

Mirage

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First published anonymously in 1804—its author remains unknown—*Mirage* is set in Guangzhou (Canton), some decades before the city was overwhelmed by the opium trade and the Opium War. Su Jishi, the adolescent son of the head of the Chinese traders' association, the men licensed to deal with foreign merchants in the port, is suddenly burdened with responsibility for his powerful family after his father's unexpected death. More interested in sex than money, Su Jishi learns to navigate between pleasure and commerce, as rebellions erupt just outside the city.

At the crossroads of two of the greatest Chinese books—the aristocratic coming-of-age novel, *The Story of the Stone (The Dream of the Red Chamber)* and the military epic *Outlaws of the Marsh—Mirage* is panorama of libertines and concubines, lecherous monks and celibate soldiers, corrupt officials and drunken scholars. As entertaining as a bestseller, it is a hectic recreation of vanished mores and customs, and the life of a Chinese city as it was beginning to discover—and deal with—the rest of the world.



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