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Indonesian tale of love, war and independence debuts at Florey's

By Jean Bartlett
Correspondent

"Sulis is a young woman selling potions in Surabaya's harbor district," reads the jacket synopsis of Lan Fang's "Potions and Paper Cranes." "She meets Sujono, a coolie with dreams of becoming a freedom fighter and whose passion for Matsumi, a geisha called to Java by a Japanese general, is destined to ruin all of them. In 'Potions and Paper Cranes,' each tells the story of their lives during the end of WWII and Indonesia's transition from a Dutch colony to an independent republic." On Saturday, the book's U.S. publisher will be on hand at Florey's to present and discuss the late author's work.

An award-winning Chinese-Indonesian author, Lan Fang was born in Banjarmasin, the capital of South Kalimantan, Indonesia, and at the time of her death, was a long established writer living in Indonesia's second-largest city, Surabaya. Proud of her Chinese ancestry, and equally a proud Indonesian, the law school graduate published her first short story at the age of 16. At her death from liver cancer at the age of 41, Fang would leave behind three young children, a country of fans, and a legacy of nine books and numerous short stories. She died on Christmas Day, 2011.

Originally published in Indonesia in 2006 as "Perempuan Kembang Jepun," "Potions and Paper Cranes," is the English translation by Elisabet Titik Murtisari. The U.S. publisher is Dalang Publishing LLC, which was founded in 2011 by Lian Gouw.

Born in Jakarta, Indonesia, then a Dutch colony known as the Netherlands East Indies, Gouw is also a writer. Her short stories and poems have appeared in such print media as *Quiet* Magazine, *Writing for our Lives*, *Voices and Visions*, and *Reflections*. Her debut novel, "Only a Girl," was originally released by Publish America in 2009. Taking place against a backdrop of the World Depression, World War II, and the Indonesian Revolution, the critically-acclaimed "Only a Girl" tells the story of three generations of Chinese women, struggling for identity in a complex and riveting tale of Chinese society in Indonesia between 1930 and 1952.

"Potions and Paper Cranes" is the third novel produced by Dalang Publishing. "Dalang" is the Indonesian word for master storyteller. Gouw explained why she became a publisher.

"After the Indonesian rights of 'Only A Girl' were bought by Gramedia (the largest Indonesian publisher), and working on placement of my books with bookstores and public libraries here, I noticed the lack of Indonesian literature on their shelves," Gouw said. "I felt that the history and culture of my country deserve attention and decided to open Dalang Publishing, a publishing house that only publishes English translations of Indonesian literary works."

Manneke Budiman, a respected literary critic and lecturer at the University of Indonesia in Jakarta, is Gouw's Indonesian literary advisor. He recommended Fang's book for English translation, and Gouw said the work is precisely what she is looking for.

"'Potions and Paper Cranes' gives the reader a glimpse into Indonesian history," Gouw said, "the way things were at the end of the Japanese occupation of the country during WWII, and the onset of the Indonesian Revolution immediately thereafter (1942-1945)."

Adjunct Professor George Quinn, College of Asia and the Pacific, Australian National University writes, "'Potions and Paper Cranes' affirms the fragility of hatred, and the capacity of memory and love to endure a lifetime of separation."

"At the Florey's presentation, I'll introduce the book," Gouw said, "and touch on the importance of sharing cultures. I'll also discuss the universal value of the major elements in life – love, survival, death."

"This work is life-truth," Gouw went on to say. "It is also a gripping love story."

Saturday, February 8, 2:00 p.m. - 4:00 p.m., publisher Lian Gouw, <http://dalangpublishing.com/home-english>, will be at Florey's Book Co., 2120 Palmetto Avenue, Pacifica (www.floreysbooks.blogspot.com) to present "Potions and Paper Cranes" by Lan Fang.

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