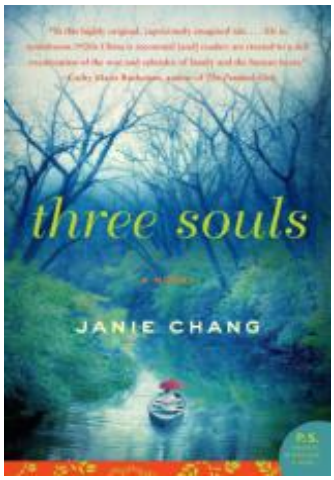
ReadingGroupGuides
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Three Souls

by Janie Chang



About the Book

An absorbing novel of romance and revolution, loyalty and family, sacrifice and undying love

We have three souls, or so I'd been told. But only in death could I confirm this....

So begins the haunting and captivating tale, set in 1935 China, of the ghost of a young woman named Leiyin, who watches her own funeral from above and wonders why she is being denied entry to the afterlife. Beside her are three souls --- stern and scholarly *yang*; impulsive, romantic *yin*; and wise, shining *hun* --- who will guide her toward understanding. She must, they tell her, make amends.

As Leiyin delves back in time with the three souls to review her life, she sees the spoiled and privileged teenager she once was, a girl who is concerned with her own desires while China is fractured by civil war and social upheaval. At a party, she meets Hanchin, a captivating left-wing poet and translator, and instantly falls in love with him.

When Leiyin defies her father to pursue Hanchin, she learns the harsh truth --- that she is powerless over her fate. Her punishment for disobedience leads to exile, an unwanted marriage, a pregnancy, and, ultimately, her death. And when she discovers what she must do to be released from limbo into the afterlife, Leiyin realizes that the time for making amends is shorter than she thought.

Suffused with history and literature, THREE SOULS is an epic tale of revenge and betrayal, forbidden love, and the price we are willing to pay for freedom.

Discussion Guide

1. Leiyin?s three souls manifest three very distinct and different personalities. What do you think the souls represent,

individually and collectively? What do you think their role is in the story?

2. Pre-World War II China was a time of great turmoil. What details and descriptions of ordinary life does the author use to evoke the social and political transitions taking place?

3. Think about the conflicts that women of Leiyin?s generation experienced during this time of transition. How are they similar to the experiences of immigrant women today? How are they different?

4. THREE SOULS makes a strong statement about how women were treated in Chinese society. Of all the examples showing how women were oppressed, which affected you the most, and why?

5. What new information did you learn about Chinese history, society, or family dynamics? Were there any passages or scenes in the novel that you felt gave you fresh insights into that time and place?

6. In Leiyin?s memories of her times with Hanchin, what tips us off that he is just toying with her? Discuss what Leiyin doesn?t see or won?t acknowledge that she sees.

7. Throughout Part One, Leiyin is warned repeatedly to obey her father. What do we know about her father that might cause her to believe he will eventually give in to her or at least forgive her?

8. Many readers consider Stepmother the most interesting secondary character of the novel. Do you agree? What makes her so memorable and admirable --- especially given the constraints of the era and her status in the family?

9. The female characters are not the only ones whose lives are constrained. Discuss how some of the male characters are also trapped by tradition.

10. In many ways this is a coming-of-age story --- in which the final coming of age happens after the protagonist dies. In each of the three parts of the novel, how does Leiyin grow and mature? What does she learn about herself or the way the world works?

11. At the end of the novel, do you think Leiyin will succeed in ascending to the afterlife? Why or why not? Do you find the outcome satisfying?

12. Consider the structure of the novel. The author changes between past tense and present tense. Do you feel this is confusing or effective?

Author Bio

Janie Chang is a *Globe and Mail* bestselling author of historical fiction. Born in Taiwan, Chang has lived in the Philippines, Iran, Thailand, New Zealand and Canada. Her novels often draw from family history and ancestral stories. She has a degree in computer science and is a graduate of the Writer?s Studio Program at Simon Fraser University. She is the author of THREE SOULS, DRAGON SPRINGS ROAD, THE LIBRARY OF LEGENDS, THE PORCELAIN

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