

Shanghai Gone: Domicide and Defiance in a Chinese Megacity (State & Society in East Asia)

By Qin Shao

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Shanghai has been demolished and rebuilt into a gleaming megacity in recent decades, now ranking with New York and London as a hub of global finance. But that transformation has come at a grave human cost. This compelling book is the first to apply the concept of domicide—the eradication of a home against the will of its dwellers—to the sweeping destruction of neighborhoods, families, and life patterns to make way for the new Shanghai. Here we find the holdouts and protesters, men and women who have stubbornly resisted domicide and demanded justice. Qin Shao follows, among others, a reticent kindergarten teacher turned diehard petitioner; a descendant of gangsters and squatters who has become an amateur lawyer for evictees; and a Chinese Muslim who has struggled to recover his ancestral home in Xintiandi, an infamous site of gentrification dominated by a well-connected Hong Kong real estate tycoon. Highlighting the wrenching changes spawned by China’s reform era, Shao vividly portrays the relentless pursuit of growth and profit by the combined forces of corrupt power and money, the personal wreckage it has left behind, and the enduring human spirit it has unleashed.

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Editorial Review

Review
Shanghai grew rapidly in the decades before the People's Republic of China was founded in 1949. The population continued expanding over the subsequent 30 years, but the housing stock did not: millions of residents occupied tiny spaces in deteriorating buildings. Since the 1990s, high rises and shopping centers have replaced most of those buildings. In the process, many people were forced out of their homes without what they considered adequate compensation. This book introduces victims of 'domicide' who fought back. Based on extensive interviews, five lively case studies explore the motivations and strategies of people who challenged the city's right to take away their beloved homes. Some petitioned government offices for redress, some studied housing law and filed suit, some tried to attract media attention, and some appealed to historic preservationists. Only one found satisfaction. The stories are told almost entirely from the point of view of the dispossessed homeowners; officials and developers declined to offer their perspectives. As the dispossessed are well aware, Shanghai's movers and shakers have made tremendous profits from its amazing real estate boom. This book gives voice to those who lost out. Summing Up: Highly recommended. All levels/libraries. (*CHOICE*)

An extraordinary book that documents the contemporary history of housing demolition and relocation in Shanghai. . . . As a historian, Qin Shao is extremely sensitive to historical details and pays particular attention to the oral history of the everyday experiences of those residents who suffered from housing demolition. She turns these narratives into an account of conflict and resistance in the histories of urban development. . . . The book contains very rare and detailed materials and reveals the enormous suffering caused by 'domicide'—the eradication of homes against the will of their dwellers—in the process of rapid urbanization and housing development. The book devotes its narrative to concrete events and the words of ordinary people, and preserves memories that would otherwise disappear quickly along with the old homes. . . . The narrative of this book is full of surprises—even for those who believe they are 'familiar' with Chinese cities. . . . *Shanghai Gone* is an extremely fascinating book for those who are interested in Chinese cities as well as the general public interested in urban histories and social well-being. (*China Quarterly*)

The book discusses the life and struggle of Shanghai's displaced, whose life courses have been abruptly changed by city-wide redevelopment projects. Facing the almighty power of the state, developers, media, and so on, the displaced are transformed from ordinary residents to occupational petitioners, a barrack-room lawyer, or a community leader. The rights discourse spelled out by these people also provides a fascinating insight for our understanding on how the interaction between reform measures (economic, political, and legal) and people's response to these have reshaped their rights awareness and views on social justice. (*Urban Commune*)

This book is characterized by its informative first-hand data derived from field investigations made over several years. . . . The book successfully conveys the passions of diverse people (particularly those evicted from their dwellings) who display determination, courage, strength, wisdom and patience. This is a story of common people turned stubborn protesters/petition specialists, government officials, developers, media professionals and public intellectuals. This unfolding story is situated within a wider governance context: China’s housing, land use, juridical and petition systems, regulations relating to urban planning, demolition and relocation, and cultural heritage preservation, their effects, loopholes and historical dynamics. (*Building Research & Information*)

Qin Shao offers, with remarkable detail, the struggles of evictees against commercial developers and the local government in Shanghai. Alternatively gripping and painful, thoroughly honest and, at times, impassioned and even humorous, Qin's account provides the closest approximation available to a record of socio-legal cases or textual documentation of housing disputes in urbanizing China. . . . Qin's book is a testament to tenacity in research methods and goals, just as it is to the struggles of her informants. It sets a bar for empirical fieldwork on political issues in contemporary China. Students and scholars of modern history, urban studies, law and society, and anthropology will find in *Shanghai Gone* a vivid account of the best and worst in reform-era China. (*China Information*)

Shanghai Gone is an extraordinary book—one that blends academic thoroughness and personal passion to yield a monumental study of Shanghai's transformation, and, indeed, that of China more generally. The book is built around the gripping accounts of residents whose homes suffered the type of demolitions that have recast the face of Chinese cities. What is especially compelling are the ways in which ordinary citizens have sought to avail themselves of the law to defend their rights and interests. (William Alford, Harvard University)

A devastating shadow biography that reveals this great city's dark secrets. Qin Shao teaches us volumes about the powerful forces remaking Shanghai, through forced relocation and demolition of its old neighborhoods. What is even rarer, she has written a book that manages to be both beautiful and poignant, because she tells her story through the lives of real people. (Howard W. French, Columbia University; author, with Qiu Xiaolong, of Disappearing Shanghai: Photographs and Poems of an Intimate Way of Life)

Shanghai Gone, an homage to a city that no longer exists, deftly weaves interviews with individuals and old-fashioned digging to provide a nitty-gritty look at how urban China is being reconstructed. This makes it more than a dirge; in fact, it is a paean to the fighting spirit of ordinary people across the country. (Ian Johnson, author of Wild Grass: Three Stories of Change in China)

The lives of ordinary people trying to hang on to their homes and their dignity in the midst of China's superheated urban development is the subject of Qin Shao's by turns inspiring and disturbing study. Her insights into the interworking of state, economy, and culture will stimulate debate about the management of China's megacities, while her vivid portraits of victims becoming petitioners and activists pin down abstractions of policy, citizenship, and social justice in concrete and unforgettable ways. (David G. Strand, Dickinson College)

Shanghai Gone was a huge hit in my class. This was manifest in the dynamic, excited series of discussions that we had about the work. My students loved it and were caught up in the poignant, devastating human dramas. They were engrossed by the complex interplay between private life and official life, all set against the backdrop of a shifting legal culture. Qin Shao has written an important, powerful book that reveals an aspect of contemporary life in China essential for grappling with the profound transformations underway in the twenty-first century. (Hugh Shapiro, University of Nevada)

Put simply, if Shanghai is China's face to the world, this book pulls off its mask to reveal the activities of powerful and unaccountable players in the city's drive to modernity, as well as the human cost associated with it. . . .Shao's book provides a rich texture complementing the canonical work on China's urban transformation by authors such as Fulong Wu, Anne Broudehoux, or John Friedmann, to name but a few. Filling the gap in interpretive approaches to China's complex and fascinating urban landscape, *Shanghai Gone* is a remarkable book that will interest both China-watchers and urban scholars, as well as those interested in protest and global civil society movements. (*E-International Relations*)

This remarkable book invokes the concept of domicide—the planned deliberate destruction of a home—to provide deep personal insights into the vast human cost of the dramatic changes in Shanghai. . . .Shao is at her best when framing the hopelessness of individual grievances within an incisive historically informed analysis of the wider constellation of circumstances that underlie urban transformation in contemporary China. Those with an intimate knowledge of the urban fabric of Shanghai and other large cities in China will appreciate the extended exploration of new perspectives and the insights revealed. Others less familiar with Shanghai will benefit from a superb and highly readable introduction to the human dimensions of restructuring in a Chinese megacity. (*The China Journal*)

The nexus between relocation, destruction, and development is one of the most contentious in contemporary China. Qin Shao's book makes a critical contribution to the topic. . . .[She] adds a crucial voice, by focusing on the stories from below. . . . Embedded in these tales is a profound exploration into some of the tensions that underlie contemporary China's high-speed urbanization. . . .The book is organized around fascinating character sketches, rich in detail. . . . What makes the book so important, however, is that it focuses, as well, on the powerful changes that are being led from below. (*The Chinese Historical Review*)

Shanghai Gone provides one of the best accounts of the reality of gentrification and urban development in China to date. . . . As a trained and experienced historian, Shao is skillful in collecting and analysing materials from all potential sources, including archival materials, personal memoirs, legal documents, internet and social media blogs, popular media sources and—most importantly—oral histories, which bring to life the vivid stories of ordinary citizens struggling to maintain their rights to the city of Shanghai. . . . Thanks to Shao's elegant narrative style, the book reads like a novel—only that all of the stories are true, and that all the places and names are real. Shao's historical accounts are as complex and compelling as her ethnographic observations. . . . *Shanghai Gone* captures the late Maoist and post-Mao eras with equal richness in what is sure to be a new classic. With energy and wit, Shao poses in *Shanghai Gone* the most important question about the most fundamental need of urban Chinese society today, namely how to balance the need for housing and the 'desire' for urban development. . . .Grounded with solid historical, ethnographic and legal evidence, *Shanghai Gone* is provocatively convincing, making it a perfect choice for a seminar in any area related to urbanism and society. (*Urban Studies*)

Shao's sympathies are clearly with her subjects; they are the disregarded human monuments of a disappearing Shanghai, and her chapters read best as sensitive ethnographies that show us the world through their eyes. . . . Collectively, Shao's cases added up to a passionate critique of China's urban development. . . . This is an accessible and engaging book. The deliberate and reasonable focus on those resisting allows us to see the world through their eyes. . . . Shao should be commended for her excellent contribution; even if demolished, this Shanghai will remain preserved in her work. (*Journal of Asian Studies*)

About the Author
Qin Shao is professor of history at The College of New Jersey. She is the author of *Culturing Modernity: The Nantong Model, 1890–1930*.

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