

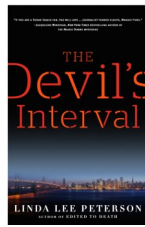


# Sunriver Books & Music

## October 2015

### Newsletter

[Sunriverbooks.com](http://Sunriverbooks.com)  
541-593-2525



Saturday October 10<sup>th</sup> at 5:00 PM Linda Lee Peterson presents ***The Spy on the Tennessee Walker***. She is a northwest author, an entertaining speaker and tells a rousing good story.

Aunt Phoebe's package from Oxford Mississippi lands in Oakland California starting the Fiori family on a trip back in time. Josh sees an uncanny likeness to his Mum, Maggie, in the picture of a beautiful woman

astride a magnificent Tennessee Walker. Maggie assures her son she has not dressed up in Civil War Era fashions to pose atop a horse, nor does she know much about the woman. The other picture in the package is Maggie's grandmother Alma who served as a Captain in the nursing corps during WWII. Along with the pictures, the package holds a leather bound book, ***Drum-Taps*** by Walt Whitman with an inscription from the author to Victoria Alma Cardworthy, Maggie's great-great-grandmother. Thus starts the quest to know more about Victoria, the probable equestrian with the uncanny similarity to Maggie. Son Zach also notes the striking resemblance to his mother and eventually takes part in solving the puzzle, but first Maggie and Michael make a trip to Oxford where Uncle Beau, the family genealogist, holds the clues to the secret of who was Victoria Alma Cardworthy. The book shifts back and forth in time from present day to the Civil War. Victoria was indeed a handful. She rode onto battlefields on her magnificent horse, Courage, to aid the wounded and dying. As the story progresses, it is clear Victoria was involved in many adventures, jailed for bigamy and espionage. What had this Southern Belle been up to? Part of the story is the role women played in the Civil War and part of the story is about a loving family from Oakland who overcame family trials to forge a closeness and mutual respect. Although Maggie is the main sleuth in tracking down Victoria's history with clues supplied by Uncle Beau, Michael and her two sons take

an active part. There is lots of snappy repartee and well timed sprinklings of humor. This is a departure for Linda Lee Peterson, her two prior books featuring Maggie were murder mysteries. The mystery in ***The Spy on the Tennessee Walker*** is more about uncovering the secrets of the life of a remarkable woman.

There are many things I like about the series featuring Maggie and her family. The San Francisco setting is used beautifully, the reader feels like you have taken a ride around the City by the Bay. Maggie Fiori is an interesting protagonist. Peterson avoided the pitfalls of making her either too cozy or too hard-bitten and crafted in Maggie a character who feels real. She is a devoted mother to two sons. She works as a magazine editor and her interactions with her coworkers ring true. One of my favorite aspects of her character is the way she drops references to works of literature thorough the story, I always enjoy novels that make references to other books.

Maggie has a very appealing husband, Michael, who takes part in the stories in meaningful ways. In a prior book, ***Edited to Death***, she made a mistake, putting their relationship in jeopardy, they committed to counseling and to making their marriage work, it is nice to read about a couple who are not always perfect but both strive to be nurturing and reach reasonable compromises when in conflict.

In ***The Devil's Interval***, the second book in the series, Isabella, an attorney working for a client on death row, seeks Maggie's aid. She believes Maggie's magazine might uncover something helpful to her client's appeal if they would do an article. Isabella has a challenging case; her client, Travis Gifford, was known as the Limousine Lothario. Travis is handsome man who thrived on female companionship; he was known to deliver more than a ride from place to place. The murder victim was found in his limousine, tied up and covered in his DNA. The police had a quick arrest, dead woman, found in the suspect's vehicle, all kinds of DNA, no need to search further. Grace Plummer was the wife of a very wealthy, high profile financier. She was often featured on the society pages, her death was shocking. Maggie and her crew start looking into the life of the victim, finding far more than the shallow society dame they expected. Peterson's mystery is a fascinating story with complicated characters that do not always adhere to societal norms but challenge the readers to see past stereotypes. The jazz scene is plotted into the storyline in interesting ways.

Join us for an evening of history and the unraveling of long held secrets with Linda Lee Peterson. There will be light refreshments and drawings for door prizes. Sign up to attend by calling 541-593-2525, e-mailing [sunriverbooks@sunriverbooks.com](mailto:sunriverbooks@sunriverbooks.com) or stop by Sunriver Books & Music.

#### Upcoming Author Appearances

Saturday November 28th 2015 at 5:00 PM ***You're the Best: A Celebration of Friendship*** by Liz Dolan and Fiona Dolan.

Saturday April 30th 2016 at 5:00 PM ***New Hikes On The Oregon Coast***, slide show presentation by Bill Sullivan.

Join us to enjoy these fabulous authors! Hearing an author speak clarifies and enriches the reading experience. Author readings are free with refreshments served and drawings for prizes. Call or e-mail Sunriver Books & Music to attend and be entered in the prize drawings. Space may be limited for some events. Check our web site, [Sunriverbooks.com](http://Sunriverbooks.com), for changes and additions.

## A Month of China

Every year we journey to other lands through the pages of books, concentrating on another country or region. Reading books set in far off places can expand your horizons, inspire you to travel, and perhaps bring understanding or empathy to your thoughts of other cultures. China is a fast growing power, it is a country worth understanding better. Yet it is not a young country, it has a rich culture going back thousands of years. For this month, join us in reading books set in China. Fortunately there are many splendid books to chose from!

### Nancy Nelson Recommends.

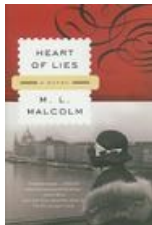


**River of Dust** by Virginia Pye is the story of a family of missionaries in the year 1910, shortly after what is known as the Boxer Rebellion. Reverend John Wesley Watson is a man who stands very tall and is quite powerful looking. Reverend Watson is zealous in his task to bring faith in Jesus to the heathen peasants. His faith however, is tried when his first born son, Wesley, is stolen by group of Mongol nomads. After the kidnapping, his life, his wife's and his servants' change drastically. The Reverend becomes obsessive about finding his son. He soon becomes known as "Ghost Man" famous for his ability to perform miracles and evade death. The revelations he experiences bring him to a better understanding of these people he had so fervently wanted to convert to Christianity, and to his own part in this tragedy of his family. The story is also about his young wife, Grace who barely manages to stay alive after the loss of her son. She is very pregnant and sickly. Thanks to the expertise of her amah, she survives. Her faith in her husband has changed; she sees him less as a deity, more as a man with flaws. In the end, both husband and wife are very different people than the two young and idealists who once thought that they had the answers to the world's problems. The story was well told, one that I very much enjoyed reading.

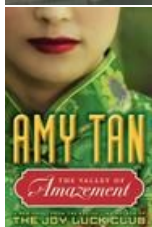


**The Third Son** by Julie Wu takes place in 1943. Taiwan is occupied by the Japanese. Saburo is the narrator. During an air raid the 8 year old Saburo is fleeing home when he comes upon Yoshiko, another fleeing student. They both narrowly escape the bullets from an American plane, finding a safe place until the bombing stops. Saburo cherishes this moment for the rest of his life. Yoshiko talks about her family and her life. She is well loved. Saburo, on the other hand is at best dismissed, at worst physically and verbally abused. As Saburo grows up the reader is informed of the responsibilities that one inherits in this culture. Saburo dreams of freedom. After the war the Japanese leave only to be replaced by the Chinese Nationalists. They are at least as severe. Saburo's dreams seem unattainable. We see the gentle Saburo summoning the strength it takes to fight for love, education, and for the chance to make the choices required of him to master his own life. On reading about the third (and least wanted) son, Saburo, it was second nature to root for him, to feel his pain, and the joy of his successes. It was also rewarding to read about the circumstances surrounding the history of Taiwan, and to get a glimpse of how the people of the island were personally impacted by their cultures, their governments. I very much liked this book.

### Deon Recommends.



**Heart of Lies** by M.L. Malcom. Leo is an endearing man with a very wobbly moral compass. WWI cost him dearly. Seizing a chance to improve his situation he gets caught up in the web of Hungarian thugs. Leo escapes Europe with a cache of diamonds and Martha's heart. Shanghai is just the place for a man like Leo to find his niche. Or so it seems, but Leo's flexible morals ensnare him in the net of a nefarious gangster as the world moves again to war. The characters are endearingly flawed, the story compelling, and the view of Shanghai dazzling.



**The Valley of Amazement** by Amy Tan. Mothers and daughters are perilous territory, never more so than in Tan's epic story of three generations separated by betrayal, yearning for redemption. In 1905 Shanghai, Violet is the pampered daughter of Lulu, an American proprietress of a very high end house of exquisite courtesans. But the woman has a secret past, Shanghai erupts in Revolution and she must flee. Violet is forced to become a "virgin courtesan" sold to the highest bidder. Half Chinese, half American she moves between the two worlds. Violet will become a mother, history will do as history often does, repeating itself in cruel ways. The story spans fifty years, incorporating the history of China in a time of great change. Each generation tries to do its best, starts out with love and good intentions, but is foiled by circumstances and necessity. Three women navigate the uncertain byways of life crossed by fate. This is territory Tan knows well; mothers, daughters, and the cost of family secrets.



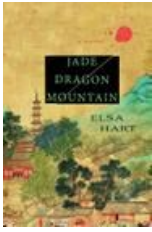
**The Piano Teacher** by Janice Y. K. Lee is stunning! Claire led a sheltered life in England, living with her Mum and Dad. Traveling to Hong Kong as a young bride she is taken into a society for which she possess no map. She is unmoored. Claire married because that was what young women did with their lives. Her husband is a pleasant chap, but not terribly exciting. She takes a job teaching the Chen's daughter to play the piano. Claire meets Will, the Chen's Anglo chauffeur and begins a torrid affair. Slowly she discovers Will's past. He arrived in Hong Kong before WWII, fell in love with Trudy, a high spirited woman who will always own his heart. The world was their oyster until the Japanese invaded Hong Kong. Will was interred with the rest of the Brits while Trudy did her best to live under Japanese rule. The story alternates time periods, opening piece by piece like the petals of a rose, each layer slowly revealing the past.



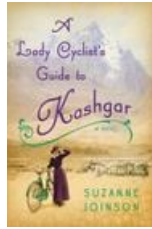
**The Good Earth** by Pearl S. Buck, winner of the Pulitzer Prize. Deceptively simple, this powerful story follows the life of a poor rural farmer. He suffers famine, poverty and eventual wealth, but always it is the land that brings him back to his roots. Poignant and filled with rich human drama, the story paints a vivid picture of life in a small rural Chinese Village and the suffering possible when fate is uncontrolled. Pearl Buck was the first American woman to win the Nobel Prize for literature.

## A Month of China.

### Deon's recommendations.



**Jade Dragon Mountain** by Elsa Hart is a perfect gem of a book! It is one of my favorites of the selections I am recommending on China. Li Du was once a librarian in the Forbidden City. Banished by the Emperor, he has been traveling remote regions of China with nothing more than the rucksack he carries filled with his meager belongings. As Li Du approaches Dayan, he is unaware the Emperor is expected soon for an imperial visit, a display of his divinity as an eclipse of the sun will darken the sky. Li Du only wants to get his travel permit signed by the magistrate and go on his way; he is surprised to find the town crowded to overflowing. His cousin, Tulishen, is magistrate; the meeting of the two men is awkward after so much time and the estrangement of Li Du's expulsion. However Tulishen has need of his cousin's skills. Li Du can speak Latin, the language of the Jesuits who arrived for the Emperor's festival and the spectacle of the eclipse. Tulishen is ambitious, everything for the Emperor's visit must be perfect, but he does not speak the tongue of these foreigners nor does he understand their ways. Li Du must stay and help with the Jesuits, and then he can go on his way before the Emperor arrives. Of course all does not go as planned. One of the foreigners will die. Li Du will pursue the truth. A lush, beautiful portrayal of China and interesting characters make this a pure pleasure to read. Li Du is a very likeable sleuth, intelligent and compassionate. I enjoyed his keen interest in nature and in learning more about his world. I truly hope the author intends to write more novels featuring Li Du!



**A Lady Cyclist's Guide to Kashgar** by Suzanne Joinson. Evangeline and her sister Lizzie are on their way to the Silk Road and Kashgar as lady missionaries under the supervision of Millicent, a zealous woman intent on converting the locals. Evangeline has brought along her bicycle, a novelty in 1923. While Lizzie is a true believer, Evangeline is more interested in seeing the world. Soon the women run afoul of local custom and law. In current day Frieda is confused by a letter informing her she is the sole heir of a stranger. She has one week to clean out the mystery person's flat. Aided by Tayeb, a homeless refugee, she delves into the accumulation of a lifetime looking for a connection. This lively story told in two time frames has strong female characters; it is an interesting look at the sometimes volatile intersection of differing cultures



**The Painted Veil** by Somerset Maugham, a master at writing stories that are filled with deeper meaning and a joy to read. Maugham's lovely prose brings China in the 1920's to life on the page. Kitty was meant to marry well. A beautiful young girl, her mother Doris had big plans for Kitty. The years go by without the anticipated wealthy fiancée. Doris had assumed her younger daughter would not do well on the marriage market, she was a plan girl. But it is Kitty's little sister who snags the wealthy fiancée while Kitty grows older year by year. Doris expected good things from Kitty; she is disappointed in her oldest daughter, now she thinks her standards must lower. Kitty is getting on in years, she is 25, it is time to find a husband and not be so choosy. Walter Fane didn't expect to marry a beauty. He is a quiet man, engrossed in his work as a doctor studying bacteria in China. On a trip home he meets the beautiful Kitty and is smitten. She accepts Walter to get out of her mother's house. Almost instantly Kitty knows it was a dreadful error. It is not that she is a mean woman, just shallow. She was raised to be pretty and pleasing. She was not raised to be compassionate or enlightened. Give Kitty a choice and she would pick a party wearing a new frock over an afternoon in the Uffizi. And why should anyone expect more from her? Her mother taught her to be a pleasant, lively, charming woman, a role she fills nicely. Anything deeper was not on the program. Hong Kong is boring for Kitty; she is used to parties, shopping, and being admired. She finds life married to Walter dull. Charles Townsend, the Assistant Colonial Secretary, is another story. He is tall, handsome, exciting, and always ready with the perfect remark. Sparks fly when they meet. Kitty thinks it is love, she thinks Charles is feeling the same passion. She assumes he will want to always be with her and be willing to leave his wife. Poor little Kitty. Charles has a closetful of discarded lovers; he has no intention of upsetting his appercart for Kitty. Maugham says he was inspired by lines from Dante; you can count on a deeply layered story if Dante is involved and this is no exception. What is the nature of attraction? Why do we expect more from one another than it will ever be possible to give? What is the nature of forgiveness? Kitty's journey from a shallow unenlightened young girl to a compassionate young woman is an epic tale. Maugham brings his life experiences to his writing. He certainly had a varied life! He was educated as a doctor, he palled around with Hemingway in WWI, he was a British spy, and he traveled all over Asia. He was an inspiration for Ian Fleming's James Bond. He also admits to his fair share of mistakes of the heart.



**When We Were Orphans** by Kazuo Ishiguro is set in England and China. Banks lived with his parents in the International Settlement of Shanghai until his ninth year when both his parents disappeared, one after the other. The orphaned child was taken to England to live with relatives. Sent off to boarding school Banks embraces everything British, and as an adult achieving some renown as a private detective. The first half of the story shifts time frames from Banks' childhood in Shanghai and his life as a bon vivant private eye in London. His life's work was set the moment his parents disappeared, the mystery there to be solved. In 1937 Banks realizes his career has been leading up to this moment, that the mystery he has been training to solve is the disappearance of his parents. His mother was openly critical of the opium trade, an unpopular notion at the time. Banks has the idea that if he can find his parents he can avert the storm clouds of war fast closing in, that they are all tied up together. The novel now shifts as Banks encounters people from his past in Shanghai and the reader realizes he may be an unreliable narrator. A major theme of the book is the question of reality, as Banks sees himself in one way while others may see him quite differently. This adds a deeper element of suspense and a surrealistic feel to the story. The writing is absolutely brilliant, the story drawing the reader in and going unexpected places, not only entertaining but also giving much to think about long after the last page is finished. Ishiguro can be a playful writer, while also exploring such weighty concepts as self-awareness and whose version is reality. His earlier book, **Remains of the Day**, winner of the Man Booker Prize, is a masterpiece. This is an author well worth reading, he challenges and entertains.



## A Month of China.

### Deon's recommendations.



***Snow Flower and the Secret Fan*** is Lisa See's most well known novel, the subject of a movie, and a fascinating tale of historic fiction. Lily and Snow Flower are of the Yao ethnicity. As children, their families arrange for them to be "laotongs", life long friends. It is a serious commitment, one that will eventually be tested by betrayal and redemption. Snow Flower is from a higher class than Lily, but fortune and a formidable mother will reverse their stations. Lily's mother sees the potential in her daughter to make a good match and ruthlessly pursues that goal, binding her feet into the tinniest lotus feet possible. See gives lots of historical detail, showing what a woman's lot would be as she explains the painful procedure for foot binding, the festivals, the class structure, and the subservience to men required of all women. The fan from the title is part of the story too, women would write in their secret language, nu shu, upon their fans. Lily's mother is correct, she is able to make a brilliant match, becoming Lady Lu, and marrying into a household that will bring another great character into the story, her mother-in-law (a very perceptive woman). The stations of the two women reverses, Lily goes from a moderate household into one of wealth while Snow Flower's upper class family falls on hard times and she is married off to a brutal butcher. They have eventful lives that make for a good story. At its heart this book is an exploration of the past and the story of the bonds of friendship between two women. A lovely book.



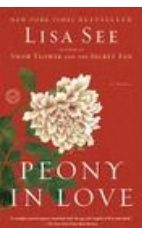
***Shanghai Girls*** follows the fortunes of two sisters who must struggle to overcome the violence of war and poverty. Pearl and May are happy young sisters, the world is their oyster, until their father loses the family fortune. They are appalled to find themselves promised as brides to two brothers from Los Angeles in payment for their father's gambling debts. Unsavory marriages are soon overshadowed by the violence of the invading Japanese. In an instant their lives change in horrible ways. The intrepid young women make their way to Los Angeles where they struggle to make a new life for themselves far from their homeland. This story is set mostly in the US, but the opening scenes take in life in Shanghai when it was a vibrant city followed by the brutal sack of Shanghai by the Japanese.



***Dreams of Joy*** by Lisa See. Joy fled LA after the family skeletons escaped the closet. She feels guilty over the death of her father and is thrown for a loop by the discovery of a biological father living in Mainland China. College in Chicago exposed Joy to the ideals of communism and she bought into the idea of Chairman Mao doing something big and grand for the world. Without pausing to reflect Joy heads out of LA and on to China, intent on finding her biological father and contributing in a meaningful way to Mao's new world order. But she is in for a shock, enlightenment may come too late, Joy's youthful idealism has placed her in the center of a nightmare. Pearl follows her daughter to China, knowing the risk she is taking, knowing how bad things might be, but desperate to save her child. Drama, love, betrayal, loyalty, and family all play out against the backdrop of Mao's China.



***The Interior*** by Lisa See is the second in a mystery trilogy. Our Mystery Book Club is discussing ***Flower Net*** this month, the first in the trilogy. ***Interior*** finds Liu Hulon trying to quiet the cacophony of sound from street musicians played early in the morning as it disturbs her mother, a woman confined to a wheelchair and suffering from a wavering sense of reality. Liu Hulon has been recently handling routine easily solved cases in her job as a detective in China's Ministry of Public Security. She is a Red Princess, wealthy and favored. Yet in the days of the Cultural Revolution she was sent into the countryside to learn from the peasants. It was hard brutal work, but as a child Liu Hulon was a true believer. Out of the blue, she receives a letter from her best friend on the farm, the woman's daughter has died and the local police ruled it suicide. The distraught mother does not believe the ruling, there was no investigation and her daughter had everything to live for; she was engaged to her childhood sweetheart and working at an American factory. She was not a depressed woman contemplating suicide. Liu Hulon agrees to travel back to the desolate village that still haunts her childhood memories in order to check on the circumstances surrounding the death of her daughter's friend. In San Francisco David Stark is not feeling as idealistically toward his role as a government prosecutor, when a job in the private sector offers him the opportunity to open an office Beijing, he accepts, his private agenda being reunited with Liu Hulon. Ironically, one of David's clients is the owner of the factory that employed the daughter of Liu Hulon's friend. As the case progresses, Liu Hulon decides to go underground, something about this American factory rouses her attention. Both David Stark and Liu Hulon's boss protest against this action. Liu Hulon is not deterred by the concerns of her superior or of taking an action that would put her on opposite sides from David. As she immerses herself in the investigation, she is also challenged by the actions in her past. This series gives a great look at the differences between China and the US, introduces very interesting protagonists, and tells good mysteries. ***Dragon Bones*** concludes the trilogy. All three have much to recommend them.



***Peony in Love*** by Lisa See is set in the 17th century. It draws on the very real reaction of young women to the Peony Pavilion Opera by Tang Xanizu in 1598. Young women had few options. They were routinely promised in marriage by their family from a very young age, the opera suggested an alternative. Part love story, part ghost story, the book follows the life of Peony, a young woman obsessed with the opera. Lisa See explores the Chinese reverence for ancestor worship, the role of women in literature, and the reactions to the Peony Pavilion Opera that spread across China.

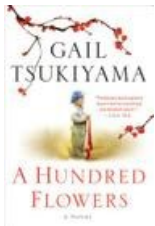
The Deschutes County Library will be featuring Lisa See in February 2016 as part of their excellent Author! Author! Series. Take part of our Month of China by reading a few of her excellent books, then enjoy going to see her in February. This month's speaker for Author! Author! Is Tim Egan, author of ***The Big Burn***, ***Short Nights of the Shadow Catcher***, and ***The Worst Hard Times***.

## A Month of China.

### Deon's recommendations.



**Ghost Month** by Ed Lin is a kicky mystery set in Taiwan. Jing-nan had a bright future, he qualified to study engineering in the US. His girlfriend, Julia, was a brilliant student heading for NYC to study. Jing-nan and Julia were childhood friends, their families ran stalls at the Night Market in Taipei, they grew up together and friendship turned to something deeper. The two young lovers, headed to different sides of a foreign land, to earn degrees in fields that would propel them into more financially rewarding lives made a romantic pact. They would not communicate until Jing-nan had achieved his goal and was employed as an engineer. The two kids had their life planned out. There is an old saying Scottish saying: “*The best laid plans of mice and men often go awry.*” In this case spectacularly so. Jing-nan did not finish college, he returned to Taiwan when his father was ill, then his mother died in an accident, and when his father died shortly thereafter Jing-nan inherited not only the family’s stall in the Night Market, but also a debt passed down from his grandfather’s time. He soon learned that no matter how hard he worked, that debt would just keep climbing. Still cherishing dreams of returning to the US to finish his degree, he did not contact Julia, he wanted to be worthy of her first. So their teenage promise to stay apart until Jing-nan had made something of himself continued. Years went by. Then in the opening days of **Ghost Month**, when the spirits of the dead are about, Jing-nan learns that Julia had returned from the US, and was working as a scantily clad betel nut beauty selling betel nuts out by the highway. He makes these discoveries in a news article about her murder. Distraught about her death, he contacts her parents who ask him to investigate. Soon other people are eager to have Jing-nan stop asking questions. Jing-nan’s Night Market Stall is named Unknown Pleasures, after a song on an album by Joy Division, his favorite group. Collecting albums is his one indulgence, a true fan. Lin, whose Chinese name is Jing-nan just like his character, takes the reader all over Taiwan, highlighting the sights, culture, and history of this Chinese island country while spinning an interesting story.



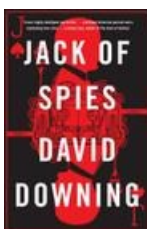
**A Hundred Flowers** by Gail Tsukiyama. Mao declared a new era of openness, encouraging input and suggestions from the citizens. Then he decided he really didn’t like criticism and all those letters with helpful suggestions became one way tickets to reeducation camps, or worse, for their authors. Intellectuals were suspect already, their letters doomed them. Sheng is arrested, his family left to wonder of his fate. The story is told from a variety of perspectives, giving it richness and diversity. Tao is only six, when he watches his father being taken away by the authorities. He misses Sheng, a year passes then one day he climbs the ancient Kapok tree in the front yard, a climb with consequences. Kai Ying keeps the family going with her work as an herbalist, she is sick with worry for her husband and son. Grandfather Wei shares Kai Ying’s concerns. Suiyin, a homeless girl, tries to survive in an unforgiving world. The story illuminates what life must have been for a middle class family in Mao’s China.



**Women of the Silk** by Gail Tsukiyama focuses on the fate of a young girl from a poor rural farming family. The story opens in 1919 with the birth of a fifth daughter for Ya-Sung who had hoped desperately to give her husband Pao Chung the son he desired, a son to carry on the family name and help run the farm. It was not to be. Only two of their daughters would survive; Li, quiet and dutiful, and Pei, curious and rambunctious. The family was very poor, this year’s drought meant their mulberry bushes would not be generous and there would be few fish in their fish farm. Something must be done if they were to survive. Pao Chung consulted the village fortune teller, the old man predicted marriage for Li but was uncertain about Pei’s fate. This decided Pao to deliver Pei to the silk factory some distance from their village, where she could labor and send home money to help her family. At first Pei is devastated by being abandoned, alone in this far city to toil away from her family. Soon she forges friendships with the other silk workers and Auntie Yee who runs the house where they live. The story goes from 1919 to 1938, progressing from Pei’s first days as a silk worker, through the strong bond of the sisterhood they form, to the invasion of China by the Japanese. The sequel, **The Language of Threads**, continues the story as Pei settles in Hong Kong.

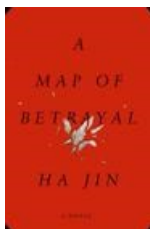


**Empire of the Sun** by J.G. Ballard is a work of historic fiction inspired by the author’s war time experiences. In 1941 Shanghai the streets are chaos as everyone attempts to flee the advancing Japanese after Pearl Harbor. Jim is separated from his parents in the melee. At first he goes back to the place he knows, the home his parents fled, and camps out. Eventually he ends up a prisoner in a Japanese concentration camp. Jim spends the rest of the war years a prisoner, witness to the harshness of wartime, growing from an 11 year old boy to a teenager. The loyalties within the camp are confusing to the young British boy, he admires the Japanese pilots although they are the enemy. Ballard was not separated from his parents, they were also interred by the Japanese, but his experiences inform the story, giving it a feeling of reality. Steven Spielberg filmed the story to much acclaim.



**Jack of Spies** by David Downing is set on the eve of WWI. Jack McColl is a thirtyish Scottish car salesman, selling luxury cars in exotic locations. He rather fancies taking a flyer at being a spy, so begins to collect data for the British at the behest of the Admiralty. In Tsingtau, China, Jack hangs about ostensibly selling automobiles, while really listening in on German conversations in the port city and taking pictures of German ships. Jack has a flair for languages, speaks several, a handy aptitude for a spy. His life becomes even more interesting when he makes the acquaintance of an American journalist. Caitlin is a free spoken proponent of women’s rights, including the right to have consensual relations of a casual nature without any strings attached. Jack is all in favor of her free attitudes, he becomes quite enchanted. Eventually the Germans, not being entirely stupid, catch on that Jack is up to something and Jack learns that being a spy might involve pain and danger. Running for his life he heads to Shanghai. The action then moves to the US, as Caitlin and Jack end up on the same ship headed for San Francisco. He crosses the US from west to East, heads to Mexico, then back to England and Ireland. He will discover secrets that test his relationship with the feisty Caitlin.

A Month of China.  
Deon's recommendations.



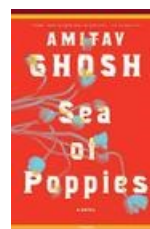
**Map of Betrayal** by Ha Jin. E.M. Forster said “*If I have to choose between betraying my country and betraying my friend, I hope I should have the guts to betray my country.*” It is a belief that might have helped the characters in Ha Jin’s latest superb novel. The story shifts between Lilian in current day and her father’s life between 1949 and 1989. Lilian’s mother was Irish American, her father, Gary, a Chinese spy. His American family never suspected the quiet, responsible family man working diligently as a translator at the CIA could be a spy. Gary’s story tells how that came to be, the struggles of conscience and the loneliness he endured as he lived in an alien land, both longing for his homeland and being seduced by life in America. As the story opens Lilian is spending time in China teaching a course in Beijing, while there she intends to track down any surviving members of Gary’s Chinese family. Finding relatives whose life is vastly different from her own, opens Lilian to new challenges. Ha Jin packs in a lot of history, both US and Chinese, along with an intimate portrait of the two cultures, and the complexity of the shadow life. One of the aspects I admire about Ha Jin’s writing his range: **A Free Life** is the story of immigrants assimilating in the USA, using a slower pace to give the details of an immigrant life, **Map of Betrayal** gives a realistic, portrayal of the recruitment and life of a spy, **Waiting** is a spare, powerful account of life in China, and **Nanjing Requiem** reveals the evil of an army run amok and the courage of the few willing to stand in their way. These are but a few of Ha Jin’s novels, however they are each very different in style and content.



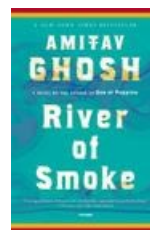
**Nanjing Requiem** by Ha Jin is set in 1937 when the Japanese invaded Nanjing, then the capitol of China, in a frenzy of killing, rape, and cruelty. Chiang Kai-shek hightailed it for the hills, along with his army. Ditto the Mayor. Leaving behind the civilians to their fate. A woman stayed behind to face the Japanese and do what she could to protect the civilian population, she was Minnie Vautrin, an American dean of a woman’s college. Ha Jin’s work of historic fiction tells her story. He had available Vautrin’s journals and other records to lend authenticity. There were many other heroes, Ha Jin gives them voice as he tells how a city succumbed to chaos as an army ran amok. His portrait of this city under attack is rendered with bright unexpected moments too, a Japanese officer who brings food, the Nazi, John Rabe, who saves lives. Vautrin shelters ten thousand refugees in a college built to accommodate 2500. Even within the shelter of the college, Vautrin could not provide safety, when the Japanese demand to take women, there is no force to stop them. The atrocities committed in Nanjing do not speak well of human evolution, they are beyond any humanity. Edmond Burke said “*the only thing necessary for the triumph of evil is for good men to do nothing*”. **Nanjing Requiem** tells the story of those who stood up to evil.



**Whispering Shadows** by Jan-Philipp Sendker begins in Hong Kong where German-American expat, Paul Leibovitz has lived for the past three decades. He is living as a hermit, his life in shambles, devastated by grief from the death of his young son, and his ruined marriage. His life of isolation on a small island outside Hong Kong, is interrupted by an encounter with Elizabeth, an American woman trying to find her son. Michael Owen was in China managing the family business, he was proficient and seemed to be doing well. Michael has gone missing, Elizabeth and Richard Owen are in Hong Kong trying to find him. Paul was a journalist, he is capable of finding out what has happened. Elizabeth prevails on Paul to help in her search for Michael. Throughout his isolation Paul has kept in touch with two friends, Zhang a homicide detective and Christine, a single mother. While Christine counsels against getting involved, Zhang joins forces with Paul to discover what happened to the missing American. Within a day, Michael’s body will be found in Shenzhen. Soon a man is arrested, but possibly he is not the right man. Zhang and Paul continue, without official sanction, trying to find the truth. Zhang has secrets of his own that come out as the story progresses. The murder of the American businessman will reach into the dark side of China’s burgeoning new prosperity. Sendker writes with a pace that allows for an exploration of the culture and landscape of China while telling a mystery with plenty twists and turns. This is the first in an expected trilogy.



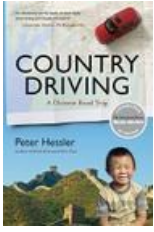
**River of Smoke** by Amitav Ghosh is the middle book in the Ibis trilogy about the opium trade. The first in the series, **Sea of Poppies**, is set in the 1830’s in India where the poppies are grown. Ghosh creates characters that make you believe their stories, want to learn more about them. Eventually the disparate group ends up on the Ibis. **Flood of Fire** is set during the Opium wars, concluding the trilogy. In **River of Smoke** the middle book of the trilogy, the Ibis battles through a tremendous storm, losing several of its passengers who escape by faking their death in the sea. One of the escapees, Neel, is a Raja of India imprisoned by the Brits. He is charismatic and articulate, but his life heretofore has been one of prestige and comfort. He is in a new world now, penniless and far from home. Bahram Modi is also out in the cyclone, aboard his luxurious ship Anahita. He is transporting the largest load of opium ever assembled to Canton, it will either make his fortune or ruin him. Bahram has another reason for making the perilous voyage, he has an illegitimate son, his only son, who has gone missing. Bahram hopes to learn his fate. The Redruth, a floating jungle, is also about in the storm. Its decks are a mass of green, plants lashed to and fro, here and there, with hardly space for the crew to walk. It is the property of Fredrick “Fitcher” Penrose, a botanist of some renown, protégée of Sir Joseph Banks, and proprietor of a Cornish garden center. Penrose is traveling to Hong Kong and Canton to procure rare plants, his foliage filled cargo is intended for trade or sale to the Chinese making room for the plants he discovers in China to be transported back to Britain. Paulette, a French woman orphaned by the death of her father, also travels on the Ibis. Her father taught her botany, she will escape the Ibis and take a position aiding Penrose. I thoroughly enjoyed all the passages with Paulette and Penrose! All of the characters are fascinating, a pleasure to spend time with, but Paulette and Penrose with their botanizing adventures were a real treat. At the heart of this trilogy is the opium trade thrust on India and China by the British East India Company. **River of Smoke** is set in the days leading to the Opium Wars, when China decides to close its doors to importing opium, a move harshly resented by the British East India Company. **Flood of Fire** has just released and will take the characters forward into the Opium Wars. Amitav Ghosh uses real historic figures in his narrative, such as the Chinese Commissioner who shut down the profitable opium trade. Adventure, intrigue, the coming together of characters from vastly different backgrounds to create a compelling story are all present in this ambitious novel that is highly entertaining while also historically enlightening.





## A Month of China.

### Deon's recommendations.



**Country Driving** by Peter Hessler. China is well known to Hessler, he served two years there in the Peace Corp then was the Beijing correspondent for the New Yorker from 2000 to 2007. He has two previous books on China, **River Town** and **Oracle Bones**. **Country Driving** is an entertaining book, it mixes Hessler's road trips while living in China with an account of the Chinese' enthusiastic embracing of the car culture and driving, albeit very bad driving. Information about China's current culture and past enliven the story. Hessler writes a very readable, entertaining story about a place and culture different from our own.



**Iron & Silk** by Mark Salzman. He is the author of powerful works of fiction, written with a moving, spare but beautiful prose. **The Soloist** was nominated for the 1995 Pulitzer Prize. **Lying Awake** is set in a convent where a nun must decide if she will undergo medical treatment for epilepsy that may take away the raptures she has always believed were her connection with God. What would you do if everything you believed might be an error? **Iron & Silk** is the true story of Salzman's time in China teaching English at Hunan Medical College. He was able to interact with the Chinese in ways your average traveler would not be able to achieve. Salzman studied Chinese language and literature at Yale. He graduated Phi Beta Kappa, Summa Cum Laude in 1982. So he had a few more language skills than most American visitors in China. He was also deeply interested in martial arts, having studied since he was a child. He continues his education in martial arts in China. The writing is beautiful, the story interesting, and the country worthy of interest.



**The Laughing Sutra** by Mark Salzman is at times laugh out loud funny, quite an accomplishment for a novel about such a perilous time. Hsun-ching an orphan, is taken in by a kindly Buddhist Monk and raised in quiet solitude near the bank of a river. He is taught by the learned Monk, proving himself a willing scholar, particularly in the legends about the Monkey King. The Monk's life's desire is to travel to America to retrieve a stolen sutra, **The Laughing Sutra**. To this end, he procures English language books for his young ward with the aim of having him learn to speak the alien tongue. When Hsun-ching is still a mere boy all this quiet life is brought to a violent end by the Red Guard during the Cultural Revolution. Time passes, circumstances change, and Hsun-ching decides to make the perilous journey to America in search of the missing sutra. He is accompanied on his journey by the wily, exceedingly strong Colonel Sun, who might be far more than he seems. Salzman writes with grace and humor. **The Laughing Sutra** is a joy to read!



**The Last Six Million Seconds** by John Burdett is a thriller set in 1997 in the last days before Hong Kong is handed over by the Brits to the Chinese. Chief Inspector Chan Siu-kai, known to most as Charlie Chan, is on the sea drifting toward Chinese water with a storm approaching. Storms can be very, very bad in that part of the world. He is searching for a floating sack with grisly contents, the heads of 3 murder victims. The murders were sadistic and strange, leaving no clues, not even the identity of the victims. Charlie has an amazing rate of solving crimes, but usually they involve the local triads, people known to one another or criminals who leave nice clues to follow. This is different. The actions of his superiors do not lead Charlie to believe they are all that eager to help in solving the crime. As he ferrets out leads, he becomes involved with players in the financial world, English higher-ups in the government of Hong Kong, and the mainland Chinese waiting to take over. Charlie is Eurasian, his mother was Chinese, his father Irish. Charlie is not close to his father, he doesn't know where the man is or if he is still alive, he decamped when Charlie was a teenager leaving his family behind. His mother he revered, when Charlie's Dad left, it destroyed her spirit. Depressed and confused, she traveled back into mainland China in the last days of the Cultural Revolution, meeting a sad death at the hands of the Red Guard. Charlie hates the government of mainland China, soon it will be his government too, the handover is on the horizon. He is erudite, handsome, and tenacious, a winning combination in a protagonist. The story is richly complicated and paints a fascinating picture of Hong Kong in the last days of British control.



**The Courtesan** by Alexandra Curry is the story of Jinhua, a work of historic fiction that may, or may not, give a picture of the life of this resilient woman. Either way, it is a compelling story that will keep you turning pages and give a view of China in the late 1800's. Jinhua was sold into a brothel as a child, her feet bound, then given to men for profit in the house of ill repute ran by a harsh woman able to impose cruel punishments. Her only comfort, the serving girl Suyin who becomes like a sister to her. Subchancellor Hong rescues Jinhua from life as a "money tree" at the brothel, making her his concubine. China is in a turbulent period, resenting the foreigners who have been nibbling away at the empire, the Empress Cixi sends Hong to Europe to observe the foreign devils and learn to understand them. Hong finds Europe overwhelming, it is so totally different from China in every cultural way. Jinhua finds it enlivening and fascinating, she is smitten by the handsome Count Alfred von Waldersee. Returning to China, her fortunes change again. She will be in Beijing as emotions continue to rise against the foreign devils and those who are sympathetic to them culminating in the Boxer Rebellion. Curry weaves in a blend of history and story. Jinhua is famous in China, the subject of films and operas.

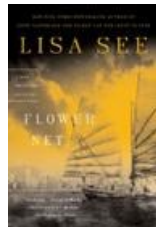
### Rich Stonehouse Recommends.



**For All The Tea in China** by Sara Rose. In the mid 1800's a Scotsman, Robert Fortune committed an act of industrial espionage that had huge consequences to history and helped shape a cultural revolution within the largest empire of its day. What Fortune accomplished was to steal one of the most secret and best guarded industries in China; tea. English people were already cultivating inferior teas in India. The East India Co. saw the establishment of huge tea plantations growing the finest of Chinese teas in the Himalayas as a way to reverse its economic decline and to make the British empire again the most powerful in the world. Rose portrays Fortune's success and failure to steal the best and most valuable teas and bring them to India for cultivation. Using disguises and stealth, his theft of the tea seedlings later fueled an industrial revolution at home in Britain and made him the darling of tea drinkers to this day.

## October 2015 Book Clubs.

Reading can expand your world; each year we focus on a different country or region. Step into the pages of a book and live for a while in another landscape, another culture. Reading about other places fosters empathy and brings understanding to different ways. It is fun to travel to far off lands through the pages of a book and may inspire you to visit in person too. This October's selection is a Month of China. In September, leading up to our Month of China we read and discussed two related books. *Ghost Hero* by S.J. Rozan is told through the view of an American Born Chinese set in New York and *A Free Life* by Ha Jin examines the experience of a Chinese family immigrating to the United States. This month our two book club selections are set in China.

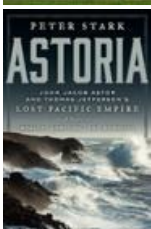
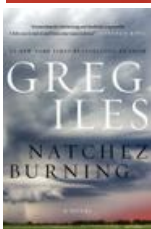
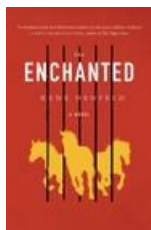


October 12<sup>th</sup> the Mystery Book Club discusses *Flower Net* by Lisa See. As the story opens, the son of the American Ambassador to China is missing, his corpse is soon discovered by a Grandfather and his Granddaughter out for an afternoon ice skating. Police Detective Liu Hulan finds little cooperation in investigating the suspicious death of the robust young man. The investigation is soon tabled. Very shortly thereafter in San Francisco, Assistant US Attorney David Stark accompanies the FBI to a ship with illegal Chinese immigrants set adrift in the path of a storm. Marooned with unfortunate human cargo on the floundering vessel as the storm approaches, David makes a grisly discovery, the body of a dead man. Clearly he was not one of the refugees. The plot thickens when he is identified as a Red Prince, one of China's elite. The two deaths, the Ambassador's son and the Red Prince of China, share similarities that make a link between them likely. Now both countries are more eager to find answers. David is dispatched to Beijing to join forces with Liu Hulan. This is not only a gripping mystery; it is also a good look at the differences in both lifestyle and the use of police authority in both countries. For instance, the court system and carrying out of sentences is quite different in China from the USA. *Flower Net* is the first of a trilogy; *The Interior* is next, followed by *Dragon Bones*. Although Lisa See is best known for her literary historical fiction such as *Snowflower and the Secret Fan*, her three mysteries are excellent too.



October 19<sup>th</sup> the Fiction Book Club discusses *Waiting* by Ha Jin. Book club members, who read *A Free Life* by Ha Jin last month, will find the pacing and style of *Waiting* quite different. Ha Jin was ten when Mao launched the Cultural Revolution; his father was an officer in the Red Army. In 1985 he left China to study in the US at Brandeis. In *Waiting* he reveals a China where major choices require official sanction. Every sentence is spare and to the point, moving the reader quickly into the story. You could make a case for describing Ha Jin's *Waiting* as similar to Hemingway but without the swagger. *Waiting* takes the reader on a cultural immersion into China by way of telling the story of a doctor, Lin Kong, who is married to Shuyu, a woman in his ancestral village, but loves Manna Wu, a nurse in Muji City where they both live. Every year Lin Kong travels, on the time permitted, to Goose Village seeking a divorce from Shuyu, without success. He has lived away from his wife for years, a doctor in the city, having little in common with the woman who cares for his small ancestral home far away in the country. The characters are interesting, their aims, desires and conflicts showing starkly the clashes in culture between communist China and the old village ways. Lin Kong's marriage to Shuyu was arranged by his mother. His bride is definitely a part of old China, a country woman with bound feet and a strong sense of familial duty. Manna Wu is a modern woman, with strong opinions. As you read about the three characters, you learn about life in China too. *Waiting* won the prestigious National Book Award.

Book Clubs are a good way to connect with other readers. Book Club meetings are Monday evenings at 6:30, everyone is welcome.



### Upcoming Book Club Dates for Monday Evenings at 6:30 PM

November 2nd 2015 *The Enchanted* by Rene Denfeld [Fiction Book Club](#)

November 16th 2015 *Natchez Burning* by Greg Iles [Mystery Book Club](#)

November 30 2015 *Astoria* by Peter Stark [Non-Fiction Book Club](#)

December 14th 2015 *The Ascendant* by Drew Chapman [Mystery Book Club](#)  
December 21st 2015 *The Steady Running of the Hour* by Justin Go [Fiction Book Club](#)

**2016!!!**

January *Oscar Wilde and A Death of No Importance* by Gyles Brandreth [Mystery Book Club](#)

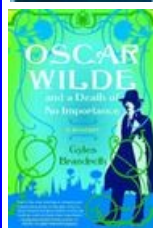
January *Short Stories* by Oscar Wilde [Classics & Fiction Book Club](#)

February *Ice Princess* by Camilla Lackberg [Mystery Book Club](#)

February *Countdown* by Alan Weisman [Non-Fiction Book Club](#)

February *Year of Wonder* by Gerladine Brooks [Fiction Book Club](#)

Comment on book clubs, look up future book clubs, or find more information at [Sunriverbooks.com](http://Sunriverbooks.com)



If you are involved in a club or gathering that would enjoy using space in Sunriver Village, please remember the Village owners have kindly provided space in the loft area above Sunriver Books & Music. The space is available for uses compatible with the bookstore during Sunriver Books & Music's hours of operation. Using the space is free. To reserve the space for your group contact Deon at Sunriver Books & Music.

Sunriver Village is an ideal place to meet. After concluding the day's agenda enjoy a meal at one of the Village restaurants and browse in the many shops.

E-readers are changing the landscape for books, not always in gentle ways. Many Independent Bookstores offer e-books for sale, including Sunriver Books & Music. On the right hand side of our website, [sunriverbooks.com](http://sunriverbooks.com), you will find information on buying e-books. We hope that you consider an Independent Bookstore when purchasing e-books. If you are contemplating purchasing an e-reader, please know that Amazon's kindle dictates your e-books be purchased from Amazon while the I-pad, the Sony e-reader, and others allow you the freedom to chose.