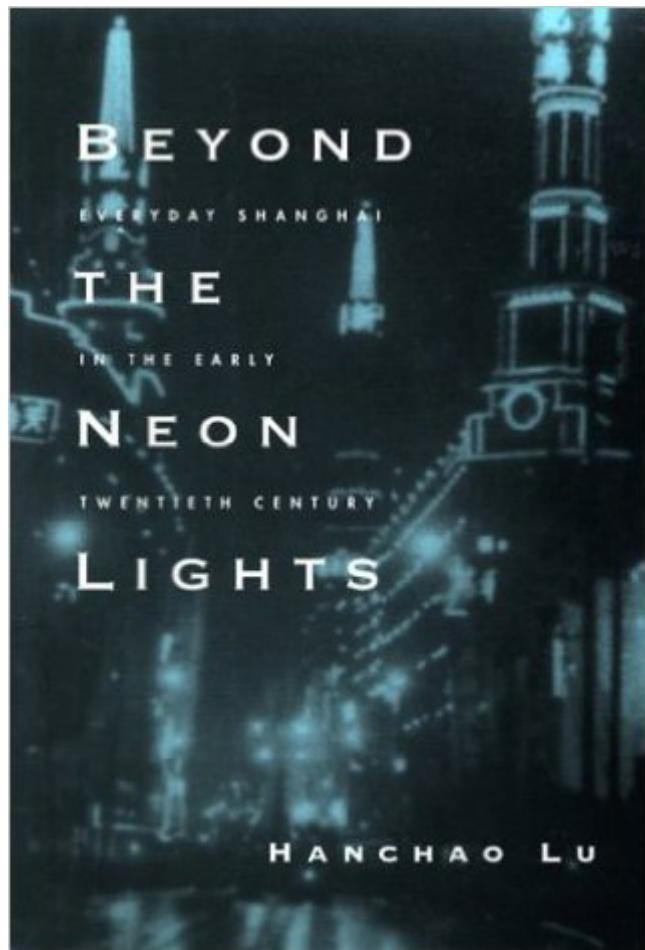


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Beyond The Neon Lights: Everyday Shanghai In The Early Twentieth Century



Synopsis

How did ordinary people live through the extraordinary changes that have swept across modern China? How did peasants transform themselves into urbanites? How did the citizens of Shanghai cope with the epic upheavals—revolution, war, and again revolution—that shook their lives? Even after decades of scholarship devoted to modern Chinese history, our understanding of the daily lives of the common people of China remains sketchy and incomplete. In this carefully researched study, Hanchao Lu weaves rich documentary data with ethnographic surveys and interviews to reconstruct the fabric of everyday life in China's largest and most complex city in the first half of this century.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

If you are looking to understand the enigma that is Shanghai, then look no further than Mr. Lu's incredibly insightful "Beyond the Neon Lights". It could be subtitled: "Beyond the hype, the myths, the stereotypes and the cliches," but Mr. Lu is an academic, and uses sound research to sell his books rather than sensationalism. Bravo for him, I say. Shanghai history books - the sensationalist, badly researched ones, at least - tend to present an Old Shanghai of Gangsters, Bankers, Hookers, and Foreigners...oh my! Even the more thorough ones present mostly the wild advantages of those wacky expatriates, ignoring or neglecting the role and the life of the "laobaixing", the ordinary people of Shanghai. "Beyond the Neon Lights" fills this very large gap amazingly well. It is dedicated to life in the lanes that were and are the arteries of the city, the source of its lifeblood, the petty urbanites. Lu explores the architecture of the Shikumen, the typical pre-1920s Shanghai lane dwelling, and

explains how its system of sub-sub- and sub-letting fomented the complicated communities that emerged there. He also conveys how the social structures and cultural habits changed with the introduction of more modern lanes (with indoor plumbing, fewer households, etc) and the Art Deco highrises. Every aspect of life in Shanghai was and often still is structured around the lane neighborhood. Although the new-style lanes are less contained, more open, and thus less of a microcosm, both vintages boast their own economy of scale. There is the old-style convenience store, the "tobacco and paper shop", at the entrance, plus a tailor, produce dealer, shoe-repairman, locksmith, pharmacist...and more in the larger lanes.

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