


Cornell University Southeast Asia Program

Lu Xun's "My Old Home" and *Beijing Bicycle*

By Roberta E. Adams, Department of English, Fitchburg State College

Additional Documents

- Discussion Questions: "My Old Home"  [download as PDF doc](#)
- Discussion Questions: *Beijing Bicycle*  [download as PDF doc](#)

Themes and Goals

This teaching unit, developed for a World Literature II course, addresses the contrast between early modern and contemporary China. Lu Xun's "My Old Home" raises questions of memory and social hierarchy and portrays the struggles individuals face based upon their social status. The film *Beijing Bicycle*, a good contrast to the writings of Lu Xun, raises questions about life in urban China today and one individual's attempts to "get ahead." This contrast allows students to explore the drastic social, political, and economic evolution China experienced over the course of the twentieth century.

Student Readings: Lu Xun
Lu Xun, "My Old Home." (1921)

Available online at <http://www.marxists.org/archive/lu-xun/1921/01/x01.htm>

Print versions:

- *Selected Stories*. By Lu Hsun. Translated by Yang Hsien-yi and Gladys Yang. Introduction by Ha Jin. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2003. Pages 54-64.
- *Selected Stories of Lu Hsun*. Translated by Yang Hsien-yi and Gladys Yang. Peking: Foreign Languages Press, 1960 and 1972.

Lu Xun, Preface to "Diary of a Madman." (1918) Translated by William A. Lyell. In *Diary of a Madman and Other Stories*. University of Hawaii Press, 1990. Pages 21-28.

It is helpful to provide the students with a biographical introduction to the writer and some context for the stories. For reliable information on Lu Xun and the period in Chinese history in which he was writing, see:

- [Lu Xun: China's Greatest Modern Writer, Asia for Educators, Columbia University](#)
- [Introduction to China's Modern History, Asia for Educators, Columbia University](#)
- [Lu Xun Biography by Kirk A. Denton, Modern Chinese Literature and Culture Resource Center](#)
- [Lu Xun Studies Bibliography, Modern Chinese Literature and Culture Resource Center](#)

Distribute the [discussion questions](#) ahead of time so that each student has time to think about the topics and raise their own questions. In class, break the students into small groups to discuss one or more set of questions, and then bring everyone together for a large group discussion. Alternatively, use the discussion questions for a journal assignment.

In a world literature course, these readings work well with Chekhov's play *The Cherry Orchard*. The play can be included when discussing the ideas of home and leaving home also raised by the Chinese materials.

Film: *Beijing Bicycle*

After discussing Lu Xun's story, show the following film (or portions of it) in class: *Beijing Bicycle*. Written and directed by Wang Xiaoshuai. 2001. 113 minutes. In Mandarin with English subtitles.

The film is available for rental from many retail video outlets (such as Blockbuster) and from Netflix. New and used DVDs are available for purchase from online retailers such as Barnes and Noble and Amazon.

Recommended Excerpts (times listed are approximate for DVDs):

- 1) 00:00:00 - 0:10:16
- 2) 00:23:59 - 00:36:38 (Guei tries to get his bike back from Jian)
- 3) 01:43:35 - 01:50:29 (the last 10 minutes of the film)

Characters

The country boy: Guo Lian Guei (played by Cui Lin)

The city boy: Jian (played by Lee Bing)

Jian's girlfriend: Xiao (played by Gao Yuan Yuan)

The country maid posing as a city girl: Qin (played by Zhou Xun)

The tough: Da Huan (played by Li Shuang)

Synopsis

The film opens with vignettes of young men from the countryside being interviewed individually for a job as a bicycle courier with Fei Da Express Delivery. Guei is one of those hired. Each messenger is provided with a uniform and a top-of-the-line silver mountain bike. For each delivery charge, the messenger earns 20%; after earning 600 yuan, the bike becomes the property of the messenger, and he then gets to keep 50% of the delivery charge. Guei is living with a

slightly older relative, also from the countryside, who has a small shop that sells soy sauce and miscellaneous items.

Jian is a young man from a family that is not well to do, but is able to send him to a private school. However, his father has been promising him for years that he will buy him a bicycle and hasn't. He tells him that the money he's saved for the bike will now have to go for the tuition for his younger sister, who got into a good school. (The mother and sister are actually the half-family from his father's second marriage.)

Guei's bike is stolen. There are several scenes of Guei searching for his bike before he discovers that Jian has his bike. Look at the scene where Guei tries to get the bike back from Jian (excerpt 2). Why do you think Jian is going to lose his girlfriend after this incident? (She takes up with the street tough, Da Huan, after she and her girlfriends watch him perform stunts on his bike.)

At first, it seems Jian must have stolen the bike, but the class can then discuss the scene where Guei confronts Jian at his family's house.

After this, Jian's friends convince him that they can get the bike back for him. In spite of their attack on Guei, he won't give it up. They suggest he buy it back from Jian, but he has no money. They finally compromise on trading the bike back and forth, every other day.

Attachments:

Discussion Questions: "My Old Home"

Discussion Questions: *Beijing Bicycle*