

## Asian 204, Summer 2010 Q02

### The Sea of Regret: Discussion Questions

The second unit in the course is devoted to Wu Jianren's 1906 novella *The Sea of Regret*. The novella is in two files on eread: [SeaofRegret01] and [SeaofRegret02]. Finish reading at least the first file before class on Friday 6/25, and finish the whole novel by Monday 6/28.

Review the reading questions before you begin reading the novel. Jot down notes as you read; it can be particularly useful to note the page numbers of passages you think relate to the various questions. Be prepared to discuss these questions in class on Friday 6/25 and Monday 6/28.

#### Discussion Questions (Part 1)

1. In the society portrayed in the novel, how are marriages arranged? Who decides who marries whom, and who makes the arrangements? How are engaged couples expected to behave?
2. In the first chapter, who becomes engaged to whom? What differences are there between:
  - the backgrounds and personalities of the various individuals;
  - the processes by which the two engagements are settled;
  - and the behavior of the couples once the engagements has been arranged?
3. To which of the two engaged couples does the novel give the most attention? Within this couple, which character gets the most attention?
4. Carefully review the scene in Chapters 1-2 of *Sea of Regret* portraying Dihua's experiences during the third night she and her companions stay in a country inn (bottom of p. 111 to middle of p. 116).
  - What happens during this night?
  - What are Dihua's feelings?
  - Why does she feel this way?
  - What might be the significance of this scene in the novel? In other words, why do you think the author finds it important to focus on Dihua's experience in this way?

### **Discussion Questions (Part 2)**

1. Briefly summarize the adventures and ultimate fates of the two couples. What parallels, contrasts, or other patterns can you see in the design of the plot?
2. Does Dihua's character change over the course of the rest of the novel? Identify key scenes and passages you can use to support your response.
3. At the beginning of the novel (see pp. 103-104) the narrator tells us that this story will concern the theme of "passion." What does the narrator mean by "passion"? And what, in the end, does his story have to say about the theme of "passion"?
4. Is this a love story? You might think about this question from two angles:
  - In what ways does it fit, or not fit, your own expectations of what a "love story" might be?
  - In what ways does the narrator frame it (set it up) as a love story? Does the narrator present it as a "love story," or as something different? Cite specific passages.