



***Lady Tan's Circle of Women* by Lisa See**  
**Discussion Monday, 25 November at 5:30pm**

1. The opening of this novel begins with a preface which includes the line “My cousin has excelled at treating women because she has shared in the losses and joys of what it means to be a female on this earth.” How does this set up the novel and what is to come for Yunxian? After reading the novel, what does it mean to be a “female on this earth?”
2. How does the death of Respectful Lady shape Yunxian? What lessons from Respectful Lady does Yunxian carry with her?
3. Grandfather Tan and Grandmother Ru have very different ideas about childbirth. Who do you agree with, and why? Although 500 years have passed since the time the novel takes place, do you think these contradictory ideas still hold true today – not just for childbirth but for women’s medical care in general?
4. These two girls shouldn’t have contact with each other, let alone have a relationship formalized and sanctioned by Grandmother Ru and Midwife Shi. How do Yunxian and Meiling each benefit from the relationship? Are there downsides for each of them?

5. Each character—and Yunxian’s relationship to that person—changes and evolves over time. How does Yunxian come to see and understand the characters of Miss Zhao, Miss Chen, Lady Kuo, Doctor Wong, and her husband and father?
  
6. The importance of having a son was critical in ancient China. It still is in many countries and cultures around the world. What are the main plotlines in the novel related to this issue? Consider the perspectives of Spinster Aunt, Miss Chen, Doctor Wong, Midwife Shi, Lady Kuo, and Meiling and Yunxian. Were these characters out for his or her own self-interest?
  
7. Lisa often uses aphorisms to help illuminate a character or a plot. One of the most significant in this novel is “No mud, no lotus.” Discuss how this aphorism is important to the story. Miss Chen recites a series of aphorisms to Yunxian: “It takes a lifetime to make a friend, but you can lose one in an hour. Life without a friend is life without sun. Life without a friend is death.” What message is Miss Chen trying to convey to Yunxian?
  
8. A case could be made that Yunxian was a modern woman. What are some of the ways she balances work and family? Do you see yourself in her?