

Francisco Garcia

Dr. Warner

ENGL 112B

11 October 2020

Silver Phoenix By Cindy Pon

Her website- <https://www.cindypon.com/>

Cindy Pon is a Taiwanese American author born in Taipei who immigrated with her parents to



LA. She received a Bachelor's from UC San Diego and a Master's from New York University. Silver Phoenix was her first published novel and came out in '09. She has written six novels, four of which exist within her fictional fantasy nation known as Xia. Besides writing she is also a student of Chinese



brush painting.

Beautiful work from what I can tell. In addition to these interests her other passion comes in the form of diversity in YA literature. She is the cofounder of "Diversity in YA." Currently on hiatus but it was a website and book tour aimed at highlighting diversity within the genre we have been studying. A noble cause in the modern day. I imagine their work did not stop with the hiatus of their website.

Summary



Xia is the fictional world of Cindy Pon's creation. It is a nation existing within this far eastern setting. There is an imperial court and everything that comes with it, mysticism, and dark denizens of the night. Ai Ling is a seventeen year old girl whose father was an advisor and scholar within the court before being released for unknown reasons. When a merchant attempts to force marriage on Ai Ling as a means of repaying a false debt, she gathers up some supplies and ventures out in search of her father. Well educated because of her upbringing she can fend for herself intellectually but what of the demons that hunt her? The sole daughter she must find her father while avoiding the monsters believed to be but legend. Accompanied by a young man of mixed race this dark fantasy adventure mixes Asian mythology, horror, and political intrigue, while throwing in Chen Yong into the equation to give the reader a novel about a young woman finding herself in a terrifying world all while uncovering secrets about herself, her father, and getting mixed up in the intrigue surrounding her mixed race companion.

Notable Quotes

To ensure no spoilers are given the summary and quotes is only taking information from the first half of the book if that. As well in doing this I hope to prove that this book holds merit as something of interest and to be read if anything for pure entertainment.

- “Was she doing the right thing? Should she be the dutiful daughter, offer herself to Master Huang, and take the burden off her mother? Ai Ling couldn’t do it.” (26)

This is not a long quote by any means, but I feel it is vital to this novel and what it is trying to accomplish. This quote could be on the back of the book it is so important to the story. Ai Ling is an intelligent girl raised by a great father who will not submit to the bullying of a grotesque and perverse man who cannot sire a son and wishes to copulate with anything that moves. This quote is highlighting the point at which Ai Ling steels her resolve and leaves the only home she has ever known. There is something to be appreciated about the agency given to female protagonists. Female protagonists in any form of literature is something that we still are sorely lacking in. So for this novel to make it abundantly clear that Ai Ling will be making decisions for herself and will not become a victim of a twisted world made for men is important and it does it well. In simple words and with conviction. She cannot and will not give into that man. She will find her father and save her family. Now does she find help along the way in the form of a romantic interest and young man, yes but she will fend for herself intellectually and have a means by which she can defend herself as well.

- “Qing He was bigger than the town she had grown up in. She jostled against others as she took in the storefronts of textile shops, bolts of silks and brocades gleaming in the sunlight. She ran her fingers along the smooth materials, imagining what her mother

would create with the fabric... The enormous size of the place surprised her. It was two stories, and many patrons sat above on the second-floor balcony. A rowdy midday crowd crammed the first level. She had difficulty finding a table but finally chanced on one tucked in the back corner, with a view of the entire dining area. Dishes from the previous patron's meal remained.”(30-31)

These examples are being chosen for what I feel can be a very obvious reason. It is the magnificent and wonderful world building that is present throughout the novel. Small moments that could be innocuous in another book are made into bright examples of wonderful detail and imagery being painted but Cindy Pon. Just small paragraphs making the world feel alive more than most Young Adult novels that usually focus more on characters than setting. It makes sense as well when looking at the historical context because Pon has gone on to add 3 more novels that have also taken place in the Kingdom of Xia. Two separate arcs within this world. I love this aspect of her writing and have seen similar sentiment from some reviews I have read. It is what I feel is the best part of the novel. The mythology and worldbuilding and the detail given to both are the highlights for me. These are descriptions of a street market in the first city Ai Ling goes to after leaving her home village. She has never known anything else so I feel that it is fantastic use of detail and perspective because to Ai Ling this world is wondrous. We spent almost no time on that street or in the restaurant, but these sites, sounds, and smells will stick with Ai Ling because of how she was raised isolated in a far off small village in a home alone with her loving parents.

- “Her father appeared, wearing his favorite dark blue robes. He raised one hand toward his daughter, a look of love and concern on his face. Ai Ling wanted to speak, reach her hand to him. Then the whites of his eyes began to move as hundreds of maggots squirmed,

falling from empty sockets, until his entire body was a writhing mass. His skin peeled away to expose raw flesh, then decayed to mere bones. The skeleton dissolved to silver wisps of dust, streaked away before her horrified eyes. Your father is dead. Go home.”(40)

The reason I chose this quote was because I wanted to point out a great example of the light horror elements this book can have. These aren't just your run of the mill spirits haunting a unique girl with powers. It is steeped in mythology and has psychological horror elements like much of mythology. They plague your mind and play with your sense of self worth and eat at your already powerful doubts in order to torment you. In this passage specifically we are given a glimpse into Ai Ling's fears about her father and his fate. Read a bit before and it is rooted in her self esteem being lacking due to being unmarried and those people telling her that she is a burden and useless to her family. Raised in this society, she can only go by what she knows and has experienced and because of this Ai Ling cannot help but hold these fears deep within her soul. Besides the content itself I want to point out the style and detail. It is disgusting and creepy. Makes your skin crawl a bit with how it is being represented and that is a good thing. Adds further interest to the novel. I appreciate horror elements in adventure novels because it is not used enough or well enough. It adds further stakes to the story and what is transpiring with our protagonist.

Readability/ Text Complexity

Flesch Reading Ease score: 82.1 (text scale) Flesch Reading Ease scored your text: easy to read.

Gunning Fog: 7.4 (text scale) Gunning Fog scored your text: fairly easy to read. Flesch-Kincaid

Grade Level: 5.1 Grade level: Fifth Grade. The Coleman-Liau Index: 8 Grade level: Eighth grade

The SMOG Index: 5.3 Grade level: Fifth Grade Automated Readability Index: 5.5 Grade level:

10-11 yrs. Olds (Fifth and Sixth graders) Linsear Write Formula : 6.4 Grade level: Sixth Grade.

New Dale-Chall Readability Index: Grade level: Grades 9 - 10

I used some apps recommended from the example book talks as well as the ones recommended by you. As we can see from the scores there is a big mix of rating and grade levels. So I would like to offer my own ideas on readability. It feels a bit more complicated than just these grade levels. The novel is written to give off their atmosphere and mood of existing in this old oriental world. It is not that difficult to read but I do feel it is more advanced than some of these ratings might make one believe. Also the themes that are in the novel are for older young adults. There is horror, demons, attempted rape and violence with the main characters being 17-19 in terms of age. So from my perspective this is more of a book to be read in high school rather than middle school. It isn't that hard to read and there is some cool use of language but the themes are what turn me off from the ratings given here and the reason why I turn it up a bit higher.

In the Classroom

This is not the type of novel to be read as a class but I still would want to recommend it to my students. So what I am thinking here is highschool in an honors class. Then take it further to the genre studies I did in English 9 Honors. So here we have a well developed world of dark fantasy fiction with a female protagonist that is of a good length at 300+ pages. It is very entertaining to read as well and not that difficult to read but there are things that can be analyzed and studied for various paper topics. Tackle the world building, the insinuations of mixed race and racism, female protagonists in a male dominated world, perspectivism being used with imagery to see through the characters eyes, mythology. This book has a lot going for it in terms of analysis. I am thinking I want to delve deeper too. And the characters are nice which makes

the world stand out all the more almost like a character in and of itself. With that in mind I can also say the world is so wonderfully realized that you just get sucked in. I read the book in just a few days time with half of it being in just a night. I like the idea of talking about this novel with some students in a high school setting and I would like to pick their brains on what the setting and world building do for them and their feelings about the characterization of the main female protagonist and her mixed race cohort.

- Good for teens in that regard looking at the world Ai Ling lives in and how she wields her agency within it.
- The mixed race is good for teens to look at as well historically and in the modern day. He is treated with disdain and is immediately at a disadvantage in his encounters with normal people.
- As for writing style this is also fantastic for younger people to analyze if they hope to write themselves. Could also be used as inspiration for creative writing essays in their AP courses.