A House Divided Study Guide

A House Divided by Pearl S. Buck

BOOKRAGS

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Plot Summary

A House Divided is a poignant coming of age tale depicting the life and struggles of a Chinese youth named Wang Yuan. Nineteen-year-old Yuan is the son of a Chinese war lord at a time when reform sweeps his nation. The upheaval brought about by revolution leaves him trapped between old ways and reform, and he doe not agree completely with either extreme. Conflict plagues him as he struggles against old traditions and new rebellions which embrace foreign customs. He grapples with his own ideologies which takes him on a personal and solitary journey to find his place in his changing homeland.

Yuan flees his father's home and domineering control without a word. He thinks he is running from his father, but he is really running from his own inner conflict. With no idea of where to go, he remembers a peaceful earthen house his grandfather lived in before he garnered his wealth. He takes up residence within this simple earthen home much to the dismay of the common tenants who live there. In reality, he is not only hiding from his father, but from himself. He wants to be something different than he is, and different from his father. When the entire village looks at him with suspicion as the general's son, they wonder what he wants from them. This bothers him because he has explained he wants nothing but to feel the earth under his feet.

Within days, his father locates him and sends word to return home. The message says his father's health is failing. Upon Yuan's return, his father announces he has arranged Yuan's marriage. The young man feels deceived and refuses to accept such bondage. Once again he flees without any idea of where to go. His horse goes lame; he sells it and uses the money to take a train to the coastal city where he lives with one of his father's wives and his half-sister Ai-lan. The lady of the house takes him in as her own son, and he calls her mother. Within this home, he learns modern city ways along with some western customs. As he learns new ways and customs, he does not let go of his traditional foundation. The mixing of the two fuels his inner conflict, often is evidenced by a rigidity that cuts him off from others. This cycle repeats itself throughout stages of his life as a student, revolutionist, prisoner, American student, and a teacher in China. While fighting these personal battles in every direction from without and within, he falls in love with Mei-ling because she is "between" just like he is. She does not fit with the old or the new. In his eyes she is perfect. However, when he asks her to marry him, she says no. Through this event, Yuan grows and accepts her answer with a willingness to still be friends and to stay in touch. When he returns home to his tortured father, he calls on her as a doctor and friend. She comes to stand with him in what is right and through the process agrees to be his wife.

Chapter 1—Pages 1-27

Chapter 1—Pages 1-27 Summary

A House Divided is a poignant coming of age tale depicting the life and struggles of a Chinese youth named Wang Yuan. Nineteen-year-old Yuan is the son of a Chinese war lord at a time when reform sweeps his nation. The upheaval brought about by revolution leaves him trapped between old ways and reform, and he does not agree completely with either extreme. Conflict plagues him as he struggles against old traditions and new rebellions which embrace foreign customs. He grapples with his own ideologies which takes him on a personal and solitary journey to find his place in his changing homeland.

Nineteen-year-old Wang Yuan arrives home on a winter's night to the home of his wealthy war lord father, Wang the Tiger. Yuan grows up fearing and loving his father, but after an absence returns wearing a revolutionist's uniform. He harbors a seething hatred for all his father stands for. His father sits in the hall before a brazier, warming himself. He has grown old. It takes a little time for him to recognize the enemy uniform his son wears, but when he does he struggles to his feet and fumbles for his sword. Wang Yuan responds in anger. He rips open his uniform coat and stands with his bronze chest exposed. "I knew you would want to kill me—it is your old and only remedy! Kill me, then!" (p. 1). However, as the words fall from his lips, Wang Yuan knows his father cannot kill him, because he is his only son. His father's arm goes limp, and the old, hair-lipped server who has serviced the Tiger since both men were young walks into the room to serve hot wine as he does every night. At first he does not see Yuan in the shadows. The Tiger's sword clatters to the floor; his hands tremble. He picks up his bowl of hot wine and drinks.

Yuan stands in the shadows watching the two old men. From his perception, his father's old servant eagerly works to please while his father looks to wine for comfort; two old men center on wine and comfort and nothing more. Standing forgotten in the shadows, Yuan's fury turns to cold hatred. Emotions constrict his throat and tears burn his eyes. However, like his father, he refuses to let tears fall, though he attributes his self-control to his training at the school of war. He turns with posture erect and heads to the room where he studied as a child under a tutor. This same tutor became his Captain at the school of war.

Without lighting a candle, Yuan finds the chair behind his old desk in the dark and sits. "It came to him now that he need not have let himself be so passionate with fear for his father—no, nor so passionate with love for him, either, that for this old man's sake he had forsaken his comrades and his cause" (p. 3). He considers his father as he just witnessed him, old, frail and drinking wine. The reality makes him ponder his feelings. He has always feared and loved the man, but he harbors an inner rebellion. He wants to be free of his father's control. Yet, even with all his father's rants, rages and angry outbursts, Yuan knows his father loves him. In fact, his love is as fierce as his anger. No one else in the Tiger's life matters to him. All of his wives live other places now. One wife

who is the only child to a wealthy physician has returned to live in a far off coastal city with her only child, also a daughter, for her to learn in a foreign school. This daughter is the only child the woman bore to the Tiger.

Because of the Tiger's fierce, controlling love, Yuan feels trapped. He trained at the school of war but left. This makes him feels as if he turned his back on his comrades there. They believed in helping the common man, the very same who suffer at the hands of war lords like the Tiger. As Wang Yuan watched his friends vow their allegiance to the Captain, he slipped away, torn by the fear and love he holds for his father. Now he hates himself for his heart is with them. Memories of how his father treats the common people haunt him. Faces of poor folk's flash to the forefront of his mind as he remembers how his father's army trampled down their grain. That same army was not fazed by the commoners' dead bodies littering the ground.

Yuan sits in the darkened room feeling sorry for himself. "For all my father knows or cares or understands, I might as well have turned a revolutionist! I might as well have followed after my captain, for now I have no one—no one at all—" (p. 5). Not one server from the wealthy household comes to check on him. He assumes it is because they know his father is angry with him, and do not want to chance turning that anger on themselves. He falls asleep in the dark with his head on his desk.

Dawn brightens the room. Yuan awakens and thoughts of the quarrel from the night before rush back into his mind. He walks to the still empty outer court. The watchman is asleep at the gate. Yuan flees, leaving the gates open behind him. He enjoys traveling alone. The time refreshes his creative spirit and he longs to write. After the third day away from his father's home, his first verse comes to him, every line in his mind is perfect. The following day he feels renewed as he rides up to the earthen home that once belonged to his grandfather. Farmers and their families stand in the street staring at him, wondering what he wants. Yuan feels kindly toward them as he is still in a good mood from traveling alone and doing as he wishes for the last three days. Yet, Yuan does not realize the people look upon him as they would his father, because they do not know him or that he hates war. Instead they see him sitting on his horse straight and tall like a general. When he enters his grandfather's former house, he is greeted in the same way. The old couple living there are afraid and wonder what he wants, and even though Wang Yuan tries to reassure them they have no need to fear, they do not trust him. He finally tells them, "I want nothing at all except to shelter myself here awhile in this house of my fathers—perhaps I may even live here—I do not know, except I have always had the strangest longing after fields and trees and water somewhere, although I know nothing, either, of such life on the land. But it happens just now I must hide myself awhile, and I will hide here" (p. 12).

The old man tries to talk him out of staying with them because Yuan's father and uncles are hated by the people. He bends and whispers in Yuan's ear that the lad's uncle and his wife moved to a coastal city in fear for their lives because of the intense hatred the people had for them because of the taxes and shares of war exacted from them. However, Yuan, still feeling good about being free, chooses not to believe them. Instead, he decides to stay. He looks around at the simple life and likes it because

everything is new to him. He tells the woman he is hungry and to give him something to eat. She tries to tell him she does not have anything good enough for him. "I must first kill a fowl out of our four—I have only this poor bread, not even made of wheaten flour" (p. 13). He says he likes it along with everything else in the small, simple house. Still doubtful, she gives him a bread stick which he eats and then asks where a bed is that he may sleep. They show him to a small room. He falls asleep but awakens while it is still dark. People are moving about in the middle room of the house. He peeks through the curtains hanging at the door and glimpses the old tenants going to bed.

He lays awake thinking about his father and wondering if he has figured out where he has gone off to. As his thoughts ramble, he imagines his father sending someone after him, and his refusing to go along. Suddenly he remembers his horse which he left tied to a willow outside. He gets out of bed and beyond the curtain sees about 20 or so farmers crowding the middle room. Yuan steps into their view. The eldest farmer steps forward and asks when Yuan's father will be arriving. Yuan tells them he is not coming. The man explains they have little left. Yuan's uncle has treated them harshly, spending more money than ever now he has moved to the coast. The farmer tells him about the war lord tax, and about the money they pay the bands of robbers to stay safe from them and concludes by telling him clearly they have almost nothing left. Instead of reaching out in pity, or an offer of sympathy, Yuan says, "It is a strange thing I cannot come to my grandfather's house without such talk as this. I want no money from you," (p. 16). He tells them a revolution is coming against war lords including his father and he had been part of the revolutionists but then realized he could not take up arms against his father. He even tells them of the quarrel with his father, but the response is fear and doubt. They can only believe what they have experienced—their landlord and Yuan's uncle, Wang the Merchant, lives in luxury because he grew so rich through usury.

The men rise to leave and Yuan wonders whether he should rise or not, a gesture reserved for his superiors. He stands because he wants to please them. After the men leave, Yuan is alone with the old tenants and the man asks again what Yuan really wants. They think he is a spy. Yuan denies he is sent by his father, and then remembers his horse again, but learns the old man already took care of the beast. Yuan thanks him. The old man drops onto one knee. "It is nothing—are you not my old master's grandson?" (p. 18). However, he goes on again asking for Yuan to speak the truth regarding his reasons for being there with them. Yuan tells him it is as he has said and he does not want to talk about it anymore. He tells the woman to bring him food, but it does not taste as good as it did the day before.

Yuan lives in the earthen house for six days before his father's people find him. During those six days he enjoys the countryside and even stops riding his horse because people thinks it looks like a soldier's horse. It stirs up gossip of why he is here. He forgets about the people's doubts and grows closer to the land. Each morning he creates new verses in his mind. These verses sometimes reflect the deep melancholy within him.

The people watch his wanderings. They cannot understand why the son of Wang the Tiger walks about alone. These rumors reach his uncle, Wang the Merchant, who thinks

it impossible his brother would let his only son free in this way. So he sends out a servant the following day to see who is living in his father's tenant house. However, the servant never finds out, because news of Yuan's whereabouts also reaches his father who sends his mother and one of her servants to fetch him. They bring news his father is ill. Yuan rarely sees his mother and is surprised by her visit. He doubts the two women and thinks it might be a trick to get him to return home. However, after talking to her long enough, he knows he must return home to see for himself. Soldiers accompany him home, and as he rides he wonders how he ever thought he could be free. Faces of the villagers show relief and joy at his departing.

Chapter 1—Pages 1-27 Analysis

The story is written from the son's (Wang Yuan) perspective, but with a third person omniscient point of view. This allows the reader to experience the world through Wang Yuan's youthful ideologies and emotions and yet gives deeper insight to what Wang the Tiger is really feeling through the same circumstances. As much as Wang Yuan despises his father, he is very much like him, a theme which repeats throughout the book. His self-centeredness is evident in scenes like his walk to the outer court where he sees the guard asleep at the gate. This man befriended Yuan as a child. However, now Yuan looks at him as, "...one old and hideous and one who cared nothing for his young master's pain," (p. 6). He only looks through eyes colored by his own desires. This is evidenced in his enjoyment of traveling alone so he can do as he pleases. Once he arrives among the common villagers, he ignores what they say because he is in a good mood from traveling alone. Life is about feeding his appetites with new things, but they do not satisfy because the newness wears off and his amusement turns to hatred.

Yuan struggles with his own private war. As a child, his western tutor planted seeds of revolution and told him he would some day have to use his father's army for the country because the day of the war lords must end. Now, Yuan wants to run from it all. The theme of "running from self" is ripe within the first section of this book and lays the foundation for the theme of "social change" threaded throughout the book. Yuan remembers a place he visited as a child. A small earthen house marks the humble beginnings of his family's wealth, and was built by this grandfather, Wang Lung, who was a farmer until he gathered wealth. Yuan decides it is the perfect place to hide, for it sits empty except for the aged tenants who live there. This reasoning also reflects a likeness to his father. Even leaving the gates open behind him reflects one who thinks more highly of himself than he ought. This negligence reflects his self-absorption with what he perceives to be his problems—he allows them to consume his thoughts. This same discourteous behavior is shown when he invites himself to eat from the sparse food supply of the old tenants, and is compounded when he asks them where a bed is for him to sleep on. In his world, life is all about him.

Chapter 1—Pages 27-46

Chapter 1—Pages 27-46 Summary

Yuan returns to his father's house, riding up to the gates against his will and yet coming voluntarily. Guards accompany him the entire way. He chafes at his lack of freedom. As he rides with them, he comes to understand they do not accompany him so much for his protection as much as because they think he will try to escape. He speeds up, riding as fast as he can, "taking haughty pleasure in his quick horse that kept so easily before their common ones that they must press their poor beasts on and on," (p. 27) It is evening when he arrives at his father's house. He dismounts immediately and heads to visit him upon his bed. However, he is not there. Yuan becomes angry, thinking he has been deceived—something he fears from the moment he is summoned. He heads into the hall and finds his father sitting in his chair draped with the tiger skin. His father is in fact ill. His yellow-tinged skin look like leather and his eyes are dark and sunken. He only glances at Yuan for a moment and then back at the fire working to chase the chill that will not leave him.

Wang Yuan bows before his father and tells him he came when he heard he was ill. However, his father denies being ill and says it is only "woman's talk". Yuan cannot believe it and asks again to clarify whether or not his father sent for him. His father says, "I did not send for you. They asked me where you were, and I said, 'Let him stay where he is,'" (p. 28) As Yuan watches his father try to warm his hands at the fire, he only sees how old and dry they look. Instead of being angry, he sees that it is time to show gentleness to his old father and to show him tenderness like that shown to a child. He fights tears and almost reaches out to touch his father's hand, but he stops himself. "This weakness in his father struck at the roots of Yuan's anger, so that he felt unusual tears come to his eyes, and if he had dared he would have put his hand out to touch his father except some strange natural shame restrained him," (p. 28). Instead he waits in silence for what his father might say. While he waits, he thinks about what this means. His father as he knew him is gone along with the old man's fits of rage and the black threatening looks he uses to control people. "For Yuan saw the truth, that these tricks were only weapons his father used; though he had not known it he had used them as a shield, or as men will take a sword and brandish it and never mean to bring it down on any flesh. So those tricks had covered the Tiger's heart, which never had been hard enough nor cruel enough nor merry enough to make of him a truly great lord of war," (p. 29). In place of fear, he starts to feel love for his father.

Yuan suggests his father go to bed, and with gaunt eyes his father stares at him and confesses that at one time he spared 173 men who should have died—he spared them for Yuan's sake. Yuan can see his father is trying to please him. Again he prompts him to go to bed, but his father does not move. Yuan goes to the hair-lipped servant who sits on his haunches at the door. Yuan pleads with him to have his father put to bed. The servant tells him he has already tried without success. If Wang the Tiger does go to bed, he does not stay long but returns to his chair next to the brazier. Yuan offers to sleep

along side his father and that almost coaxes him from his chair, but then he tells his son there is something else he must tell him, but he cannot remember it right now. As he sits and waits, Yuan's attention turns inward to himself and the inconvenience of waiting for an old man to remember.

Wang the Tiger remembers and says he might hide his son from his enemies. He remembers what Yuan told him "yesterday" and Yuan tries to explain it was not yesterday, but his father's angry countenance stops his voice and he again sits in silence. Now his father rants that it was yesterday and he knows what he is talking about. The old servant tells Yuan to let it be. Yuan takes the servant's advice in fear of making his father's condition worse, but inwardly he struggles. Resentment rises. His father sits in long silence in retaliation for being interrupted. Yuan's anger simmers and grows stronger than ever before. He comes to realize there is nothing he loves about his father.

Unaware of all the turmoil within his son, Wang the Tiger goes on to say that his only hope is in his son's body and he has chosen a wife for him. Inwardly Yuan knows this is expected and his part as a good son is to accept the wife, and give his parents grandchildren, but the thought pushes him over the edge. "I have waited for this—yes, my comrades told me how they were forced to marriage—and many of them left their homes for this very cause—I used to doubt my own good fortune—but you are like all the others, all these old people who would keep us tied forever—tied through our bodies—forcing us to the women you choose—forcing us to children—well, I will not be tied—I will not have my body used like this to tie my life to yours—I hate you—I have always hated you—I know I hate you-," (p. 33). He runs from the house and flees on horseback, without knowing where he will go. He has no one. As a train passes him and his weary horse he thinks of his half-sister and her mother who have lived in a coastal city for many years. He ponders going back to the Captain and army of revolutionists but decides with his education and skills he can make it in the city. He looks at his life as one without fun, and one in which his only purpose has been duty to his father and then to the revolutionist's cause which he could not follow. He resents not having fun like other children enjoyed and thinks back to his very early years to his younger sister, Ai-lan. This memory stirs a plan to go to the coastal city to find this sister he has not seen in many years. He sells his horse which has gone lame and uses the money to travel by train to the coastal city to find his sister and her mother.

With knowledge gained by reading letters to his father from his wife in the coastal city, Yuan knows enough details to help him find the home of the woman and her daughter, Ai-lan. When he gets to the city, he is in awe of how high the houses stand, and how bright it is even at night. The rich folk ride along in machines with squealing horns which cause the ricksha man carrying Yuan to pull over. Yuan is aware of the contrast of rich and poor and feels pity for the less fortunate, but when his ricksha driver brings him to the gate of his sister's home, he pays him only the agreed to price and not any more even though the driver asks if he might consider it from his kind heart. Yuan turns his back and forgets about the driver and goes to the gate where a manservant greets him with suspicion. After some going back and forth, the woman of the house comes out and recognizes Yuan because he looks much like his father in his younger days. She invites

him in to stay in her home. He sits quietly in his shy way, dressed in his traditional robes when a girl comes to the house and fills it with laughter. This is his sister, Ai-lan. She welcomes him as her brother and remarks how old fashioned he is, while he is taken aback by her beauty and non-traditional dress. She talks about buying him new foreign clothes, tells him of family, including uncles and cousins, and even that she will teach him to dance like young people do in the city.

Yuan is not eager to embrace these ways and explains he is here to pay respects to her mother so Ai-lan runs off and fetches her mother. Along with the lady of the house, a serving man brings food and drink to welcome Yuan. She is happy he has sought her and this news leaves Yuan much relieved. She invites him to live with her as her son and provides him with his own room. Her kindness makes him feel at home. During their talks, he confesses he can never hate enough to kill a man and that is why he cannot join the revolutionists. On the matter of arranged marriages, the lady agrees with him. She will never force Ai-lan to marry.

Chapter 1—Pages 27-46 Analysis

The author lays the foundation of how Wang the Tiger's culture works and how his son Wang Yuan bucks against the bondage inwardly but obeys outwardly. This foreshadows the inner struggle Yuan will experience along with social changes and interpersonal relationships that will challenge who he is and who he will become. The author's selective use of third person omniscient point of view lets us see Wang the Tiger is not all he appears to be either and fights his own inner turmoil. "For Yuan saw the truth, that these tricks were only weapons his father used; though he had not known it he had used them as a shield, or as men will take a sword and brandish it and never mean to bring it down on any flesh. So those tricks had covered the Tiger's heart, which never had been hard enough nor cruel enough nor merry enough to make of him a truly great lord of war," (p. 29).

After the lady invites Yuan to live with her as her son, and provides rich foods, he embraces the gaiety and full life and quickly forgets how satisfied he had been with the food served in the earthen home not so long before. Yuan tells the lady everything and admits, "I thought I ran because I would not go against my father, but now as I tell it, lady, I see I went partly because I hate the killing my comrades must do some day even in their good cause. I cannot kill—I am not brave, I know." (p. 44). He goes on to explain he cannot hate enough to kill a man. This foreshadows difficulties ahead when his father's insistence to move forward with the forced marriage pushes Yuan to join the revolutionists.

He goes on to tell the lady he understands his father has the right to arrange this marriage, but he cannot bear to think of being bound in such a way. He knows his father has the right by law and custom and finds that, even though he has run, true freedom is elusive. This reflects the inner conflict tormenting him in his quest for freedom. Again, when he says, "Almost I understand how sons kill their fathers in these days—not that I could really do it, but I understand the feeling in those with a readier hand than mine,"

(p. 44), it foreshadows a time when he will have to face his father and deal with their differences.

Chapter 1—Pages 46-70

Chapter 1—Pages 46-70 Summary

Yuan enjoys the freedom brought about by his new life. The "lady" discusses her plans for him. She buys him new clothes, sends him to school and tells him not to worry about finding work for now. "Let me treat you as my son. Let me give you what I had planned for Ai-lan if she would have had it," (p. 46). He enjoys their conversations, enthralled at the future opportunities she tells him are possible including going abroad after his studies are finished. He is so thankful he tells her he will do anything she says. She expresses her own happiness that he has come to stay with her and Ai-lan.

The lady provides his new clothes and he enjoys the feel of the foreign clothing with pockets and the freedom to move. He likes it, but when he sees his reflection in the mirror he is ashamed. Yet when Ai-lan praises his new look, his shame dissipates as he gradually adjusts to city life filled with its new ways. "On the second day after this one the feast was set, and Yuan went with his sister and with the lady whom already he called mother—and the word came to his tongue more easily than it did for his own mother, somehow—to his uncle's house," (p. 48). On the way there, Ai-lan tells him all about his extended family, including his uncles, aunts and cousins. They will be visiting the home of his uncle, Wang the Landlord who has three sons. The eldest is married with a family. Yuan's middle cousin is Sheng, who is a poet, and the third, Meng, is a revolutionist. The lady scolds her daughter and tells her to watch what she says and warns her that to use that word is dangerous in the city.

They arrive at his uncle's home where Yuan is greeted warmly. The young people pull him aside to drink tea with them. At first Yuan sits quietly as everyone else talks. The only other one not talking is his 16-year-old cousin, Meng, who sits eating peanuts with a gloomy expression. Younger children run about them, and Yuan takes note of how the others interact with them. Soon no one notices him, and he thinks the behavior rude and not like the courtesies he learned growing up. Finally, they join the elders for dinner. Yuan watches all the nuances and interactions of this family, and the fact that his lady mother sits with dignity, little talk, and shows courtesy to everyone. Without a word she is able to give her daughter a look to still her tongue. Yuan is proud to be able to call the lady his mother.

For a short time, Yuan lives a carefree life—the life he has dreamed of. He trusts the woman he calls mother and follows her advice even though she never demands he does so. In fact, by the time they finish talking about things, her advice is offered so kindly it feels more like his own idea. However, one day she tells him it is not right to neglect telling his father where he is, and if he likes, she will write a letter and even "beg" him to free Yuan from the prearranged marriage. "And I will beg him to let you free from this marriage and let you choose some day for yourself as the young do nowadays, and I will tell him that you are to go to school here and that you are well and that I will care for you, for you are my own son," (p. 55). The fear of his father follows

him in his thoughts, and he worries his father might come with his soldiers and carry him back home. His memory focuses only on his father's anger and controlling nature and he thinks of none of his father's kindnesses or that his father has grown old and ill. Instead, he thinks on the fact that his father always wants his own way without considering Yuan's desires. He is happy the lady is willing to write the letter he has been unable to bring himself to write. He tells her to write, "I will never go back again, not even to see him, if I am to be in danger of such slavery," (p. 56).

In contrast to the possibility of bondage he faced at home, within the lady's home he experiences gaiety and laughter with Ai-lan which goes against his leading a sober, dignified life. Over time, Ai-lan's teasing helps him to lighten up. She declares to her mother he is becoming young again and they should buy him foreign clothes and teach him to dance. Yuan resists the idea, but after a short time the lady talks him into it by asking he go to keep an eye on Ai-lan because she does not make the wisest choices of whom she keeps company with. The conversation opens a window into the lady's past as wife of Wang the Tiger. When her daughter was born, he would not look at her. In fact he never saw her. "But he has the strangest shyness toward all females," (p. 60). Their conversation is cut short when Ai-lan comes into the room, showing off her beauty as she is ready to go out for the evening. The lady asks whom she is seeing tonight, and Ai-lan tells her she will be going with a friend of Sheng's, a man who is a writer named Wu Li-yang. At this point, the lady suggests she bring Yuan along sometime and Ai-lan loves the idea and offers to teach him to dance. Yuan is embarrassed and shakes his head. The lady reminds him it is the thing young people do. Then her date arrives and after introductions, Ai-lan draws to Wu Li-yang and the look they give to each other troubles the lady.

After Ai-lan and Wu Lin-yang leave, the mother tells Yuan that Lin-yang is a married man. "I asked Sheng to tell me, and at first he would not, but at last he made light of it and told me it was not thought now, if the man's wife were old-fashioned and chosen by his parents, a dishonor if he walked with other maids. But I wish it were not my maid, Yuan," (p. 63). With this Yuan decides that what seemed wrong to him can be put aside in order to help the lady—he will learn to dance.

The lady and Ai-lan take Yuan shopping to buy his foreign clothes. Once he is dressed in the foreign garb, he likes the freedom of walking about without robes hindering his movement. As Ai-lan teaches him to dance, he feels awkward and confused. However, with his natural rhythm he finds he likes dancing after all, but even amidst the pleasure he struggles with feelings of shame too. Within a short time he is a good dancer and goes along with Ai-lan on a regular basis. He dances with a variety of different women, but, "He saw no maid better than another, in these first days, and they were pretty and they all were friends of Ai-lan's and willing enough, and anyone did as well for him as any other, and all he wanted was a maid to hold and to set his heart burning with a slow sweet smothered fire to which he dared no yield," (p. 65). The feelings shame him. He thinks them dangerous and something to avoid. However, he cannot because he has told the lady he will go to keep Ai-lan safe.

Even this new found pleasure is marred when Yuan asks Ai-lan why she dances with someone she does not want to dance with. She tells him she does not want to be rude. When Yuan steps outside the dance halls, known as pleasure houses, for a break from the activity, it bothers him to see the poor. Beggars and the homeless poor live in the streets like animals. "Even against his will he saw them, and it came to be that even in the midst of the night's pleasure, in the midst of music and dancing, he remembered with great dread the moment when he must go into the grey street and see the cringing figures and the wolfish faces of poor," (p. 68). As these poor beg, they are told to move out of the way, and very few give them anything. Yuan tucks his head and moves on to avoid seeing it. "At this time of his life Yuan loved pleasure, and he was unwilling to see the poor, and yet he was so shaped within that he saw them even while he wished he did not," (p. 68).

Along with the pleasures of the night, Yuan also enjoys school and his studies. Through his time at school he gets to know his cousins Sheng and Meng. Ai-lan calls Sheng "the poet" and Meng "the rebel". At school he gets to know them in a much different light than when he first met them in their home.

Chapter 1—Pages 46-70 Analysis

When Yuan sheds his traditional wide-cut country robes and dresses according to city fashion, has his hair cut, and slips his feet into new leather shoes, this represents the shedding of the old customs and ways and the embracing of the new. When he looks in the mirror, he feels ashamed at his new look until Ai-lan showers him with praise. This foreshadows his tendency to judge by the way things look, a tendency which fuels his inner conflict and struggle as his old traditions clash with the new. Yuan is swayed a little at a time to accept change that inwardly he resists and yet longs for. However, even with change there are limits.

When the lady mother, Ai-lan and Yuan are on the way to his uncle's house, Ai-lan tells him all about his extended family and mentions that his cousin, Meng, is a revolutionist. Her mother scolds and warns it is a dangerous word in the city. This foreshadows danger in the city for Yuan with his revolutionist ties in the past and the future.

While sitting among his cousins, he thinks they have forgotten him. Again, his attention is on himself and what he thinks he deserves. He is comparing their behavior to what he expects it should be based on the customs with which he grew up. This again plays into the "like father, like son" theme, as he is expecting others to live up to his expectations based on tradition and custom just like Wang the Tiger, his father, expects him to agree to the arranged marriage.

When the lady asks Yuan to accompany her daughter when she goes out, he does not want to learn to dance or dress in foreign clothes, but when he sees Ai-lan go out with a married man, he agrees to do so to honor the lady. Once he is dressed in the foreign garb, he likes the freedom of walking about without robes hindering his movement. At first he feels awkward and confused when trying to dance, but he lets Ai-lan show him.

He has a natural rhythm and finds he likes it after all. This experience reflects the theme of social change, which comes slowly one decision at a time. As he goes out dancing, he still struggles with feelings of shame but allows the sense of pleasure to overpower his reservations.

As he becomes more comfortable with dancing, he enjoys the dance but does not look at one woman different from another. Yet it stirs desires within him he decides are dangerous and something to avoid. This ties into the "like father, like son" theme as it hints at Yuan's feelings toward women.

Chapter 1—Pages 70-101

Chapter 1—Pages 70-101 Summary

Yuan enjoys the buying of new books and considers school a sweet pastime. He cannot learn enough of the history of foreign countries and art, but most of all he likes the study of nature. His love of studying runs deep enough that he does not want to take time to eat or sleep, but the lady whom he calls mother makes sure to serve him his favorite meals often and watches over him to be sure he takes care of himself.

His relationships with his cousins Sheng and Meng grow through interaction at school. Sheng shares a class with Yuan. In this class, Sheng's verses are read and praised. This stirs pangs of envy within Yuan and leaves him wishing he could write as well. Sheng acts as if it is nothing to receive praise, but the slight smirk on his face tells Yuan differently. Yuan's own verse writing has dwindled to almost nothing because he is occupied with so much else. When he does try, the verses no longer come as naturally as they once did. When he writes and even polishes his work, the teacher offers little praise. He tells Yuan his verses are interesting but he does not quite grasp the meaning. "Then he (the teacher) paused one day when Yuan had written a poem about a seed, and Yuan could not say what his meaning was exactly, either, and he stammered out, 'I meant—I think I meant to say that in the seed, in that last atom of the seed, when it is cast into the ground, there is an instant, a place perhaps, when seed becomes no longer matter, but a sort of spirit, an energy, a kind of life, a moment between spirit and material, and if we could catch that transmuting instant, when the seed begins to grow, understand the change—" (p. 71). The teacher points out the reason the meaning is not clear is because it is not clear in Yuan's mind. Through his conversation with Sheng, part of this confusion comes into focus when he realizes that although he does not want the poor around him, he also does not want them to die.

Yuan questions Sheng further about the revolutionists and learns there are many within the school, including maids who have joined the cause. After this conversation, he scrutinizes his fellow students and notices one maid in his class who usually keeps her eyes downcast. But one day, as he stares at her, she looks up and their eyes meet. He asks Sheng about her and he tells Yuan the girl belongs to the revolutionists and she is a friend of Meng's.

One day not long after, Meng catches up with Yuan at school and asks him to have lunch. Over their meal, Meng points out the rich and fat with distain. "Look at that great fat lord in that motor car! See how he eats and how he lolls! He is an extortionist—a usurer or a banker or he has a factory. I know the very look. Well, he does not know he sits upon a hidden fire," (p. 76). Yuan takes Meng back to his room to talk and the conversation opens the door for Meng to speak with Yuan of joining the revolutionist cause for the first time. "This talk with Meng stirred deep in Yuan a sort of conscience that he wished not to remember. Yuan loved so well the east of these days, the merriment and stir, the rest from duty, the doing only what he liked to do," (p. 76). This

talk reminds Yuan of the poor, the control his father has over him, and he withdraws. He does not want to be reminded. However, the one thing that keeps him in touch with those less fortunate is his love for the land.

This love takes him to a small plot of land that is part of a school project. Yuan chooses the plot at the far end, away from the others but adjacent to a farmer's field. The neighboring farmer makes fun of the fact the students expect to learn how to farm from books, and when Yuan cannot use the hoe effectively the man laughs. Finally, after much sweat and frustration, Yuan tells the farmer he is right and asks if he will be his teacher. He even offers to pay the man. This pleases the farmer who not only teaches Yuan, but becomes his friend, although Yuan does not make this public. The young man even helps the farmer in his field when the other students are not there and joins the man at his house to visit. Yuan enjoys working the land, and his mind often drifts to thoughts of that small plot while he is studying. "To himself Yuan thought sometimes, 'If all the poor were like this one man, then I might be willing to join Meng's cause and make it mine,'" (p. 86). He keeps this relationship a secret from everyone, because he cares so much what others think of him. He does not even tell the lady he calls mother.

Yet she too has her own connection with the poor. She runs a home for young girls whose parents abandoned them when they were born only because they were female. Of these foundlings, one girl is particularly special to the woman. She brings Yuan with her to visit the home one day, and meets the girl who is a young teen. "If I find one, even one, among them, who might be what I planned for Ai-lan . . . I will take her apart then to my own home and spend myself upon her. I think there is this one—I do not know yet—" (p. 87). He needs this steadiness, as spring sets in and the maids and boys at school interact, touch hands and in other ways forget decencies Yuan expects. "Him the Tiger had reared in every old tradition and in his own added hatred of all women," (p. 90). Yet, in the throes of spring, his dreams turn to the young women at the pleasure houses. They bother him enough that he would stop going there, if it were not for Ai-lan and his agreement with the lady whom he calls mother.

It is during this same time that Yuan stays a bit after class to go over a poem with his teacher. When he is finished he is greeted by the maid who belongs to the revolutionist cause. When he stands near her, she does not seem as cold as he first thought. They walk together, and Yuan shows old-fashioned courtesies like bowing, while the maid ignores all such traditions. At first he finds her differences stimulating, but quickly he begins to see things he does not like. On one walk together, she asks him to join the cause. He immediately thinks this whole relationship was set up as a trap to get him to join the revolutionists. Yet she tells him there is something else, but instead of hearing her words of love, he makes an excuse to leave. Before they go separate ways, their hands clasp and he touches in an intimate way he has never experienced. He thinks about her that night in bed, and all the other maids he has danced with and how they are all so different from one another. This is the first time he has ever really thought about a maid. However, he does not love her in return yet he tosses upon his bed thinking of touching her hand again and again.

He is ashamed of the thoughts he has in bed, and is thankful his father does not know. Instead of telling the maid he does not love her, he avoids her. However, she pursues him. She sends him a letter professing her love and tells him she does not need marriage. Within a few days, his desires have grown, but it is not love and he does not answer the letter. His inner turmoil shows on his face, but he shares it with no one, not even the lady whom he calls mother. He does not love the maid, and because of this cannot accept what she offers even though he wants it. "So he let the struggle wage itself in him and was as moody as his father ever was when any war was being waged," (p. 101).

Chapter 1—Pages 70-101 Analysis

When Yuan's teacher asks him the meaning of his verses about the seed, he is unsure how to answer. The dialog between the two foreshadows the social changes within Yuan's own life as, little by little, change occurs almost undetected, but leaves him altered never to return to the youth he was when he arrived at the coastal city. When the teacher points out the reason the meaning of Yuan's poem is not clear is because it is not clear in his mind, this also reflects Yuan's inner turmoil as he battles against the customs and traditions laid down in the foundational years of his life.

The teacher himself is old and has taught for many years, and knows what he wants and considers right. He represents the old ways. Since he praises Sheng's writing, this ties Sheng to the old ways, while his brother Meng represents the ways of change with the revolutionists. Another episode which ties Sheng to the ways of Wang the Tiger occurs when Sheng tells Yuan of Meng's involvement in the cause. He says he has plans to go abroad and never return, for he has no desire to fight for the common man. He calls them filthy and coldly says to let them die. The coldness of his words stirs the inner conflict within Yuan. He does not want the poor near him but he does not want them to die.

One day not long after, Meng catches up with Yuan at school and asks him to have lunch. Over their meal, Meng points out the rich and fat with distain. "Look at that great fat lord in that motor car! See how he eats and how he lolls! He is an extortionist—a usurer or a banker or he has a factory. I know the very look. Well, he does not know he sits upon a hidden fire," (p. 76). Yuan takes Meng back to his room to talk and the conversation opens the door for Meng to speak with Yuan of joining the revolutionist cause for the first time. "This talk with Meng stirred deep in Yuan a sort of conscience that he wished not to remember. Yuan loved so well the ease of these days, the merriment and stir, the rest from duty, the doing only what he liked to do," (p. 76). Instead, this talk reminds Yuan of the poor, the control his father has over him, and he withdraws. He does not want to be reminded. He tells Meng he cannot join him. His life is too busy to think about things like poor and rich. This is another example of the "like father, like son" theme, for as much as Yuan despises his father; his actions follow the same road, only at a different place in time. With this in mind, the reader can also gain insight into Yuan's father, Wang the Tiger. For although Yuan says he ponders the poor, the only thing that does not cut him off totally from the poorer of his people is his love for

the land. If this is true in Yuan, then it leaves the door open for the same to hold true in the life of his father.

The lady mother has her own connection with the poor. She runs a home for young girls whose parents abandoned them when they are born because they were female. Of these foundlings, one girl is particularly special to the woman. She brings Yuan with her to visit the home one day, and he meets the girl who is a young teen. "If I find one, even one, among them, who might be what I planned for Ai-lan . . . I will take her apart then to my own home and spend myself upon her. I think there is this one—I do not know yet—" (p. 87). This statement foreshadows the presence of an unrelated woman who will be a young adult when Yuan returns from his foreign travels.

Yuan's thoughts of shame while lying in bed let the reader see his inner turmoil, while his thankfulness that his father does not know them shines a light on the control his father and tradition have in this boy's life. However, true to his pattern, instead of telling the girl he does not love her, he avoids her. When she pursues him, and sends the letter professing her love, his desires grow. Yet he does not answer her letter. His inner turmoil shows on his face, but he shares it with no one. Not even the lady whom he calls mother. He does not love the maid, and because of this cannot accept what she offers even though he wants it.

The touching of hands changes him—it is the touch of social change. Once it happens, he thinks about the girl that night in bed, and all the other maids he has danced with and how they are all so different from one another. Until now, he has looked at all the girls the same. This is a major event in his life, and from here on he will look at and think about women differently.

Chapter 1—Pages 101-136

Chapter 1—Pages 101-136 Summary

Life goes on for Yuan. He is not wholly committed to anything, but busy with a lot of things. It is during this time that a letter comes from Yuan's father, Wang the Tiger, telling him the arranged marriage is going on as scheduled. The letter is not written by a letter writer, but in the Tiger's own hand. It says, "I have not changed my will. Come home and be wed. The day has been set for the thirteenth of this moon," (p. 101). Yuan arrives at his home in the coastal city with thoughts of pursuing the revolutionist maid for what she is willing to give him. He is filled with a giddy excitement when he finds the letter from his father waiting for him in his room and the bottom falls out of his world. The wedding is less than 20 days away. He toys with the idea of going back for one day to wed the maid chosen for him, spend one night and then leave with his duty fulfilled. However, the thought fills him with coldness, thinking of it as nothing more than lending out an animal to breed.

After a sleepless night, he rises early and brings the letter to the lady mother. She tells him to go and eat. When she joins him at the table, she offers him the freedom to follow his old duty or stay with her, for she is not afraid. Her words light the first kindling of courage within him, but it is Ai-lan who comes into the scene and pushes him to dare go against his father's command with her reckless abandonment toward authority. After listening to her reasoning, he tells her his father does not have this right over him any longer. Yuan writes to his father, but not in a forthright voice. Instead he mixes excuses in with why he cannot be there because of school. However, his father's plan is not to be thwarted. Less than seven days later he sends three letters containing the same message. One to Yuan, one to the Tiger's brother and one to the lady mother. The letter states the wedding will go on and since Yuan cannot be there, it will be carried out by proxy. Yuan feels his father's anger through the letter and it fills him with fear. The lady mother arranges a family meeting to decide what to do. However, the group is impotent against the Tiger whether by choice, because of a political alignment, or because they fear repercussions. Although the elders speak, they say very little in an effort not to offend anyone.

The lady does not speak, nor do the young people, for no one would listen to them. With the meeting over, the young people congregate outside the room. Sheng is ready to laugh and he tells Yuan he would ignore the summons and do as he pleased. It is this conversation Meng uses as a springboard to point out the very reason he belongs to the revolutionist cause. For no matter what Yuan does, stays or goes, he will be married by law. By this same law, he will not be free again, no matter what he says or thinks. He turns to Yuan and asks him if now he understands the cause and will he join them, and Yuan in his anger agrees. He joins the cause with what he thinks is whole-hearted enthusiasm. However, soon enough, Yuan sneaks away to his garden plot to avoid Meng's demands to join protests and other things Yuan does not want to do. "Now he saw why the Tiger was an enemy. For now, to save his country meant to save himself,

and now he saw how his father was his enemy, and could not save him if he did not save himself," (p. 111). With this motive, it is easier to serve the cause. Because of his circumstances, Yuan finds he hates the "old" because it is his enemy, the enemy trying to steal away his freedom.

That night Yuan attends a secret meeting with Meng, in a less desirable part of the city. On the way, prostitutes try to grab a hold of Yuan but Meng shags them away. Yuan find the women beastly and gross. When they arrive at the meeting place, about 50 men crowd into a small upper room. Yuan is eyed with suspicion as the room falls into silence. Meng vouches for Yuan as his cousin and explains his circumstances and that he now hates his father enough to be ready to join the cause. Meng's words make Yuan stop and question if he really hates his father. As he turns over the meaning of hate in his mind, from the dark shadows of the corner the young maid from class extends her hand and welcomes him. It warms him to be welcomed and the touch of her hands feels wild and exotic to him. He easily recalls all the reasons he hates his father as Meng goes on talking to those gathered. After they finish, the maid still holding Yuan's hand walks outside with him. They are joined by others; Yuan takes his oath and signs the agreement in his own blood to seal the promise.

Once he has joined, Yuan learns the brotherhood of the cause he has joined is widespread and in many other cities. Each meeting held by one of these groups brings them a step closer to their goal of carrying out the plan for a great future, when they will initiate change in the nation by seizing the seat of government. Yuan has mixed feeling about these plans because they are not new to him. He heard his father speak this way; he learned it in the school of war, and now again. Yet in his heart he questions how this is to be accomplished. It does not take him long to learn not to question the others. For when he does, he causes problems for Meng and the maid. Instead he holds in the burning question of how this is freedom if he must follow what he does not understand. So again, he is functioning out of duty. He goes out to spread word to the less fortunate and since they cannot read, he reads to them, and they are in awe at how horrible they have been treated but did not know it. He pities the poor, but when he returns home he is glad to be away from them because they smell. Even though he cleans up, he can still smell them on himself.

Another problem he has is the maid. In her mind, he is hers, but he does not return the feeling. Yet, they must work closely within the cause. Plus she waits for him after class to walk with him, and when he attends the secret meetings she always saves a place for him to sit next to her. It is another trap, stealing away his freedom. Yet, he also uses her love to his advantage when Meng wants him to do an errand or chore he does not want to do. The maid speaks up and offers to do it and Yuan does not protest. The more Yuan avoids the maid, the deeper her love grows for him. Then one day, he is looking forward to stopping by his plot of land after speaking with the poor farmers of the cause, and the maid talks her way into coming along so she can speak to the women. Yuan does not want her to come because he does not want her to know of his plot of land, or that he has befriended the farmer. However, there is no getting out of it and she comes along.

At first he walks ahead of her so he can enjoy the scenery without looking at her. Eventually, they come to words. She lays her hands on his shoulders and turns him to look at her. "I know why you cannot love me—I know where you go of nights—I followed you the other night and saw you with your sister, and how you went into the great hotel and I saw the women there. You like them better than you do me—I saw the one you danced with—that one in the peach pink gown—I saw her shamelessness the way she hung herself upon you—" (p. 120). Her words anger him as he starts to protest he was a guest. She is furious and compares the way he freely touched the other woman but draws away from her. He comes back at her and asks if she thinks talking to him like this will make him love her. She grows silent except for her sobs, which gradually diminish. They go about their work in silence the rest of the day.

The odd thing is Yuan never really paid attention to Ai-lan's friends, but now this maid makes an issue of his dancing with them. "But this other maid's incessant jealousies drove him strangely to look at the very ones against whom she complained, and their merriment was sweet to him because she was never merry, and he found a sort of pleasure in their gaiety, and lack of any cause except to find pleasure anyhow," (p. 121). Following this line of reasoning, he singles out a couple of the girls he has danced with and fancies them more than before, while the revolutionist maid is full of fury one day and cold the next. It exhausts him, and he cannot love her.

A few days before his wedding by proxy, Yuan stands at his window. "And he was so struck that he had not thought of this before, how he had let his freedom go again, that he sat down and planned swiftly of what escape he now could have and how he might be free once more by some means from this new bondage, which in its way was as heavy as the other because it was so secret and so close" (p. 122). The hour arrives when the cause takes human form and armies march through the heart of the nation cutting a swath of victory. This army is young and does not fear death. The old vanguard within the coastal city seeks out everyone who might have revolutionist ties. One morning, as Yuan sits in class, the soldiers come in and search every student for signs they belong to the cause. They find such evidence on the maid. She is taken away at gun point. At the door she stops and looks at Yuan, the soldier pushes her with the gun and she is gone. Yuan's first thoughts are that he is free. His happiness is mixed with guilt at the fact that she will be put to death. School is dismissed for the rest of the day.

Yuan walks from class and Sheng catches his arm,asking if he knows where his brother Meng is because he does not know of this raid. However, Yuan has not seen him in the last two days. Yuan heads home and tells the lady what has happened. She is clever enough to realize they will be searching the homes too, and asks if there is anything—anything at all in his room that the soldiers could find to tie him to the cause. Then he remembers the letter from the maid and slips it from within the pages of the book where he keeps it, and sneaks off to burn it without the lady's knowledge. As it burns, he thinks of the maid and the way she looked at him as she was led away. It fills him with a deep sadness, partly because he never loved her. The letter turns to ash as a disruption marks the arrival of Sheng and his family. Sheng's father seeks safe haven from his tenants whom he thinks will turn him in because of Meng and his involvement with the cause Sheng has just now told him about. The lady takes charge and decides to hide

Sheng and Yuan in case the soldiers come to the house, but the soldiers burst in before the plan can be worked out. The maid has given the soldier's Yuan's name and description and he is hauled off and thrown in a dark dungeon-like room crowded with other ill-fated youth facing death for their part in the revolutionist cause.

For three days, Yuan sits in the large cell with no food or water. Each day all the prisoners are led out to be executed, but Yuan is pushed back into the dungeon with no explanation. The room refills with prisoners each day who are taken to be executed but Yuan is held a prisoner. However, the third day is different. He starts to be led out with the others, but this time the guard does not push him back into the cell. "Instead, the soldier held him, and when the others were all gone their doomed and certain way, and when at last not even their footsteps could be heard echoing, the soldier led Yuan by another narrower passage to a place where a small barred door was set, and he drew back the bar and without a word thrust Yuan through that door" (p. 132). Yuan lands in a narrow street at dawn, weak with hunger and thirst, but free. Two people are in the street; one of them a child runs to Yuan and declares it is him to the other. The other person approaches, and Yuan sees it is his lady mother and then he faints.

When Yuan awakens, he is on a boat with Sheng, headed to an island where they will await papers to go abroad. Yuan gradually gets his strength back. He learns from Sheng that his brother Meng is safe as well. Sheng tells him he is happy to get away and does not grieve anything he is leaving behind. Yuan considers this and realizes he feels the same—except for the plot of land he tilled. "But that land—it is one thing that will still be there when I come back—land is always there—" (p. 136).

Chapter 1—Pages 101-136 Analysis

After a sleepless night, Yuan rises early and brings the letter from his father to the lady mother. When she joins him at the table she tells him, "If you feel your old duty to him stronger than the duty to yourself, then return to him. But if you will not go back, then stay on, and I will help you somehow at every step. I am not afraid," (p. 103). This statement highlights the inner struggle waging war within Yuan. Duty to father, duty to self and what is right and what is wrong. He is divided within, and only conflict remains.

After the elders speak and resolve nothing, Sheng stands outside, ready to laugh, and says Yuan should ignore the summons. "Say nothing angry, but do as you please. You need not go home again," (p. 110). This reflects Sheng's pacifist thinking, and how he stands on the opposite side of the issue from his brother Meng. Yuan's answer is even more revealing. He tells Sheng that to do so would be to live selfishly. This foreshadows his real inner struggle. For much of what Yuan does or does not do is really to please himself, although he tries to tell himself otherwise. For now, Yuan decides to put all his effort into the cause, but this too wanes.

"He never felt the cause clearly until today he knows that what I have told him is the truth, that his own father is his enemy—as all our fathers are our enemies. Now he is ready—he hates enough to be ready," (p. 112). This stirring of hatred, foreshadows the

hatred that will grow within Yuan, fueled by prejudice based on racial superiority, and also fueled by legalism based on his own sliding scale of what is right and wrong. Not even this lasts, however, because he questions how they will accomplish what they set out to do. His questions brings trouble on Meng and the maid, so he falls back into the trap of living out of duty rather than in freedom.

Yuan's three days in the prison are a type of dying to self and the old life, and his release to freedom a new birth and a new life, much like Christ's three days in the tomb before rising from the dead. Yuan's new life begins as he heads to America.

Chapter 2—Pages 137-161

Chapter 2—Pages 137-161 Summary

Wang Yuan arrives in America at age 20, full of dreams, unsettled feelings and incomplete plans. He lived a privileged life in China, thought he does not recognize it. There someone always took care of his needs, and now he stands on the shores of America totally on his own. He plans on going to school for six years to get his degree and then to return to his homeland, but other than that, he has no plan and no place to live.

The beauty and strangeness of this new country amazes Yuan. Life in America is different. By the second day, he experiences prejudice when a white man accidentally takes his hat and walks out of a diner. Yuan trails after the man and points out the error. The man says to words Yuan does not recognize, but he knows they are evil. When the man returns his hat and walks away, Yuan does not even want to put it on his head because it has been on the head of this white man whose scent still clings to it. From this point on, Yuan is more somber. "Inside he gathered steadfastly his own self, stubborn and resistant. He, Yuan, son of Wang the Tiger, grandson of Wang Lung would remain himself forever, never lost in any millions of white alien men," (p. 142).

Yuan and Sheng go their separate ways when Sheng falls in love with big city life, and Yuan moves to a rural setting. "For Yuan set in his heart to do in this foreign country what he had always hoped to do, to learn how to breed plants and how to till the soil and all such things, and the more steadfastly because he soon believed this people owed their power to their wealth of harvest from the land," (p. 145).

As Yuan searches for a place to live, he is appalled by the appearance of a fat woman willing to rent him a room. There is no man to be master of the house, and he finds her loud-mouthed and difficult to look at. He walks away unable to bear it, but is turned away at all the other houses with rooms to rent because of his race. This forces him to go back and accept the room from the woman he considers ugly. "And the truth was the woman was not so ill as her looks and he lived in her house, year after year, while he went to that school, and the woman grew kind to him and he came to understand her kindness, covered as it was by her hideous looks and coarse ways," (p. 147). As much as he is prejudiced, the landlady shows her own ignorance in statements like, "'I reckon you find it hard eating without what you're used to—' And then she laughed freely and roared, 'But rice is the best I can do—snails and rats and dogs and all them things you eat I can't supply!'" (p. 147). No matter how much Yuan tries to correct her thinking, she seems to revert to what she believes by rumor and hearsay. Over time he learns to let such things go. Others of his race have found much worse living situations, so Yuan avoids looking at the landlady's face and finds his room adequate. He is amazed that in this land where a man is allowed to choose his wife, that any man ever chose this woman. However, she had been married and has a daughter, who is about 17 years old. Yuan finds it odd the daughter is beautiful. However, he dislikes the daughter, for she

dresses to draw men's attention. When Yuan realizes she purposefully does this, he does little more than offer a slight bow to her. He otherwise stands unapproachable. By her looks he judges her to have idle hands and reminds himself that her flesh and his are not the same but alien to one another. After his betrayal by the girl back home, he has no use for another. For if the same were to happen in this foreign land, there would be no one to help him.

The other students say he does well because he has no other life other than his studies. Yuan's ego is stroked as he wins awards for his accomplishments, and he knows others resent it. However, he is proud and feels he represents what his race can accomplish. Day by day, he becomes more aloof. "His native pride, the silent pride of men old before the western world began, began to take its full shape in him. He learned to bear silently a foolish curious stare upon the street; he learned what shops he could enter in that small town to buy his necessities, or to have himself shaved or his hair cut," (p. 150).

Yuan finally makes a friend named Jim, who is in a couple of the same classes. As they share stories, Yuan is careful what he tells Jim about his country. For he wants this friend to think highly of his homeland. Therefore, he does not always paint an accurate picture, yet does not lie. Then Yuan attends a church, because a missionary who has spent a good deal of time in China is going to speak. To Yuan's astonishment, the man speaks of poverty and need. Yuan grows angrier and angrier and finally stands up to say this is not an accurate picture of his homeland. The man smiles and answers, "Well young man, all I can say is that I have lived among the poor, like these I have shown, for more than half my life. When you go back to your own country come into the little city in the inland where I live and I will show you all these things," (p. 155).

Jim and Yuan's friendship grows until one night when Yuan arrives home and hears the boy's voice. Thinking he is there to visit, Yuan steps into the room to find Jim occupied with the daughter of the landlady. The daughter makes it clear Jim is there to see her. This is the start of the end of their relationship. Yuan emotionally backs away from Jim little by little and returns to his life of solitude. During this time in his life, Yuan finds it easier to write letters to his father and tells him that when he returns to his homeland, he will be happy to return to his father's house. To console himself, he takes notice of all the things he does not like about the town in which he lives—things like the clacking of tongues when the people speak their language. He considers the sound harsh compared to the smoothness of his native language. "Without knowing it he came to despise this race because he wanted to despise them, and yet he could not but envy them their ease and wealth and place and these great buildings and the many inventions they had made and all they had learned of the magic of air and wind and water and lightning," (p. 160). Yuan both admires and is surprised by the vast knowledge available in the libraries and wonders to himself if his country will ever be able to catch up.

Chapter 2—Pages 137-161 Analysis

This chapter brings to light the prejudice against race and culture Yuan harbors and experiences. In fact, this prejudice propels him to try to be the best at school to show others his race is superior. The irony is this same prejudice cuts him off from society. Even small differences drive a wedge between him and others, leading him to live a lonely existence with his thoughts—which only perpetuates the cycle and create more of a barrier between him and the white race. Even in these first days, surrounded by the beauty of this new place, he thinks the land "strange," leaving no room in his heart for things different and yet beautiful.

When Yuan seeks a place to live in the new country, his prejudice against the overweight, white woman almost makes it unbearable for him to look at her. This plays on the theme of social change. For while the revolution roars in his own country, Yuan carries the old ways in his heart and calls them right. Often, he bases his feelings on first impressions and is too stubborn to change his mind. Gradually this cuts him off from the real world around him, leaving him alone and self-righteous. This is another example of the "like father, like son" theme because this is how his father functions, although the similarity is not something Yuan can see from his perspective. So while father and son are divided, they are yet very much united in the way they think. It is what makes them the same that pulls them apart.

Chapter 2—Pages 161-184

Chapter 2—Pages 161-184 Summary

In six years in America, Sheng does not leave the city in which he lives. He tells Yuan he would rather know a lot about one place than little about many. The two exchange letters, and Yuan spends his summers with Sheng in the city. Sheng also advises Yuan he lives alone too much for his own good, and points out the people of their homeland worship books and those who study them, but this country is different. Instead of books and knowledge, Sheng plans to take advantage of the pleasures and advantages of living in America. Yuan tells him that is selfish. Sheng asks, "Who is not selfish? We are all selfish. Meng is selfish in his very cause. That cause! Look at its leaders, Yuan, and dare to say they are not selfish—one was a robber once—one has shifted back and forth to this winning side and that—how does the third one live except upon the very money he collects for his cause?" (p. 164). He tells Yuan it is better to admit you are selfish than to pretend you are not. While Yuan spends time with his cousin, hatred does not fill him but neither is he as brave. When Sheng talks Yuan into accompanying him to go out and have fun, often Yuan sits alone by choice. As he does, he notices not all the women treat Sheng with respect. It angers Yuan, but it does not bother Sheng. He is not proud. Yet the women's actions stir hatred in Yuan.

One day Sheng shows Yuan some of the poems he has written, and tells him they are not his best work. Yuan reads them in awe, thinking they are very good. Then Sheng invites him to come along to meet a woman who has put some of his poems to music. When they arrive to visit this woman, she invites Sheng to sit beside her which he does without hesitation. This behavior surprises Yuan to whom she gives a cursory greeting. With a cigarette holder dangling in her lips, she strums her instrument and sings the lyrics Sheng wrote. Her voice sounds oddly deep to Yuan, and the music does not capture the feeling of the words. Instantly, Yuan does not care for this woman. Seeing Sheng sitting there with her almost makes him ill as the woman clings to his cousin and flatters him in a bold way. Sheng laughs at Yuan later and tells him they are only words and do not really mean anything.

While Sheng thinks the city has everything to offer, Yuan does not agree. He is lonely, and one hot day goes for a walk. He finds himself in a part of the city he has never visited before, and for the first time in this new land he sees the poor. He returns to Sheng's apartment and tells him what he witnessed and marvels that even with all this wealth, this country too has poor. The Americans with Sheng tell Yuan that one day they will remedy poverty, but Yuan accuses them of hiding their poor because of shame. Sheng eases past the conflict by reminding everyone they will be late if they do not leave for the theater.

Back in his own room at the boarding house and going to school, Yuan becomes close to one of his teachers. Even though he is white, Yuan perceives him to be genuinely kind. The old teacher invites him to his home for dinner, where he also meets his wife

and daughter, Mary. They all welcome him warmly. Yuan notes the daughter is much different than Ai-lan, confident, taller, with white skin and not as pretty. She is controlled in what she says and does and speaks words that make sense. She speaks of Yuan's writings, asks questions and reveals a kinship to his land and a hunger to add to her knowledge gained through books. The teacher and his wife show hospitality and invite Yuan to attend church with them. The honest, forthright way they speak makes him at ease and he accepts the invitation. He goes back to his room and ponders this family, and especially their daughter, Mary. He thinks about the things of which they spoke, some of which he had never thought of. "Idealism and enthusiasm are not are not the same thing. Enthusiasm may be only physical—the youth and strength of body making the spirit gay. But idealism may live on, though the body be aged or broken, for it is the essential quality of the soul which has it," (p. 180). When Mary states her father has idealism, he corrects her and says his is faith. As Yuan ponders this, he realizes Mary became silent at this answer.

Yuan returns to their home to go to church with them the following Sunday, and Mary answers the door with a look of surprise to see him. When he enters, the home seems different in the daylight. More worn, and less hospitable. He reminds her he said he would go to church with them. With little conversation, she says they are almost ready to go. The parents welcome him, and the mother says she has prayed that he would come, but Mary's demeanor is cold and she stares straight ahead as she drives the car taking them to church. Within the service, Mary continues to stare ahead even when others bow in prayer. Yuan returns to his room not understanding anything of the religious rite, but thinks more of Mary's profile, with her head held high as others bowed in prayer.

Chapter 2—Pages 161-184 Analysis

Yuan struggles with pride as he witnesses affronts to his country or race. Things like the way some women look sidewise at Sheng, or the way the woman singer calls Sheng 'darling' and touches him so casually. While this does not bother Sheng, Yuan cannot stomach it as he fights his private inner war.

Often Yuan bases his opinions on outward appearances and does not see that in his own life he can also be swayed with words that please him. This is brought into focus when he meets Mary, the daughter of his teacher. Due to her interest in his writings and homeland, he looks beyond her white skin and foreign ways and enjoys her companionship. "For he saw she was one whose body seemed a thing not of itself but only a covering for her mind and soul. And this was new to Yuan, who had known no such woman," (p. 179). When the family welcomes him so warmly, he can almost forget they are not his kind.

Mary's words, "Idealism and enthusiasm are not are not the same thing. Enthusiasm may be only physical—the youth and strength of body making the spirit gay. But idealism may live on, though the body be aged or broken, for it is the essential quality of the soul which has it," (p. 180), reflect the truth of Yuan's life. Often, his enthusiasm is

evident when he experiences new things, but this wanes quickly while the idealism instilled in him by his father and the old ways live on in his soul.

Chapter 2—Pages 184-199

Chapter 2—Pages 184-199 Summary

Yuan returns to his room after tending his field and finds a letter from Mary waiting for him. Letters are rare. He gets one from his father once every three months, and a couple of times from Ai-lan or her mother. This is how he keeps up with news from home. Through one such letter he learns his lady mother has taken the girl Mei-ling into her home as a daughter. However, this letter from Mary invites him to come to their home for "a special purpose" at a time convenient for him. He prepares to go to see her and on his way out the landlady calls out for everyone to hear that she put a letter in Yuan's room from a lady and he must be off to see her. Everyone in the house laughs and above them all he hears the landlady's daughter loudest of all. "He was only angry that this rude laughter should come even as near as this to Mary Wilson, who was too high for such as these to touch her name," (p. 185).

When he arrives, the house is warm and welcoming again. Only the parents are not home, and Mary speaks directly and to the point. She tells him she is embarrassed by her parents' attempt to convert him to their faith. Yet in all she says, she does not speak against them but admires them. Her fear is her father will influence Yuan so he will return to his country a Christian and bring the religion to his people as a Christian leader. "They feel because you are what you are, how glorious to win you to their cause! To me, how presumptuous to think you could be made more than you are—by religion! You are of your own race and your own time," (p. 188). He is thankful for her candor and tells her that for the first time since arriving in the country, he feels a mind speaking to his mind and he believes they will be friends. Her parents return and they visit while Yuan stomachs warm milk out of politeness until Mary apologizes and fetches him hot tea.

Yuan returns to the house regularly, almost forgetting they are not his people and the hatred he feels toward their race. He spends much time discussing the old teacher's beliefs. One day Yuan tells Mary that her father has almost convinced him to be a Christian. She accentuates the word almost, and says it is the difference between them and her parents. "Our two minds are different, Yuan—less simple, less sure, more exploring," (p. 192). With her words, Yuan draws back from thoughts of belief in the Christian God. Through this, Mary and Yuan become closer and by spending time with her, he learns the history of her people. They spend many hours together. "So while he often saw her beautiful, her body arrowy and light with all her energy, and while he could not but be moved by her darting mind, yet he could never feel her quite flesh to his flesh, or as a woman to be touched or loved, for there was that in her which made him a little afraid of her, and so held back growing love," (p. 193). Inwardly he is thankful he does not want to touch her, because they are of different blood. Yet at times he could almost forget that difference. She looks and speaks of his country in the way he wants to remember it. "And Yuan, listening, forgot his own childhood and remembered only that it was true he did hate violence and war, and since he did, he felt his people did,

and he remembered the villagers, how they had besought him against any wars, and so her words seemed true to him and only true," (p. 194). Yuan continues to see Mary in his 5th and 6th year in America. However, because of his narrow nature, they remain only friends. One night, when he invites her to a show at the school, two Chinese brothers put on a comedy act. Yuan is embarrassed they play the fool in front of Mary and he grows angry and humiliated. He tells Mary these men from the south are not true Chinese.

Chapter 2—Pages 184-199 Analysis

Mary's words, "They feel because you are what you are, how glorious to win you to their cause! To me, how presumptuous to think you could be made more than you are—by religion! You are of your own race and your own time," (p. 188), are true not only of this cause but the cause within Yuan's homeland and foreshadow things to come when his cousin Meng thinks bringing him into the cause will also make him more than he is.

When Mary talks of China and how marvelous it must be Yuan's people have found the answers to all human problems, Yuan does not speak of the reality of his land, but rather believes along with her that everyone in his country feels as he does. This is another example of running from self and the difficulties of social change. Instead of using this as a time to gain ideas that may help his homeland, he lives in a fantasy, believing his country has solved all of humanity's problems.

When Yuan is embarrassed by the two Chinese brothers and tells Mary these men from the south are not true Chinese, it shows evidence of prejudice within his country. It also foreshadows future difficulties when Yuan returns to his country and goes to the south to work with Meng in the new capital.

Chapter 2—Pages 199-214

Chapter 2—Pages 199-214 Summary

After the incident with the Chinese brothers making fools of themselves, and Mary even laughing at their foolery, Yuan attempts to return to his life of solitude. However, Mary does not let him go so easily. She writes him again, and he eagerly opens the letter. When he reads the letter he is disappointed because her words are ordinary, as if she has not missed him the last three days. It talks of a flower ready to bloom in her mother's garden. Her mother would like him to see it, and that it will be in full bloom tomorrow. He goes the following day, and while he is in the garden, Mary comes along and slips her gardening gloves on. She does not accept his little bow and few words, but works to draw him out so he forgets his hurt. They end up pulling weeds together as Mary's mother talks of her faith. Yuan listens, but Mary's smile frees him from his inner bondage long enough to return her smile. Later, when he chooses not to accept this faith, Mary's father tells Yuan he is just like Mary. This saying stays with him and he ponders it. He considers them alike to two ways: in youth, and in their rebellions.

As spring arrives, Yuan feels a new freedom. He actually feels at home among this family of different blood with little thought of the differences. Individually, Mary and Yuan start to plan to meet in the garden each morning. One day, while he bends to pull a few weeds, Mary reaches out to remove a bit of weed from his hair. Her hand brushes his cheek. He knows she did not do it purposefully but he cannot forget the touch. She does not apologize, but the blush tinting her cheeks reminds Yuan her intensions are pure. It reminds him of the touch of the maid back in China, and he determines he will think of it no more. This is easier said than done. That spring, Yuan fights with the duplicity of loving her but rejecting her race. At times he finds her beautiful, but not the whiteness of her skin. He ponders staying in this foreign land, but then receives news of home, including wars and social change. Yuan writes to Sheng about returning home, but Sheng decides to stay longer for he has more to see and experience.

Not long after this, Yuan walks with Mary along the path as they often do and they come to rest on a bench beneath the willows in the shadows. Everywhere else moonlight shines brightly, except here under the willows. It is black and the two shiver with cold. Mary puts her hands, one on each of Yuan's cheeks and asks him to kiss her. He has never kissed a woman, but has witnessed it in the movies. He bends his head towards her and their lips meet. "In that instant he drew back. Why he must draw back he could not tell, for there was that in him to that wanted to press on and on, deeper and long," (p. 209). The distaste for flesh different than his overpowered his desire. Confused and shamed, he stands quickly. Mary looks up at him with the unasked question on her face, "what's wrong?" He makes an excuse that it is cold, and she tells him to go back if he must. Her answer sounds dead and cold, and he walks away leaving her on the bench. "The next morning he awoke, knowing he must go and see Mary, and yet he delayed, half fearful, for now in the morning still there were these truths clear to him, that he had

somehow failed her, though he knew he could have done no other thing than what he did," (p. 210).

Yuan finally musters the courage to go to Mary's house, but he finds the family upset over bad news. The old teacher invites him in and asks if this news can be true. Yuan reads about the revolutionists in his homeland attacking white men, women and children and driving them from their homes. Some have even died. Yuan is shocked and tells them it must be a mistake and he searches the article for the cause. However, Mary perceives what he is doing and tells him she has read it and there is no cause. They attacked innocent families in their homes with their children. She looks at him with cold accusing eyes.

Yuan becomes more talkative, saying it must be a mistake. He promises to contact his cousin to find out the real story. Mary's mother relaxes a bit saying she knows the Lord would not let such things happen to their missionaries. At this Yuan becomes speechless. Mary's eyes still accuse, and he wants to ask her forgiveness but at the same time draws away from her. They never see each other alone again. Yuan busies himself with school and trying to clear his country's name. However, when he speaks with Sheng about it, Sheng tells him it is the truth. This dumbfounds Yuan and he asks why. Sheng admits no one really knows the truth. Yuan sets his plans in motion to return home to China. He still sees Mary and her family, but because he cannot prove his country innocent he feels they blame him in some way for what happened to the missionaries. His heart turns against this family he has called friends. They see it, and though the old couple do not blame him, they draw back in their own way. As he reads the current news, his thoughts go to his father and he wonders at his welfare.

Yuan finishes the school year and graduates with honors with no one he cares about there to see it. As he packs, he thinks of Mary and her family, and how her father is probably glad he is leaving in fear that he might want to wed his daughter. The thought eases his leaving. He is thankful that Mary stopped him from becoming a Christian. She saved him from that, and then he saved himself from her.

Chapter 2—Pages 199-214 Analysis

The very duplicity Yuan struggles with when loving Mary and yet hating her race mirrors the inner conflict he endures throughout his life. He loves his father, but hates his controlling ways enough that he grows to hate him. He admires Sheng at the start, but then, as he draws closer, is torn between what he considers honorable based on custom and how Sheng's lifestyle is in conflict with what he believes. This happens too with Meng, who is anti-establishment and "for" the common people. Yet, Yuan sees the reality of the new government and its failures. He longs for something more—true honor, true love, true change, but it always lingers beyond his grasp as he grapples with traditions, expectations and change.

A classic example of his resistance to social change is found in this chapter, the morning following Yuan and Mary's kiss. Anyone can have second thoughts when it

comes to relationships, but Yuan's second thoughts shine a light on his inner conflict. His love cannot overpower his repulsion for her race. Even though he wants to ask Mary for forgiveness, he draws away from her because he fears he will yield to his fleshly desires. He leaves the house promising Mary's father he will report any news he hears, and feeling responsible for clearing his country's name. His actions are driven by a quest for honor by being better—being the best, and unable to admit to flaws or weakness. This reflects the traditional ways in which he was brought up.

Chapter 3—Pages 215-244

Chapter 3—Pages 215-244 Summary

Yuan leaves the foreign country with a mixture of love and hate for it. Much like the feeling he struggled with in his youth against his father. He gets on the big ship home with a box of books, notebooks, and wheat seeds he has experimented with and hopes to grow to bring an improved harvest to China.

He ponders his time in America, realizing he gained vast knowledge from books. Also, "He knew that when he wed, the woman must be of his own flesh and kind," (p. 216). So, "As though he cast aside a garment no longer to be used, he cast aside these whole six years of his life except the knowledge in his brain and the box of books . . . Yet now upon the ship when he thought of the years, there was the unwilling love in his heart, because this foreign country had so much he would have, and because he could not hate these three [Mary and her family], since they were truly good; but the love was unwilling because now he was turned homeward he began to remember certain things he had forgotten," (p. 217). His thoughts rest on his father, the crowded streets in the coastal city as he remembers them and even his time in prison. His hope rests in the revolution changing things during the time he has been gone. After all, Meng was in hiding when he left, and now he serves as a Captain in the new army and can come and go freely. Others of his kind on the boat also talk of changes like new wide streets, motor cars and the great army of the new revolution. He and the other Chinese young people grow eager to return to their changed land. One of the Chinese women lifts her foot showing it is not bound and says it is a weakness women endured for so long. "For myself, I am determined to endure nothing—nothing at all I do not like, and shall try to each all my countrywomen not to endure anything. I never saw any woman in the foreign country endure anything she did not like and that is how they have come as far as they have," (p. 119). They go on to tell the men that in the foreign country it is the men that must endure, and they will need to learn how also.

In the first days of the trip, Yuan enjoys the company of these Chinese young people. They grow in their self-assuredness as all think they will play an important role in their old country made new. As this happens, Yuan notices their use of foreign words because there are no appropriate words in his native tongue to convey their ideas. If he sees one of the young men from the back, he cannot tell the difference between him and a foreign fellow. When they spend the evenings dancing, Yuan shrinks away because he does not want to hold any of these women in his arms. He sees them too easily touch men, and in his mind this is not right.

When the day arrives for them to reach shore, Yuan goes to the front of the boat to watch for the first signs of land. He sees large buildings towering from the city in the distance and harbors a secret pride at his country's accomplishment. As the ship docks, a group of common men jump onto the ship looking for any scrap of work. Dingy boats float upon the harbor filled with beggars holding baskets above them on poles looking

for handouts. Yuan feels shame for these and he also feels hate for the white women who try to avoid being brushed up against by the sweaty common men who have come aboard. Just as suddenly, he hates the common men and beggars because they make a bad impression. Foreigners should not see these things and the ruler should forbid it from happening. As he steps from the ship, he sees his lady mother and Ai-lan. Because of Ai-lan's beauty, Yuan becomes proud again. He figures her beauty will cause people to forget the beggars and common men. Slightly behind his lady mother, a tall girl stands and he recognizes her. She is not as pretty as Ai-lan but attractive. As introductions are made, Yuan realizes this is the young girl, Mei-ling, who found him in the alley when he was released from jail. Only now she is 20 years old. He bows to her without a word, and she returns the gesture.

Wu, the writer, is also present to greet Yuan—the very same man whom his lady mother did not trust with Ai-lan back in the days when Yuan went with her dancing. "This Yuan soon understood, for after the first cried of greeting and the bows were over, the lady took this young man's hand delicately and took Yuan's and she said, 'Yuan, here is the man who is to wed our Ai-lan,'" (p. 223). Yuan wonders at this turn of events, knowing his mother's feelings toward the man, but he remains quiet, knowing this man is already married. His lady mother announces it is time to go home and get out of the sun, and Ai-lan rides in a fine red motor for two with her betrothed, while Yuan rides in another with his lady mother and Mei-ling. When a beggar reaches for a handout from Ai-lan's betrothed, he smashes the man's hand with his western shoe.

The lady has moved to a larger, foreign-looking home since Yuan last lived with her. On his first day in the new house he learns it was because Ai-lan was ashamed to bring her friends to the smaller house. During this conversation, he also learns Mei-ling is more like her own child. At this time the girl attends a foreign school of medicine and has two more years of study before she becomes a doctor. Yuan is taken aback, because while overseas he thought of Mei-ling as a child. His lady mother reminds him she is 20 and more mature than Ai-lan who is three years older. This leads him to ask about the marriage. His lady mother is not happy, but the man is divorced and Ai-lan is expecting his child. "We can do nothing in these days, we old ones, except let the new sweep us on as it will . . . Who can do anything? The country is upset, and anyhow, and there is nothing left to guide us—no rule, no punishment," (p. 227).

The coastal city is busy and wealthy. Yuan feels encouraged by the changes and filled with hope. The humble landscape is being transformed with new shops. He stands at his window that first night, looking out at the city, feeling good to be home where he can read signs in his own language. He marvels at all the changes. "So must all be pushed aside who cannot stand in this new day. It is right. Ai-lan and the man are right. The new cannot be denied," (p. 228). In his first days home he is in awe at his freedoms. He left a prisoner and now walks about as he desires. A couple of days after his arrival, he receives a letter from Meng telling about the new capital and all the rebuilding and tearing down going on. Meng holds a position as Captain and the General whom he serves under is the man that used to be Yuan's tutor, and once his Captain at the School of War. Meng passes on a message from the man who invites him to come to the capital. He has a place for him there. Yuan puts off a response, for his immediate

responsibilities include visiting his uncle's home, attending Ai-lan's wedding and, finally, visiting his father. When he visits his uncle, Wang the Landlord, he finds time has taken its toll on Yuan's uncle. He and his wife have moved in with their eldest son during the time Yuan was overseas and when he comes to visit his uncle, he finds an old man sitting on a bench beneath a banana tree with a maid servant fanning flies from him. He has lost a lot of his excess weight. To Yuan, he looks shriveled among folds of loose skin and lost among his rich satin robes, now too big.

He asks Yuan how long ago he went away and how his son Sheng is doing. During the course of this conversation he mentions his eldest son says Sheng is spending too much money. Then he goes on to brag about Meng and how he is a Captain in the new army. Yuan finds this ironic. This is the same man who spoke against Meng when he was a fugitive. Little courtesies the man shows through their time together makes Yuan feel like a guest rather than a nephew. Finally his uncle tells him he dresses and acts like a foreigner. Yuan realizes he has nothing to talk about with this old man and leaves.

As Yuan visits with his uncle's eldest son and his wife, he realizes another change. He is no longer looked upon as a youth, but is now a man who has been educated overseas and holds a degree. He makes small talk with this cousin until his aunt is brought to the room, leaning on her servant. She still seems mentally sharp, but she suffers from a cough that breaks the conversation until she can catch her breath. She asks Yuan of Sheng, and says if he were home she would have him wed. Her daughter-in-law reminds her this is not how things are done these days, but the old woman ignores her and asks Yuan what he will be doing. He lists all the things he must do before he decides what is next, and the woman becomes sidetracked talking of how she would not let Ai-lan marry that man if she were her daughter. Yuan takes his leave before he answers her question about Sheng.

Soon he is caught up with everyone else in Ai-lan's wedding and he finds no time alone to talk with Ai-lan. He worries, because she no longer laughs and teases. Instead there is a sense of assuredness about her, and Yuan feels he cannot get through to the half-sister he once knew. While Ai-lan's mother has much to do to help prepare for the wedding, Yuan is happy for the young Mei-ling's help to the old woman. Mei-ling explains his lady mother saved her life as an infant, and when she says it, she shows no shame that she was a foundling. "He watched her, forgetting that he did so, and he saw how slight yet strong her lithe body was, how firm and quick were her hands, not making one useless movement, and he remembered how not once when his mother asked if a thing were done or not, had it been undone," (p. 239).

Ai-lan's wedding is of a new fashion, and her elder cousin gives her away because her father is not there and her elderly uncle cannot do it. Ai-lan and her husband display the newest trends. All the people marvel at her beauty. Yet after it is all over, Yuan finds himself thinking of Mei-ling. The young woman and his lady mother are the only two throughout the celebration who wear grave expressions. He talks with the two of them later, and his mother tells him she is not happy about the marriage but has no choice, for Ai-lan is expecting the man's child. Yuan is embarrassed his mother would mention

this in front of Mei-ling, but she tells him the young woman knows all and helped her through this difficult time.

Yuan thinks on how his own sister used her new freedom. It troubles him in a divided way, "For now half he was ashamed of Ai-lan's recklessness, because such things ought not to happen to his own sister, in whom he wanted to have nothing but whole pride, and yet half he was troubled because there was a hidden sweetness in this wild thing and he wanted it for himself," (p. 244).

Chapter 3—Pages 215-244 Analysis

When the young Chinese woman on the boat headed for China says, "For myself, I am determined to endure nothing—nothing at all I do not like, and shall try to each all my countrywomen not to endure anything. I never saw any woman in the foreign country endure anything she did not like and that is how they have come as far as they have," (p. 119), this foreshadows far reaching changes in Yuan Wang's homeland of China. It is evident on the boat before he even gets to shore. Yuan takes note of the foreign words used because his language does not have words for what these young people expect and plan. As the young people dance in the evening, Yuan shrinks away from the foreign pastime, for the women too easily touch the men. Change seems a good thing, but for Yuan it leaves him between times. He does not really belong with the old ways, nor the new ways, but sees some value in both along with some regrets of things lost.

When Yuan visits his uncle, Wang the Landlord, he finds time has taken its toll on his uncle. He has lost a lot of his excess weight and to Yuan, he looks shriveled among folds of loose skin and lost among his rich satin robes, now too big. This represents Yuan's view of the old. It is no longer useful, but only draped in the same colorful silks to look good. He soon realizes he has nothing to talk about with this old man and leaves.

In contrast, Ai-lan's wedding is everything new and yet what he remembers is Mei-ling. She is neither old nor new, but like him—a person caught between in the cultural upheaval brought about by the revolution.

Chapter 3—Pages 244-283

Chapter 3—Pages 244-283 Summary

After the wedding is over, Yuan is ready to see his father after all these years. In fact, he feels sad in his mother's home for she sits more quietly than ever, and Mei-ling is busy with school. He thinks perhaps the girl is avoiding him as part of her modest nature, something he likes about her. When the time comes that he must leave, he realizes he wants to say good-bye to Mei-ling. So he waits for a later train in hopes of having dinner with her and his lady mother before leaving. "And as they talked he found he listened for the girl's speech, very clear and soft and pleasant, always, and not shy and giggling as the laughter of maids is sometimes. She seemed always busy at some bit of sewing, and once or twice when a servant came in to ask a question of the next day's meats or some such thing, Yuan heard her ask Mei-ling instead of the lady, and Mei-ling gave directions as though she had done it many times," (p. 245). She goes on to tell him how she wants to be a doctor and how her foster mother inspired her to follow that pursuit. In the future she hopes to have her own hospital where she can help women and children.

As the lady mother and Mei-ling say goodbye to Yuan at the train, one of the last things the lady says to him is this is a better day because women are not forced to wed. In his berth on the train he ponders these words. "Yet their eagerness for freedom left a little coolness in him, so that when he said farewell he felt less warmly than he thought he would and bewildered in himself because he was hurt somewhere within him, but he did not know just where or how the hurt was," (p. 246). His thoughts turn to Mei-ling. In his eyes she is different from all the other women he has observed. He wonders if she will someday want a husband and children as all women should.

The following morning he awakens with the train stopped beside a mighty river—he and all the other passengers must cross to pick up their journey on the other side. Yuan crowds onto the deck of a low wide boat and is tucked up to the railing because he is one of the last to board. He thinks back to crossing this water when he escaped prison. That time he did not see a thing. Now the stench of the poor living on boats crowding the waterway grabs his attention. He stares out at men with sunken faces and unwashed children crying. Families drink their own filth from the water. The ferry moves swiftly and soon the boat people are out of sight and out of Yuan's mind. Instead his thoughts are drawn to great foreign ships towering like giants on the river. The sight makes Yuan angry. He questions why they are in his country. Even when he steps off the ferry, he is bothered by these intruding ships. "Now here was a strange thing that Yuan found in himself; so long as he could maintain his anger against these white ships and remember how they had fired on his people, and so long as he could remember every evil thing whereby his people had been oppressed by other outer peoples, and these were many, for he had learned in school of evil treaties forced upon the emperors of old by armies sent to ravage and plunder, and even in his lifetime had there been such things, and even in the great city while he been away young lads had been shot down by white guards for crying out their country's cause—so long as he could

remember all these wrongs that day, he was happy enough and filled with a sort of fire, and he thought in all he did, while he ate, and while he sat and looked out over the passing fields and villages, 'I must do something for my country,'" (p. 249).

As the day passes on the train, Yuan is distracted by those around him: the bulk of a fat man who has removed his clothes in the stifling heat; wailing children pulling at their mother's breasts; flies everywhere. He never noticed them when he was younger. The man serving the food wipes his bowl with a filthy rag that he also uses to mop the sweat from his face. Yuan shouts at the man that it would better to leave his bowl unwiped than to use that rag. He is overwhelmed by it and hates them all, even the flies. People on the train take sides—some siding with Yuan and some with the server. The fat man finally says, "So that's what he is! Here I have sat my whole day through staring at him to see what he was and making nothing of him," (p. 251). At this Yuan ignores the man and looks out the window, too proud to answer or eat. His day grows worse as at every station for the people seem poorer. At one stop a white foreign man stops to tell Yuan not to be discouraged. Yuan watches the man get off the train and walk among the crowd of ill-clothed poor. Then he recognizes the man as the priest he saw back in the United States. The one who angered him by showing pictures of these poor and at the time humiliating him. Now Yuan wonders why he never saw this before.

When Yuan finally returns to his father's home, weeds have taken over the courtyard and only a few soldiers are here and there. However, he puts this behind him when he sees his father. Tears fill Yuan's eyes as he takes in his father's old face. Wang the Tiger tells his servant to bring the wine, and the old hare-lipped servant pours wine with a slight smile that Yuan is home. Once inside, Yuan meets his uncle Wang the Merchant and his son. To his dismay, he learns his father owes them a fortune for the money he has borrowed to get Yuan out of prison and so he could study abroad. The war lord business is no longer profitable under the new government and a local bandit has hurt business and killed Wang the Merchant's wife.

Yuan takes on the responsibility of repaying his father's debt, and his uncle tells him he will have to find work. "He [Yuan] knew that according to the old laws his uncle might so plan and might so claim his years, and when he remembered this, Yuan's heart rose as it never had against the miserable rights of the young, so that they might never run swiftly," (p. 264). When Yuan finally complains of being sold into surety, his uncle remarks it is not surety to help one's own blood. So Yuan takes on the bondage of the debt. He says to his uncle, "I am really your investment, then, my uncle. You have used me as a means to make your sons and your old age safe," (p. 266). His uncle tells him he will do the same for his own son some day. Yuan says he will not, but the very thought is the first time he thinks of having a son and a wife in his future. His son will be free. "They should not be made for soldiers, nor shaped for any destiny, nor bound to any family cause," (p. 266). At this point, Yuan feels hatred for those of his own blood—his family.

While alone with his father, for the first time his father admits he has been wrong and that young men should do as they please. He has plans to gather up his army again and get the money needed back from the bandit. He tells Yuan he can stay home and have

everything his heart desires. However, Yuan does not want his old father going into battle. In the same thoughts, he is ready to say he does not wish to wed—but he stops. A moment ago he thought of his sons living free, and so his mind turns to a wife, and he thinks of Mei-ling. He passes the days half-listening to his father as he thinks of Mei-ling. He finally announces to his father and mother of his intentions to marry Mei-ling and they are happy as they say their farewells. His thoughts are on Mei-ling and inwardly he is anxious to return to the Coastal City.

However, when he returns to the lady mother's home, she and Mei-ling are not home but at the foundling home tending to a baby in grave health. When they do arrive, it is with sadness, for the child dies. So the timing is not right to bring up his plans to marry her. The following morning he tells the lady mother of all the financial trouble, and he realizes for the first time that if he pays his uncle he will have little left for a family. Finally he bursts forth with the news that he loves Mei-ling and wants to marry her. The news totally surprises his lady mother. In his shyness, Yuan tells his mother he does not know where to start with these new ways. Later, the lady mother tells Mei-ling of Yuan's desires. Mei-ling looks to her foster mother and asks if she must marry him. In the end, the young woman turns down the proposal. She explains she likes him as her brother, but not as a husband.

In his dejected state, Yuan wanders the streets. His mind returns to the peace he experienced from the little plot of land and he hails a public vehicle to take him there. It goes as far as it can and then he walks. HOwever, when he gets there he finds strange new streets filled with people. He finally recognizes where he is, but the land is all developed. The old farmer who helped him learn to hoe and harvest is gone, moved on to a new life. Yuan returns home knowing that the same is in store for him. He will find his new life.

Chapter 3—Pages 244-283 Analysis

After the lady mother speaks of the times being better now women are not forced to wed, the subtle affect of social change is evident in Yuan's reaction. "Yet their eagerness for freedom left a little coolness in him, so that when he said farewell he felt less warmly than he thought he would and bewildered in himself because he was hurt somewhere within him, but he did not know just where or how the hurt was," (p. 246). For as social change equals out the rights of men and women, one gains and another loses in order for the balance to take place.

Events in this chapter highlight the theme of Yuan's inner conflict. His emotions carry him along on waves of anger, pride, mistrust and a sense of misguided patriotism as he focuses on symptoms of social problems. His answer is to treat the symptom but he does not realize the cause will still exist. This is true in every area of his life as he often judges quickly and harshly by what he sees without taking into consideration the cause. He does the same in his own life and it is the reason for his roller coaster of emotions. For example, when he decides he should do something for his country, his next thought is that Meng is better than he is and Meng is strong because of his singleness of cause.

So even in his desire to do something for his country, Yuan is conflicted and thinks himself weak and that he must learn to hate all the foreigners if he is to be strong for the cause.

When Yuan's eyes are opened to actually see the poor, he marvels that he has not seen this before. This marks a turning point in the theme of social change, but it is only the beginning as Yuan must go to his father's home and see what the social changes have made of him. There he learns of the breakdown of the war lord's world. Wang the Tiger now owes his brother Wang the Merchant 11,517 pieces of silver. Much of this debt was incurred to pay for Yuan's education in America. This is another consequence of social change.

So, as Yuan thinks on Mei-ling, "For him, she holds double charm. She had sedateness and gravity as the older women had, whom he looked to, his lady mother, his aunt, and had this new thing, too, that she was not shy and silent before men," (p. 274). This mindset reflects his own inner conflict as he stands with a foot in the old and a foot in the new and finds himself living inbetween.

Chapter 4—Pages 284-312

Chapter 4—Pages 284-312 Summary

The following day changes the course of Yuan's life for the lady mother tells him it is not wise for him to continue to live in the house now Mei-ling has turned down his marriage proposal. Yuan feels as uncomfortable as Mei-ling and tells his mother, "I feel I want to be where I must not see her every day, too, and where I need not remember every time I see her or hear her voice that she will not have me," (p. 285). Yet even as he says it, he knows he will be miserable without being near her. The lady mother sees his quivering lip and encourages him that Mei-ling may change her mind within a couple of years. However, Yuan does not get his hopes up. One thing he likes about her is she is not easily swayed.

The lady mother reminds him he has a son's duty to perform, and Yuan bitterly answers. "Yes, that is what they always say, but I swear I am tired of it. I did my duty always to my father and how did he reward me? He would have tied me to an unlettered country wife and let me be tired forever and never known what he did to me. Now he has tied me again to my uncle, and I'll do what I did before—I'll go and join Meng and throw my life in against what old people call duty—I'll do it again—it is no excuse that he did it innocently. It is wicked to be so innocent and injure me as he has—" (p. 287). Even as he speaks, he thinks of how his father helped free him from prison.

On this same day, Yuan receives a letter from Meng inviting him to come and work in the new Capital city where things are daily being recreated bigger, new and improved. Yuan's countenance is lifted by the option, and he decides to accept the opportunity. He makes plans to leave. As the days draw near for him to leave, he wonders if he will see Mei-ling before he departs, but she remains busy with her medical practice, trying to fight the cough spreading among the children. Upon his bed he ponders the young women who had loved him and how he could not return their love and wonders if this is how Mei-ling feels? He finally decides that if he has her friendship, he can live with that. The two agree to write to one another before he gets on the train.

When he debarks from the train, he is met by an officer. Suddenly he becomes important in the eyes of the crowd and beggars hover around him for a handout. Meng shouts at them to leave him alone. Meng barks orders for his men to carry his cousin's bags. His bags pass through without inspection because of Meng's position of authority. They ride away in a motor car with soldiers holding to the sides as they plow through the crowded streets with the horn blasting, scattering people in the nick of time. Meng sits erect and proud as he brags of the accomplishments of the cause in the new capital. However, as they speak, the shadow of the old city wall falls across the new road. Yuan's eyes fall upon huts clustered against the base of the wall—homes of the very poor. Meng becomes angry, "Next year they are not to be allowed, these huts. It is a shame to us all to have folk like that about. It is necessary that the great of foreign parts should come to our new capital—even princes come here—and such sights are

shameful," (p. 292). As Yuan listens to Meng, he thinks of the foreign priest who shows slides of the poor he lives among. He marvels that even in this new city, the poor still exist. He chides himself for being too soft and determines to be more hardened like Meng.

Meng shows the room he has let at a nearby inn. It is dirty and not really to Yuan's liking, but rooms are hard to come by. Since he is not in the military, Yuan is not allowed to live in soldiers' quarters with Meng. He learns to make do with his new accommodations. His first night, he fashions a small table where he can write, and he begins his first letter to Mei-ling in which he tells her all about the new city.

Within this new city where old collides with new, Yuan grows busy. "And one day he [Meng] took Yuan to his offices, which were in an old sagging house and full of dust and flying cobwebs," (p. 295). Young men fill dusty tables, working on colorful future plans for the new city and new government. In five years everything is going to be changed—an entirely new city in place. Again that night, Yuan writes of all he has learned to Mei-ling but without realizing it, he writes as if all the work is completed. "Among all the planning there was a new sort of lord of war who planned new armies and new ships of war and new ways of warfare and some day he planned a great new war to show the world his nation was now mighty as any, and this one was Yuan's old tutor, who was afterward his captain, and now general over Meng, to whose army Meng had escaped secretly when Yuan was betrayed to prison" (p. 297). Yuan is nervous about facing his former tutor who is now Meng's general. When Yuan finally sees him, he looks much older. "When Yuan came in he did not rise but nodded his head towards a seat, and when Yuan sat edgewise on it, for he had once been this man's pupil, he saw the two sharp eyes he remembered gazing from behind the foreign spectacles, and the harsh voice he remembered, which was not unkind nevertheless, asked him abruptly, "So now you have joined us, after all?" (p. 298). Yuan willfully says he still hates war. He will serve the cause in other ways. When he writes to Mei-ling, he tells her of the young soldiers, with simple faces, who think nothing of killing.

He settles in and unpacks his books and his foreign seeds carried to his country with hopes of an enlarged harvest and he becomes a teacher. When he complains of the poor, drafty condition of the building where he teaches, he is asked to bear it until the new buildings are built. Part of Yuan wishes he could take his own salary to pay for improvements, but he does not have money to spare because he is working to pay off his father's debt. Plus, his pay is not always on time. Wages are paid to the top ranking people first and funds work their way down as they become available. When he belabors the situation to Mei-ling, she asks him why he does not take his students out into the warm winter sunshine. He is astonished he did not consider this possibility and marvels at Mei-ling's ability to find solutions to every situation.

As a teacher, he is responsible to teach a variety of subjects, and has a group of students he takes out to plant the seed he brought from America. People who walk past him and his students carrying hoes make comments about a new army that carries hoes. His students end up complaining and murmuring at the long walk, hard work and the fact they did not go to school to be farmers. "Now Yuan grew angry when he heard

this, and he answered swiftly, "Yes, and if you know how to do it better you would not need to leave home to find a way to earn more. Better seed and better ways to plant it and greater harvests would have made your life better, too," (p. 305). Farmers stand around poking fun at them saying if they took such care in planting their seeds, they would be lucky to harvest once in ten years. A couple of the students speak up proudly of the foreign seed. Eventually the taunting farmers leave, and Yuan and his students plant the seeds. Yuan revisits the pleasure of warm earth beneath his fingers.

The new city becomes his home, but he looks forward to his letters from Mei-ling. Through her correspondence, he learns his uncle has told Sheng he must come home from America. Yuan notes Mei-ling answers quickly if he asks a question, but when he mentions in a letter that he still loves her and is still waiting, she does not respond. Other than this, he lives a solitary life, except when Meng forces him to come out with him after much pestering. One night while he is out with Meng and some of his friends, they discuss their dissatisfaction with everything. Later on the way back to his room, Meng continues his complaint. He tells Yuan that when he rose so quickly to be Captain, it filled him with hope, but since that time, no matter how hard he works, his career climb is stymied. "Do you know why? It is because that general fears us. He is afraid we will be greater than he is someday. We are younger and more able, and he keeps us down. Is this the spirit of revolution?" (p. 309). Passersby cast curious glances, and Meng lowers his voice and tells Yuan this is not the true revolution, because their current leaders are just as selfish as the old war lords. While he is still so stirred up, they come upon a white sailor arguing with a ricksha driver and beating him with his fists. The driver cowers and Meng becomes more angry. Yuan and the ricksa driver keep the two from coming to blows. Yuan directs the sailor through the gate and on his way and offers the ricksa driver some money for his trouble. Meng is upset, strikes the driver and runs off. The driver is stunned and so is Yuan, who runs after his cousin.

Chapter 4—Pages 284-312 Analysis

First, Yuan experiences rejection from Mei-ling. This is a direct effect from social change and, from Yuan's point of view, negative. The shadow of the old city wall falling across the new street is a visual representation of the negatives brought about by the social reforms—like the poor living in hovels along the city wall and Meng saying it is shameful and will not be allowed. This reflects the corrupt reality of the social change, originally touted as helping free the common man. Instead, it creates a new social structure that still has no room for the poor.

Also, the cause which wanted to do away with war lords and their ways now perpetuates its own version of the same system. "Among all the planning there was a new sort of lord of war who planned new armies and new ships of war and new ways of warfare and some day he planned a great new war to show the world his nation was now mighty as any, and this one was Yuan's old tutor, who was afterward his captain, and now general over Meng, to whose army Meng had escaped secretly when Yuan was betrayed to prison" (p. 297).

As Yuan comes before his old tutor, Captain and now general, his life has come full circle, and yet with all his experiences, he cannot commit to the cause.

Chapter 4—Pages 312-353

Chapter 4—Pages 312-353 Summary

Yuan looks expectantly toward the approaching holidays in hopes of spending time with Mei-ling. Meng plans to go home too, and is filled with new anger, this time directed at the common people who have decided they no longer need to honor the great feast day marking the New Year. The new government changes things, and now the calendar follows the sun instead of the moon, and Meng takes their indifference as a personal affront. "So whether they will or not the people must be taught and forced out of the old superstitious ways!" (p. 313). Yet Yuan is not as bothered by his cousin's words because his thoughts are on Mei-ling. He answers Meng, "Nothing will please you, Meng, not the rich because they are rich, and not the poor because they are poor," (p. 313), but for the most part he listens seriously to Meng without a word.

When Yuan goes home to the coastal city, he climbs the steps quickly to find the house empty, save for the servant who tells him to go to his uncle's. Sheng has returned and a great feast is waiting. As much as Yuan looks forward to seeing Sheng, he wonders if Mei-ling has gone ahead with his lady mother. He arrives to a round of welcomes just behind Meng, and as he walks to bow before his old uncle he sees Mei-ling. Their eyes meet. For the rest of the night, he never catches her eye again, and when he greets his lady mother, Mei-ling makes an excuse to slip away. Sheng becomes the focal point of the party, and Yuan learns he plans to stay in the coastal city with its pleasure houses and modern living for the new Capital City has no conveniences or entertainment. As everyone sits and eats, they no long sit divided by age. Yuan's thoughts go to his family not present—his father and how these cultural changes have not touched him. As he looks around the table, the women all admire Sheng, and Yuan glances at Mei-ling, wondering if she looks at his cousin in the same way. However, she looks at Sheng calmly and looks away. Yuan realizes she is like him. She is not totally caught up in the old ways or the new ways. She is between, just like him.

He goes to bed making plans for how to speak with Mei-ling the following day, but when he awakens the house is in confusion for the time has come for Ai-lan's baby to be born. She has a boy and hands it off to a nurse to be fed, for she does not want to ruin her figure. Mei-ling speaks up and says, "You are not fit to have this good sweet son! Here he is born strong and lusty and starving, and your two breasts running full, and you will not feed him! Shame, shame, Ai-lan!" (p. 323). Ai-lan pities herself and retorts that Mei-ling knows nothing because she is a virgin.

Yuan starts to feel neglected because he never gets to see Mei-ling because she is so busy with the baby. Finally, when Sheng and Ai-lan's husband pester him enough, he agrees to go out with them and gets drunk. Though he holds his liquor well, when he returns home, Mei-ling is upset. He tells her she never had time for him so he decided to go, and she lets him know she planned for them to talk that evening but he went out. Her stare is icy and she tells him to take Ai-lan's husband to bed because he is too

drunk to get there himself. After days of silence, she says, "You are like all the others, Yuan,—like all the other foolish, idle Wangs!" (p. 329). She goes on to point out all the ways he is like the others with his foreign clothes, out dancing and drinking. She leaves crying and the following day Yuan has to return to the capital city. It is a dreary, rainy day.

On the train he reads Sheng's book of poetry. Dark shadows of the poor huddle outside, trying to stay dry. Yuan realizes he could not write this kind of poetry because he cannot help but think of the poor he has seen—a world Sheng has not experienced.

The rains continue and the New Year begins on a dreary note. Meng visits Yuan often to let out his pent up anger. Yuan lets him talk and when he leaves he stands looking out the window thinking about how Mei-ling has not written. He puts all his efforts and time into his work. Then, for seven days in a row, he finds his classroom empty of students. He walks in the rain out to the place where he and the students planted the seeds he brought from America and the rains have washed them out or they lie rotting in the water. A nearby farmer points out the foreign seed does not do well here. Yuan looks over and sees the farmer's field growing and healthy.

The days drag on, and Yuan finally receives a letter from his lady mother. He tears it open hoping to find news of Mei-ling but not even her name is included. Instead his mother speaks of caring for Ai-lan's son. Even this makes him sad because he feels like the baby has taken his place in the lady's heart.

He writes to his father once a month, and his father answers every other month, but Yuan has no idea how things really are in his father's life. He still speaks of an attack in the spring and other such nonsense for an old man. Then one day his cousin, the son of Wang the Merchant with whom he discussed the debt, comes knocking at the door. His little finger has been cut off. He tells Yuan his father is being held captive, carried off to the earthen house by robber bands. His father spoke of going to war, and stirred up trouble. Yuan plants to leave immediately to go to his father. Before he leaves, he learns Meng will be gone when he returns because he is going to join the "new" new revolution. It takes two days and nights to reach his father by train. He hurries through the village where some of the houses have been burned as he heads toward the earthen house. He enters and goes to the small room where he slept and finds his father still and stiff but alive. His father has lost everything material, and Yuan tells his father he will buy it back. The old servant tells Yuan he wishes he had a garment that was not foreign because the villagers will look at him as one responsible for all that has happened. He puts on a robe because he knows his father cannot be moved and will die here. He sends for his lady mother and Mei-ling and they come straight away. Together they discuss what should be done. Mei-ling tells him his father will not live through the night. The servant warns they must leave as soon as he dies because he has heard the villagers talking and they think Yuan has returned to claim the land.

That night Yuan feels restless and goes outside. Mei-ling joins him and tells him his father weakens every time she checks on him. They determine not to sleep and to wait together. She tells him she can live anywhere, but for people like them it is better to live

in the city. She uses the word "we" and Yuan catches it. She explains she hated him for that one night in her anger. He kisses her and feels as he has never felt before. Her lips are of his kind. She tells him he looks different in the robe, but that she likes it. He says if she likes it, he will always wear robes. However, she shakes her head and tells him not always but sometimes. They decide not all foreign things are bad and together they need not fear anything.

Chapter 4—Pages 312-353 Analysis

The fact the family eats the New Year feast mingling old and young and no longer divided by age like rank, offers the first glimpse of social change willingly accepted within Yuan's family. As Yuan looks around and notes all this, he thinks of his father, home living as he has always lived—unchanged. No foreign food, or foreign words—his culture has not changed.

When Yuan reads Sheng's poetry, he realizes that, though it is exquisite, he could not write poetry like this for he would see the faces of the poor and the reality of the world Sheng does not know. This reveals social change has entered Yuan's heart. It is not dictated by a rule or law; it is a change from within.

Characters

Wang Yuan

A tall, dark youth with an honest high cheeked face, Wang Yuan stands taller than most Chinese youth his age. Although he is willful, he is also shy. His voice is deep and yet there is a delicateness in his speech. He is the only son of Wang the Tiger, the son of Wang Lung. Wang Yuan grows up living a sheltered life within the courts of his father who is a war lord. When the story opens, Wang Yuan is 19-years-old. He struggles with the fact that his father is a lord, goes away to the school of war and wears the uniform of a revolutionist. However, he walks away from his comrades knowing he cannot fight against his father, and yet when he sees his father he also knows he cannot live with him and take part in what he abhors. As a writer, he writes of things of beauty, not of war or its glory. When his comrades press him to write a song of revolution, they say it is too mild. He refuses to rewrite it, and from then on keeps his writing to himself.

Yuan has one sister who lives with her mother in a far off coastal city. He has not seen her since they were children. In fact, he forgot about her until everything else in life dissatisfies him. It is then he remembers more lighthearted days when they laughed and played as children. When his father presents him with news he will marry the woman chosen for him, Yuan bucks the tradition. "I have waited for this—yes, my comrades told me how they were forced to marriage—and many of them left their homes for this very cause—I used to doubt my own good fortune—but you are like all the others, all these old people who would keep us tied forever—tied through our bodies—forcing us to the women you choose—forcing us to children—well, I will not be tied—I will not have my body used like this to tie my life to yours—I hate you—I have always hated you—I know I hate you—" (p. 33). He flees to the coastal city to find the home of his only sister.

Within the coastal city his father's wife and mother to his half sister, takes him in as her son. She provides for his schooling and spends time talking with him. He is not quick to accept modern customs, and yet he is fleeing from the old. Gradually his life changes. His relationships develop with his sister and her mother, he attends school, learns to dance and even accompanies Ai-lan to the dance clubs as a favor to her mother. He also makes friends with his cousins, Sheng and Meng as he gets to know them better at school. Yuan learns through Sheng that Meng is part of the revolutionist cause, and eventually, Meng asks Yuan to join him, but Yuan turns him down the first time. However, Wang the Tiger sends a letter stating Yuan's marriage will go on as planned by proxy. The lady whom Yuan calls mother arranges a meeting of the family to see what can be done to help Yuan. However, no one is willing to stand up to Wang the Tiger, for fear of his anger or political ties that line their pockets. This action to force the arranged marriage upon him pushes Yuan to join the revolutionists. Now he can identify with the need for change within his country on a personal level. However, it is not the plight of the common man that stirs him, but his own personal fight against traditions binding him to his father's authority.

Yuan has a love of school and studies history, art and biology. Yet even in school, small things mar his pleasure. For example, he shares a class with Sheng in which the teacher often praises his cousin's writing, while he calls Yuan's writing interesting but hard to understand. Yuan strives to be the best, and is envious of his cousin in a secret way. Also, there is a girl in one of his classes who belongs to the revolutionists. She tells him of her love for him, but he does not return her love. To him, this is another bondage.

As the revolution unfolds, soldiers in the coastal city take preemptive measures and round up anyone with ties to the cause. They come into the class room and search the students, taking away the girl who, in her hatred of Yuan for shunning her, turns him in as a collaborator. He is arrested and sentenced to die, but is held three days without food and water until he is released at great expense to the lady whom he calls mother. He is placed on a boat with Sheng and they go to America together. However, their differences mark their separation in the new land with Sheng staying in the big city, while Yuan goes to a more rural setting.

In his new school, a teacher befriends Yuan and invites him to his home for dinner. The welcome he receives is friendly and warm, and Yuan establishes a kinship with the teacher's daughter, Mary. She is intelligent, and not as pretty as Ai-lan, but is familiar with his writing and has knowledge of his country. He enjoys her company. The teacher and his wife invite Yuan to come to church with them the next Sunday. The experience shows him Mary does not agree with her parents in this faith, and it links them on another level. The two grow close and Yuan enjoys the intellectual bond and even finds himself in turmoil as in some ways he is physically attracted but also repulsed because she is of different blood. Eventually, the two kiss and their relationship crumbles. Yuan seeks to keep his distance which is further broadened when the teacher's family has missionary friends mistreated in China. By the time Yuan says good-bye to Mary and her family before leaving for China, he knows he will not stay in touch with them.

Yet, once he returns home, he desires to have dinner with Mei-ling and his lady mother and even delays to take a later train in order to accommodate these plans. He is intrigued by Mei-ling because she seems different from the other women he has known. However, the two women speak of the new freedoms women have and how they are no longer forced to wed. It makes Yuan wonder if Mei-ling will ever want a husband and children. His hopelessness climaxes when he returns home and learns his father is heavily indebted to his uncle because the war lord business is not what it once was due to the rebellion. The money was used to free Yuan from prison and to pay for his education overseas. So, after all these years, Yuan is still enslaved to duty—but of a different nature. He accepts this challenge and it is through his willingness to respect that duty that his relationship with his old father is restored, and Mei-ling comes to help him when his father has been tortured and is dying. Yuan finds the freedom he longs for in a healed relationship with his father before he dies, and also in finding a woman he loves to be his wife.

Revolutionist Maid/Student

After Yuan learns there are many revolutionists among the student body, he scrutinizes his fellow students more closely. This girl keeps her eyes downcast. He steels glimpses at her regularly without her noticing until one day, when she feels Yuan's eyes upon her and looks up. From that day on, every time he looks her way, she is looking back at him. She is a thin girl, with a delicate face with narrow serious eyes and high cheek bones. Yuan does not consider her pretty. His interest in her is that she is the only one of her kind in the class. She is quiet, never speaks in class but never misses a day.

Yuan learns through Sheng that she belongs to the revolutionist cause and is a friend of Meng's. Sheng compares her to ice—always cold, but good for his brother Meng because she cools his hot temper. One day Yuan and she walk together after class and she is bold enough to take Yuan's hand. Traditionally, girls do not act in such a bold way, but her touch burns in his memory as he thinks of the girl. She is the first maid to be counted among Yuan's few friends. Over a short amount of time, their friendship grows, but then becomes cold. He sees things in her he does not like. He knows he does not love her and tries to avoid her as much as possible. Within the revolutionist cause he is forced to work with her, and sometimes uses her love for him to get her to do things he does not want to do. Finally, one day she arranges to go with him to talk to farmers about the cause and he does not want her to come along, but he has no way out. As they walk, he tries to walk on the other side of the road and in front of her so he can enjoy looking at the land and not have to see her. She confronts him, and tells him she knows why he does not love her. She thinks it is because he loves Ai-lan's pretty friends with whom he dances. It is not true, but he cannot convince her without explaining he just does not love her. They walk the rest of the day in silence.

As the revolutionists become more active throughout the country, the regular army comes to the school where Yuan and this girl attend and into their classroom. They search the students for any evidence they are part of the revolutionist movement and she is arrested. She casts a haunting look toward Yuan as she is led from the room and he looks away. He struggles with guilt. He wonders if he should do something, but he knows there is nothing he can do. Her love turns to hatred and she gives the authorities Yuan's name as a revolutionist before she is put to death. This leads to his arrest.

Mary Wilson

Mary Wilson is the daughter of the teacher, Mr. Wilson, who befriends Yuan in America. Upon first meeting Mary, Yuan tends to compare her to Ai-lan and notes she is much different. She is not as pretty as Ai-lan and she is taller. Her dark-grey eyes are serious and not full of laughter like Ai-lan. Although she is more serious, she can be witty, and her conversations are substantive. Before her parents she is reserved and modest but they treat her as an equal. When her old, teacher-father speaks of Yuan's writings, she is familiar with them and discusses them intelligently. Yuan is surprised by her knowledge of his people and asks her how she has obtained such knowledge. She

answers, "Oh, I have always had a kinship with your land, I think. I have read books about it," (p. 176). Yuan enjoys her company very much and feels a kinship toward her. "For he saw she was one whose body seemed a thing not of itself but only a covering for her mind and soul. And this was new to Yuan, who had known no such woman," (p. 179).

Mary's parents invite Yuan to church in hopes of converting him to Christianity. On the way to church, Mary drives. Her demeanor is cold as she stares straight ahead. She seems like a different woman and one Yuan almost fears. During the church service, Mary does not participate but remains detached. Yuan later learns Mary does not share her parents' Christian faith, and she reminds Yuan that the young do not need such faith. This draws him closer to her. From then on, he enjoys her company on a regular basis.

Over the years he stays in America, Yuan becomes close to Mary and her family. He finds himself distracted by Mary, but he tells himself he cannot love her because they are of different blood. When he looks at her he is repulsed by her white skin and straight nose. One evening, he takes her to a show at his school, and when two Chinese students put on a comedy act, Yuan is humiliated that his people would act the fool for everyone to see. When Mary laughs at the act, Yuan is hurt. After that he avoids her, but she does not allow it. Three days later she writes him a letter. He opens it with eagerness to see what she has to say but is disappointed that the words seem ordinary and not like she has missed him. However, within the letter she tells him her mother has a flower in the garden that only blooms once a year and she would like him to see it. He goes, and Mary does not let him stay isolated within his thoughts. Instead, she draws him out and their friendship is rekindled. However, one evening, as the two walk along the path in the moonlight, they stop and rest on a bench in the shadows of the willows. There they kiss. Yuan is revolted, leaves, and their relationship is never restored.

Mei-ling

Mei-ling is a young girl Yuan's lady mother finds abandoned as a baby. She lives in the home the lady mother runs for abandoned girls, but the lady mother sees something special in the girl. When Yuan is in prison and released three days later in a weakened condition, Mei-ling is the young girl who finds him in the alley. In his mind, Yuan pictures her as a young girl still when she is mentioned in letters from his lady mother while he lives in America. However, Mei-ling is 20-years-old when Yuan returns to his homeland, and she lives as a daughter with the woman he calls mother and as a sister to Ai-lan.

Mei-ling is a beautiful young woman, although her beauty differs from Ai-lan. For her attractiveness does not depend on her smile or how she uses her eyes to express delight. Her face is oval-shaped and pale, with black eyes, wide-set beneath dark brows. When Yuan thinks of her face he remembers, "Its good high look was from the perfect line of bone beneath the firm clear flesh, a line which, Yuan thought, would keep its strength and nobleness long past its youth," (p. 241) When Yuan meets her she is going to school to be a doctor. She is a hard worker, and takes care of the lady who is

getting up in years. It is during the time of Ai-lan's wedding that he first really notices Mei-ling in spite of Ai-lan's distracting beauty.

She is a maid of integrity and a hard worker. After the busy wedding, Yuan finds he would like to spend time with Mei-ling before he leaves to see his father. He even reschedules his departure for a later train. "And as they talked he found he listened for the girl's speech, very clear and soft and pleasant, always, and not shy and giggling as the laughter of maids is sometimes. She seemed always busy at some bit of sewing, and once or twice when a servant came in to ask a question of the next day's meats or some such thing, Yuan heard her ask Mei-ling instead of the lady, and Mei-ling gave directions as though she had done it many times," (p. 245). She speaks to him of longing to be a doctor and how his lady mother is the one who gave her the idea and hopes to see it through. Yuan falls in love with her for she, like him, does not belong wholly to the old ways, nor totally to the new. They live between. For him this holds a double charm. However, when he asks her to marry him, she declines. This devastates him, but after time passes he realizes he would rather have her as a friend than not be in contact with her at all. This is a major step in Yuan's life. For up until now he always closes a relationship without looking back. He writes to her regularly from the Capital City and when he his father is tortured and dying, he calls for her help. It is through this serving of his father that Mei-ling comes to his aid and stands by his side. She then agrees to be his wife.

Wang the Tiger

A war lord, Wang the Tiger has grown old. His dream is to see his son return home and lead his armies into victories he planned as a younger man, but never fulfilled. Given to sudden rages and known to draw his sword without much provocation, his son Wang Yuan wakes up from nightmarish dreams of displeasing his father. Yet, even though he is an angry man, he has much love for his one and only son. Even in his old age, he does not bring women into his court to pass the time and his wives no longer visit. Now Wang the Tiger is ill in his old age and sits unshaven, and unwashed before a brazier warming himself. Food dribbles down the front of his clothing and his son sits before him with the realization that he loves nothing about his father at that moment. It is during this visit that Wang the Tiger announces his plans for a forced marriage. Once he has a grandchild, Yuan will be free to do whatever he wants. However, Yuan does not accept such a marriage and flees, until he reaches the home of one of Wang the Tiger's wives who now lives in a coastal city with her only child, a daughter named Ai-lan.

Wang the Tiger's plans are not thwarted by his son's actions. He arranges for the marriage to take place with or without him, by proxy. However, fate thwarts his plans, because Yuan is thrown into prison. It is not until Yuan returns from America that he learns his father has fallen in debt because he borrowed money to help free Yuan from prison and to pay for his schooling overseas. When Yuan returns from America, his relationship with Wang the Tiger is restored, and Yuan is at his side when his father dies.

Sheng

A gentle, laughing young man, Sheng is the middle Son of Wang the Landlord and known as a poet and writer. Sheng wears his hair long and straight and has long, delicate fingers and dark shining oval eyes. Ai-lan calls him "the poet" and at school he is quiet and "too good" for all the other students. As for his poetry, he keeps it mostly to himself. Sheng socializes with different people from his brother Meng or his older brother. He often goes to the same pleasure houses as Ai-lan and is seen with one girl at a time—the one that currently infatuates him. The two dance the night away with little talking. Sheng knows his brother Meng is secretly a revolutionist. Yet, he keeps his brother's secret and talks to no one of it, until he tells Yuan. Yuan becomes a good enough friend, and he talks of things to him that he does not talk about with Meng. Yet, even in this relationship, Yuan sees no one really knows Sheng well. His words are kind and gentle, but they do not allow others access to the real man behind the words.

In school, however, Sheng and Yuan share a class in which Sheng's writing is often praised. This leaves Yuan a bit envious of his cousin. However, he still enjoys time with him. Only once, Sheng speaks to Yuan of his brother Meng's cause and tells him he could never join them because he has no wish to die for a cause, and only thing that stirs him is his love for beauty. It is during this conversation that Sheng tells Yuan of his dream to someday go abroad where he has heard it is more beautiful than his homeland. When he goes, he plans never to return for he has no desire to fight for the common man.

When the revolutionists in the coastal city are rounded up, Sheng and Yuan escape on a boat and go to America. Here, Sheng prefers to live in the big city where he finds pleasure and entertainment along with his schooling. He even has a woman who puts his verses to music. But Yuan finds the woman vulgar and cannot bear the way she treats Sheng. Sheng shrugs it off and tells Yuan that is how she treats everyone. Sheng stays in America after Yuan leaves, but comes home months later when his family says they cannot afford to pay his way any longer.

Meng

Youngest son of Wang the Landlord, and three years younger than Wang Yuan, Meng is the least good looking of his brothers and a revolutionist sold out for his cause. As a student he is sulky and likely to knock other people into the wall if they are in his way. Meng socializes with different people than his brother Sheng. He is a secret revolutionist and has secret places where he hangs out with others of his cause. He shares his secret with his brother Sheng and eventually with Yuan. He becomes close enough with Yuan that he talks to him about things he does not tell his brother Sheng.

One day at school, Meng catches up with Yuan and asks him to come have lunch with him. Over their meal, Meng points out the rich and fat with distain dripping in his voice. "Look at that great fat lord in that motor car! See how he eats and how he lolls! He is an extortionist—a usurer or a banker or he has a factory. I know the very look. Well, he

does not know he sits upon a hidden fire," (p. 76). This conversation opens the door for Meng to speak with Yuan of joining the revolutionist cause for the first time, but Yuan turns down the offer until later when his father makes him angry by arranging to have him married by proxy.

Meng goes into hiding when soldiers raid the coastal city and Yuan is thrown into jail. While Yuan and Sheng are in America, Meng becomes a Captain in the revolutionary army. However, when Yuan returns home and reconnects with Meng, he finds him just as angry and unhappy with the new leadership as with the old.

Wang the Tiger's Wife Who Lives in the Coastal City

This woman is a wife to Wang the Tiger who bears him a daughter, Ai-Lan, but leaves to live in a coastal city when her daughter is still very young. Her face is honest, and she possesses a comforting voice and mild eyes. She opens her home to Wang Yuan when he runs from his father's home to avoid forced marriage and takes him in as her son. Her name is not given, but she is often referred to as "Lady" or sometimes Yuan calls her Mother.

She not only opens her home to Yuan, but offers him sound advice and provides for his schooling. When Wang the Tiger threatens to have the forced marriage go on by proxy, she calls a meeting of the family to see if there is any way to help.

When Yuan is arrested, she takes action to gather the money to have him freed before he is executed and when he returns from America she opens her home to him again.

Ai-Lan

Ai-Lan has a pretty, three-cornered face, smooth black, curled hair, bright black eyes, and a love of laugher. Her small mouth with full lips is often painted. Slightly built, her clothes fit tightly and she wears rings in her ears. She is an opposite personality from Yuan even though she is his sister—though really she is a half-sister. They have the same father but different mothers. Ai-lan is instrumental in guiding Yuan away from traditional ways to embrace life in the city as young people live it. She teaches him to dance and helps him shop for foreign clothes along with her mother. Yuan considers her beautiful and carefree.

However, when he returns to his homeland after his time away, Ai-lan has changed. Her beauty is more exquisite than ever but she is more subdued. Yuan wonders if it is the man she is to marry—the same man his lady mother wanted him to protect her from in the days when they went out dancing. However, the truth is she is expecting this man, Wu's, baby.

The wedding is a huge affair, and the newlyweds carry on their socialite lifestyle. When the baby is born, Ai-lan lets her mother and a nurse care for him as she does not have the time, nor does she want to ruin her figure. As the story progresses, Ai-lan's self-

centeredness and superficiality become evident as Yuan grows further from those tendencies.

Wang the Landlord

Older brother of Wang the Tiger and uncle to Wang Yuan, Wang the Landlord is a huge man with a big belly whose brocaded robes hang like curtains across his large mid-section. He is married and has a concubine and an eye for the ladies. When the soldiers round up those suspected of being part of the revolutionist cause, Wang the Landlord flees to the home where Yuan lives with the lady he calls mother, for he fears his tenants will try to do away him by making false accusations.

By the time Yuan returns from America, time has taken its toll on Wang the Landlord. He and his wife move in with their eldest son during this time and when Yuan comes to visit him after his time in America, he finds his uncle an old man sitting on a bench beneath a banana tree with a maid servant fanning the flies from him. He has lost a lot of his excess weight and Yuan considers him shriveled among folds of loose skin and lost among his rich satin robes, now too big.

He asks Yuan how long ago he went away and how his son Sheng is doing. During the course of this conversation he mentions his eldest son says Sheng is spending too much money. Then he goes on to brag about Meng and how he is a Captain in the new army, and Yuan finds it ironic this is the same man that spoke against him when he was a fugitive. Little courtesies the man shows through their time together makes Yuan feel like a guest rather than a nephew. Finally his old uncle tells him he looks like a foreigner in his dress and mannerisms. Yuan realizes he has nothing to talk about with this old man and leaves.

Yuan's Former Tutor

In Yuan's early years, his western tutor taught him western ideologies and filled him with talk of revolution and how it could reshape the nation. His teaching influenced the heart of Wang Yuan against his father, Wang the Tiger. As Wang Yuan's Captain, this man laughs at Yuan's writing because he writes about soft, gentle things instead of writing of war and its glory.

Later, when Yuan returns to China, he learns this man has become a high ranking general in the revolutionist movement and Meng serves as Captain under his command.

Wang the Tiger's Server

A trusty, hair-lipped man. He has served Wang the Tiger since both men were young. He is faithful to his master and often tries to smooth the tumultuous relationship between Wang the Tiger and his son Wang Yuan.

Objects/Places

School of War

The place where Wang Yuan trains with the revolutionists. His former tutor serves as Captain. Here he hears about what the evil foreigners have done to his country, but also that Yuan's father is an enemy.

Earthen House

The ancestral home that belonged to Wang Yuan's grandfather when he was a farmer. Yuan escapes from home after leaving the school of war and wants to feel the earth under his feet. Two old tenants who live here fear Yuan as he stays with them for six days before his father's people retrieve him with news his father is ill.

The Coastal City

Unnamed, this city along the coast brings together people from many cultures and ethnic backgrounds. Wealthy people live within this city, and where the wealthy are, the poor are found too. "Where the rich were, there were the poor beside them, the beggars and the maimed and the diseased who made much of their woes to gain a little silver. But it was hardly gained, and the silver leaked from the purses of the rich in very small scanty pieces, for usually the rich passed on their way, their noses high and their eyes unseeing," (p. 38).

Lady Mother's Home in the coastal city

The home of one of Wang the Tiger's wives. Yuan lives there with his half-sister Ai-lan and the lady whom he comes to call mother. She treats him kindly, sends him to school and saves his life when he is thrown into prison as a revolutionist. While staying here, Yuan learns to dress in the modern fashion of the city, cuts his hair, and even learns to dance. During this time, he also rejoins the revolutionist cause.

Pleasure Houses

Establishments where the young people of the coastal city go to dance.

Plot of Land

A small plot of land that is part of a school project, where Yuan learns to farm and develops his love of the land.

Boarding House in America

Home in which Yuan lives for six years. It is owned by a heavy-set, white woman Yuan finds hideous, who lives there with her 17-year-old daughter.

Capital City

Large city in the south the revolutionists tear down and rebuild as the new capital.

Letter From the Revolutionist Maid

The maid Yuan comes to know through school and the revolutionist cause writes him a letter telling him of her love and that she does not require marriage. When the soldiers raid the city looking for revolutionists, Yuan remembers this letter tucked away in the pages of a book and burns it.

Lady Mother's Second Home

When Yuan returns from America, he finds his lady mother has moved to a new, larger home, foreign in style. The reason she moves is because Ai-lan is embarrassed to bring her friends home to the smaller home.

Themes

Like Father, Like Son

As much as Wang Yuan does not want to be like his father, his foundation is molded by the man. Within the first chapter he refuses to cry and puts on a stoic face just like his father. However, he attributes his self-control to his training at the school of war. As much as Wang Yuan likes to think he cares for the common people, his inner thoughts reflect his true feelings. He is as arrogant as his father in his thinking. For example, after his quarrel with his father, he wants to run away the following morning. As he ponders his options, he remembers the small earthen house built by his grandfather. "The house was empty except for the two old tenants and he might go there," (p. 8). He gives no thought as to how the current occupants might feel because, like his father, he does not really consider them as he does himself. This is shown more clearly when the tenants try to explain they do not have much food to offer him, only a bread stick wrapped around a garlic stem and he takes what little they have and eats it. After he eats, he grows tired and asks them where there is a bed—rather than asking if they have a bed or a place for him to sleep.

Yuan views his father's behaviors as if they are weapons. He uses his anger as a shield, "...or as men will take a sword and brandish it and never mean to bring it down on any flesh. So those tricks had covered the Tiger's heart, which never had been hard enough nor cruel enough nor merry enough to make of him a truly great lord of war," (p. 29). Throughout the story, Yuan allows his own simmering anger to shield him from caring about or accepting others. When he starts to get close to someone, if his expectations are not met, he becomes angry and distances himself. In the case of Jim, he does not like it that Jim comes to see the landlady's daughter. With the revolutionist maid, he does not like her forward ways and then her clinging. With Mary, he is repulsed by her white skin and different blood. It is not until Mei-ling that love works its way through the barrier set up by his anger and pride. In this way, he is different than his father, for he finds true love.

Wang the Tiger also has "...the strangest shyness toward all females," (p. 60). This same trait is obvious in Wang Yuan throughout the story. When he meets Ai-lan's friends, he only goes dancing with them as a favor to his lady mother so he can keep an eye on Ai-lan for her safety. When a young student who is a revolutionist shows interest in him, he is at first intrigued, but soon convinces himself he does not love her and never will. Even when she is arrested and put to death, his grief is short lived and he focuses more on the fact he could never love her. Again, when Mary Wilson falls in love with him, he enjoys her company until they kiss, and after that they are never alone again and when he returns to China, he does not write to her.

At the start of the story, Yuan remembers how his father treated the poor. The thing he does not see is that, in his own way, he does the same just in a less violent way. He pities the poor, even thinks they need help, but he turns away because he does not

want to see or smell them. When they beg within the ports it shames him because foreigners will see them. He solution is that they need to be moved somewhere out of sight. Yet when they serve a purpose, he finds them pleasant and interesting to know but still remains ashamed to admit he has a friend who is poor. For example, when Yuan works the plot of land as part of the school project and befriends the farmer who helps him learn how to use a hoe, he hides this relationship from everyone else in his life.

Running From Self

Wang Yuan starts the story as a young man who only cares for himself. He is concerned for his own interests and welfare and gives little regard to others. However, he often disguises his motives with self justification. When he sees the other soldiers at the school of war taking the vow of allegiance, he determines he cannot do this because it would be against his father. However, in truth he hates war and cannot think of killing. Instead of addressing it with the Captain who once served as his boyhood tutor, he runs from it and returns home.

Once home, because his father does not see things his way, he runs away again without any real purpose or destination. In fact, as he walks out the door to the outer court he is not sure where he could go. He remembers the little earthen house his grandfather built before he was rich, gets on his horse and goes there. Each time change is required on Yuan's part, he runs. To stay would require change, and at the start of the story that is not a consideration for this idealistic, arrogant young man who grows up in wealth and affluence but does not realize how fortunate he has been. This foundation institutes an arrogance and pride that leaves him closed to change. Instead of growing through life experiences, he runs from them. This running is sometimes physical, other times emotional and often both. While he enjoys new things, he is resistant to change and running away brings him both.

He looks at his life as one without fun, whose only purpose has been duty to his father and then to the revolutionist's cause which he could not follow. He resents not having fun like other children and thinks back to his very early years with his younger sister. As children they laughed together. This memory stirs a plan to go to the coastal city to find this sister whom he has not seen in many years. In his running, he sells his red horse which goes lame and uses the money to travel by train. When he arrives and is welcomed into his sister's home, all things are new and exciting. However, little by little, his battles with change cause him to put up his shield of anger and pride. Even small differences drive a wedge between him and others, leading him to live alone with his thoughts—which only perpetuates the cycle and creates more of a barrier between him and others.

In America, Yuan finds it difficult to accept the white race. His prejudice against the overweight, white landlady almost makes it unbearable for him to look at her. He cannot see the good in her until after he has lived there for awhile. This reflects the same problem he has in his own life. As proud as he is, he often considers himself lacking in

his own estimation and this is one of the reasons he runs, looking for something else, something better to complete his idealistic life.

Private War for Inner Peace

The themes within this story are woven in very cleverly. As much as Wang Yuan does not want to be like his father, his own ideology and cultural background make him very much the same as his father even when he goes off to the city. Running from himself is connected to his private war for inner peace. This struggle is revealed early on when he flees his father's home and is on his way to small earthen house. "Then being after all young, on such a morning Yuan felt suddenly that no life, even his, could be wholly evil," (p. 9). This search for inner peace is reflected in his writing, which his tutor laughs at when Yuan is at the school of war. The western man calls his writing "soft" because he never wrote about war.

The inner wars battling within him, get him so caught up in his feelings that he often overlooks courtesy. For instance, when he flees his father's home, he sneaks out the gate. He could just as easily have closed the gate, but instead he climbs onto his horse and rides away, leaving the gates behind him wide open. Also, his treatment of the old tenants in his grandfather's former home, who are poor and lack amenities to offer hospitality, is another example of this. When he arrives he assumes they must feed and house him. He is so enthralled with his new surroundings and the freedom he feels that he eats of their sparse food and invites himself to sleep in the house and stay as long as he wants. It is not until after he falls asleep and awakens in the night that he remembers he left his horse tied to a willow tree outside. His inner conflict drives him along without thoughts of others.

Part of Yuan's lack of peace is brought about by the impressions he draws from people and circumstances, and how they relate to his expectations. He wants his father to understand what he has done, after he leaves the school of war and returns home. However, his father does not understand. In Yuan's quest for inner peace, he see things in a way that makes his decisions easier to live with. He looks at his father as unwashed and unshaven, and with wine stains marking his robe. "There was not anything about his father that he loved, at least for this moment," (p. 31). Yet he does love his father, and herein the battle for inner peace escalates.

When Yuan's teacher reads his poem about the transmuting of a seed, he asks Yuan the meaning. This poem mirrors the changes in Yuan's life, and when the young man stammers to provide the meaning of the poem, the teacher points out the meaning is unclear because it is still unclear in Yuan's mind. This reflects his own inner turmoil, desiring to know what he wants to do and what is right to do as he battles the foundational customs and traditions laid in the early years of his life while living in a time of social reform. The struggle to incorporate change feeds the need for inner peace as he finds himself "between" cultures. He does not fit with the old and he does not fit with the new.

Social Change

The story opens with Wang Yuan's father Wang the Tiger holding the position of war lord. Yuan runs from the school of war where revolutionists plan to revolt and change the nation, eliminating war lords and establishing justice for the poor. Yuan enjoys the company of the common people, but still holds a superior view of himself in comparison. He is steeped in old world traditions and thrust into a world in turmoil and social change.

When his father calls Yuan home because he is ill, Yuan learns his father has arranged a bride for him. "This was no more than any good father ought to do, and what every son must in reason expect, for any son should accept the wife so chosen for his parents' sake, and wed her and give her a child, and then he is free to find his love elsewhere as he will." (p. 32). Although Yuan honors many of the old traditions, this one he cannot accept. He looks upon it as bondage, and he runs off to the coastal city where he lives with his half-sister and her mother. While living with them, little by little he accepts change. However, most of the change is outward. New clothes, new hair cut, learning to dance, but inwardly he does not accept foreign dress, or the way a girl allows a man to touch her while they dance. His inability to accept these social changes cuts him off from others and he leads a solitary life, alone with his thoughts which perpetuate his resistance to changes that go against his foundational moral code.

In discussing the meaning of his own poetry about the seed with his teacher, Yuan stammers to explain how, when the seed is in the ground, there is an instant when it changes and is no longer a seed. "...a place perhaps, when seed becomes no longer matter, but a sort of spirit, an energy, a kind of life, a moment between spirit and material, and if we could catch that transmuting instant, when the seed begins to grow, understand the change—" (p. 71). This reflects how social change works in Yuan's life as well as society's. Almost imperceptible at the start, but, nevertheless, once the change has occurred it cannot be reversed or allowed to return to the original form.

One of the difficulties Yuan has with the social changes is his ingrained moral code. Although he does not agree with forced marriage, he has trouble with the expression of women's freedoms when they dress scantily, act too bold, or touch men casually. This is one of the reasons he falls in love with Mei-ling. Even though she turns down his marriage proposal, he sees their relationship as one worth pursuing because he enjoys her company, and admires her work ethic and strong morals. Upon reflection of this, he realizes she does not belong to the old ways, nor the new ways. She is between, just like him. This in reality is real social change. Not one extreme or the other but changed for the better.

Style

Point of View

Pearl S. Buck writes in a direct narrative style using Wang Yuan as her central character, with the actions of her other characters relating directly to him. In fact, no character performs any act independent of the main character. For example, when Yuan is in America, the reader does not see what is happening in China other than what Yuan learns through letters, communication with his cousin Sheng, or in the newspapers. The main action at this point in the story is Yuan's life in America.

The story is most often seen through Yuan's perceptions and is colored by his biases. However, the book is written in third person omniscient point of view which allows the author to act as an all-knowing narrator offering insight into the main characters' thoughts and feelings as they interact. This author juggles these elements with clarity and instills a link between the reader and character. As Wang Yuan struggles to find his place in the world, the reader not only knows what he is saying and doing, but also has an understanding of the ancient Chinese culture which influences his actions and words. As the revolutionist cause spreads change across the country, Pearl S. Buck presents enough detail to let the reader not only see the contrast between poverty and wealth but to know how the characters feel. The broad scope of third person omniscient point of view allows readers to understand the whole picture. One advantage to using this viewpoint is that anything can be described, because there are no limitations as to what is known. Through this tool, the reality of the relationship between Wang the Tiger and his son Wang Yuan sets the tone for the rest of the story as the reader understands their disagreements carry a deeper meaning than would be understood from a limited POV.

This also allows for the reader to collect knowledge from minor characters like the old hare-lipped servant who offers deeper insights and backstory in his relationship with Wang the Tiger. It is these small bits of information sprinkled throughout the story that help tie together Yuan's quest for inner peace and love because it offers clarity as to how his world functions. Through his lady mother, the reader learns even more of Wang the Tiger as one learns of her forced marriage and how that custom changed both parties. Wang the Tiger hates women, and the lady regrets her daughter never really had a father for he would not even look at Ai-lan because she was a girl. These types of rigid customs are the backdrop to Yuan trying to break free of traditional bondages without swinging so far in the other direction that he finds himself in bondage to the revolutionist cause. It is the journey between the two as he finds his way that holds a reader—one hopes this young man can let go of his anger and rigid expectations, freeing himself to offer his unique gifts, as the narrative moves effortlessly to a satisfying conclusion.

Setting

Pearl S. Buck writes with a steady forward style. She introduces characters and settings through action while presenting backstory through thoughts and dialog. Since the story is written in third person omniscient, there is input from more than one direction, but most of it comes from Wang Yuan's perspective. The author expertly weaves a rural pre-industrial world run by a feudal-like system with war lords and tenants who pay to be protected, side-by-side with the industrialized city life of the coastal city where Yuan learns modern dress, customs and even how to dance. For more than half of the book, the word "China" is not used. Yet it is clear this is where the story takes place as an ancient culture and its customs come into conflict with the new ways reforming the country by force, until the revolutionist reformers become the new war lords in their own way and the former war lords are reduced to poverty.

A thread within the story highlights that Yuan's grandfather rose from poverty to wealth, and hints this possibility exists for everyone. When Yuan returns to the small earthen house where his grandfather once lived, at first he finds a sense of satisfaction and belonging. He enjoys the freedom from his father's control and the simple things like a bread stick wrapped around garlic. However, as the newness wears off, and the villagers' suspicions grow as to his intentions, a clear distinction is drawn between poor and rich as Yuan rides off on his horse like a little general returning to his father's house.

The author shows the hopelessness of poverty with great clarity in scenes when the poor huddle on small house boats, drinking their own filth from the water and begging from passing boats using baskets attached to poles, or when the great "old" city wall casts a shadow across the modern, wide street of the new capital, and there along the base of wall are hovels crowded together to house the poor.

The sights and sounds include a world of the past, where races did not mingle or think of mixing. In America, Yuan experiences racism and prejudice from both sides as he is not always allowed to shop or live where and as he chooses. However, in his own heart also, he looks upon the white race as inferior. Even when he loves a girl, he cannot see past the color of her skin and the thought that she is of different blood. So this setting paints a picture of a time when in America cultural change was needed, while in China we see a picture of social change in the works. There it is a time when women are breaking free of cultural taboos. They are allowed to stop binding their feet, and can get an education and choose whom they wish to marry.

In both the Chinese and American settings, the colors and textures Yuan enjoys in nature are captivating as the author brings landscapes into focus. Yuan love of the land brings these rich details into focus as he sees them from the deck of a boat or the end of a hoe. While the author leaves some detail up to the reader's imagination, there is plenty of description to make the world real enough to feel and smell.

Language and Meaning

Peal S. Buck's narrative storytelling style weaves a first hand sense of Chinese culture and history into her story as the reader enters the world and time of war lords on the decline. A war lord collects money from their tenants in return for their protection. However, the tenants for the most part consist of poor villagers who have little left to give and the war lords are generally hated.

Even in the busy streets of the coastal city, ricksha drivers try to eek out a living by pulling the weight of the rich while hurrying out of the way of the motor vehicles working to replace them. Within these same city streets, Pleasure Houses fill with rich young people living for pleasure. Here they dance and talk with their friends but do not notice the shallowness of their lives.

The term "different blood" is used to express racism. Yuan finds the white foreigners repulsive to look at, and even when he is tempted to fall in love with Mary Wilson because they connect on an intellectual level, he does not find her pretty because of her white skin. When they finally kiss, he pushes her away with thoughts she is of different blood. This kiss ends their relationship.

Arranged marriages are also called forced marriages depending on a person's point of view. These marriages sometimes are political in nature, but the son's parents choose a wife for him and set the wedding day. In general, neither the husband or wife like the arrangement but they honor the tradition out of respect. However, Yuan cannot make himself obey. For to him it is bondage even though many perform their duty and then take on concubines. For this reason he flees his father's home and lives in the coastal city with his half-sister and her mother. This city works as a springboard for the rest of the story. For here he learns to dress in modern Chinese fashion, learns to dance, dress in foreign clothing, joins the revolutionist cause, and gets thrown into jail and sentenced to die. It is from here that he escapes to America with the help of his family's wealth.

In America he continues his education. It is a time when men wear hats, smoke cigarettes and women have already become less modest. However, even here in the land of great wealth, Yuan finds the poor hidden away in the inner city as if the people of this great land are ashamed of them. In his own country of China, the peasant uprising turns into a revolution, a revolution designed to free the common man, but which instead only creates a new government which still represses them.

Upon his return to his homeland, the contrast of the poor and rich is evident along with Yuan's shame of the poor. When he sees his beautiful sister Ai-lan standing in the crowd, he thinks her beauty better represents China. However, he learns she is expecting a premarital baby, which scandalizes those in his family who still hold to traditional ideals, such as his father.

Structure

The plot starts out with Wang Yuan leaving the school of war and coming home wearing the revolutionist uniform of his father's enemies. This invokes the overall theme of a house divided. The revolutionists are comprised of uprising peasants while Yuan and his family belong to the wealthy upper class. Yuan is introduced as a self-serving young man who runs away from home seeking freedom from the bondage of duty to his father. He runs to a simple earthen house where his grandfather lived before he grew wealthy and stays with the tenants living there, much to their dismay. Within days his father finds him and calls him home because he is ill. Yuan wonders if it is a deception but does not want to take a chance something will happen to his father when he is not there. He returns to learn his father has arranged his marriage and Yuan cannot bear the thought of being treated like an animal lent out to stud. He runs away from home seeking freedom from duty and the bondage of a prearranged marriage.

His running takes him to the coastal city where life is busy and the streets are light even at night. The further Yuan gets away from home, the more he is introduced to change. This action introduces background information through his lady mother, his uncle and cousins and even his sister Ai-lan. With the introduction of these new characters the author also introduces conflict, because the more Yuan is introduced to change, the more evident it is he too clings to old traditions and customs of honor like his father. His inner and outer struggles are reflected in his relationships. Although Yuan is steadfast in his ways, his beliefs do not change those around him most often because he does not really get close enough to make a difference. Instead, at the first signs of conflict, he tends to build up a shield of solitude around himself.

The conflict continues to develop and build within each chapter, providing respites of resolution only to send another wave of conflict carrying the plot along as new relationships develop and crumble. Yuan's hopelessness climaxes when he returns home and learns his father is heavily indebted to his uncle because the war lord business is not what it once was due to the rebellion. The money was used to free Yuan from prison and to pay for his education overseas. So after years, Yuan returns home still enslaved to duty—but of a different nature. He accepts this challenge and it is through his willingness to respect that duty that his relationship with his old father is restored, and Mei-ling comes to help him when his father has been tortured and is dying. This brings the plot to resolution as Yuan finds the freedom he longs for in a healed relationship with his father before he dies, and in finding a woman he loves to be his wife.

Quotes

"I knew you would want to kill me—it is your old and only remedy! Kill me, then!" (p. 1).

"In his childish early days Yuan's western tutor had taught him, trained him, plied him with the talk of revolution, of reshaping the nation, until his child's heart was all afire with the meaning of the great brave lovely words," (p. 6).

"He looked at them in scorn and silence and would not speak to them, but rode on as fast as he could, taking a haughty pleasure in his quick horse that kept so easily before their common ones that they must press their poor beasts on and on," (p. 27).

"This weakness in his father struck at the roots of Yuan's anger, so that he felt unusual tears come to his eyes, and if he had dared he would have put his hand out to touch his father except some strange natural shame restrained him," (p. 28).

"For Yuan saw the truth, that these tricks were only weapons his father used; though he had not known it he had used them as a shield, or as men will take a sword and brandish it and never mean to bring it down on any flesh. So those tricks had covered the Tiger's heart, which never had been hard enough nor cruel enough nor merry enough to make of him a truly great lord of war," (p. 29).

"No, his very flesh shrank back from this old man and he loathed his father suddenly because he was not washed or shaven, and because he had let his wine and food dribble down upon his robe. There was not anything about his father that he loved, at least for this moment," (p. 31).

"This was no more than any good father ought to do, and what every son must in reason expect, for any son should accept the wife so chosen for his parents' sake, and wed her and give her child, and then he is free to find his love elsewhere as he will," (p. 32).

"I have waited for this—yes, my comrades told me how they were forced to marriage—and many of them left their homes for this very cause—I used to doubt my own good fortune—but you are like all the others, all these old people who would keep us tied forever—tied through our bodies—forcing us to the women you choose—forcing us to children—well, I will not be tied—I will not have my body used like this to tie my life to yours—I hate you—I have always hated you—I know I hate you—" (p. 33).

"Where the rich were, there were the poor beside them, the beggars and the maimed and the diseased who made much of their woes to gain a little silver. But it was hardly gained, and the silver leaked from the purses of the rich in very small scanty pieces, for usually the rich passed on their way, their noses high and their eyes unseeing," (p. 38).

"I thought I ran because I would not go against my father, but now as I tell it, lady, I see I went partly because I hate the killing my comrades must do some day even in their good cause. I cannot kill—I am not brave, I know," (p. 44).

"I know he has the right to do it—I know the law and customs—but I could not bear it. I cannot—I cannot—I must have my body for my own and free—" (p. 44).

"Almost I understand how sons kill their fathers in these days—not that I could really do it, but I understand the feeling in those with a readier hand than mine," (p. 44).

"And I will beg him to let you free from this marriage and let you choose some day for yourself as the young do nowadays, and I will tell him that you are to go to school here and that you are well and that I will care for you, for you are my own son," (p. 55).

"I will never go back again, not even to see him, if I am to be in danger of such slavery," (p. 56).

"But he has the strangest shyness toward all females," (p. 60).

"Look at that great fat lord in that motor car! See how he eats and how he lolls! He is an extortionist—a usurer or a banker or he has a factory. I know the very look. Well, he does not know he sits upon a hidden fire," (p. 76).

"This talk with Meng stirred deep in Yuan a sort of conscience that he wished not to remember. Yuan loved so well the east of these days, the merriment and stir, the rest from duty, the doing only what he liked to do," (p. 76).

"To himself Yuan thought sometimes, 'If all the poor were like this one man, then I might be willing to join Meng's cause and make it mine,'" (p. 86).

"He only knew he liked the hours he put upon the land. They joined him to some root he had, so that he was not, as many others, rootless and floating upon the surface of the life in this city," (p. 88).

"Him the Tiger had reared in every old tradition and in his own added hatred of all women," (p. 90).

"Say nothing angry, but do as you please. You need not go home again," (p. 110).

"Now he saw why he Tiger was an enemy. For now, to save his country meant to save himself, and now he saw how his father was his enemy, and not could save him if he did not save himself," (p. 111).

"Inside he gathered steadfastly his own self, stubborn and resistant. He, Yuan, son of Wang the Tiger, grandson of Wang Lung would remain himself forever, never lost in any millions of white alien men," (p. 142).

"His native pride, the silent pride of men old before the western world began, began to take its full shape in him. He learned to bear silently a foolish curious stare upon the street; he learned what shops he could enter in that small town to buy his necessities, or to have himself shaved or his hair cut," (p. 150).

"Well young man, all I can say is that I have lived among the poor, like these I have shown, for more than half my life. When you go back to your own country come into the little city in the inland where I live and I will show you all these things," (p. 155).

"Without knowing it he came to despise this race because he wanted to despise them, and yet he could not but envy them their ease and wealth and place and these great buildings and the many inventions they had made and all they had learned of the magic of air and wind and water and lightning," (p. 160).

"Idealism and enthusiasm are not are not the same thing. Enthusiasm may be only physical—the youth and strength of body making the spirit gay. But idealism may live on, though the body be aged or broken, for it is the essential quality of the soul which has it," (p. 180).

"We can do nothing in these days, we old ones, except let the new sweep us on as it will . . . Who can do anything? The country is upset, and anyhow, and there is nothing left to guide us—no rule, no punishment," (p. 227).

"Now here was a strange thing that Yuan found in himself; so long as he could maintain his anger against these white ships and remember how they had fired on his people, and so long as he could remember every evil thing whereby his people had been oppressed by other outer peoples, and these were many, for he had learned in school of evil treaties forced upon the emperors of old by armies sent to ravage and plunder, and even in his lifetime had there been such things, and even in the great city while he been away young lads had been shot down by white guards for crying out their country's cause—so long as he could remember all these wrongs that day, he was happy enough and filled with a sort of fire, and he thought in all he did, while he ate, and while he sat and looked out oer the passing fields and villages, 'I must do something for my country,'" (p. 249).

"Among all the planning there was a new sort of lord of war who planned new armies and new ships of war and new ways of warfare and some day he planned a great new war to show the world his nation was now mighty as any, and this one was Yuan's old tutor, who was afterward his captain, and now general over Meng, to whose army Meng had escaped secretly when Yuan was betrayed to prison" (p. 297).

Topics for Discussion

Although Wang Yuan fears and hates his war lord father, in some ways he is like him. How are the two similar? And what result does this have in Yuan's life after he leaves home?

How does Yuan's interaction with the teacher regarding his seed poem show that Sheng and Meng stand as a house divided? And what does it reveal about Yuan's place in the matter?

What part does Ai-lan play in helping Yuan make the transition to city life? List at least three ways and back them up with how he changes inwardly as well as outwardly.

What experiences tie Yuan with the poor in a good way? List at least three circumstances and why they are good.

When Yuan and Sheng reach the foreign country, Yuan finds it beautiful, However, the following day something changes his mind, and an inner hatred for the country and its people begins to brood. What causes this and what subsequent events fuel this hatred and make it grow? List at least three reasons.

Following the overall theme of the book, "A House Divided," in a paragraph or more explain how the following houses are divided: 1) that of Wang the Tiger and his son Wang Yuan; 2) that of the brothers Sheng and Meng; 3) that of Ai-lan and her mother; and 4) that of Mary and her old parents

During Wang Yuan's years in America, he makes few friends and usually stays aloof and keeps to himself. Who befriends him and does this friendship continue or does it end as so many others in Yuan's life? Explain.

What is it that first attracts Yuan to Mei-ling? How, in his estimation, is she different than the other women he has met?

Examine Yuan's inner conflict as represented in his relationships with Sheng and Meng. What do each of the cousins represent, and how do Yuan's own ideologies line up with theirs?

Wang the Tiger hates women, and following the "like father, like son" theme, list at least three women Wang Yuan meets and how he comes to hate them.