

Shanghai : The Rise and Fall of a Decadent City 1842-1949

By Stella Dong

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Transformed from a swampland wilderness into a dazzling, modern-day Babylon, the Shanghai that predated Mao's cultural revolution was a city like no other: redolent with opium and underworld crime, booming with foreign trade, blessed with untold wealth and marred by abject squalor.

Journalist Stella Dong captures all the exoticism, extremes, and excitement of this legendary city as if it were a larger-than-life character in a fantastic novel.

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Editorial Review

Amazon.com Review

For a good, spicy read about colonial Asia's most decadent city, this is the book. Stella Dong, a second-generation Chinese-American living in New York, tells the story of Old Shanghai in racy style: readers expecting tales of drugs, prostitution, and gang warfare will not be disappointed. Her scholarship is sound, however, and at the end of each chapter she provides bibliographies of drier, more academic studies for those wishing to delve deeper.

The Treaty of Nanking that ended the First Opium War between Britain and China in 1842 granted trading concessions in Shanghai to the European powers. The international currents shaping the city over the next hundred years were complex: British merchants, Chinese warlords, Russian émigrés, Sephardic Jews, and German spies exploited its extraterritorial status to make Shanghai a hotbed of greed, vice, and intrigue. Opium was crucial to the city's extraordinary wealth and lawlessness, though Dong also relates the rise of its criminal gangs to the development of coastal steamships and consequent loss of inland-transportation jobs. Foreign participation in the opium trade was not confined to the British: the role of the French Concession in Shanghai is described in well-researched detail. The flamboyant personalities that prospered in the city's unfettered environment come alive, characters like Pockmarked Huang, who combined the post of police chief in the French Concession with leadership of the Green Gang. Dong explores Shanghai's political significance both as the source of Chiang Kai-shek's fortunes and as a center of Communist revolutionary activity. As the city again becomes the leading commercial metropolis of a dynamic national economy, *Shanghai 1842-1949* successfully documents its unique role in the development of modern China. --*John Stevenson*

From Publishers Weekly

In its heyday, Shanghai was known by many names--the emperor's ugly daughter, Sodom and Gomorrah of the Far East and whore of Asia. In her first book, Dong, a journalist and second-generation Chinese-American, has filled her often-absorbing history of the city with vivid details that leave little doubt as to how Shanghai earned its reputation. She also offers tidbits on colorful local personalities, such as the Chinese warlord who never left home without his enormous lacquered teak coffin, the radical American feminist who was indirectly responsible for the end of Mao Zedong's second marriage and the wealthy Chinese businessman whose two younger daughters married Chiang Kai-shek and Sun Yat-sen. Although the city was inhabited by 250,000 Chinese when the British invaded in 1842, it wasn't long before the nationals were serving the foreigners, who were making Shanghai one of the world's wealthiest business centers. Banking and manufacturing were the respectable professions, but it was opium--controlled largely by foreigners but used largely by Chinese--that built modern Shanghai. The arrogance and excess of foreigners, who set up their own courts, lived lavishly and excluded the Chinese from governing bodies and private clubs, created the uneven balance of power and economics that helped pave the way for Communism. Dong skillfully packs her narrative with all of the city's "sordid pleasures and exploitation," offering an account that is at once informative and entertaining. (Mar.)

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From Library Journal

Journalist Dong here colorfully and lucidly recounts the myths and stories of exotic Old Shanghai. Using mostly English sources and scholarship, she gleefully chronicles the overlapping and sometimes merging cosmopolitan worlds of trade, sin, politics, play, and, above all, money that made the city both "the Paris of

the East" and "the whore of the Orient." She uses many stories and even gossip to personalize the great events of modern Chinese history that took place there, from the Opium Wars to the bloody battles of the Chinese Revolution dating from the 1920s to 1949. Specialists are not offered new theoretical insight or information, but general readers will find this story lively and informative. Other recent books that cover much of the same material include Betty Wei's more scholarly survey *Shanghai: Crucible of Modern China* (1987. o.p.) and Harriet Sergeant's *Shanghai: Collision Point of Cultures* (1990. o.p.).

-*Charles W. Hayford, Northwestern Univ., Evanston, IL*

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