

Asian 204, Summer 2010 Questions 08

For our last unit we are reading three short stories from Taiwan. The stories represent the perspectives of different segments of Taiwan's population from different moments in 20th-century history. We'll think about them individually but also in comparison with one another; we'll also want to compare them with material from our other units, including the first, the Hong Kong film *Comrades*. One possible approach to these stories is to consider their treatment of various kinds of *place, space, and geography*.

Be prepared to discuss the following questions in class. Note specific passages in the text that you see as relevant to your responses.

Discussion Questions for Bai Xianyong, "Winter Nights"

1. What setting and situation does the story's opening scene present? What is the emotional tone of the opening? What specific elements contribute to this tone?
2. Describe Prof. Yu Qinlei's life. How does he view his own career? How does he view that of his friend Wu Zhuguo?
3. Describe Prof. Wu Zhuguo's life. How does he view his own career? How does he view that of his friend Yu Qinlei?
4. How do the characters' lives reflect recent Chinese history? How does each of the main characters view the past they have shared?
5. What future does each of the main characters face? Beyond these characters' probable fates, does the story offer any other glimpse of the future?
6. This story is from a collection entitled *Taipei People*. How does each of the main characters view Taipei and Taiwan? In what sense are they "Taipei people"?

Discussion Questions for Huang Chunming, "The Drowning of an Old Cat"

1. What geographical model does the story's opening section present?
2. The story's central conflict revolves around different views of Clear Spring and its Dragon-Eye. What are these views? What groups hold these views, and what is at stake for them?

3. What transformations does Uncle Ah-sheng go through in the course of the story? What accounts for these changes?
4. Where do the narrator's sympathies lie? How can you tell; what details of language and narration color the reader's perspective on the story?
5. How does the story's picture of rural life and rural consciousness compare with that of other works we have considered in class?

Discussion Questions for Zhu Tianwen, "Fin de Siècle Splendor"

1. What story does this text tell? Is there a series of events, or a drama involving certain characters, which you can summarize?
2. Is "telling the story" this text's major concern? What does it do besides or beyond narrating a series of events; what kinds of material or information occupy most of the text?
3. What does "*fin de siècle*" mean? What does "*fin de siècle splendor*" mean? Why is this phrase used as the title for this story; what events, situations, or images might it refer to?
4. Compare the image of Taipei in this story and in "Winter Nights." How has the city changed over the years between the two stories' settings? What does the city mean to each of the stories' protagonists?
5. Recall Sheldon Lu's discussion of different models of Chinese identity from the first article we read. Can we apply his analysis to "Splendor" and "Winter Nights"?