

Asian 204, Summer 2010 Q03

Lu Xun: Discussion Questions

Our third unit is devoted to two pieces by China's most famous modern author, Lu Xun: the "Preface" to his collection *Cheering from the Sidelines* (1922), and "Ah Q—The Real Story" (1921).

Discussion Questions for "Preface" (for Tuesday 6/29)

1. Lu Xun's "Preface" to *Cheering from the Sidelines* is in part an autobiographical sketch, an account of his own life. Briefly summarize the main events in his life according to this account.
2. Lu Xun begins the "Preface" by saying that "as a young man I had my share of dreams too." On the basis of the preface as a whole, what do you think these dreams were? How does he feel about them at the time of writing the preface?
3. What incident inspired Lu Xun to take up literature?
4. What is the parable of the "iron room" (or "Iron House" as it is often translated), and what does Lu Xun mean by this parable? How does it apply to his own situation?
5. This is a preface to a collection of stories which is entitled *Nàhǎn* 呐喊 in Chinese. Our English version translates this phrase as "cheering from the sidelines." Others have translated it as "battle cry." What is the difference between these two English phrases? Which translation better expresses the mood and aims of the preface? Why?

Discussion Questions for "Ah Q" (for Wednesday 6/30)

1. Who is Ah Q? Can you briefly (in four or five sentences) summarize the story of his life?
2. What events in modern Chinese history does Ah Q find himself involved in? How much does he understand about these events? What perspective on these events does his story offer to the reader?
3. The publication of this story led to debates about "the Ah Q spirit." How would you describe Ah Q's personality and attitude towards life? What is his strategy for winning "psychological victories"? Illustrate with specific examples from the text.
4. Who is the narrator (note: not the author!) of the story? What information does the text give us about the narrator's identity, social status, etc.?

5. What does the narrator think of Ah Q? Choose one or two passages from the text that you think most clearly reveal the narrator's attitude towards his subject.
6. How do you, as a reader, feel about the narrator as a person? What aspects of the text might encourage you to feel this way?