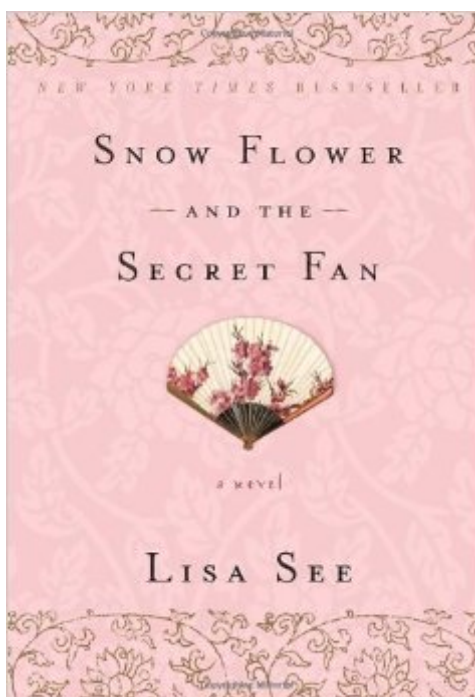


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# Snow Flower And The Secret Fan: A Novel



## Synopsis

In nineteenth-century China, in a remote Hunan county, a girl named Lily, at the tender age of seven, is paired with a laotong, an old same, in an emotional match that will last a lifetime. The laotong, Snow Flower, introduces herself by sending Lily a silk fan on which she's written a poem in nu shu, a unique language that Chinese women created in order to communicate in secret, away from the influence of men. As the years pass, Lily and Snow Flower send messages on the fan and compose stories on handkerchiefs, reaching out of isolation to share their hopes, dreams, and accomplishments. Together they endure the agony of footbinding and reflect upon their arranged marriages, their loneliness, and the joys and tragedies of motherhood. The two find solace in their friendship, developing a bond that keeps their spirits alive. But when a misunderstanding arises, their relationship suddenly threatens to tear apart. *Snow Flower and the Secret Fan* is a captivating journey back to an era of Chinese history that is as deeply moving as it is sorrowful. Now in a deluxe paperback edition complete with an expanded Random House Reader's Circle guide and an exclusive conversation between Lisa See and her mother, fellow writer Carolyn See, this lyrical and emotionally charged novel is, as the *Seattle Times* says, "a beautifully drawn portrait of female friendship and power."

## Book Information

Paperback: 288 pages

Publisher: Random House Trade Paperbacks; Reprint edition (May 26, 2009)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0812980352

ISBN-13: 978-0812980356

Product Dimensions: 5.6 x 0.8 x 8.3 inches

Shipping Weight: 9.9 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.5 out of 5 stars [See all reviews](#) (1,468 customer reviews)

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## Customer Reviews

This 2005 novel is about the friendship between two Chinese women in mid-19th century rural China. What was so wonderful about it was that I actually felt I was part of their world and totally accepted their view of life as my own. Snow Flower and Lily are friends, but their friendship was not

random. When they were only seven years old, a marriage broker arranged a contract in which they agreed to be friends for life. They did not live in the same town and Snow Flower came from a more prosperous family than Lily, but Snow Flower visited Lily often, and learned to do household chores as well as the complicated embroidery that all young Chinese girls did in preparation for their future marriages. Yes, both of these girls, as well as the other girls in their households had bound feet. The pain must have been awful. Yet, it was an accepted part of being a woman in those times, and mothers who wanted their daughters to marry well had to force their young girls to go through the agony. A woman's world was completely different from the world of men. Their lives were that of isolation. In order to communicate, they actually had a secret written language. This language has been documented and really did exist. It is the only known language in the world to have been developed exclusively by women for women. The two girls would write to each other in this language on a fan which they sent back and forth to each other. Both of them hoped for a bright future. As the girls grow up we share their experiences of marriage. They didn't meet their husbands until the wedding day. And their function in their new households was only to bear sons. Mothers-in-law were usually hard taskmasters and were always critical of them.

First of all I'd like to start this review by stating that I lived in China for four years and during that time I saw quite a number of elderly women who still walked with difficulty, using a cane, due to the fact that they had "lotus feet" - in other words, they had endured foot binding when they were children. Also during my stay in Tianjin, I had heard of the ancient practice of "nu shu" (whereby women wrote in code to one another). Therefore, when I began reading Lisa See's novel, *Snow Flower and the Secret Fan*, I was eager, yet skeptical, as to whether or not she would truly delve into what life would have been like for a woman living in a primarily impoverished 19th century rural China that was male dominated or if she would merely skim over the surface and present a superficial vision of life during that time. The book is told from the point of view of Lily, and the author accurately describes life for Lily in this highly suppressed female society. We see in excruciatingly painful detail what Lily had to endure when it was her time for her feet to be bound in order that she might have a bright future. Furthermore, Lisa See clearly spent a great deal of time precisely describing a life where marriages were arranged without consulting the future bride, where a woman's daily life was based on family obligations and respect, and constant obedience. Additionally the author provides us with a rare view of "laotong" where a matchmaker is summoned by a family to formally find a suitable, and lifelong friend for their daughter. In this instance, See describes the necessity and joy of nu shu when shared by Lily and her newly

arranged friend Snow Flower.

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