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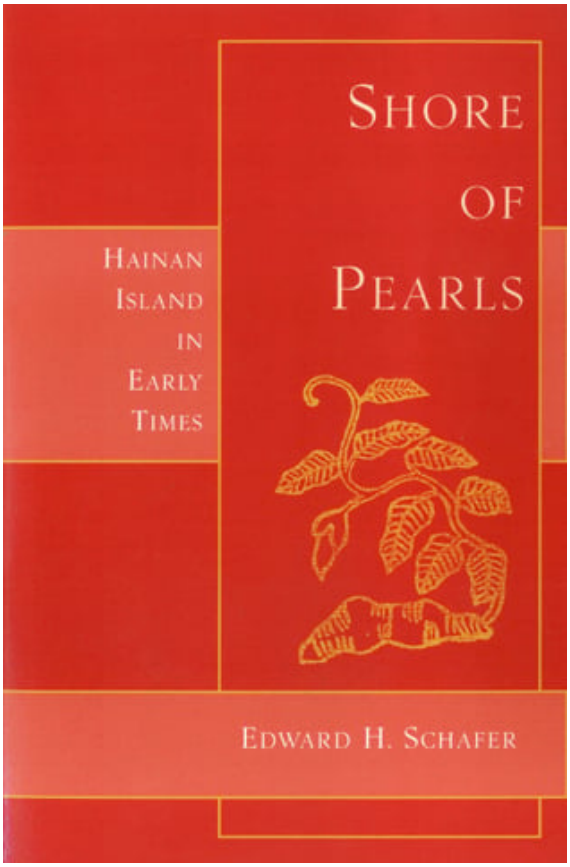

Shore of Pearls

Hainan Island in Early Times

Edward H. Schafer

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Hainan Island is the southernmost extent of what is now the People's Republic of China. Today the island is strategically important for its geographic position and its rich mineral and oil resources, and economically important as a thriving tropical resort. Historically, however, Hainan had been regarded as a backwater by successive Chinese dynasties. In *Shore of Pearls* the eminent Sinologist Edward Schafer recounts the history and culture of the island, annexed during the reign of Han emperor Wu Di in 111 BC, when Chinese armies defeated its indigenous Li people. Pearl gathering became an important industry, and this "treasure island" also yielded other luxury goods prized by the Chinese court, including incense, medicinal herbs, precious metals, tortoise shell, ivory, and exotic woods. However, the difficulty of colonizing and exploiting Hainan's riches changed its reputation from a "treasure island" to one of a "dank, poisonous land unfit for normal men," and it later became a place of exile for scholars and officials who had offended the court, including the great poet Su Shi, as well as a lair for criminals and pirates. As in *Vermilion Bird*, Professor Schafer writes precisely and poetically about this fascinating interface between China and the cultures of its southern borders. Also available: 9781891640377 *Vermilion Bird*, $50.00

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