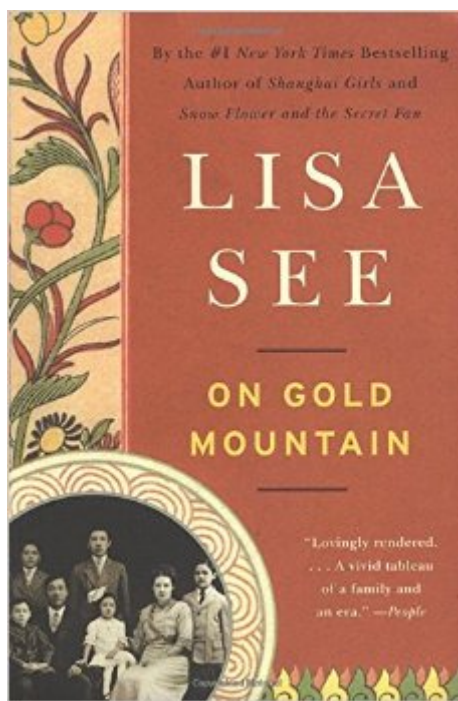


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# On Gold Mountain



## Synopsis

In 1867, Lisa See's great-great-grandfather arrived in America, where he prescribed herbal remedies to immigrant laborers who were treated little better than slaves. His son Fong See later built a mercantile empire and married a Caucasian woman, in spite of laws prohibiting interracial marriage. Lisa herself grew up playing in her family's antiques store in Los Angeles's Chinatown, listening to stories of missionaries and prostitutes, movie stars and Chinese baseball teams. With these stories and her own years of research, Lisa See chronicles the one-hundred-year-odyssey of her Chinese-American family, a history that encompasses racism, romance, secret marriages, entrepreneurial genius, and much more, as two distinctly different cultures meet in a new world.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

I must admit that I was a little (all right, very) skeptical when I first saw this book several years ago. I resisted buying or reading it only because I didn't believe that a part-Chinese (1/8 to be precise) American could do a good job in telling the story of "the" Chinese-American experience. In many ways, I was stereotyping the idea of what Chinese-American is. I was thinking of a Chinese-American as one who is ethnically 100% Chinese but is culturally American and that would preclude someone like See. Well, I was wrong. This author, Lisa See, convinced me that her family story is truly a Chinese-American one. No, let me rephrase, her story is an "American" one. Now that I've read and enjoyed the book, I am especially surprised, pleasantly, at how honest and real her

portrayal of the characters are. I know these are real people and the stories are real but to me their stories read like fairy tales and so they become characters. Their stories are so unusual that had See not done such a good job in writing it, they would have been unbelievable. One of the reasons that it is a really good book is the way the author presented the facts -- with stories and photographs. It is a well documented, well researched, and well written book. I could also attest to the veracities of the historical events and personal dramas that were described in the book because my own family's history had very many of the same events, trials and tribulations are similar to hers. And since I do read and speak Chinese and I am knowledgeable about the customs of the Southern China district where her great-grandfather came from, I can also say that her description of the cultures (including family practices, language, etc...) are extremely accurate.

There's not much magic realism or mystic exoticism about this blunt, detailed, multi-generational history of an immigrant family. If you're looking for a novel, you'll find that Lisa See has written several. I repeat, this is a history, and it will be of interest chiefly to historians and other social scientists, professional or arm-chair. Ms. See's great-great-grandfather arrived in America in 1867. The shabby treatment that he and other Chinese immigrants received is part of American history, but here in this book it becomes more vivid because See includes the reader in her "family album." Suffice it to say that the Fong/See family shrugged off indignities, worked hard, brought kinfolk to share the work despite arbitrary and unfair hurdles, took root in America, and succeeded more or less to the measure of their immigrant dreams. So it was with my mother's immigrant family from North Europe, and so it has been with every immigrant complement to America's cultural universality. Quite a few of the Fong/See second-comers spent time at the detention center of Angel Island, as described in the book "Island" which I reviewed a few days ago. The drama in this history of the branching See family - what makes this book memorable - is a love story, the secret and perilous marriage of Fong See, the son of the 1867 immigrant, to a woman of European heritage, Lettie Pruett. Interracial marriage was illegal for decades in California, as in many states, and the penalties were a lot more severe than mere annulment. The Fong See clan ran the risk of deportation, and the couple had reason to fear ostracism and personal violence. There's a sheaf of family photos in the center of the book.

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