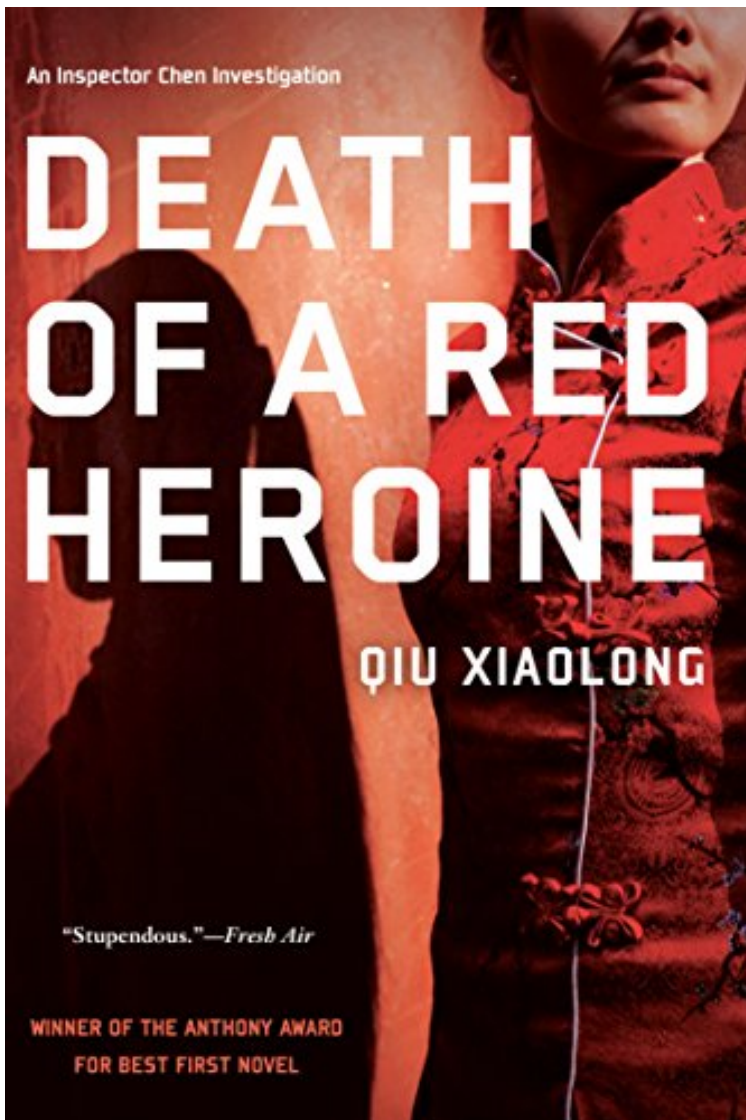


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Death of a Red Heroine



Par Qiu Xiaolong
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Description :

Prsentation de l'diteurQiu Xiaolong's Anthony Award-winning debut introduces Inspector Chen of the Shanghai Police.A young national model worker, renowned for her adherence to the principles of the Communist Party, turns up dead in a Shanghai canal. As Inspector Chen Cao of the Shanghai Special Cases Bureau struggles to trace the hidden threads of her past, he finds himself challenging the very political forces that have guided his life since birth. Chen must tiptoe around his superiors if he wants to get to the bottom of this crime, and risk his careerperhaps even his lifeto see justice done.From the Trade Paperback edition..comBy any standard, Inspector Chen Cao is a novelty in the world of police procedurals. A published poet and translator of American and English mystery novels, he has been assigned by the Chinese government, under Deng Xiaoping's cadre policy, to a "productive" job with the Special Cases Bureau of the

Shanghai Police Department. Shanghai in the mid-1990s is a city caught between reverence for the past and fascination with a tantalizing, market-driven present. When the body of a young "national model worker," revered for her adherence to the principles of the Communist Party, turns up in a canal, Chen is thrown into the midst of these opposing forces. As he struggles to unravel the hidden threads of this paragon's life, he finds himself challenging the very political forces that have guided his life since birth. With party-line-spouting superiors above him and detectives who resent his quick promotion beneath him, Chen finds himself wondering whether justice is a concept at all meaningful in late-20th-century China. *Death of a Red Heroine* is a book hovering uneasily between the spheres of fiction and fact, creativity and didacticism. For much of the novel, author Qiu Xiaolong seems more intent on driving home the actions and consequences of the Cultural Revolution and its aftermath than on the slowly unfolding plot. Tedious repetitions of the fates, under Mao, of "educated youths" joust with both the actions of the detectives and Chen's "poetic" ruminations, which, unfortunately, are infected by precisely the stiffness and arbitrariness Qiu is at pains to decry in his historical passages. The moving couplets Chen favors are potentially fascinating insights into the interaction between ancient and modern China, but instead of provoking the reader into reflection, Qiu offers reductive explanations of each and every poem. The moments when Qiu concentrates on invoking atmosphere are both illuminating and rewarding: Detective Yu's wife's pride and pleasure in having brought home a dozen crabs at "state price" are movingly well crafted, all the more so because Qiu seems almost unaware of what he is doing. Rather than lecturing on the economic dilemmas of the modern worker, he lets Peiqin's simple happiness speak for itself. In the last quarter of the book, Qiu seems to find his stride, though his writing style remains undeniably awkward. Here Chen expands and relaxes, and with him, the novel. Qiu's debut, though anything but polished, holds the promise of better things to come. --Kelly Flynn From Publishers Weekly

Set a decade ago in Shanghai, this political mystery offers a peek into the tightly sealed, often crooked world of post-Tiananmen Square China. Chen Cao, a poet and T.S. Eliot translator bureaucratically assigned to be chief inspector, has to investigate the murder of Guan Hongying, a young woman celebrated as a National Model Worker, but who kept her personal life strictly and mysteriously confidential. Chen and his comrade, Detective Yu, take turns interviewing Guan's neighbors and co-workers, but it seems most of them either know nothing or are afraid to talk openly about a deceased, highly regarded public figure. Maybe they shouldn't be so uneasy, some characters reason; after all, these are "modern times" and socialist China is taking great leaps toward free speech. Chen and Yu make headway when they stumble on Wu Xiaoming, senior editor of Red Star magazine, who apparently was involved with Guan before her death. Tiptoeing around touchy politics and using investigative tactics bordering on blackmail, Chen slowly pieces together the motives behind the crime. The author, himself a poet and critic, peppers the story with allusions to classical Chinese literature, juxtaposing poignant poetry with a gruesome murder so that the novel reads like the translation of an ancient text imposed over a modern tale of intrigue. This is an impressive and welcome respite from the typical crime novel. (June) Copyright 2000 Reed Business Information, Inc.