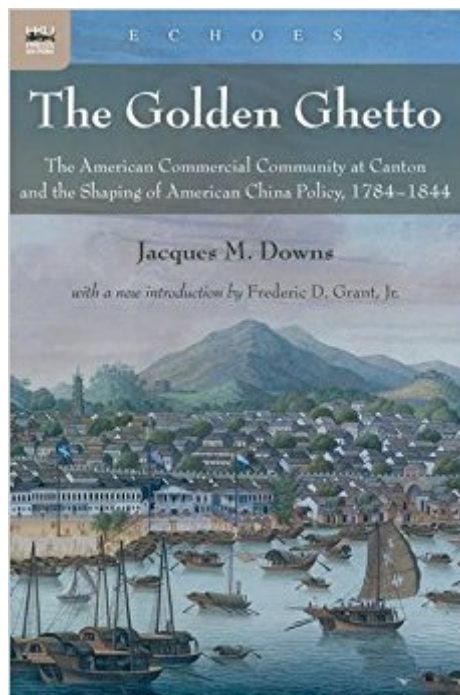


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The Golden Ghetto: The American Commercial Community At Canton And The Shaping Of American China Policy, 1784-1844 (Echoes: Classics Of Hong Kong Culture And History)



Synopsis

Before the opening of the treaty ports in the 1840s, Canton was the only Chinese port where foreign merchants were allowed to trade. The Golden Ghetto takes us into the world of one of this city's most important foreign communities—the Americans—during the decades between the American Revolution of 1776 and the signing of the Sino-US Treaty of Wanghia in 1844. American merchants lived in isolation from Chinese society in sybaritic, albeit usually celibate luxury. Making use of exhaustive research, Downs provides an especially clear explanation of the Canton commercial setting generally and of the role of American merchants. Many of these men made fortunes and returned home to become important figures in the rapidly developing United States. The book devotes particular attention to the biographical details of the principal American traders, the leading American firms, and their operations in Canton and the United States. Opium smuggling receives special emphasis, as does the important topic of early diplomatic relations between the United States and China. Since its first publication in 1997, *The Golden Ghetto* has been recognized as the leading work on Americans trading at Canton. Long out of print, this new edition makes this key work again available, both to scholars and a wider readership.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

The fullest exposition on the subject thus far and as the final word on extant, previously untapped, English-language sources. (Eileen Scully *The China Quarterly*)

Jacques M. Downs ([1927–2006]) was Professor of History at the University of New England in Biddeford, Maine. Frederic D. Grant, Jr. is the author of *The Chinese Cornerstone of Modern Banking: The Canton Guaranty System and the Origins of Bank Deposit Insurance 1780-1933*.

Many readers--not just history buffs--will find *The Golden Ghetto: The American Commercial Community at Canton and the Shaping of American China Policy, 1784-1844* fascinating and enlightening. Jacques M. Downs' comprehensive study of American merchants involved in the China trade during the first sixty years of U.S.-China relations, published in 1997 after a lifetime of exhaustive research, is now the definitive work on this topic. *The Golden Ghetto* is divided into three sections: (1) an account of the American community at Canton [or Guangzhou] under the restrictive Canton System established by Chinese officialdom to buffer the Central Kingdom from the potential harm of foreign activity and influence; (2) a detailed study of American firms and some 200 merchants involved in the China trade over six decades; and (3) an exploration of the path to the first Sino-American treaty--the 1844 Treaty of Wanghsia [Wangxia] negotiated by lawyer, politician, and diplomat Caleb Cushing after the Opium War (1839-42). Focusing on individual actions and attitudes--which Downs has culled from a wealth of sources including letters, diaries, and company histories--his presentation takes on a personal tone, occasionally reading more like a novel than a work of history. At the heart of his account is American trade in tea and silk, and increasingly in opium in the early 19th century. Downs does not mince words in condemning opium traders regardless of their nationality and the deleterious effects of the opium enterprise, but at the same time he explains how opium trade profits came to form the financial bedrock of the foreign community at Canton. He argues persuasively that American merchants with direct personal experience in China, and to a lesser extent missionaries, had a significant influence on official U.S. China policy. Readers familiar with U.S.-China relations in the 20th and early 21st centuries, and in particular with the proliferation of American business interests in China in the past two decades and with the political implications thereof, will find that Downs' study resonates with contemporary as well as historical relevance.

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