



# FRIENDS

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BOOK CLUB

FOPSL Book Club: November 15, 2019  
Book: ***The Garden of the Evening Mists***  
Author: Tan Tuan Eng  
Discussion leader: Pearl Moskovitz

Pearl began her mesmerizing discussion with some revealing information on the author. Tan Tuan Eng was born in Malaya to Chinese parents loyal to the British government; English was his primary language. He formed the character of Yun Ling and the history of the Japanese occupation as the theme for this book but felt it lacked a character who would create an emotional impact to which the other characters could react. At a dinner party in South Africa, Tan was introduced to a Japanese gentleman who informed him that he was a gardener for the Japanese emperor...and so we have the creation of Nakamura Aritomo, master of soil and stones as a gardener, master of paper as a woodblock print artist, and master of skin as a Horoshi or tattooist.

She then moved on to identifying themes. How many can you name? war, occupation, thriving, communism, fascism, Japanese gardening, love, tattooing, woodblock prints, civil war. How does the creation of a Japanese garden relate to the structure of the novel? Hint: a Japanese garden is created to reveal itself slowly in its twists and turns. Explain

the character of Aritomo: why did he leave Japan? In disgrace? How many people did he save. Discuss the significance of tattooing: Magnus (large eye and the Boer flag); Tatsuji and Terezen (two cranes in a circle); Yun Ling (full body tattoo). Why did Aritomo remove the portrait of the emperor after Yun Ling relates her time in the camp? Discuss the character of Yun Ling. Why did the author choose a female protagonist? Discuss the effect of Yun Ling telling the story in the first person. How does the style relate to her character?

On the whole, readers loved this book with minimal exceptions. Kudos to Pearl for leading our large circle in a rich informative and illuminating discussion on this historical novel about a part of WWII not often revealed in the West.

Richard Bass, Coordinator Emeritus

Coordinator: David Kelly, [DavidJaxKelly@gmail.com](mailto:DavidJaxKelly@gmail.com)

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Palm Springs Library, 300 S. Sunrise Way, Palm Springs, CA 92262