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# “HIDDEN LETTERS” DOCUMENTARY EXPLORES THE ONCE-SECRET LANGUAGE CONNECTING GENERATIONS OF CHINESE WOMEN UNDER PATRIARCHAL OPPRESSION, PREMIERES MARCH 27 ON PBS’S INDEPENDENT LENS

February 2, 2023

*Directed by Award-Winning Filmmaker Violet Du Feng, the Film Follows Two Millennial Chinese Women Connected by Their Desire to Protect the Centuries-Old Written Language of Nushu as They Forge Their Own Paths in Patriarchal China*

**(San Francisco, CA) February 2, 2022** — For centuries leading up to the 1949 Communist Revolution, repressed women in China, who categorically were denied literacy and forced into oppressive marriages, communicated through Nushu—a secret language considered one of the most extraordinary methods of feminist protest. Connecting generations of Chinese women, Nushu’s history of sisterhood and survival in a patriarchal culture is carried out through the lives of Hu Xin and Simu, the present-day women protecting its legacy. “Hidden Letters” introduces Nushu through a contemporary lens, shining a light on the women’s liberation movement in China over the centuries to the state of women’s rights today.

Described as “a deep and wonderful rebellion” by feminist writer and activist Gloria Steinem and named one of the “Most Powerful Arthouse Films of 2022” by *Vice*, “Hidden Letters” makes its television debut on INDEPENDENT LENS on

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March 27, 2023, at 10 p.m. ET (check local listings). The film will also be available to stream on the PBS Video App.

Emmy® Award-winning documentarian Violet Du Feng (“Harbor from the Holocaust,” “Confucian Dream,” “Mainland,” “Please Remember Me”) began working on “Hidden Letters” to start a conversation about women’s issues in China, still largely considered a political taboo. The film dives deep into how the clandestine tradition of communicating with Nushu has provided women a safe space to share their stories, express hope and solidarity, and affirm their dignity in the face of patriarchal struggles.

Throughout the documentary, the film’s primary subjects struggle to find balance as they operate within a society dominated by men. In rural Jiangyong, Xin works as a Nushu museum guide and aspires to master the ancient script following the breakup of her marriage. In Shanghai, Simu is passionate about music and Nushu, but marital expectations threaten to end her pursuit of both.

“‘Hidden Letters’ brings a different perspective to feminist discourse, sharing a secret language of sisterhood with a global audience and connecting our history to today’s issues, including gender-based violence, economic inequality, and reproductive rights,” said Feng. “It was important to show an intimate, observational perspective on how women operate within a society dominated by men and honor the resiliency that has passed down through generations, which we hope will resonate with the INDEPENDENT LENS audience.”

“Hidden Letters” was shortlisted for the Oscars® and IDA Documentary Awards. A staple on the 2022 film festival circuit, the film also received awards at the Heartland International Film Festival, Bergen International Film Festival, Austin Asian American Film Festival, Hot Springs Documentary Film Festival, and was featured as an official selection at Tribeca Festival and BFI London.

“Hidden Letters” received Open Call and Diversity Development Funding from ITVS. Visit the [“Hidden Letters”](#) page on INDEPENDENT LENS to learn more about the film.

**ABOUT THE FILMMAKERS:****VIOLET DU FENG**

Violet is an Emmy® Award-winning independent documentarian and a 2018 Sundance Creative Producing Fellow. Her producing credits include “Singing in the Wilderness,” “Confucian Dream,” “Mainland,” and “Please Remember Me.” She directed the most recent PBS/CPB special program “Harbor from the Holocaust,” which had a national premiere in September 2020, with music performed by Yo-Yo Ma. She started her career as a co-producer on the critically acclaimed 2007 Sundance Special Jury winner, Peabody and Emmy® winner “Nanking,” which was distributed theatrically in 30 countries throughout the world, and was the highest grossing documentary in China. Violet is the producer of the forthcoming films: “People’s Hospital,” “Dark Is Not Black,” and “Running with the Prime Minister.” Violet is a consulting programmer for Shanghai International Film Festival. Born in Shanghai and based in New York, Violet holds a bachelor’s degree in journalism and received her MFA in journalism from the University of California at Berkeley.

**ZHAO QING**

Zhao Qing is the director of the award-winning “Please Remember Me,” which is supported by Sundance Documentary Fund, IDFA Bertha Fund, and the Britdoc Connect Fund. She started her career at Shanghai Media Group in 1991, where she directed and produced many television documentaries affiliated to the Overseas Programming Center, now known as the Documentary Channel of SMG. She directed and hosted several popular TV documentary programs such as “The Bund” and “Documentary Editing Room.”

**JEAN TSIENT**

Jean Tsien is a documentary editor, producer, and consultant. She received two Peabody Awards in 2021: one for executive producing the landmark PBS series ASIAN AMERICANS; and one for producing “76 Days,” winner of the 2021 Primetime Emmy®. She produced “Free Chol Soo Lee,” which premiered at the 2022 Sundance Film Festival. Tsien is a recipient of the 2018 Art of Editing Mentorship Award, presented by Sundance Institute, a Lifetime Achievement Award at DOC NYC’s 2020 Visionaries Tribute, and the 2021 IDA Pioneer Award.

**METTE CHENG MUNTHE-KAAS**

Mette Cheng Munthe-Kaas is an Emmy®-nominated and award-winning producer, interactive producer, and editor of feature documentaries. Through Ten Thousand Images she produced the award-winning “No Word For Worry” in 2014 and “Nowhere to Hide” in 2016, winner of over 20 awards including the first prize at IDFA and a two-time nominee for an Emmy® Award. Her recent co-productions have won numerous international awards, including Best Documentary at the Berlinale for “Myanmar Diaries” in 2022.

**SU KIM**

Su Kim is an Emmy® and two-time Peabody Award-winning producer. She is an acclaimed documentary producer whose works include the Oscar®-nominated “Hale County This Morning This Evening,” “Free Chol Soo Lee,” and “Midnight Traveler.” Su is a former Women at Sundance Fellow and recipient of the 2022 Sundance Amazon Studios Nonfiction Producers Award. Films in release currently include: “Bitterbrush,” “Hidden Letters,” “Sansón and Me,” and “The Tuba Thieves.”

**CREDITS:****Director & Producer**

Violet Du Feng

**Co-Director**

Zhao Qing

**Producers**

Mette Cheng Muthe-Kaas

Jean Tsien

Su Kim

**Executive Producers**

James Costa

Ken Pelletier

Jaeson Ma

Lois Vossen

Sally Jo Fifer

**Co-Producers**

Tanja Georgieva-Waldhauer

Betsy Tsai

Visit the INDEPENDENT LENS [website](https://www.independentlens.org) for more information.

**ABOUT INDEPENDENT LENS**

INDEPENDENT LENS is an Emmy® Award-winning weekly series, airing on PBS Monday nights at 10:00 p.m. ET. The acclaimed series, with Lois Vossen as



executive producer, features documentaries united by the creative freedom, artistic achievement, and unflinching visions of independent filmmakers. Presented by ITVS, the series is funded by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, a private corporation funded by the American people, with additional funding from PBS, Action Family Giving, the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, Wyncote Foundation, and the National Endowment for the Arts. For more visit [pbs.org/independentlens](https://pbs.org/independentlens). Join the conversation on Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram at @independentlens.

#### **ABOUT ITVS**

ITVS is a San Francisco-based nonprofit organization that has, for over 25 years, funded and partnered with a diverse range of documentary filmmakers to produce and distribute untold stories. ITVS incubates and co-produces these award-winning films, and then airs [them](#) for free on PBS via our weekly series, INDEPENDENT LENS, as well as on other PBS series, and through our digital platform, OVEE. ITVS is funded by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, The National Endowment for the Humanities: American Rescue Plan, Acton Family Giving, the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, the Ford Foundation, and Wyncote Foundation. For more information, visit [itvs.org](https://itvs.org).

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