Extension Activities

- 1. Sticky Rice and Eating Sticks. Make a list of the various foods in Silver Phoenix and visit a Chinese restaurant to sample some of them. Eat your meal with "eating sticks" and experience how sticky rice is different from fluffy rice.
- 2. Beauty Salon and Spa. Author Cindy Pon often describes her characters' hairstyles. Why? What did hairstyle signify about a person in imperial China? Illustrate each hairstyle that is mentioned in Silver Phoenix, and then compare and contrast them. Also explore some of the scents associated with Chinese culture and used in soaps, shampoos, lotions, and creams, such as those Ai Ling uses to bathe. What are natural aromatics? Become familiar with these scents, including citrus, gardenia, ginger, honey, honeysuckle, jasmine, lotus, mango, orchid, peach, plum, rose, and sandalwood. Which ones do you prefer?
- 3. Night at the Opera. Research the ancient art form of the Chinese opera, and create masks for the main characters in Silver Phoenix. Investigate the symbolic meaning of the various colors used on the masks. Why and how are Chinese opera masks used?
- 4. Graceful Chinese Brushwork. Ai Ling and author Cindy Pon are both skilled in Chinese brushwork, creating landscape paintings and calligraphy. Read about these art forms. How are the scrolls, rice paper, parchment, chop, brushes, grinding stone, and ink sticks used? Experiment with brushes and ink to create calligraphy or simple landscapes, and find a red stamp for your own signature. Visit a gallery that displays Chinese art, including calligraphy, carved jade, ceramics, cloisonné, lacquered objects, or paintings.
- 5. Martial Arts. Chen Yong and Li Rong are martialarts sparring partners. Find out more about martial arts by researching kung fu and wushu. Are you or any of your classmates skilled in these art forms? Organize a group of your friends to take a class together at a martial arts studio.



About the Author

CINDY PON is an accomplished Chinese calligrapher and brush painter with an academic background in Chinese studies. Silver Phoenix: Beyond the Kingdom of Xia is her first book, and she is currently at work on its sequel. Cindy Pon lives with her family in San Diego, California. You can visit her online at cindypon.com and read her blog at cindypon.blogspot.com.

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Guide prepared by Linda Z. Hamilton, PhD, Leawood, Kansas.

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Beyond the Kingdom of Xia

BY CINDY PON

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About the Book

Embark on an epic quest through a world inspired by ancient China in this debut fantasy of adventure and love. Seventeen-year-old Ai Ling leaves her home in Xia to rescue her father from the Emperor's palace, where a terrible evil has lived, stealing souls, for centuries. While traveling to the imperial city, Ai Ling encounters two brothers, Chen Yong and Li Rong, who accompany her. Mysterious demons and sorceresses target Ai Ling, and the trio of travelers is forced to rely on Ai Ling's supernatural powers and the brothers' martial-arts skills to survive. Li Rong dies during the journey, but the others continue—old wrongs are righted, Ai Ling's father is released, and Chen Yong learns about his birth parents. A potential romance between Ai Ling and Chen Yong is postponed when Chen Yong sets off to look for his father.

Discussion Questions

- 1. Ai Ling's story begins with a broken betrothal. What is a betrothal? In the world of *Silver Phoenix*, do couples marry for love, or for other reasons? Do you think it is true that, as Ai Ling says in chapter 1, "an unmarriageable daughter [is] a bad daughter"? How would you feel if you were betrothed to a stranger?
- 2. The word "spirit" is inscribed on Ai Ling's pendant and appears often throughout the novel. What are its various meanings in the story? What does "spirit" mean to you?
- 3. In chapter 1, Ai Ling's father tells her that she is special. As the story unfolds, what characteristics set Ai Ling apart from others? Does Ai Ling have a gift? Is she a sorceress? Would you want to be "special" in the same way Ai Ling is?
- 4. Make a list of Ai Ling's positive and negative qualities, distinguishing between her human and superhuman abilities. Do you share any aspects of Ai Ling's personality?
- 5. Is Ai Ling in control of her own destiny? Think about the roles of fate, luck, and the intervention of goddesses and seers. Does freedom of choice exist for the characters in *Silver Phoenix*? Do you believe that you have the freedom to choose your destiny?
- 6. Who or what are the sources of evil in the novel? Why is Ai Ling targeted? Why can't the lunar telling sticks reveal Ai Ling's future?
- 7. What objects are given to Ai Ling to protect her from evil? How do these items help save Ai Ling and her friends and family?
- 8. Why is Chen Yong discriminated against? How does this discrimination affect his life? How does it affect the ending of the story? Have you ever been discriminated against? How did this prejudice make you feel?
- 9. Who are the Immortals? What is their role in the story?

- 10. Do you think Ai Ling is responsible for Li Rong's death? Should she feel guilty about it? Why does Ai Ling keep Li Rong's heart? What happens in the world of *Silver Phoenix* if a person's heart is not burned on the funeral pyre with the body?
- 11. Who or what is the Silver Phoenix? What is reincarnation, and what role does it play in this story? How does Zhong Ye manage to stay alive for so many centuries? How does he upset the balance of nature?
- 12. Ai Ling laments in chapter 8, "Why were women always seen as things to be possessed by men in these tales, never with more than their physical beauty?" What are the roles for women in Ai Ling's culture? What is a concubine? Is Ai Ling a typical Xian woman?
- 13. Why do you think many appeals for help, like Ai Ling's to the Goddess of Mercy in chapter 1, are made to females rather than to males? Do you find this odd, considering that Xian culture appears to be male dominated? Explain.
- 14. What roles do the mythological creatures of the dragon and the phoenix play in this story? What do they symbolize in Chinese mythology?
- 15. From the beginning, Ai Ling finds herself connected to Chen Yong. How are their histories, feelings, quests, and destinies linked? Why do you think Ai Ling falls in love with Chen Yong? Are you satisfied with the ending of the story? Do you think Ai Ling and Chen Yong will meet again?

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