traveler, anyone interested in SE Asia, or those of us who are fascinated by the great rivers of the Earth.

This is the story of a journalist's trip down the Mekong river. I have not finished it, but I can say that I think it is a wonderful book. He takes you right along on his trip and that's a nice way to travel. He shares wonderful stories of the people and insights into the area, that a lot of us don't know about. And, if you do, it would probably be fun to compare your experiences with his.

Gargan completed an ambitious project: to travel along the whole course of one of the world's longest rivers (the 12th longest) for a year, exploring the nature, the cultures and the economic activity that takes place on its banks and hinterland. He does a remarkable job of observing what happens around him and narrating a captivating story. He is humble enough not to pass judgement, but he does make interesting observations on history, economics and politics when he sees things happening around him. A remarkable account of travelling in a region spanning several countries which share a great river!

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