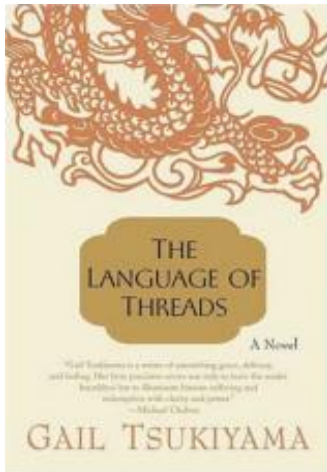


# The Language of Threads

by Gail Tsukiyama

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## About the Book

In her acclaimed debut novel, **Women of the Silk**, Gail Tsukiyama told the moving story of Pei, brought to work in the silk house as a girl, grown into a quiet but determined young woman whose life was subject to cruel twists of fate, including the loss of her closest friend, Lin. Now we finally learn what happened to Pei, as she leaves the silk house for Hong Kong in the 1930's, arriving with a young orphan, Ji Shen, in her care. Her first job, in the home of a wealthy family, ends in disgrace, but soon Pei and Ji Shen find a new life in the home of Mrs. Finch, a British ex-patriate who welcomes them as the daughters she never had. Their new family is torn apart, however, by war, and the Japanese occupation of Hong Kong. As Mrs. Finch is forced into a prison camp, and Ji Shen tries to navigate the perilous waters of the gang-run black market, Pei is once again forced to make her own way, struggling to survive and to keep her extended family alive as well.

In this dramatic story of hardship and survival in the face of historic upheaval, Gail Tsukiyama brings her trademark grace and storytelling flair to paint a moving, unforgettable portrait of women fighting the forces of war and time to make a life for themselves.

## Discussion Guide

1. When Pei and Ji Shen first arrive in Hong Kong, they meet the rickshaw boy, Quan, who takes them to their boarding house. How does he represent the bustling city of Hong Kong and what role does he play in both Pei and Ji Shen's life?
2. Discuss how the sisterhood was able to thrive in Hong Kong after the demise of the silk villages in China. How were they able to remain a unionized faction?

3. Why is Pei determined that Ji Shen get an education rather than immediately become a domestic servant? How does this put a strain on their relationship?
4. Pei first goes to work for a Chinese family, which ends in disgrace. She then goes to work for an English woman, Mrs. Finch, whom she grows to love. What are some of the distinctions in each household and how does Pei cope in each?
5. Discuss how Pei, Ji Shen, and Mrs. Finch become a tight-knit family of their home despite social differences.
6. Discuss Mrs. Finch's internment at Stanley camp. How did they function within the camp? How do Pei and Ji Shen make her imprisonment more comfortable?
7. Ji Shen becomes involved with a man named Lock and the black market in Hong Kong during the occupation. In what ways does Pei try to get her out of it? Does she succeed?
8. Why do you think Pei refuses Lin's brother Ho Yung's offer of marriage?
9. After the war and Mrs. Finch's death, Pei becomes an invisible mender or seamstress rather than returning to work as a domestic servant. How does her new business turn her life around?
10. Pei's friend Lin remains a powerful memory throughout the book. The past is never far from her mind. How does the bond between her and Pei effect the way Pei lives her life?

## Author Bio

Gail Tsukiyama was born in San Francisco, California, to a Chinese mother from Hong Kong and a Japanese father from Hawaii. She attended San Francisco State University where she earned her Bachelor of Arts Degree and a Master of Arts Degree in English. She is the bestselling author of such novels as *WOMEN OF THE SILK*, *THE SAMURAI'S GARDEN* and *A HUNDRED FLOWERS*, and has received the Academy of American Poets Award and the PEN Oakland/Josephine Miles Literary Award. She divides her time between El Cerrito and Napa Valley, California.

## Critical Praise

"Tsukiyama's writing style has a controlled fluidity, that hints at explosive passions lurking beneath the surface.... A sensory experience."

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