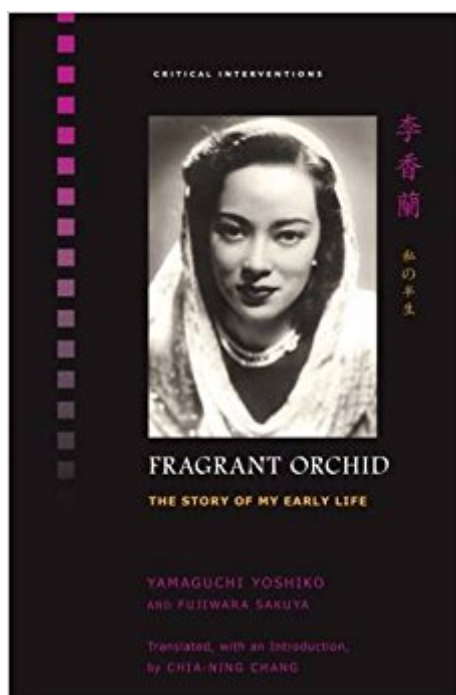


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Fragrant Orchid: The Story Of My Early Life (Critical Interventions)



Synopsis

The acclaimed actress and legendary singer, Yamaguchi Yoshiko (aka Li Xianglan, 1920-2014), emerged from Japan-occupied Manchuria to become a transnational star during the Second Sino-Japanese war. Born to Japanese parents, raised in Manchuria, and educated in Beijing, the young Yamaguchi learned to speak impeccable Mandarin Chinese and received professional training in operatic singing. When recruited by the Manchurian Film Association in 1939 to act in "national policy" films in the service of Japanese imperialism in China, she allowed herself to be presented as a Chinese, effectively masking her Japanese identity in both her professional and private lives. Yamaguchi soon became an unprecedented transnational phenomenon in Manchuria, Shanghai, and Japan itself as the glamorous female lead in such well-known films as *Song of the White Orchid* (1939), *China Nights* (1940), *Pledge in the Desert* (1940), and *Glory to Eternity* (1943). Her signature songs, including "When Will You Return?" and "The Evening Primrose," swept East Asia in the waning years of the war and remained popular well into the postwar decades. Ironically, although her celebrated international stardom was without parallel in wartime East Asia, she remained a puppet within a puppet state, choreographed at every turn by Japanese film studios in accordance with the expediencies of Japan's continental policy. In a dramatic turn of events after Japan's defeat, she was placed under house arrest in Shanghai by the Chinese Nationalist forces and barely escaped execution as a traitor to China. Her complex and intriguing life story as a convenient pawn, willing instrument, and tormented victim of Japan's imperialist ideology is told in her bestselling autobiography, translated here in full for the first time in English. An addendum reveals her postwar career in Hollywood and Broadway in the 1950s, her friendship with Charlie Chaplin, her first marriage to Isamu Noguchi, and her postwar life as singer, actress, political figure, television celebrity, and private citizen. A substantial introduction by Chia-ning Chang contextualizes Yamaguchi's life and career within the historical and cultural zeitgeist of wartime Manchuria, Japan, and China and the postwar controversies surrounding her life in East Asia.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

it is a testament to the quality of the autobiography of ri koran (aka yamaguchi yoshiko, aka li xianglan, aka shirley yamaguchi) that its inherent interest is just able to survive this lumbering & inept translation. the japanese version is a smooth & chatty read. one would think that an outfit with the reputation of u-hawaii could have got a native speaker to edit the MS to correct such basic mistakes as film "rolls" for reels, people feeling "embarrassing" instead of embarrassed, a company going "bottom up" & many other eye-rollers that aggravate & obstruct the reader on nearly every page. a graduate student would have done it for 50 bucks, about the price of the book.that said, the info on offer here is unavailable elsewhere in english, fascinating in its own right, & peppered with a wealth of absolutely sterling footnotes which are a credit to the efforts of prof. chang, who is obviously a knowledgeable scholar even if a poor translator. his introductory historical notes are also quite useful, altho turgidly theoretical & with the biases that naturally accompany theory. for readers unfamiliar with the era, a much more basic & factual introduction would be appropriate. for such readers it may be advisable to skip this intro entirely until after finishing the book.a few simple sketch-maps of china could also have been included, surely, at little cost. each city has at least 3 names (pre-empire, japanese & PRC, not to mention 2 transliterations) & is not often identifiable without visual aids. a contemporary photo or 2 of important settings such as harbin or shanghai, cheaply available on old postcards, would also have made a world of difference. the photos overall are OK but the captions uninformative.

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