

‘Snow Flower and the Secret Fan’ Could Be Cure For Insomnia

Submitted by [BrianTT](#) [1] on July 22, 2011 - 12:42pm

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Rating: **1.0/5.0**

CHICAGO – Wayne Wang’s “Snow Flower and the Secret Fan” is such a stunningly inert film that it’s almost worth seeing to watch a movie with no thrust whatsoever. Probably due to a language barrier, the film features two of the least effective lead performances of the year, which keeps the audience from engaging in the story emotionally and just leaves them wondering how this book became a bestseller.

There are many problems with “Snow Flower and the Secret Fan” but the biggest is the assumption that subject matter is enough to sustain viewer interest. You know those manipulative TV movies, often on Lifetime, in which in the true story is so devastating that it feels like the filmmakers thought there was so much power in it that they didn’t need to bother with anything else? Such is the case with “Snow Flower,” which was clearly intended as an emotionally important movie that could be an alternative to the guy-centric summer movie season but never registers beyond the manipulation of its melodramatic story.



Snow Flower and the Secret Fan

Photo credit: Fox Searchlights

Said story focuses on female friendship with the hook being that while times may change the importance of having a best friend who always has your interest in her heart never does. The film centers on the concept of *laotong*, an ancient Chinese word for BFF. Seriously, the understanding was that marriage was for status, family, and other practical reasons but *laotong* was something deeper, more emotional resonant. The idea behind Lisa See’s best-seller was to illustrate the importance of *laotong* in ancient society, but Wang and his team have made the remarkably-poor decision to reflect it in modern society by showcasing it through two friendships across the decades of time.

The primary, filmmaker-created story centers on Nina (Li Bingbing), an upwardly-mobile young lady in modern Shanghai who is about to move to New York to continue her career. She'll be leaving behind one half of her laotong, Sophia (Gianna Jun) but the two haven't spoken in months (for reasons left a mystery until the final act and even then not fully explained despite the best efforts on the part of a Hugh Jackman cameo). When Sophia gets into a bike accident that leaves her comatose, Nina rushes to her side and discovers that her friend has finally written that novel she spoke of about "Snow Flower and the Secret Fan." Through flashback, we meet Snow Flower (also Jun) and Lily (also Bingbing) and what unfolds is a story about how little of emotional importance has changed with modern technology. What mattered about friendship then matters today.



Snow Flower and the Secret Fan

Photo credit: Fox Searchlights

Bingbing and Jun may be fully capable actresses in their native tongue but Wang and his team chose to shoot most of "Snow Flower and the Secret Fan" in English and it was a devastatingly-bad decision. Neither actress is effective in the language, sounding like they're reading their lines phonetically from cue cards off-stage and the nature of the story allows them each to not only give one bad performance, but two apiece. And the nature of the story demands that one of the two young ladies is in every single scene. There's never a break from the lack of believability.

It doesn't help that the script has a remarkable lack of urgency. The story of Snow Flower, Lily, and the secret fan simply isn't interesting enough to warrant as much screen time as it does and the parallel is never distinctly drawn to the modern couple beyond the surface-level message about the importance of friendship. It's a melodramatic flashback within a melodramatic story but neither half of the film plays up the melodrama. Wang shoots the piece with such a languorous pace that we never worry about anything happening to the characters. We never care.

It's because these aren't real characters. They're so clearly nothing more than devices in a film that's doing nothing beyond trying to appeal to the under-served female movie-going demographic. Who knew friendship could be so boring?

"Snow Flower and the Secret Fan" stars Li Bingbing, Gianna Jun, and Hugh Jackman. It was directed by Wayne Wang. It was released in Chicago on July 22nd, 2011.



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