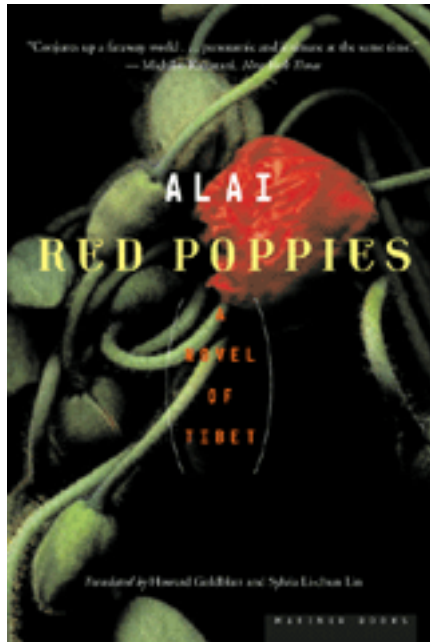


## Press Release



# Red Poppies

by Alai

translated by Howard Goldblatt and Sylvia Li-chun Lin

- [About the Book](#)
- [Praise for Red Poppies](#)

"Conjures up a faraway world . . . conjures and conjures at the same time." — Michiko Kakutani, *New York Times*

## About the Book

---

From a rising star of international literature comes a debut novel of epic proportions, a richly drawn and altogether captivating introduction to a little understood, often caricatured culture. Praised by critics across the country when it was first published last year, *Red Poppies*, now available in paperback from Mariner Books, is a cinematic tale that breathes new life into age-old sagas of family, religion, politics, and love, set against the breathtaking backdrop of pre-occupation Tibet.

Artfully translated by Howard Goldblatt and Sylvia Li-chun Lin, *Red Poppies* describes a Tibet that many Westerners will find surprising, a land far removed from the pious and peaceful theocratic society many of us have imagined. Set in the Tibetan borderlands in the early part of the twentieth century, the book introduces us to a culture ruled by chieftains who, although they look to Lhasa and the Dalai Lama for spiritual guidance, turn to Beijing and the Han Chinese for political power. It is a place colored by the brutality

of feudalism, yet steeped in romance and beauty.

Culminating with the Chinese occupation of the 1950s, when the battling Red and White armies of China turn the region into a battleground, *Red Poppies* portrays the spectacular rise and dramatic fall of one chieftain's family, narrated by its second, "idiot" son.

Through his eyes, the reader is introduced to a life of pampered extravagance, complete with servants, concubines, and personal spiritual advisers for members of the royal family. This is a Tibet of lavishness and sensuality, but also of bloody feuds and fierce competition among the territories of the various chieftains, particularly after an emissary from Beijing introduces the opium poppy as the new cash crop.

As the growing, harvesting, and smoking of opium becomes a part of everyday life, other aspects of the outside world come crashing into the territories, including guns, silver, and syphilis. Yet even as his home becomes increasingly modernized, the narrator must deal with almost medieval social mores that keep him torn between the love of two women, one a servant and the other the beautiful yet icy daughter of the area's only female chieftain.

*Red Poppies* presents a detailed and ambiguous picture of the nobility in a complex hierarchy. While critical of many aspects of Tibetan culture — foreshadowing the inevitable downfall of a society entrenched in class division and ruled by self-serving, autocratic leaders — it is also a wistful look at the last gasping breaths of a Tibet free of Communist rule, where value was placed not only on money and power, but also on romance, spirituality, and beauty. *Red Poppies* is the first of a planned trilogy about modern Tibet that will include books on the Tibetan merchant class and the lama class.

## **Praise for *Red Poppies***

---

"A wacky and immensely enjoyable portrait of a thoroughly unusual figure . . . One of the best of the wave of contemporary Chinese novels translated in recent years." — *Publishers Weekly*

"[The juxtaposition of] kindness and beauty set against violence and cruelty is perhaps this novel's most remarkable achievement. Alai knows how to conjure the indelible image." — *New Orleans Times-Picayune*

"Lavish . . . a scathing observation of power, brutality, and corruption [and] a

magnificent journey to another time and place." — *Philadelphia Inquirer*

"*Red Poppies* goes all out for violent elegance." — Carolyn See, *Washington Post*

"A compelling portrait of an unfamiliar place on the cusp of modernity; a promising new writer." — *Kirkus Reviews*

"Equal parts anthropological tour and family epic . . . an intriguing insight into a fascinating culture." — *St. Petersburg Times*

"Drawing from Tibetan legend, landscape, and history, Alai has put together quite a tale. *Red Poppies* has a seamless, folksy quality that makes it a pleasure to read." — *School Library Journal*

[Booksellers Home](#) | [Trade Home](#) | [FAQ](#) | [Site Map](#)

[Privacy Policy](#) | [Trademark Information](#)

[Copyright © 2003 Houghton Mifflin Company](#), All Rights Reserved