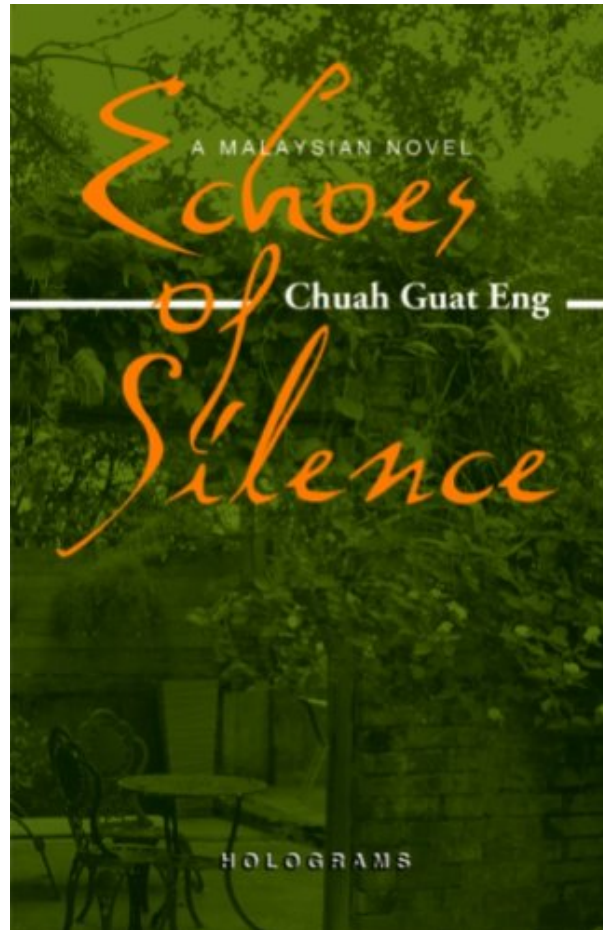
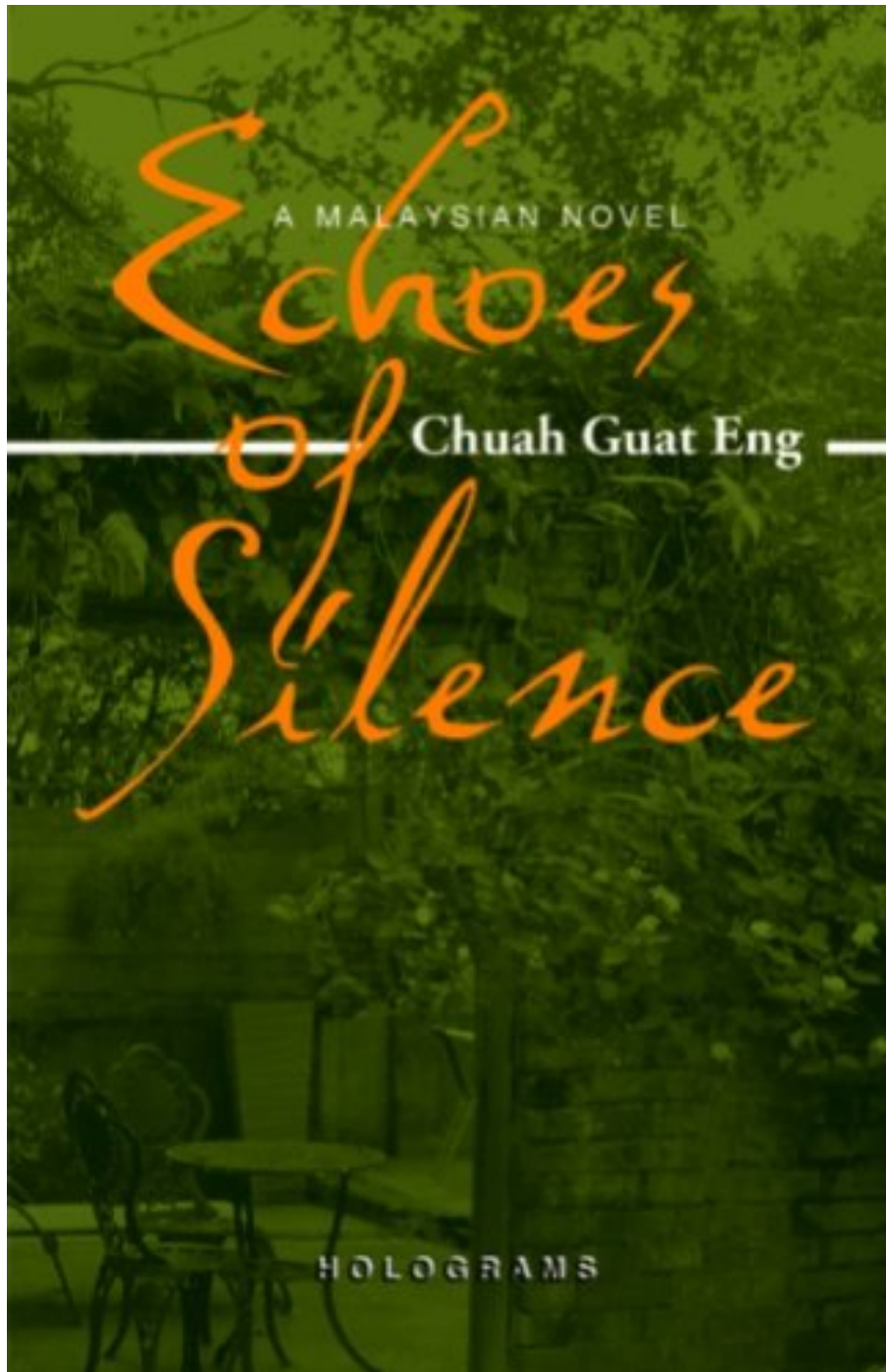


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## Review

Chuah Guat Eng's first novel more than satisfies our expectations of that suave literary species, the 'unputdownable'; -- but it is much more than a stylish thriller. As we follow the first-person narrator's progress in feeling for the murder clues, we get clues of another ilk as well, of such complex quality that as the plot thickens, the narrative blooms. Soon we are led into a parallel realm of discovery, filled with the rich reverberations of personal odyssey; .... And we are on to the fact that the thriller structure, which the author wields with so light a touch, comes away in one tug as a stage prop, a play within a play .... It is a novel of protean form, more postmodern than at first appears, in which the author accesses the world's imagination through two or more of its fondest habits, the thriller and the film. And then gives it a lot more. These are not props of narration but metaphor, the features of an inward landscape. Yet in the end it is not even this which makes it the most accomplished Malaysian novel to date, a new and cultured voice, in a society in which fiction has basically taken its own sweet time, for all the plethora of talent demonstrated in the short story form, and the passionate communally sourced novels.... It is the created world of the novel, which leaves the reader with a definite feeling of depth, weight, sorrow and maturity, caused by the passing of time, the strain of events, birth and death, the sense of life, of growth, which gives to a society the gift of seeing itself, of phrasing its experience, of recording itself at the level of the massive landscape of culture and spirit without which politics must fail. --Jun Mo, Far Eastern Economic Review

As a mystery story, Echoes of Silence is admirably crafted. This is no mean achievement. A mere entertainment the murder story may be, but it requires great cleverness to manufacture. I find myself wondering if this mystery novel is not as good as a good Christie and far better than most detective stories I have read. ... By now I am postponing other things and eating quickly so that I can get back to it. At the end ... I turn back to earlier pages to appreciate the technique that kept me in suspense. It's worthy of an accomplished mystery writer, incredible for a first-timer. But ... is Chuah Guat Eng to be just that, the Malaysian Agatha? No. For a long time before the end I was aware that Echoes of Silence is far more than a mystery novel, that it in fact has achieved what I thought was impossible. Not all its events are related to the murder. The others are part of another pattern, which has been there from the opening pages. And I can see how this has been done. The time shifts, from today to the Seventies, then to the Forties, and back again intermittently, have kept us constantly in three different but related worlds. The leisurely pace has allowed for the serious novel to develop with the mystery story. And the quiet style has authentically, and seemingly effortlessly, described a variety of experiences life on a pig farm, in a small town, in a rubber planter's bungalow before the war and 30 years later. They have all combined to make Echoes of Silence an

intellectual as well as a tender novel about love. If Chuah's second novel, already announced as *Days of Change*, should be as entertaining, intelligent, and well crafted as her first, its publication will be a national literary event! --Ted Dorall, *New Straits Times*

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'In March 1970, as a direct result of the May 1969 racial riots, I left Malaysia.' Thus begins the story of Lim Ai Lian, a Chinese Malaysian. In Germany she meets and falls in love with Michael Templeton, an Englishman born and brought up in the district of Ulu Banir, where his father, Jonathan Templeton, now a Malaysian citizen, owns a plantation. In late 1973, Ai Lian returns home to be with her sick and dying father. The following February she pays the Templetons a long delayed visit. On the day of her arrival a murder takes place and Ai Lian is soon involved in trying to find the murderer. In the process she finds herself learning about racial prejudice, truth and deception, guilt and innocence, womanhood, love, and the way past silences echo into the present.

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Engaging novel of first rank

By Hu Yaoquan

The (fictional) Anglicised Chinese Malaysian Ai Lian narrates an onion-layered account of discovery and self-discovery in her complex relationship with Michael Templeton, heir to the eponymous sprawling estate in Ulu Banir, Malaya, where things are not as they appear. Beautifully crafted prose describing Ai Lian's agonizing self-examination will reward readers who enjoy introspective novels. The plot is onion-layered, somewhat evocative of *Rashomon*, and its denouement satisfying. The setting is pre-independence Malaya, a time when British-run estates were tropical replicas of genteel England with concessions to the heat, humidity and local mores. It is evident that the author has assiduously researched the milieu of those times, impressively informed by her Peranakan background. A novel of first rank, a great read, with timeless themes. Its sequel, "*Days of Change*", has recently appeared.

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Compelling reading

By Charles D. Klingman

This is a well-crafted, highly readable novel, accessible to all interested in literary fiction. As an added benefit, the book is written in the form of a mystery, making it interesting and fun for mystery lovers as well.

The book is set in Malaysia and written by a Malaysian writer, making it a rarity for English-language readers.

Through this book, one sees the development of interesting characters and how they react to conflicts and challenges. One also learns something of life in Malaysia, and the events that surrounded the 1940s and 1950s in Malaysia.

All in all, this pleasurable book merits greater readership.

Readers will want to read the sequel to this book by Ms. Chuah.

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