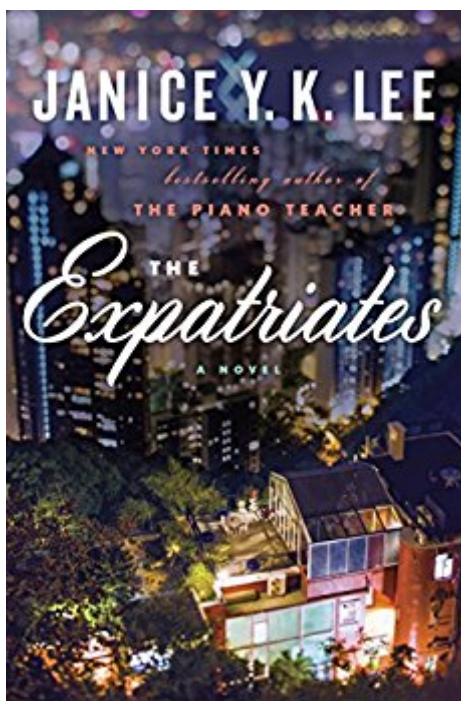


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The Expatriates: A Novel



Synopsis

"Raise a glass: The first great book-club novel of 2016 has arrived." "USA Today," 4/4 stars "A female, funny Henry James in Asia, Janice Y. K. Lee is vividly good on the subject of Americans abroad." "The New York Times Book Review" "Sex and the City meets Lost in Translation." "The Skimm" Janice Y. K. Lee's New York Times bestselling debut, "The Piano Teacher," was called "immensely satisfying" by People, "intensely readable" by O, The Oprah Magazine, and "a rare and exquisite story" by Elizabeth Gilbert. Now, in her long-awaited new novel, Lee explores with devastating poignancy the emotions, identities, and relationships of three very different American women living in the same small expat community in Hong Kong. Mercy, a young Korean American and recent Columbia graduate, is adrift, undone by a terrible incident in her recent past. Hilary, a wealthy housewife, is haunted by her struggle to have a child, something she believes could save her foundering marriage. Meanwhile, Margaret, once a happily married mother of three, questions her maternal identity in the wake of a shattering loss. As each woman struggles with her own demons, their lives collide in ways that have irreversible consequences for them all. Atmospheric, moving, and utterly compelling, *The Expatriates* confirms Lee as an exceptional talent and one of our keenest observers of women's inner lives. From the Hardcover edition.

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Customer Reviews

4.5 stars
The writing in this novel is the kind of writing that gave me the feeling I was there among this group of people, right there while they were interacting with one another, right there when the author describes what they think and feel and I thought many times that I might feel the same way under the same circumstances. I don't mean the descriptive kind that paints a picture in your mind of what the place looked like but rather gives you a sense of who these women are. There are the expatriates, and there is the group of the American expatriates of which the three women whose stories are focused on here, are a part of. It's a small community where everyone knows everyone or knows of everyone, or are connected in some way. As we are introduced to these three women, with alternating narratives in the third person, it's obvious that their paths will cross. It does in ways which are pretty realistic and pretty devastating. There's Mercy, single and alone, a twenty something Columbia graduate, who seems quite lost, unsure of herself and is almost living the self fulfilling prophecy of failure as predicted by the old Korean woman her mother sought to learn her future from. Then there is Margaret, wife and mother of three, who has come to define herself in those terms and then questions herself. There's Hilary, rich, not so happily married, who desperately wants to be a mother. It's a complex story in a way with so much going on here on several levels. There's the cultural differences, there's the class differences between some of the privileged people and their housekeepers and drivers. There are mothers and their children and how the children or inability to bear children define who these women are.

This book is a captivating look into a culture foreign to many of us. Three women are followed as their lives differ significantly and others times intertwine as they live in an encapsulated world of the foreign born in huge outer city of Hong Kong. It is a life once led by the author herself, but one that even as the book ended is evolving away from decades of custom. Hong Kong is no longer an English colony but a city of Mainland China where even now English is spoken less and less as the city yields to its new status. Mercy is a poor woman of Korean status who has moved to Hong Kong to start anew. But as we meet her, her life has taken a tragic turn that has turned her inward in almost complete poverty and isolation. Hilary and Margaret have moved as accessory wives, following Their husband to their postings in international companies. Margaret has three children, losing one to tragedy early in the book. Hilary is a wife desperate for a child and in the process of a

rather odd "trying on" of a young orphan in various visits. For the two wives, life is that of extraordinary privilege. Household help of every description is readily at hand and very cheap in comparison with their own standard of living. The community is small and almost incestuous. Long days of leisure are not questioned and exotic locales are readily at hand. A woman need never lift a hand, although she must be wary of local women well used to serving men in every way without question. The writing is engaging, and the characters are multidimensional with satisfying admission into their worlds. The story is also quite realistic.

[4.5 stars] **Headline:** The Expatriates hit a couple of my "what makes a book work for me" buttons: a good balance between plot and style, dark undertones, and social commentary. **Major Themes:** Maintaining your identity through motherhood, expat life, Hong Kong culture, appearance vs. reality, getting beneath the surface of people **What I Liked:-** When I picked up *The Expatriates*, I was expecting a light novel about wealthy, successful expats living it up in Hong Kong and I was delighted to find the story also had surprising depth. Yes, many of the characters' lives sparkle on the surface, but darkness lurks just underneath as it becomes apparent that reality is quite different from appearances. - While I can't say if Lee's social commentary on Hong Kong culture and expat life is spot-on (having never been to Hong Kong and never been an expat), it was one of my favorite parts of the novel and truly made the setting and context come alive. "This is the Hong Kong curse that expat housewives talk about in hushed voices: the man who takes to Hong Kong the wrong way. He moves from egalitarian society, where he's supposed to take out the trash every day and help with the dinner dishes, to a place where women cater to his every desire - a secretary who anticipates his needs before he does, a servant in the house who brings him his espresso just the way he likes it and irons his boxers and socks - and the local population is not as sassy with the comebacks as where he came from, so, of course, he then looks for that in every corner of his life." - I love when a book contains a mystery or crime, but it's more of a catalyst to explore relationships and emotions than the center of the story.

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