



A Thousand Moons on a Thousand Rivers

Hsiao Li-Hung

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Winner of the 1980 *United Daily* Literature Competition, this novel about love, betrayal, family life, and the power of tradition in small-town Taiwan was an instant bestseller when first published in Taiwan.

At once a bittersweet romance and a vividly detailed portrait of life in a southern Taiwanese coastal town in the 1970s, *A Thousand Moons on a Thousand Rivers* captures the intimacy of agricultural life in the midst of an increasingly industrialized society. At the heart of the story is Zhenguan, a sensitive young woman whose coming of age is influenced by new experiences in the city, the wisdom of her elders, and her strong, unique identity. In Zhenguan's journey of first love, suffering, disillusionment, and ultimately zenlike triumph, Hsiao Li-hung celebrates the values and traditions that have sustained and nurtured life in Taiwan through the centuries.

Hsiao traces the relationship of Zhenguan and her childhood friend Daxin against the background of daily existence and festival celebrations in their extended family. Daxin, in many ways Zhenguan's male counterpart, is fascinated by ancestral worship during Lunar New Year, riddle-solving during the Lantern Festival, and the noontime water and sticky rice dumplings of the Dragonboat Festival. These rituals, part of a rich cultural heritage, add charm to their romance while shedding light on the reasons for their eventual separation.

Hsiao uses simple lessons taught in the garden and prayers uttered in a mountaintop temple to enrich and temper the story with the spirit of Buddhist teachings. The novel masterfully interweaves Buddhist maxims, poetry, folk songs, and puns with the dialogue, capturing the integral nature of tradition in the characters' lives as they search for meaning and solace in life's unpredictable fortunes.

With understated elegance, Hsiao Li-hung's lyrical work affirms a way of life both fleeting and enduring. For readers interested in Chinese literature and culture, and anyone who enjoys a rich family saga, this is a unique and beautifully told story.

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