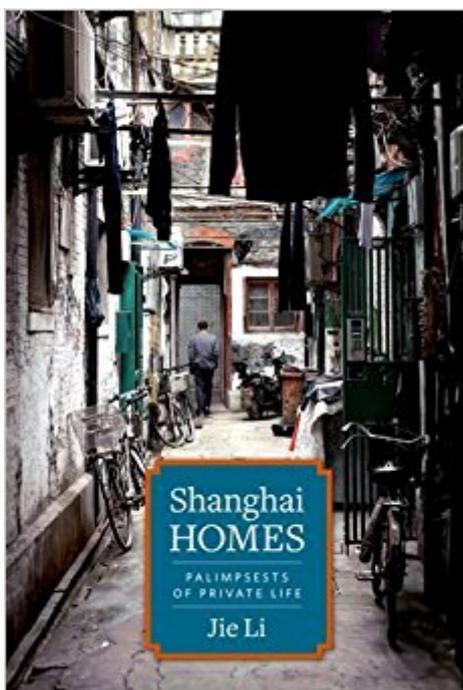


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# Shanghai Homes: Palimpsests Of Private Life (Global Chinese Culture)



## Synopsis

In the dazzling global metropolis of Shanghai, what has it meant to call this city home? In this account—part microhistory, part memoir—Jie Li salvages intimate recollections by successive generations of inhabitants of two vibrant, culturally mixed Shanghai alleyways from the Republican, Maoist, and post-Mao eras. Exploring three dimensions of private life—territories, artifacts, and gossip—Li re-creates the sounds, smells, look, and feel of home over a tumultuous century. First built by British and Japanese companies in 1915 and 1927, the two homes at the center of this narrative were located in an industrial part of the former "International Settlement." Before their recent demolition, they were nestled in Shanghai's labyrinthine alleyways, which housed more than half of the city's population from the Sino-Japanese War to the Cultural Revolution. Through interviews with her own family members as well as their neighbors, classmates, and co-workers, Li weaves a complex social tapestry reflecting the lived experiences of ordinary people struggling to absorb and adapt to major historical change. These voices include workers, intellectuals, Communists, Nationalists, foreigners, compradors, wives, concubines, and children who all fought for a foothold and haven in this city, witnessing spectacles so full of farce and pathos they could only be whispered as secret histories.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Shanghai Homes is silently stunning. It inscribes intimate details of private lives in alley

neighborhoods as family memoir, urban history, a poetics of space. Its palimpsest of images, sketches, sensations, hearsay, memories, and artifacts subtly arouse the tender, tense passions of home. It leaves us with traces of embodied Shanghai, of our humanity. (Robin Visser, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill)As the first book of a young scholar, this is a real gem and delightful read. At once personal and scholarly, intimate in tone but intellectually rigorous, Shanghai Homes is that unique work that effortlessly moves between and cuts across several disciplinary areas: family history, Cultural Revolution politics, urban architecture, and above all personal and collective memory and its place in post-Socialist and globalized China. I find the human images of these 'palimpsests' especially heart-warming. Dare one consider it a present-day Chinese counterpoint to Walter Benjamin's classic, *A Berlin Childhood?* (Leo Ou-Fan Lee, author of *Shanghai Modern: The Flowering of a New Urban Culture in China*)Shanghai Homes recounts the lives of three generations of residents in Shanghai's alleyway neighborhoods, once vibrant communities that have all but disappeared since the late 1990s. In her detailed and wonderfully written account, Li treats her subjects with a rare combination of personal engagement and academic rigor. A remarkable work in urban cultural studies. (Hanchao Lu, author of *Beyond the Neon Lights: Everyday Shanghai in the Early Twentieth Century*)In a personal yet perspective study of Shanghai alleyway homes, carried out with a sociological, historical, cultural, and biographical approach that covers both the past and the present, intimate, detailed, enriched with vivid, invaluable illustrations, Jie Li presents the much-needed academic yet readable work as the old Shanghai homes are fast fading into oblivion. (Qiu Xiaolong, novelist)A delightfully detailed study of the urban culture and history of Shanghai's vernacular alleyway neighborhoods. (Sue Anne Tay *The Guardian*)A micro history and memoir that collects the stories of generations living in two Shanghai longtang (lane) during various periods. (Lu Feiran *Shanghai Daily*)Jie Li recounts vividly and often poignantly the careers, ordeals and stories of several generations of her family, from Shanghai in the pre-Mao era, through the Communist agonies and into the reformist period. (Jonathan Mirsky *Times Higher Education*)Jie Li offers a familial ethnography that is juxtaposed to Shanghai's and China's broader historical milestones.... It is through these details of how lives are lived that one may begin to understand how broader societal changes impact upon individual human lives. (*Asian Review of Books*)A beautifully written narrative and a compelling argument for studying the archaeology of daily life. (Carla Nappi *New Books in East Asian Studies*)A rich auto-ethnography which analyses the confines of a small enclosed community weathering and adapting to the broader changes around it.... Wonderfully illustrated with drawings done by her parents.... This book is a remarkably engaging interdisciplinary achievement. (*LSE Review of Books*)[Shanghai Homes] is a major book. (Jeffrey Wasserstrom *The*

China Quarterly) Shanghai Homes is a delightful book that is accessible and should be read by scholars from a variety of fields and a broader audience. At heart, it is a human story, both local and global, that concretely shows how life unfolds across generations, over time, and in the space of home and neighborhood, in sharp relief against a backdrop of great historical changes. (Preeti Chopra H-Asia)

In a book that is part microhistory, part memoir, Jie Li salvages intimate recollections by successive generations of inhabitants of two vibrant, culturally mixed Shanghai alleyways. These voices include workers, intellectuals, Communists, Nationalists, foreigners, compradors, wives, concubines, and children who witnessed spectacles so full of farce and pathos they could only be whispered as secret histories. Exploring three dimensions of private life—territories, artifacts, and gossip—Li re-creates the sounds, smells, look, and feel of home over a tumultuous century.

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