



Dream of the Walled City

Lisa Huang Fleischman

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Marking the debut of a stunning new literary talent, Lisa Huang Fleischman's extraordinary saga -- inspired by her grandmother's life as an early feminist, political activist, and friend of Mao Zedong -- is a masterpiece about one clever and resourceful woman, growing up amidst the turmoil of twentieth-century China. *Dream of the Walled City*

Born in 1890, the privileged and sheltered daughter of a high-ranking imperial official, Jade Virtue spends her childhood enclosed by the towering walls of her family's sprawling mansion, never glimpsing the desperate struggle of China's ancient society, as the old ways are challenged and the twentieth century - fast, fearsome, and tumultuous - rushes in. But when her father mysteriously dies, young Jade Virtue is suddenly thrust into poverty, and experiences firsthand a traditional culture falling apart under the onslaught of growing rebellion against the Emperor, rapid social changes, and the mounting aggression of Japan and the West.

Fleischman has rendered a richly textured, panoramic vision of Chinese life in the perilous years between the end of the empire and the Communist triumph of 1949, charting Jade Virtue's arranged first marriage to the corrupt opium addict Wang Mang, who harbors a terrible secret in his family's past; her awakening independence and ambivalent politics; her struggles with motherhood; and her fascinating acquaintance with a gifted, idealistic, fiercely ambitious young man named Mao Zedong. But the most important choices of her life are shaped by her conflicting loyalties to her intense lifelong friendship with Jinyu, a fiery woman revolutionary, and to Guai, a government official and sworn enemy of the Communists, with whom she finally discovers true and redemptive love.

Exquisitely nuanced and lyrical yet marked with a driving power, *Dream Of The Walled City* is an enthralling novel of hard-won personal independence set against the vivid backdrop of a rapidly changing world. From the final days of the last dynasty through the savage Japanese invasion during World War II to the formidable red dawn of the Communist triumph; from the backward rural province of Hunan to exile on the tropical shores of Taiwan; and from the binding chains of predetermined fate to the exhilarating liberation of a human spirit, this is a remarkable odyssey you will never forget.

Dream of the Walled City Details

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From Reader Review Dream of the Walled City for online ebook

Daren says

Wow, what a great story. One of the best books I've read in years.

craig says

A great historical novel about China in the early 20th century when Chairman Mao was a young man. It's quite a colorful and moving book, even though the ultimate outcome of what will happen when the Japanese invade is no mystery.

Eileen says

ERC Book Club, March 2003 selection

Effective way for me to learn about China from turn of the 19th century to WWII (pre-communist era China). Many people compared this book to Memoirs of a Geisha, but I thought this book was less lyrical and a bit more choppy. Enjoyed the main character and some of the others but felt they could have been developed further. Also, there were a few issues I felt the author didn't resolve completely, eg. Jade Virtue's feelings on her choices in life, Mao's departure from the book. --eps, 03/23/03

Amazon Reviewers say: Great read for those who are interested in Chinese history, but find history books too dry; This book is for anyone that enjoyed 'Memoirs of a Geisha'.

Dream of the Walled City is a lovingly crafted work of historical fiction inspired by the life of the author's grandmother. Fleischman has successfully depicted a fascinating Chinese woman who is trapped but not defeated by the parameters of her life in a tumultuous society.

- (Andrew X. Pham, author of Catfish and Mandala)

The Best Book I Have Read This Year, December 21, 2000

Amazon.com Reviewer: Matthew Kipp from Chicago, Illinois

"Dream of the Walled City" is an emotionally moving account of the life of Jade Virtue, a self-described ordinary woman who chronicles extraordinary times. The writing is fluid, if not poetic (reminiscent, in places, of Virginia Wolff), and the characters are at once dynamic and realistic. The story exquisitely weaves the quotidian events of Jade's life with the seismic political and industrial developments of Twentieth Century China. The story is immediately enrapturing and also provides a unique overview of some of the important events in the history of modern China. "Walled City" tells its story with grace: it is superbly written; it is at times humorous, at others tragic or shocking (or both); and it is at all times engrossing. The New Yorker recently praised the book and I was not surprised to read in that review a favorable comparison to Dickens's "Tale of Two Cities."

Mark says

There are a lot of books written about China during the years leading up to the Communists and Mao, but this book was more about people and how they interact more than just a book about history... husbands and wives, families and friends, friends and foes.

I liked this book a lot.

Jennifer says

This historical novel follows the life of a woman in China during the turn of the (19th-20th) century. It is written by her granddaughter - who is a federal prosecutor in New York. The narrator was a deputy governor's wife prior to the Communist takeover of China. She was a contemporary of Mao and sympathetic to the revolutionaries. This was a fascinating view of a tumultuous era in Chinese history.

Anita says

It was a good way to explore the rise of Mao, through the eyes of a young girl with whom I could sympathize. It was a while ago when I read this, so I mostly remember the feel of the time period it portrayed: fear of the government for things that should be normal.. like an education.

Justine says

I just happened to pick this book up at a discount book store in an outlet mall and I'm so glad I did. I'm only disappointed that more people don't know about this great author who can so skillfully weave history and emotion into such an impacting story.

Gabby says

Before I read this book, I knew very little about China the country or the Chinese culture. Previous to reading Dream Of The Walled City, I read Pearl Buck's The Good Earth. DOTWC is very different from The Good Earth, but there are similarities particularly with the attitudes and thought processes of the poor farmers and the better-off middle class Chinese. Wang Lung from TGE worked hard, and he succeeded in bringing prosperity to his family against all the odds. Jade Virtue from DOTWC comes from a privileged family, but her drive to keep her family well provided for very much mirrors the dedication of Wang Lung despite the

fact that she's a female in a culture that doesn't have much use for women other than for childbirth and hard work.

DOTWC is Jade Virtue's story, and one of the things I found disconcerting about the telling of it was how dispassionate it all seemed. In her family, she was considered the emotional one, yet even though her tears may have been frequent, there was still very little passion in her voice as she described the events of her life. She lived in China during one of the most turbulent times in its history, yet she seemed to take all events both large and small as occurrences over which she had little, if any, control. The image she projected to those who knew her was one of a woman capable of handling anything no matter how challenging. When she spoke of herself she did so with a sense of being unworthy and even somewhat helpless. I think this came from the author's cutting short the telling of events so that I felt there were parts of the story either missing or neglected.

For me, this was a very sad story. By the end I felt like Jade Virtue knew exactly what it feels like to keep pounding her head against a brick wall and then finding out how very good it feels to stop. Now that I've finished DOTWC, I will look for other books about China and its people. The history is fascinating as well as heartbreaking when viewed from a personalized point of view. If Lisa Huang Fleischman has written more books, I would certainly be interested in reading them.

Charlotte says

If you love historical fiction that is well researched and believable, you should enjoy this first effort by Lisa Huang Fleischman. Her art reminds me of Barbara Kingsolver's *Poisonwood Bible*, in that she is able to capture and recreate a particular time period from several different viewpoints. Unlike *Poisonwood*, the story is told from one perspective, that of Jade Virtue, a young woman coming of age in the early decades of the 1900s. Jade Virtue comes in contact with characters representing various aspects of Chinese society at this changing time: the sage, the Communist rebel, the in-laws, the government's commanding officer, and so on. The book reads almost like a first-hand account, as it is largely based on the stories Fleischman gleaned from her grandmother. Here are some of my favorite quotes, as they resonate with me in light of events transpiring today.

Guai (Jade Virtue's husband/town magistrate): "The problem with democracy is that it's petty and boring. People's tastes are constantly jaded by the pleasures of both flesh and intellect. So they always want excitement. And the leaders always want glory, fame and adulation. Democracy is unsatisfactory to them, because its business is very ordinary, and often rather halfway and compromised. People prefer grand schemes, violent revolutions, red banners, marching armies, pure motives. All these things are much more picturesque, more artistic, more thrilling, than dull old democracy. It takes a very strong mind to be a real democrat. You have to resist a desire for perfection which can't exist in reality. The perfect is the enemy of the good."

Jade Virtue's mother: "In the old days . . . we preferred jade to diamonds, because diamonds were too glittery. We thought shiny surfaces were untrustworthy. And so they are, but the entire world is in love with shiny surfaces."

Pamela says

I really wanted to like this, but it fell a little short for me. I think Fleishman described early 20th century China quite well, and it was interesting to see the two friends ending up on different sides of the forces that fought for control of China. Jin Yu . . . did not like her. Found her too angry, too superior. And there were several passages that seemed to be thrown in for . . . I don't know, length? Maybe to make it seem more like real life? But these particular parts had little to do with the story, which was already moving a bit slow for me.

Jessica says

This book, I'm sure speaks to many people. Unfortunately, one of them was not me.

Spoilers.

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I really liked the beginning, it was all about what I thought it would be by reading the back cover. Once the husband passed away, the book pretty much lost me.

It was just not what I bought the book to read about. Nowhere from reading the cover did I think that there was going to be 300 pages of dry politics and death, and lots more of death. I kept powering through it thinking that eventually the book would move on, back to what I thought the book was supposed to be about.

So. I was lost until the mothers scrolls were empty. That page was one of the last I read before heading to bed one of the nights, and it kept me awake thinking about it. So then I was back in it.

But then I felt like the ending was so abrupt compared to the time period crossed throughout the novel. And plus, the scrolls were explained away in a way that just didn't appeal to me.

I don't know what one thing about this book didn't work for me, it just didn't. There was nothing wrong with the writing. Sorry author =/.

Tony Taylor says

Born in 1890, the privileged and sheltered daughter of a high-ranking imperial official, Jade Virtue spends her childhood enclosed by the towering walls of her family's sprawling mansion, never glimpsing the desperate struggle of China's ancient society, as the old ways are challenged and the twentieth century?fast, fearsome, and tumultuous?rushes in. But when her father mysteriously dies, young Jade Virtue is suddenly thrust into poverty, and experiences firsthand a traditional culture falling apart under the onslaught of growing rebellion against the Emperor, rapid social changes, and the mounting aggression of Japan and the West.

Elin says

A very engaging, very thought provoking book. very similar to a lot of Amy Tan's novels, but with more history. I found myself wanting to look up all sorts of topics on chinese history and the various revolutions that we never learnt about in history class. A long book to read, but worth every minute.

carrietracy says

If I could, I'd give this a three and a half. It was very interesting to see how much China changed over the course of one lifetime. The thing that bothered me was that I couldn't shake the feeling that I'd read it before, which means either I did read it before and it just wasn't that memorable, or it's too much like other things I've read about China. There may have also been some resentment on my part at having to read it quickly to get it back before its due date.

Bianka says

Dream of the Walled City by Lisa Huang Fleischman is a beautiful Chinese historical book. This book does a great job teaching Chinese culture along with how life was during the 20th century in China. The book is about Jade Virtue a high class girl and how she dealt with the sudden changes that raced through China. She holds some traditional thoughts as well as modern thoughts like the need of education for everyone including women. My favorite thing about the book is that it has many life lessons and it's realistic. Jade Virtue isn't one to make sacrifices or great things like Mao Zedong but does contribute as that it what makes her the most human character and the most relatable. At the first chance you get you don't normally throw everything away to fight for a great cause, you usually try to help out in your own way but with your loved ones or at home. I recommend this book to anyone who enjoys learning about Chinese Cultures in the 20th century or any cultures. Also if you like coming of age books this is for you. Finally if you would rather learn Chinese history in a fun interesting way this is your book.
