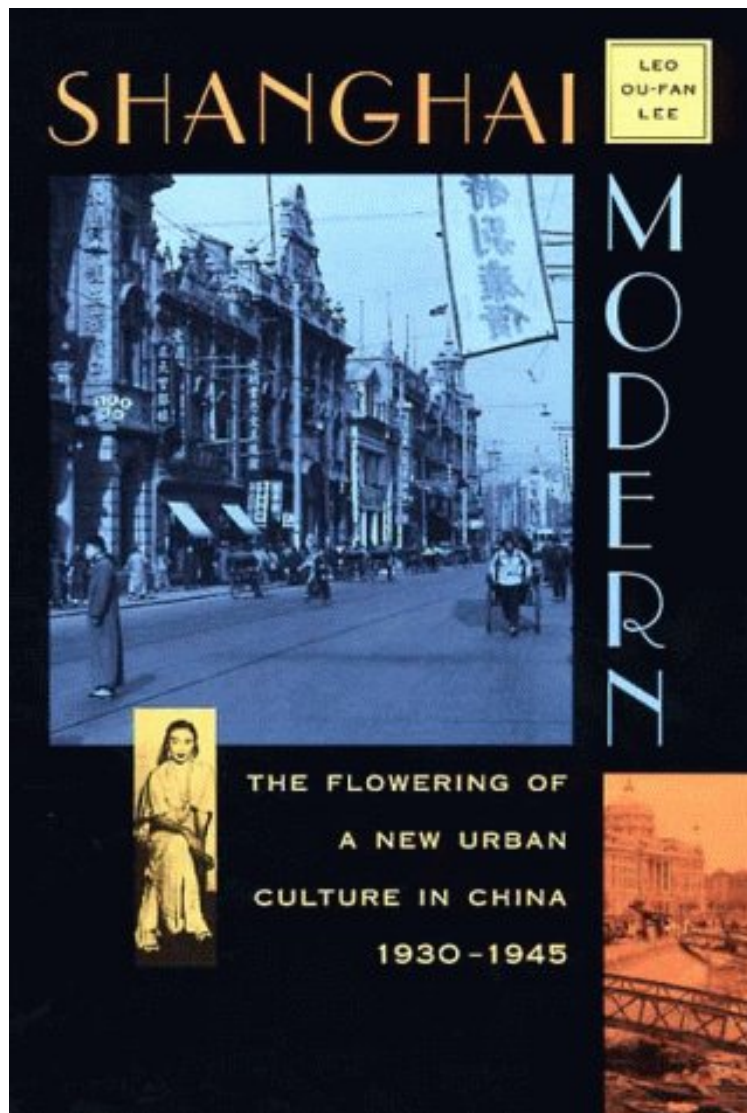


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Shanghai Modern: The Flowering of a New Urban Culture in China, 1930-1945 (Interpretations of Asia)

Leo Ou-fan Lee

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Leo Ou-fan Lee : Shanghai Modern: The Flowering of a New Urban Culture in China, 1930-1945 (Interpretations of Asia) before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Shanghai Modern: The Flowering of a New Urban Culture in China, 1930-1945 (Interpretations of Asia):

12 of 14 people found the following review helpful. An excellent introduction to Shanghai's cultural legacy By

Elisabeth W. Moviushanghai is best known for its negative legacies, "whore of the orient" and all that. But while those foreigners were drinking themselves silly all hours of the day, the city's Chinese residents were building up a world of art and letters that China had not since been able to rival. Authors with a revolutionary bent are better known these days in China. The Chinese Communist Party posthumously revived Lu Xun as a standard bearer, and many other social critics such as Mao Dun, Bing Xin, and Ba Jin saw Communism as the natural out-growth of their ideals. Others, however, were more romantic, more bourgeois, more purely artistic in their vision. They, along with most of Shanghai's leading film-makers, actors, and musicians, flocked en masse to Hong Kong after 1949. Today, Old Shanghai films and literature are far better known and more popular in Hong Kong than they are in Shanghai. That's where Leo Ou-Fan Lee fits into the picture. The Hong Kong native is one of the leading experts on the literary legacy of Old Shanghai, and he brings alive the writing and history of greats such as Zhang Ailing (Eileen Chang) for connoisseurs and novices alike. Lee offers a chapter on the Shanghai film industry, which is not his specialty and is not very strongly presented, apart from an interesting analysis of themes of modernity. His presentation of the huge publishing world pictorial magazines, with glossy spreads and advertisements that are indicative of societal norms and values at the time, proves quite engaging. Granted, the analysis seems to be based on just a few vintage copies of "Liang You" (Young Companion), but as that was a darn good magazine, one can't criticize. His real passion, however, and the strength of the book, are in the literary field. Lee seems to have a bit of a crush on Zhang Ailing, but then again, who doesn't? 14 of 15 people found the following review helpful. Good as a "source-book", but intellectually disappointing. By A Customer This book is precious in providing information, anecdotes, facts, but unfortunately lacks in intellectual depth or critical insight. It is obvious that the author loves his subject--the urban culture in 1930s-40s Shanghai, but when it comes to critical analysis of the rich data it offers, the author's quotations of other people's works often seem more interesting and more penetrating than his own viewpoints, which are painfully limited to a few catchphrases such as modernism, "modernity in the Chinese context," "body," decadence, etc.. Not that this is a terrible work, but simply that it is a little disappointing, coming from a senior professor well-known in his field. One thing that seems to hamper the author is his apparent lack of sound knowledge of literature of any other period or place except for what was produced in China (and mainly Shanghai) in the first 40 years of the 20th century, and this, unfortunately, does show after a while, as the book constantly involves references to European literatures and classical Chinese literary tradition. Still, it would be a good buy for people who share the kind of nostalgia for the 1930s Shanghai or who want to find out more about Shanghai literary world in that period. 2 of 2 people found the following review helpful. Chinese writers analyzed for English readers. By Judy R. I read a library copy of this book and thought it important enough to want to own, so I ordered a copy. The author's premise is commentary about Shanghai based/oriented writers of the 1930-45 period who wrote in Chinese, and he presents an interesting analysis of the works of some of the writers of this time. I was not familiar with the works of many of them, but found myself caught up in the writers' works and thinking, their lives, etc. As a resource, this book is invaluable as the author gives an extensive list of his source readings at the back, and comprehensive footnotes. Some of his writing, however, is heavy-handed. He uses a number of words repeatedly that I did not understand and had to go to a dictionary for help. Nevertheless, I would recommend this book for anyone who wants to know more about China between the World Wars.

In the midst of China's wild rush to modernize, a surprising note of reality arises: Shanghai, it seems, was once modern indeed, a pulsing center of commerce and art in the heart of the twentieth century. This book immerses us in the golden age of Shanghai urban culture, a modernity at once intrinsically Chinese and profoundly anomalous, blending new and indigenous ideas with those flooding into this "treaty port" from the Western world. A preeminent specialist in Chinese studies, Leo Ou-fan Lee gives us a rare wide-angle view of Shanghai culture in the making. He shows us the architecture and urban spaces in which the new commercial culture flourished, then guides us through the publishing and filmmaking industries that nurtured a whole generation of artists and established a bold new style in urban life known as modeng. In the work of six writers of the time, particularly Shi Zhecun, Mu Shiying, and Eileen Chang, Lee discloses the reflection of Shanghai's urban landscape--foreign and familiar, oppressive and seductive, traditional and innovative. This work acquires a broader historical and cosmopolitan context with a look at the cultural links between Shanghai and Hong Kong, a virtual genealogy of Chinese modernity from the 1930s to the present day.

From Library Journal Lee is a distinguished professor of Chinese literature at Harvard University who has had a long association with the founders of the Iowa Writers' Workshop. Being thus well versed in both Chinese and Western literature allows him to define Chinese modernity in Shanghai during the foreign occupation, when "culture" was at its height. Lee points out that China's adoption of Quaker Oats and cigarettes as nationalistic commodities was less important than the unprecedented use of the female body to advertise these products. Lee describes the surging modern atmosphere by examining the proliferation of cinemas, coffeehouses, theaters, dance halls, parks, and race courses. He also details the literary contributions of six writers to describe the popular demand for modern literature. Like Geremie R. Barm's *In the Red* (LJ 4/1/99), this book examines many different types of media in China, although Barm's focus

is contemporary. Recommended particularly for libraries with collections in modern literature and Chinese studies. A Peggy Spitzer Christoff, Oak Park, IL Copyright 1999 Reed Business Information, Inc. From Booklist As a "treaty port," Shanghai has looked outward since the British forced this small trading town to accept foreign merchants in the nineteenth century. By 1930 the city had evolved into a cosmopolitan metropolis with a burgeoning economy (largely controlled by Westerners) and a glittering, eclectic cultural life. Lee, a professor of Chinese literature at Harvard, was born in a rural region of the mainland but raised in Taiwan. He has provided a fascinating portrait of the city during its so-called golden age, before the hostile ideology of Communism clamped down on the vibrant spirit of Shanghai. He examines a variety of cultural facets, including literature, architecture, cinema, and music. His insights into the relationship between "modern" Shanghai and the more traditional elements of "old China" are particularly interesting. This is a well-written and wide-ranging study of a great city that is reemerging as an economic and cultural giant. Jay Freeman This is cultural history from inside out and from ground up. Lee reads the semiotics of Shanghai modernism with a stunning sensibility that evokes a cosmopolitan past when city streets were scenes of poetry rather than protests and when urban experience redefined the meaning of femininity. A major statement towards a new cultural history of modern China. (Wen-hsin Yeh, University of California, Berkeley) This is the definitive study of the making of modern Shanghai. Leo Lee has remapped Shanghai's cultural geography, marking out the intricate relations between city and coloniality in the 1930s. Admirably combining historical rigor with literary sensibility, it adumbrates an alternative style of cultural criticism for the new century. (David Wang, Columbia University) The special flavor of prewar Shanghai emerges from these pages. Shanghai Modern is immensely rich in theoretical insights, and they emerge out of the dense, living portrait of old Shanghai, with its literary circles, dance-halls, movie theatres, faades, and streets. Lee makes you see how modern consciousness only exists in the circulation of forms, images, and ideas. The process is laid out before us in this rich and subtle description of the key epoch in the life of this tragic metropolis. (Charles Taylor, McGill University) Lee is at his strongest in discussing the inter-textuality of the various works he discusses in this section of the book, showing their relationship to both the European and Chinese literary traditions Lee's focus on republican-era Shanghai is a reminder of the renewed capacities of China's largest city as a producer of the discourse of modernity in the post-Mao era. (Antonia Finnane Left History)