



Cornell University Southeast Asia Program

Discussion Questions: My Old Home

Please make direct reference to the text to support your answers.

1. Memory and the Present:

In the story's opening, the narrator asks, "Ah! Surely this was not the old home I had remembered for the past twenty years?" How does his country home seem different from his memories of it? Why? How does he rationalize this discrepancy between memory and present reality? If you have had the experience of returning to a home/place/person you hadn't seen in some time, compare your feelings with those of the narrator.

What is so special about the narrator's memory of his boyhood meeting with Jun-t'u? Why is the description of the day they spent together so fully drawn? How is the memory of this day connected in the narrator's mind with his memory of his old home in general?

2. Class Distinctions/Money/Work:

Characterize the differences between the narrator's adult relationship with Jun-t'u, after twenty years, and their boyhood friendship. The narrator feels he can do nothing to break down the "lamentably thick wall [that] had grown up between us." *Should* he be able to confront the social factors that create this distance between them (i.e., would that be realistic within the context of the story, its time and setting)? How does the narrator feel about his status in life compared to that of Jun-t'un and his family?

Why does the old neighbor, Mrs. Yang, the "Beancurd Beauty" say, "Naturally, I am beneath your notice" and why do the neighbors think the family is rich? Why doesn't the narrator have the same sympathy for them as for Jun-t'un's family? What is the importance of the narrator's work to himself and to his family?

3. Generations:

What is the narrator's impression of Jun-t'un's fifth child, Shui-Sheng? Why is Hung-erh (his 8-year-old nephew), so at ease with Shui-Sheng, when the narrator himself feels so awkward with Jun-t'un? In terms of narrative technique, are the parallel relationships in this story, the present youngsters mirroring the friendship of twenty years earlier, effective?

4. You can't go home again:

Why does Hung-erh think the family will return to the country family compound, when they have clearly packed everything up and are leaving for good? How does the narrator feel about this?

At the beginning of the story, we saw the narrator's feelings about arriving; at the end, about leaving. How does he feel about his "old home" after his stay? How does he feel about leaving? What is your response to this as a reader?

5. Hope/The Future:

How does Lu Xun create a feeling of nostalgia in the story? How is this connected to the idea of hope for the future; i.e., what is the relationship among past, present, and future in the story and in the narrator's thinking?

Explore the subtleties of the narrator's musings on "hope" at the end of the story. What does he think the future will bring? What does he mean when he asks himself if hope wasn't "nothing more than an idol I had created myself"? What kinds of changes does he hope for? Given what you know about Lu Xun, explore the social and political commentary of this story and whether or not he is trying to manipulate the reader's response, and if so, to what end.