

# **Pao Study Guide**

**Pao by Kerry Young**

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## Plot Summary

This historically-based novel is the story of Pao, a Chinese immigrant to Jamaica who, after taking over his mentor's organized crime syndicate and struggling for decades to achieve and maintain a position of status, comes to realize that there are other forms of status that are more important. As Pao comes to a place of redemption for his career-long personal and professional misdemeanors, the narrative also explores themes related to the nature of oppression and the relationship between the inner and outer life.

The novel begins with Pao's first person narration of how he first became involved with a beautiful prostitute named Gloria who, shortly after they meet, becomes his lover and, later in the narrative, the mother of his child, Esther. In spite of his feelings for her, however, Pao is advised by his mentor, Zhang, to become involved with a woman of more social and economic status. As a result, Pao seeks out such a woman and eventually finds her in the form of Fay Wong, the half-black daughter of a wealthy Chinese businessman. The two marry, and over the years their relationship, while never consistently affectionate, becomes openly acrimonious and confrontational, to the point where Fay eventually kidnaps their two children (son Xiuquan, whom she calls Karl, and daughter Mui) to England.

After a couple of chapters of expository flashback in which Pao's narration describes how he came to be in Jamaica, made lifelong friends, and became first Zhang's lieutenant and then successor, a series of episodic chapters traces Pao's career over a period of forty years. He becomes more deeply involved in prostitution (providing protection for Gloria's operation and several other houses) and in extortion (making sure the local police are on his side by, in turn, making sure that he knows some of their potentially career-ending secrets). He also offers assistance to several people who come to him for help, particularly a pair of young women in trouble - twelve year old Merleen Chin, made pregnant by a cavalier British soldier and, several years later, teenager Marguerite Lopez, manipulated into a lesbian relationship and made witness to a murder by that same soldier's daughter.

All these relationships and Pao's other criminal activities play out against a backdrop of social, political and economic unrest in Jamaica, as various exploiters move in and out of the country - the British and the Americans, corporations and private businessmen. The whole while Pao, following the teachings of Zhang who, alongside Pao's murdered father, was a fighter in the People's Revolution in China throughout his life, fought for freedom from oppression of all sorts, including racism. Early in life, Pao comes to believe that his criminal activities are themselves an act of revolution, undermining the power of the oppressors and taking money from them that would otherwise go into their bank accounts and, with that money, doing what he can to ensure the people he protects are taken care of. It's only later in life, when Pao is reflecting on what his life has been, that Gloria makes him realize that in his own way, Pao has been as much of an oppressor as the people he claims to have been fighting. Pao, for his part, resolves to live a life more attuned to his new personal values of compassion and respect.



Throughout the narrative, Pao and Zhang both make reference to the teachings of *The Art of War*, a centuries-old book exploring and explaining military tactics written by the warrior Sun Tzu. Both Pao and Zhang use lessons gleaned from the book as guidelines for choices they find themselves forced to make when faced with both personal and "professional" obstacles. Both men, as noted above, see themselves as warriors in the cause of freedom for the exploited, but by the novel's conclusion, Pao has come to realize that a fully, freely lived life cannot and ought not to be lived on military terms, but on terms that recognize and honor respect, compassion, and full individual freedom.



# Part 1, Chapters 1 and 2

## Part 1, Chapters 1 and 2 Summary

"1945"

First person narrator Pao is visited by a beautiful woman named Gloria after her sister Marcia is assaulted by a white sailor. After Gloria goes, Pao's friend Hampton observes that she and her sister are probably both prostitutes. Pao visits Marcia anyway and discovers how badly she's been beaten. Shortly afterwards, Gloria visits again, thanking Pao for what he did, narration revealing that the sailor has been put in the hospital after a "conversation" with Hampton. She asks Pao to protect her and her business - she and four other girls, including Marcia, "work" out of a house in East Kingston. Although Pao agrees, his uncle / mentor Zhang (who became Pao's surrogate father figure after his real father was murdered while resisting French and British military incursions) warns him against getting involved. Pao is too interested in Gloria to back down, spending more and more time at Gloria's house, to the point that another friend, Finlay, warns him about marrying her (see "Quotes," p. 6). For a while Pao backs off, causing Gloria to challenge him to change his views of her (see "Quotes," p. 7) and give him an ultimatum - spend the night with her, or resign himself to a purely business relationship. Pao thinks about what Zhang, Finlay and Hampton have all said ... and then spends the night with her.

"Moral Influence"

In response to Zhang's insistence that Pao get involved with a better sort of woman, Pao goes to a garden party where he sees the beautiful and wealthy Fay Wong, daughter of successful businessman Henry Wong. Pao arranges for Wong's pocket to be picked so he can go to the Wong house under the pretext of returning his wallet. When he visits the house, he is met by Wong's black wife Cicely who, over several weeks of Pao's visits, tells him that she married a Chinese man, and wants her daughters to marry Chinese men as well, because they are much harder working than Africans. When Pao gets up the nerve to ask Cicely whether he can marry Fay, she says yes, adding that she and Wong have already discussed it. When he tells Gloria, he is surprised to learn that she already knows, and is hurt when she cuts him out of her life. After a lavish wedding, Pao takes Fay on a honeymoon to Ocho Rios. Over the few days of their first real time together, Pao watches Fay constantly, becoming entranced as much by her easy way with people (see "Quotes," p. 16 - 1, 2) as by her beauty.

## Part 1, Chapters 1 and 2 Analysis

These first two chapters introduce several important elements. Among the most important is Pao's relationship with Gloria which continues, on and off, over the course of the narrative and which ultimately plays a fundamental role in both triggering and



manifesting his internal, thematically relevant transformation (see "Characters - Pao," "Themes - Redemption" and "Style - Point of View"). Another important element, introduced in the somewhat mysterious and oblique narration of what happens to the sailor, is the portrayal of what Pao actually does - in essence, arrange for people's troubles to be resolved or, as becomes clear later when the narrative portrays him as accepting money to ensure people's protection, prevent troubles from happening. In short, the incident with Gloria and the sailor is a foreshadowing of several other instances in the novel when "Uncle" Pao is visited by someone (Merleen Chin - Chapter 16) or takes on the case of someone (Marguerite Lopez - Chapter 18) who needs help of the sort only he can provide. Pao, the novel hints at here and later makes completely clear, is heavily into organized crime, "uncle" being a term similar in connotation to that of "godfather" within the Italian mafia (see "Objects/Places").

Other important elements include the introduction of the concept of "The Revolution" (see "Objects/Places"), an element of Pao's experience that, over the course of the narrative, plays a fundamental role in defining his personal and business philosophy. Then there is the introduction of the Wong family, particularly Fay (an essentially important character throughout the narrative) and her mother Cicely. Cicely's racist and oppressive attitudes are an intriguing manifestation of another of the novel's thematic interests, an exploration of various types of oppression (see "Themes - Oppression").

Finally, there is the action in Ocho Rios, which is important for two reasons. First, the brief intimacy Pao shares with Fay here is, for the most part, the only intimacy they truly share. There is an exception in Chapter 10 ("Compassion"), in which Fay reveals her vulnerability, both scenes foreshadowing the moment in Chapter 21 ("Death Ground") in which Pao catches a further glimpse of Fay's vulnerability. The second reason the Ocho Rios scenes here are important is that they also foreshadow scenes at the end of the narrative in which Pao once again has intimacy there; only on that occasion it's with Gloria, the woman he should have married, or at least committed to, in the first place.



## Part 2, Chapters 3 through 8

### Part 2, Chapters 3 through 8 Summary

#### "Command"

Pao describes how he, his mother (Ma) and his brother (Xiuquan) were brought to Jamaica by Zhang following the death of their father as well as how Zhang, his father's best friend, introduced them to western clothes and western traditions and brought them into his business. Xiuquan warns Pao against getting too involved with Zhang, whom Xiuquan describes as a "two bit hoodlum," and also against getting too involved with new friends Hampton and Finlay, black Jamaicans whom Xiuquan says can't be trusted. In spite of his brother's warnings, Pao enjoys the status that comes from being associated with Zhang, but also heeds Zhang's warning about becoming too proud of himself.

#### "Doctrine"

Zhang tells Pao that the struggle of Jamaicans fighting against the oppression of white colonizers is the same as the political fight fought by Pao's father against British oppression in China. Meanwhile, Hampton tells how Zhang gained influence and leadership in Chinatown, and that everyone knows that when Zhang retires, Pao is going to take his place as the "protector" of Chinatown. Their conversation is interrupted when they see a white man abuse, and prepare to attack, a black street vendor (see "Quotes," p. 33). Later, when Pao tells Zhang what happened, expecting him to be proud, Zhang tells him that it is not through the acts of individuals that the world will change, but by group action by the masses (see "Quotes," p. 34).

#### "Appreciation of the Situation"

Pao describes how the breakout of World War II brought an influx of American sailors into Jamaica. Pao first tries to convince Zhang to get involved in the suddenly thriving business of prostitution, which seems to spring up almost overnight with the sudden influx of American money and desire, but Zhang reminds him that prostitution is "imperialism, and the exploitation of the peasant and the subjugation of women." Pao then investigates other possibilities for getting some American money, referencing Sun Tzu's comment (from "The Art of War" - see "Objects/Places") and, with the help of Finlay, negotiates a black market arrangement with an American marine, an arrangement sustained through threats of violence.

#### "Advantages of the Ground"

Pao asks Xiuquan to help him hijack a truck of goods being prepared by the American Marine, but he refuses, saying angrily he wants to live an honest life. The next day, however, when Pao sets off to do the job, Xiuquan follows him, saying he's coming along because Pao is his brother. The first phase of the hijacking goes smoothly, but



when a police officer appears, Xiuquan takes off. Pao offers the policeman a share of the stolen goods, and he accepts. Shortly afterwards, Xiuquan announces his intention to move to America. As he packs, he tells the very upset Ma and the angry Pao that he (Xiuquan) is sick of hearing all the stories about the revolution, about the sacrifice of his father, and about the status the family's association with Zhang is bringing them.

#### "Responsibility"

Pao comments that as he watched Xiuquan's ship leave, he realized he would never leave Jamaica. "I was committed to her," Pao comments in narration, "for good or bad, rich or poor, in sickness and in health." He recalls being told how Zhang had been invited to Jamaica to lead the resistance against the white oppressors and how Zhang and Pao's father had been comrades in the similar struggle against oppression in China. After learning that Pao's father had been killed in that struggle, Pao recalls, Zhang arranged for Pao, his mother and brother to be brought over to Jamaica. It was after being told that story, Pao comments in narration, that he decided to devote himself to Zhang completely (see "Quotes," p. 51).

#### "Confirmation on the Ground"

Within a year of Xiuquan's departure, Zhang tells Pao he wants to retire. Over the next couple of years, Zhang gradually transfers power so that by the end of the war in 1945, when Pao is twenty-one, he has taken over Zhang's control of Chinatown. It was then, he says, that Gloria came into his life.

## Part 2, Chapters 3 through 8 Analysis

This section of the narrative is, in literary terms, a flashback, a detour from the main (present day) narrative line into the past. Flashbacks are generally used as they are here, to reveal important events in the past that led to circumstances of the present. In this case, those events include the death of Pao's father, which is held up by Zhang as the ultimate, and most profound, example of the sacrifices necessary to maintain the Revolution - see "Objects/Places" - and enable it to ultimately, inevitably succeed. Other important events portrayed here include the development of the friendship between Pao, Hampton and Finlay (who become, in organized crime terms, Pao's "deputies" or "lieutenants") and the arrival of both American soldiers and American money. This foreshadows events later in the narrative (particularly in Chapter 37 - "Contestable Ground"), in which American money and influence come into Jamaica and, in Pao's perspective, reinforce the country's history of being oppressed by outside, mostly white, colonizers. Then there is the brief, but vividly described, confrontation between the white man and the black vendor, an example of the violently humming undercurrent of racism running through and beneath the entire narrative.

Another piece of foreshadowing comes in the reference to Xiuquan running from the police, an incident that foreshadows a similar incident (Chapter 22 - "Truce") in which Pao's son, also named Xiuquan, also runs from the police. Pao's reaction is the same





both times - initial humiliation, and then manipulation of the situation (according to the principles taught by Sun Tzu) to his advantage.

Finally, there is the introduction of quotes from The Art of War (see "Objects/Places") and ancient warrior/writer Sun Tzu (see "Characters"). Similar quotes appear throughout the narrative, injected by narrator Pao as explanation of and/or motivation for the choices he makes. See "Topics for Discussion - Examine and consider the events of each chapter ...".



## Part 3, Chapters 9, 10 and 11

### Part 3, Chapters 9, 10 and 11 Summary

#### "Humanity"

Back in the present day narrative, Pao has an uncomfortable confrontation with Gloria on the subject of Fay, in which he learns that Gloria knew about his wedding plans before he told her. Gloria tells him she had hoped that their time together meant that he cared for her as something more than just a source of income. Pao tries to explain that he wanted Gloria to not be dependent on him, but Gloria explains that she didn't want to be dependent, she just wanted to be secure. She also says he spends too much time listening to what other people tell him. After he leaves and joins Hampton, who has been waiting for him, Pao walks into town. As they near its outskirts, he and Hampton encounter a young man performing oral sex on an older man.

#### "Compassion"

Pao describes how, on the last evening of their honeymoon, Fay begins to weep and, after accepting Pao's offer of a handkerchief, the two of them are in each other's arms, and Fay is crying even harder (see "Quotes," p. 62/3). Fay's tears continue when Pao takes her to his home on Matthews Lane. Eventually, Pao asks her what's wrong, and she confesses that she knows he only married her because his father is who he is, and that she believes their marriage is her mother's punishment "for always being too much of one thing and never enough of another." For his part, Pao tells her that he wants to help her, help THEM, create a life for themselves away from the influence of her mother. The next day, he is happy to discover that she's brought some fresh flowers into their home.

#### "Weather"

Pao discovers that a new police officer, Sergeant Brown, is being posted to the area. Pao and Hampton plan to get to know him, Pao again quoting Sun Tzu, who comments in *The Art of War* that it's important to plan "military operations" with awareness of the weather. Later, Pao and Hampton recognize Brown as the older man they saw in the alleyway (see Chapter 9, "Humanity" above), and Pao makes certain, when he and Brown meet each other, to make sure they recognize each other (see "Quotes," p. 67). He and Hampton then arrange for Hampton's young nephew Milton to enter the business and keep an eye on Brown.

### Part 3, Chapters 9, 10 and 11 Analysis

Chapter 9 is another brief flashback, this one to the weeks before Pao's wedding to Fay. It's interesting to consider the events described in this chapter in the light of what the narrative later reveals about Gloria's life - specifically, the implication in Chapter 39



("Desolate Ground") that Gloria had been Henry Wong's long term mistress. When this is taken into consideration, it's possible to see Gloria's comments in this chapter as containing the seeds of that relationship - in other words, when she doesn't get the security she wants from Pao, she seeks and obtains it from Henry Wong.

It's also enlightening to consider the events of Chapter 9 in relation to those of Chapter 10, in which Pao offers Fay the compassion that he doesn't seem able, or willing, to offer Gloria. What the narrative portrays here is, essentially, the beginning of Pao's journey of transformation - in short, his essential self-centeredness. He is interested in cultivating his relationship with Fay only because of the status, financial and social, that he gains from being associated with her and her family. There is the strong sense, in fact, that his interest in her arises solely from his search for vulnerabilities he can use and manipulate. This sense is reinforced by the incidents involving Sergeant Brown which bracket the scene with Fay - in the same way as Pao clearly intends to exploit Brown, he just as clearly is already exploiting Fay. Pao is, in short, and without intending to be, as much of an oppressor and exploiter as those he so vehemently opposes (i.e. the British, and later the Americans). Here the narrative creates and develops the parallel between the personal story of Pao and the setting/context in which that story unfolds (see "Style - Setting").



## Part 3, Chapters 12, 13 and 14

### Part 3, Chapters 12, 13 and 14 Summary

#### "The Employment of Secret Agents"

Pao and Brown meet at a local bar, the two men confronting each other with their knowledge of each other and coming to an arrangement to keep each others' activities quiet. Meanwhile, Fay's unhappiness leads Pao to buy her a ring, taking it to her at her parents' place after she again flees Matthews Lane. When he discovers that Fay has gone out with her sister Daphne in order to, according to the maid Ethyl, celebrate Fay's pregnancy, a stunned Pao accepts the drinks Ethyl offers him, meeting the tired Henry Wong when he comes home and accepting his apology for Fay being so spoiled (see "Quotes," p. 75). The next day, Pao and Fay argue, with Fay throwing the ring away and revealing that she knows about his criminal activities and his relationship with Gloria. That night, Pao is visited by Ethyl, who returns the ring and accepts his offer to help her pay for secretarial college in exchange for telling him what is going on in the Wong house. Again, Pao quotes Sun Tzu, who comments on the value and necessity of "secret agents."

#### "Offensive Strategy"

When he takes the ring to Gloria, thinking it will go nicely with a necklace she also has, Pao is surprised to learn that she too is pregnant with his baby, and moves her into a nice house in the suburbs. Meanwhile, Ethyl tells Pao of a huge fight between Fay and Cicely which started over Fay's relationship with a young Catholic priest, Father Kealey. Pao visits Kealey and introduces himself, determined that Kealey know him as he is and not just as Fay describes him. Pao also spends more and more time at the Wong house, continuing to make friends with Cicely, Fay's plain younger sister Daphne, and the youngest child Kenneth who, much to Pao's irritation, continually asks to be brought into Pao's business. Meanwhile Fay has her baby, which the family names Xiuquan and she names Karl, and immediately seems much happier, actually developing a friendship with Ma. The chapter concludes with Pao's comment that, in making friends with all Fay's friends and allies, he is following the lead of Sun Tzu, who advocates the disruption of an enemy's alliances (see "Quotes," p. 88).

"Deception" This chapter begins with a description of Jamaican life in the 1950's - how the government allowed large investments from foreign countries and how white celebrities began to use Jamaica as a playground, all of it leading, Pao comments, to the sense that Jamaica was once again being exploited. That doesn't stop him from going into business with Henry Wong and making a profit off of all the white visitors. Meanwhile, Fay becomes pregnant a second time after Pao forces her to have sex (see "Quotes", p. 91). When the baby is born, Pao names it Mui, which translates as "little sister". Fay wants nothing to do with her. Shortly afterwards, Pao saves Fay's doctor, Morrison, from being run over in the middle of a busy street - Morrison, it seems, was



trying to be killed, and confesses to Pao that he (Morrison) has been unable to give his wife the child she is desperate to have. Pao arranges for Morrison to be investigated, discovering that he has sizable gambling debts, many of which are held by a thug named DeFreitas. With the help of Zhang (who advises him to follow the lead of Sun Tzu and "subdue the enemy without fighting") and Brown, Pao enacts a plan that will see him take over the debts in exchange for Morrison's free medical services - to Gloria and her child, to Fay and hers, and to Gloria's prostitutes.

## Part 3, Chapters 12, 13 and 14 Analysis

This section introduces several new and important relationships (Morrison, Pao's children, Kealey, Kenneth and Daphne Wong, de Freitas) and develops several others (Pao's connections with Ethyl, Cicely, Brown). It's important to note that at this point in the novel, all these relationships exist because Pao sees them as opportunities for exploitation, each individual having something that he wants - access to power, to money, to information. In juxtaposing the initiation and/or development of these sorts of relationships with commentary on the exploitation that seems to be moving into Jamaica, the narrative reinforces the idea that there is an important thematic connection between Pao's personal story and that of what external forces are doing to his adopted country. It's important to note, however, that in the same way as Jamaica, over the course of the narrative, moves into a place of freedom from that exploitation, Pao moves to a place of freedom from the NEED to exploit. In other words, over the course of the narrative, many of the relationships portrayed here as exploitative (particularly those Pao has with Keeley, Mui, Ethyl and Cicely) evolve into something based more on mutual respect, recognition of need, vulnerability and compassion. People come to recognize each other for who they are, rather than what they can get from one another.

The appearances here of many characters also foreshadow the important roles they play later in the narrative. Kealey's growing (and controversial) relationships with both Fay and Pao, Kenneth's persistent desire to associate himself with Pao and his business, the threat of De Freitas Morrison's pathetic vulnerability all foreshadow incidents in which Pao is first challenged and eventually transformed by his encounters with each / all of these characters. That transformation is further foreshadowed by the with the hopeful promise indicated by the presence of Pao's children, promise it takes Pao years to recognize, realize, and fulfill.



## Part 4, Chapters 14 through 17

### Part 4, Chapters 14 through 17 Summary

#### "Force"

Pao quotes Sun Tzu, who advocates the use of "large and small forces" in battle. After a visit to Morrison (who accepts Pao's offer with relief), Pao visits Father Kealey. He contemplates Kealey's good looks, wonders about the exact nature of the relationship between Kealey and Fay and, at the same time, wonders why he (Pao) always feels so peaceful and so right when spending time with him (see "Quotes," p. 102). Later, Finlay tells Pao that a man (Samuels) formerly affiliated with De Freitas wants to come work for him, adding that he doesn't think the man is trustworthy. When he cannot offer a good reason, Pao says the man, Samuels, deserves a chance.

#### "The Modifying of Tactics" 1961.

In the middle of Jamaica's celebrations of political independence from Britain, Pao is visited by twelve year old Merleen, the granddaughter of elderly businessman Mr. Chin who asks for help with a problem. The next day Morrison examines her and reveals that she is pregnant, but refuses to give her an abortion because it's against the law, instead coming up with a plan to have the baby adopted by him and his wife. The reluctant Pao is persuaded by Merleen, who wants her baby to have a chance to live. Morrison also discovers the identity of the British soldier who got Merleen pregnant, a Captain Meacham. Pao meets Meacham and demands money from him, feeling when they meet that the soldier's attitude towards both him and Merleen is just another example of British imperialism. Pao enlists the reluctant help of Zhang, who convinces Mr. Chin to agree to the plan that will see Merleen live with the Morrisons until the baby is born, and the Morrisons adopt it.

#### "Favorable and Unfavorable Factors"

Pao describes the celebrations taking place all over Jamaica once independence is declared, commenting that he had taken Mui down with him into the streets because Fay rarely takes her anywhere (although she always takes Karl / Xiuquan). Shortly afterwards, Pao and Gloria get into an argument over where their daughter, Esther, should go to school, with Gloria insisting that sending her to an upper class Catholic school is the only way she knows how to give her daughter a better life. Pao eventually agrees, but becomes worried that he's going to run out of money, and orders Hampton to construct a safe underneath the shower at Matthews Lane.

#### "Opportunity"

Several years later, Morrison tells Pao that Meacham is back in town and needs his help. After a quick conversation, Pao gets in his car and goes to the parking lot of a nightclub, where he finds and takes a bloody knife. He contacts Brown and arranges to



meet him later, then goes to the house where Meacham is hiding with his daughter Helena. Conversation reveals that the white Helena has killed a couple of black youths who, she says, attacked her. She had the knife with her, she says, because she had heard the nightclub she was going to was a dangerous place. After burning the clothes Helena had been wearing and arranging for her car to be cleaned, Pao meets with a waitress, Marguerite Lopez, who, he has learned, witnessed the crime. There he meets Brown, and both of them learn from Marguerite that she and Helena were in the back seat of Helena's car having sex when they were startled by the two boys. Helena, Marguerite says, got out of the car with the knife and started slashing it around, killing the two boys. Pao realizes that the waitress, if word gets out, would be vilified as both a murderer and a lesbian, and orders the nervous Brown to make sure she gets off the island. The next day, after putting the knife in the new safe, Pao recalls all his expenses and all the people he has to take care of (now including Marguerite Lopez). He insists that Meacham not only pay a fee for Pao's keeping Helena out of trouble, but that he also enter into a "regular" financial arrangement.

## Part 4, Chapters 14 through 17 Analysis

An interesting aspect of the book's narrative style is the author's practice of describing a set of events and/or circumstances and only later explaining how those circumstances came into being. The technique is first employed in Chapter 1, where the author portrays Gloria's relief at Pao's handling of the situation of the soldier before defining what that handling actually was. The same technique is employed here, with the content of Pao's initial conversation with Morrison going without description in the moment but revealed through action. In other words, Pao's visit to the nightclub and his discovery of the knife are clearly prompted by information he receives from Morrison, itself passed on as the result of Morrison's conversation with Meacham, who presumably told him everything that Helena told him. The technique works well to draw the reader into the narrative, raising questions that are quickly answered and both answers AND questions leading to both action and developments in Pao's character and relationships.

Meanwhile, at this point it's important to note an important, but unstated, societal component of the story - specifically, the attitudes portrayed towards homosexuality as portrayed in the experiences of Brown and Marguerite Lopez. In the real world upon which circumstances of this novel are based, Jamaica has a reputation for being a quite conservative culture, particularly when it comes to same sex relationships and especially such relationships between two men. Homosexuals are often exposed to verbal, emotional and physical violence, to the point where their lives are often threatened. Fear of such violence can therefore be seen as a motivating factor in the actions of Brown (i.e. in agreeing to become involved with Pao and his operation) and in the attitudes towards Lopez who, in Pao's perception, is likely to be subject to even more violence and suffering if word of what she was doing with Helena gets out. The interesting thing here is that Pao doesn't seem to share the general Jamaican revulsion towards homosexuality - granted, he exploits Brown, but the novel clearly points out that he accepts Brown's orientation. Meanwhile, he sees Marguerite as having been victimized, and as being in danger of being even more so. He makes no judgment

whatsoever about her orientation. In other words, there is the sense that Pao's attitudes towards Brown and Lopez are an early manifestation of the compassion and openness he reveals in the chapter's final moments ... a foreshadowing of his eventual transformation. His treatment of Merleen is a similar foreshadowing, as is his determination to help Esther.

Other important foreshadowing includes the reference to De Freitas (which foreshadows both the further difficulties the character brings into Pao's life and the eventual favor Pao asks him to do his family in Chapter 40, "Terrain") and to Samuels (whose death at the hands of De Freitas plays an important role in the action of Chapter 20 and 21). Then there is the reference to Fay's relationship with the children, which foreshadows her eventual kidnapping of them in Chapter 24, "Employing Troops"). Finally, there are the references to the knife and the safe. These both foreshadow events later in the narrative when Pao uses the knife as leverage to get Meacham to help him out of a pair of difficult situations (see Chapter 35, "The Burning of Personnel").





## Part 5, Chapters 19 through 22

### Part 5, Chapters 19 through 22 Summary

#### "Reputation"

Shortly after the Meacham incident, Mrs. Morrison asks Pao to be the godfather to Merleen's baby, now adopted by her and Morrison. The shocked Pao consults with Kealey, who suggests that perhaps God is trying to bring something better out in him. During their conversation, Kealey accidentally reveals that Fay has been bringing both Mui and Karl (Xiuquan) to church, and that they've been baptized and confirmed. Pao accuses Kealey of betraying his trust, but Kealey again tells him to think about whether God might be calling him to live a better life, adding that Pao can still be a good person, even though he does bad deeds.

#### "Maneuver"

One day, Pao is angered to hear Samuels (see Chapter 15, "Force") discuss the so-called "Chinese riots," which Pao forcefully says were the Chinese response to being oppressed. He also tells Samuels to stop running guns for DeFreitas, whom Pao thinks is starting to move into his territory. Afterwards, Pao considers the teachings of Sun Tzu about out-maneuvering the enemy and about apparent humility being a powerful weapon. Pao and his men then make themselves friendly, available, and indispensable to the people of Chinatown, buying up DeFreitas' guns and ensuring that Samuels looks bad. Eventually, Pao asks to meet DeFreitas and, returning the guns while pretending humility, asks that his community (Chinatown) just be left alone. In return, DeFreitas demands Samuels. Pao agrees. Later, on his way home, Pao decides that Samuels' duties in the organization are to be given to Kenneth Wong (Fay's younger brother), and also realizes that he has reached a turning point in his life (see "Quotes," p. 138).

"Death Ground" Samuels is murdered. His widow comes to Pao, and because he feels some responsibility for his death, he helps her out. Shortly afterwards, Fay accuses him of being involved in Samuels' death, and prepares to leave. The confrontation, during which Fay says she married him to get away from her controlling mother, escalates into a physical fight, witnessed by the children, Ma and Hampton. In the middle of the fight, Pao catches a glimpse of the tenderness that once existed between them, but it is short lived - Fay promises to leave and take the children. Pao tells her she can do what she wants, but the children are staying. Fay goes, promising that the situation isn't over.

"Truce" In the aftermath of the fight with Fay, Pao arranges for Xiuquan and Mui to "accidentally" meet Gloria. The meeting does not go well - Xiuquan is rude, and later tells Pao that he has heard all about Gloria from Fay. Pao then talks with Kealey (now referred to in narration as Michael), who tries to help Pao come to terms with his responsibility for the situation with Fay. In response, Pao hints that Kealey (who continues to spend a great deal of time with Fay) is interested in Mui for reasons



beyond his being her priest. Kealey blushes, and the conversation ends. Then, Ethyl reports that Fay, who is now living at home, and Cicely are arguing constantly, that Cecily continues to hint that Fay and Kealey are having a sinful relationship, and that Fay is out every evening. She also reports that Fay has an older brother who left home because of Cicely's controlling ways, and that Fay is planning to take the children and join him in England. That night, Pao discovers that Xiuquan has been arrested after running from a pair of police constables. As he recalls that Xiuquan's namesake, Pao's brother, did the same thing (see Chapter 6, "Advantages of the Ground"), Pao arranges for the police to forget about what happened. The chapter concludes with a reference to Sun Tzu's comment warning about being aware of plotting going on behind an apparent truce.

## Part 5, Chapters 19 through 22 Analysis

In several ways, this section (which, perhaps not coincidentally, is in the physical middle of the novel) marks several turning points for Pao. He himself, in fact, suggests exactly that at the end of Chapter 20 (again, see "Quotes," p. 138). It seems, to him and to the reader, that he is gradually becoming aware that his past way of doing things, and his past beliefs about WHY he does what he does, are no longer serving him. They are starting to feel empty to him, and he is starting to look for more and deeper meaning. Granted, he still is taking advantage of his spies, defending his territory, and treating Fay and his children more as possessions than as a family. He also is still manipulating the police (his actions towards the two constables will, however, come back to haunt him), and makes an attempt at emotional blackmail when he hints that there is something untoward going on between Kealey, Fay and Mui (the implication here is not that Kealey is abusing Mui but that he is her father). All that said, though, and as Kealey points out, there seems to be something awakening in Pao, something that he is beginning to be moved by, something new defining his actions. Something is shifting, a process that escalates and intensifies over the course of the narrative and reaches its climax in the work's final chapters. There are smaller hints of this as well - Pao's referral to Kealey in narration as Michael rather than Kealey, for example, suggests that he is beginning to see beyond his perceptions and prejudices and into something more personal.

Other important elements in this section include the battle with Fay, Kealey's comments about her leaving, and the appearance of the two constables, all of which foreshadow events in Chapter 24, "Employing Troops," in which Fay kidnaps the children. The appearance of the constables also foreshadows events in Chapter 33, "Marches," in which the constables are revealed to have allied themselves with a businessman who wants to take control of Pao's operation. Then there is the latest confrontation between Pao and De Freitas. This is an ongoing rivalry that lingers, unresolved, in the background of Pao's life and story until its final stages, in which the two enemies make one final arrangement that, at least in Pao's mind, will lead to peace which, in the final chapter, it does.



## Part 6, Chapters 23 through 26

### Part 6, Chapters 23 through 26 Summary

"Waging War" 1965.

There are near-constant riots in Kingston, riots that Pao continues to blame on the oppression of the poor and the working classes. Meanwhile, he is having trouble with the arrogant Kenneth Wong who, after Pao lets him go, allies with De Freitas. Henry Wong has what turns out to be a fatal stroke, but remains alive long enough to tell Pao that he wants Pao to have control of his business. When Pao attends Wong's funeral (conducted by Kealey, now a bishop), he is surprised to find himself moved and beating his breast in time to the "mea culpa's" of the confession. In the aftermath of the funeral, Pao visits Cicely, who tells him she knows of Wong's wishes, but that she wants part of the business to go to Kenneth in the hope that he will settle down. She asks for Pao's help, saying that if he succeeds he can have half the income from the business. Pao realizes what a shrewd businesswoman she is.

"Employing Troops"

Kenneth reluctantly agrees to Cicely's arrangement, but doesn't put any effort into learning his father's business, continuing to work for De Freitas. He is eventually killed in one of the ongoing, escalating gun battles that continue to rage throughout Kingston. Fay blames Pao, but Cicely reassures him that it wasn't his fault. A short time later, and with the assistance of the two constables who arrested Xiuquan (Chapter 22, "Truce"), Fay kidnaps Mui and Xiuquan, taking them with her to England. Pao is furious and threatens violence against everyone involved, but is advised that he can't. Zhang quotes Sun Tzu, who states that "there are some roads not to follow ... and some ground which should not be contested."

"Human Relations"

Ethyl comes to Pao and confesses that she overheard part of a telephone conversation that she later realized had something to do with the kidnapping. Pao assures her that she has nothing to feel guilty about, commenting in narration that Sun Tzu teaches the importance of having good relations with others. A short time later, Pao visits Kealey, who confesses that he enabled a telephone conversation between Fay and Xiuquan that led to the kidnapping, and that he has long loved Fay and considered going away with her. Pao realizes the two of them have feelings in common and embraces him (see "Quotes," p. 175). Eventually, Pao visits Gloria, who encourages him to speak of his intense sense of loss and his grief now that "what might have been is never going to be."

"Sincerity"



Pao describes how the people who live at the house in Matthews Lane (himself, Ma, Hampton, Zhang) all feel and experience the loss of the children deeply, Pao in particular worrying over whether he should have spent more time with them. Zhang tells him that Xiuquan was troubled and uncertain, spending more time at Lady Musgrave Road with Cicely and the Wongs, and that probably nothing that Pao might have done could have changed his son's nature. He adds, however, that Mui was full of questions and thoughts, always asking about the revolution and the reasons for it coming into being ... and that Zhang is certain that Mui wanted to be with him.

## Part 6, Chapters 23 through 26 Analysis

If the events of the previous section constituted a positive turning point for Pao (i.e. the emergence of awareness that there is a way to have a life more grounded in compassion and connection than that which he has previously lived), this section might be regarded as a negative turning point. In other words, things begin to go seriously wrong for Pao in this section - he is manipulated out of a potentially profitable business by Cicely, but most importantly he loses his children. Both these situations, however, cause Pao to reconsider himself, his ways, and his philosophies even further - they are, in other words, incidents that send him even further along the path that eventually results in his transformation. Good eventually, and perhaps inevitably, comes out of bad; in fact, the narrative doesn't wait to develop this idea, but incorporates a couple of incidents that illustrate the nature of Pao's transformation and its eventual outcome. These are his compassionate, empathetic embrace of Michael Kealey (which admittedly, to some readers, might seem both idealized and somewhat unlikely) and Pao's own emotional release - of his anger, but more importantly of his grief. This last is particularly important, in that it simultaneously foreshadows and enables the more emotionally open, respectful, trusting relationship he develops with Gloria as the novel draws to its conclusion. It could be argued, in fact (or at least seems to be suggested by the work's structure) that the comforting information Zhang offers about Mui is, on some level, a reward for Pao's new and emerging vulnerability - he reveals his love, and is rewarded with information that he himself was loved in return.



# Part 7, Chapters 27 through 30

## Part 7, Chapters 27 through 30 Summary

### "Courage"

Pao quotes Sun Tzu, who says that if a warrior "is not courageous he will be unable to conquer doubts or to create great plans." He then describes his visit to Lady Musgrave Road, where he surprises Cicely with his admission that he misses the children and where he is, in turn, surprised by the revelation that Daphne helped Fay with her plans. Restraining his anger, he asks for an address for the children in England so he can write to them. Daphne refuses, saying she promised Fay she wouldn't give it to him.

### "Resilience"

Pao learns that the two police officers who helped Fay kidnap the children (Chapter 24, "Truce") have been physically beaten for the role in the kidnapping. Later, Pao visits Kealey, who gives him a letter written by Mui in which she asks why Pao hasn't responded to the letter she sent him. Both men realize the letter probably wasn't even mailed, and Kealey agrees to negotiate with Fay for Pao to be able to write to the children. Fay sets several conditions, to which Pao eventually agrees, realizing that the children are safer in England. He writes to Mui explaining what he thinks happened, adding a postscript addressed to his son, whom he calls Karl (see "Quotes," p. 197). After a few weeks, Pao receives a letter from Mui, in which she says she still considers Jamaica her home and asks why he called Karl Karl. Pao writes back saying he did so in the hopes of a new beginning for them all.

### "Resourcefulness"

From 1969 through 1975, Pao takes an interest in the People's National Party (the PNP), its policies reminding him of the policies that led to the revolution in China. At the same time, he's aware that his position in Chinatown is changing - fewer people are buying into his protection plan, his half of the grocery business he inherited from Henry Wong is not providing enough income, and his supporters are becoming restless. He supports the now mature Karl, who is opening a nightclub, and Mui, whom he urges to become a lawyer. He also supports Marguerite Lopez (Chapter 18, "Opportunity") as she opens a cosmetics company based in New York but with an office in Jamaica, using it as a means to make income off the people desperate to take their Jamaican money into the United States. He also regularly puts money in Kealey's collection box, as Kealey has "more and more projects for poor relief."

### "Wisdom"

Zhang falls ill with what the returned George Morrison says is pneumonia and probably more, but Zhang refuses to go to the doctor. As he becomes increasingly frail, Pao moves him into the largest and brightest room in the house, and Ma, to his surprise,



devotes herself to taking care of him, spending hours talking with him (see "Quotes," p. 204). When Zhang finally dies, Pao and Ma follow elaborate funeral rituals, rituals Pao has to undertake himself when Ma dies shortly afterwards. A short time later, Hampton reveals to Pao that he and Ethyl are planning to be married, and that they would like to move in with Pao to keep him company. Pao gratefully accepts the offer (see "Quotes," p. 208) and then reveals that while Hampton and Ethyl are on their honeymoon, he is going to stay with Gloria.

## Part 7, Chapters 27 through 30 Analysis

Pao continues the experience of connecting with his feelings, moving past his need for control and power and coming to recognize that although Fay did the wrong thing, she did it for the right reasons. This insight, in turn, leads to events in the following chapters, in which Pao makes increasing efforts to divest himself of his illegal activities and become a more responsible member of society ... in short, a credit (rather than an embarrassment) to his children and family. As this section indicates, however, he has not yet banished the devious, manipulative, money-hungry side of himself completely - his description of the business he sets up for Marguerite Lopez, while partly motivated by compassion for her situation, is far more self serving. It's important to note, however, that while the establishment of Marguerite's company is here a manifestation of Pao's lingering personal corruption, later in the narrative (Chapter 36, "Precautionary Measure"), his reorganization of the company serves as a manifestation of his transformation ... his further moving away from that side of his life.

Other important elements in this section include the reference to the two constables (which both follows through on their actions in Chapter 22, "Truce" and foreshadows their vengeful reappearance at the side of the venal Sam in Chapter 33, "Marches"), and the death of Zhang. The event itself is important because it leaves Pao with an important sounding board and/or personal resource, but it's the events before his death (i.e. the time he spends with Ma) that are perhaps more important, and for a couple of reasons. The first is the suggestion of a previous relationship, if not romantic or sexually intimate then at least a warm friendship. Ma's husband was, after all, Zhang's best friend. The suggestion here is that once again, Pao was unaware of a human relationship going on right underneath his nose, the discovery of which serves as another trigger or warning for him to enjoy such relationships (rather than merely take advantage of them) while he has the chance. The second reason the Ma/Zhang intimacy is important is that it foreshadows the intimacy that grows up between Pao and Gloria in the novel's final chapters, an intimacy that serves as perhaps the most significant manifestation in the narrative of the emergence of Pao's soul and, therefore, of the narrative's thematic interest in redemption (see "Themes").



## Part 8, Chapters 31 through 35

### Part 8, Chapters 31 through 35 Summary

#### "Wasteful Delay"

As he enjoys his time with Gloria, Pao wonders how his life might have been different if he had married her rather than Fay (see "Quotes," p. 210). When he returns home, he learns that the two constables who arrested Xiuquan and helped Fay with the kidnapping have been drummed out of the force for drug dealing and want jobs with him. He refuses, saying they're untrustworthy and doesn't want to get involved with drugs. He realizes, however, that there is a great deal of money to be made in the drug trade, particularly since the rest of the economy is unstable and becoming more so as the result of escalating political and social unrest. Pao writes to Mui, now close to becoming a lawyer, that Jamaica is not the country she believes it to be, and urges her to stay in England for the time being. Then he receives an invitation from Kealey to attend a ceremony installing him as an archbishop.

#### "Humility"

Pao attends the ceremony, and considers the closeness of his and Kealey's relationship (see "Quotes," p. 216). Shortly afterwards, Esther (his daughter with Gloria) gets married to a man from India, Rajinder. Pao is present for all the preparations, his narration revealing his many contemplations about his relationship with her, how it really only began after Mui was taken from him, and how glad he is that over the last few years, Esther has become comfortable enough with him to call him "daddy." On the big day, he walks her down the aisle, and makes a speech at the reception in which he includes a version of his contemplations, surprised to find himself, Esther and Gloria all weeping. Afterwards, Esther asks him to dance and he does, feeling like he was in "a dream [he] didn't even know [he] had had come true."

#### "Marches"

Shortly after learning that Mui has become a lawyer, Pao meets with Sam, a white American hotel owner and businessman. Sam tells Pao that he wants Pao to influence Merleen Chin (Chapter 16, "The Modifying of Tactics"), who now works in the travel industry, to get him more guests for his hotel, as well as a share of the money-laundering operation Pao runs through Marguerite Lopez' cosmetics company. He then threatens to tell the authorities about all of Pao's illegal operations, and about Kealey's relationship with Fay. Pao merely listens, recalling Sun Tzu's advice to not rush to meet an advancing enemy, and later learns from Brown that the two constables, angry that Pao rejected them, went to Sam with everything they both knew in the hopes that he would do what he has just done.

#### "Control"



Mui tells Pao that she wants to come home - she is being treated badly at the law firm where she works at the apparent instigation of Helena Meacham (see Chapter 18, "Opportunity") after she found out who Mui was. Pao urges Mui to stay as long as she can and to fight, but Mui reminds him that Helena is white and that he once told her white people always stick together. Pao tells her to calm down, recalling Sun Tzu's comment that it's important for a military leader to control the situation to his advantage.

"The Burning of Personnel"

As he considers what to do about both his situations (Sam and Mui), Pao remembers that Meacham had stopped his regular payments years before (see Chapter 18, "Opportunity"). After tracking him down, Pao manipulates Meacham into getting in touch, telling him that he still has the knife Helena used to commit murder, that he wants Meacham to get rid of Sam and the constables, and that he wants Helena to back off her harassment of Mui. Within a few weeks, Sam and the constables have disappeared, and Mui is much happier at work, although still determined to return to Jamaica.

## Part 8, Chapters 31 through 35 Analysis

The old folk saying, "the chickens have come home to roost," comes to mind when considering this section, as does another folk saying - "what goes around comes around." In this section, Pao is both confronted with the negative consequences of his actions and confronts others with the negative consequences of theirs. Interestingly, both sets of circumstances involve the two constables, whose presence proves to be an irritant that Pao, who in many ways is a very patient man, finds he can no longer tolerate. In any case, there is the strong sense about this section that although Pao finds himself on the defensive, his back against a wall, he is nonetheless resourceful enough and clever enough to find a way out, killing two birds (Sam and Helena) with one stone, to use another folk saying.

In terms of the novel's overall thematic considerations, and the relationship between those considerations and Pao's journey of transformation as a character, there is the sense here that Pao is doing the wrong thing for the right reasons - protecting his daughter and preserving his emerging moral and personal integrity. It could be argued, in fact, that that's what he has been doing all along, providing for himself and his loved ones not only in the only way he knows how, but in the only way he sees possible. It's important to remember the book's socio-political subtext here - Pao considers himself to be a member of an oppressed community, a victim of capitalist imperialism struggling to undermine the bigoted, corrupt authority that keeps him and others of the non-white, non-wealthy, non-establishment community under their thumbs. He has indicated throughout his narration not only that he believed he could not legitimately provide for those important to him, but that in making money in the way he did, he was undermining the oppressors, at least to some degree. What Gloria makes him see in the following chapters is something that the reader has known all along - that Pao has, to a significant degree, deluded himself about the nature and motivations for what he has been doing. As the result of Gloria's words, and of other experiences in this section and



throughout the narrative, he comes to see the truth of who he has been and who he wants to become, taking action to make the latter a reality.



## Part 9, Chapters 36, 37 and 38

### Part 9, Chapters 36, 37 and 38 Summary

#### "Precautionary Measures"

In the aftermath of the confrontation with Sam, Pao worries about what might happen to everyone who depends on him if he ends up in jail. He arranges for Merleen Chin and Marguerite Lopez to take control of their own companies - Merleen's cosmetics company, Marguerite's travel company. In conversation with Merleen, she ruefully recalls how Meacham took advantage of her by making her promises that he then broke, and Pao realizes that she could, in fact, be referring to how white Britain took advantage of non-white Jamaica.

#### "Contestable Ground" 1980.

The economic and political situation has improved, but only to a point. Pao reflects on how Jamaica's prosperity is all tied to the presence and money of Americans, but recalls a comment of Zhang's, and realizes Jamaica is still being oppressed (see "Quotes," p. 242). He also reflects on how few Chinese people there are left there. At one point, he tells Mui that it's now safe to come home, but she's too excitedly busy about a new case.

#### "All-under-Heaven"

Pao goes to invite Gloria to move with him to a large, expensive new house, telling her that he's given up on the revolution he fought for so long. She tells him that he never really suffered under oppression the way she and so many others did, accusing him of running to this new house only because he's now facing the discomforts that she and the other truly oppressed are now feeling. Pao realizes she is refusing his invitation, and leaves, aware that she's got a point but still determined to live out his life in the way he chooses. Then, as he, Hampton, Ethyl, Finlay, Milton, and a few others move into the new house with him, Pao remembers the words of Sun Tzu that the victor should share his profits. When the move is almost complete, Pao fetches the knife used by Helena Meacham out of his safe, and discovers that Mui had left her diary there. He looks through it, and realizes that Mui had noticed and written down an unexpected number of details about her life in Jamaica. Pao doesn't read the whole diary, resolving to keep it and the knife in case Mui ever needs it again. When he goes back to the new house, he feels peaceful for the first time ever, as though he's finally able to have a place to call home

### Part 9, Chapters 36, 37 and 38 Analysis

In some ways, it's difficult to determine where the novel's structural climax is. It could be argued that it takes place in the previous section, at which point Pao's confrontation with



his past reaches its highest point of intensity (i.e. his utilization of Meacham). After that, and as the action of this section demonstrates, it's all about tying up loose ends for both Pao and the story. This idea is supported by the fact that the confrontation with Sam, and the use he makes of Meacham to put an end to that confrontation, is the last time Pao uses his power and position to benefit himself. The confrontation with De Freitas in the following section, which some might argue is the book's climax, is on second glance less about using power than it is about asking a favor, less about himself than about his family. In other words it is a manifestation not of Pao's old corrupt self, but of his new selfless, integrity-driven self.

In any case, and no matter which event the reader believes is the book's narrative climax, it's unarguable that events in this section (particularly in Chapter 38, "All-under-Heaven") constitute its moral and thematic climax. As the result of Pao's confrontation with Gloria he learns, once and for all, that his beliefs about the revolution, his business, and himself have all been empty, false, and to some degree even delusional. Granted, he doesn't learn that right away - it takes until the following section, and his confrontation with De Freitas, for him to realize it fully. But Gloria plants the seeds, her ideas and contentions reinforced by Pao's discovery of Mui's diary, which indicates to him that all his actions had consequences he never realized and couldn't foresee. Here it's interesting to note the juxtaposition between the diary and the knife. Both are symbols of violence (the former of the emotional violence done to Mui by the conflict between her father and mother), and both are symbols of Pao's preoccupation with organized crime (the former a symbol of how that preoccupation damaged someone whom Pao, he has come to realize, profoundly loves). The diary, of course, is also a symbol of longing and connection, while the knife is a symbol of violence and corruption. Pao has kept both locked away, and embraces the power of both ... but it is only the power of the diary, as the narrative makes clear in the following section, that he wants to have anything to do with any more.



## Part 10, Chapters 39, 40, 41 and 42

### Part 10, Chapters 39, 40, 41 and 42 Summary

#### "Desolate Ground"

When Cicely Wong takes ill, Pao visits her and is both surprised and shocked when she confesses that her oldest child, Stanley, was fathered by her own father, whom she calls Mr. Johnson. She tells him how her father hired Henry to be a house servant and later, when the pregnancy was discovered, he arranged for Henry to marry Cicely, who was happy to marry such a kind man, even though he had a long time mistress. After her death and funeral, Daphne tells Pao that Cicely left him all her business assets, and left her the house and her belongings. She tells him she needs help selling the house and converting the proceeds into British currency, since she wants to go live with Fay. Pao helps her out, asking to be remembered to Fay. Later, Ethyl tells him about the urgent, extravagant preparations Daphne had the servants make for his visit to Miss Cicely, and he recalls how tightly Daphne embraced him when he saw her off at the airport, narration implying that she was in love with him. Meanwhile, Pao offers Gloria the Wong house but she refuses, saying instead she wants a house near Ocho Rios. When they go to look at it, Pao learns that the house was once owned by Henry Wong, notices that everyone there knows Gloria, and recalls how Hampton once saw her there. He chooses not to think any more about it, recalling the words of Sun Tzu - "Do not linger in desolate ground."

#### "Terrain"

Esther and Rajinder have a baby, whom they name Sunita and, at one point, give to Pao to hold (see "Quotes," p. 259). Later, Rajinder confesses to Pao that he has a labor problem with his business that he says Gloria and Esther both told him Pao might be able to help him with. Pao does some investigating, and finds out that the problem originates with a nephew of De Freitas. Pao arranges to meet De Freitas, and after reminding De Freitas of all the things De Freitas did to which he didn't react, Pao asks him to call off his nephew. De Freitas says he'll try, but makes no promises.

#### "Disposition" 1989.

Pao feels that the life has gone out of Jamaica and out of him (see "Quotes," p. 265) and wonders how many other societies have experienced what Jamaica has (see "Quotes," p. 266). Meanwhile, he makes his funeral arrangements and hands them over to Kealey, saying he's finally realized that life can be simpler than what he made it.

#### "Weaknesses and Strengths"

At the first birthday party for baby Sunita, Pao realizes that he has now fully divested himself of all his illegal activities, and how he wouldn't complain if he dropped dead right at that moment. He contemplates how he had spent his life trying "to find something to



believe in" like Zhang had believed in his stories of the revolution, but realizes that he had to find his own path (see "Quotes," p. 269). When he hears Kealey arrive, Pao realizes that if he died he would miss seeing Mui again and that he still has life to live, remembering "how Zhang rest his palm flat on [Pao's] chest one time and say to [him] 'Everything is in your own heart.'"

## Part 10, Chapters 39, 40, 41 and 42 Analysis

As Pao's life draws to what the narrative seems to be suggesting is a quiet, reflective last phase, some intriguing elements are introduced. The first is the revelation of the paternity of Cicely Wong's oldest child, and of the nature of her relationship with Henry. At first glance, the former seems to be almost irrelevant, almost a shock for the sake of a shock. Upon further consideration, however, it becomes possible that the inclusion of this incestuous incident is intended to be viewed as a defining contrast to the now more compassionate relationship Pao has with his daughters (Mui and Esther) and granddaughter (Sunita). In other words, Pao's now positive relationship with his descendants is contrasted favorably with Mr. Johnson's relationship with his.

The second, and perhaps more intriguing element introduced in this final section is the implication that Gloria, as previously discussed in the Analysis of Chapters 1 and 2, had a long ongoing, relatively secure relationship with Henry Wong, a relationship that took the place of the relationship she longed for with Pao but which is now finally coming into fruition. How does this latter revelation relate to Pao and his journey of transformation? By providing another suggestion that, had he listened to his heart (as Zhang, in his quoted words at the book's conclusion, seemed to be suggesting he do) rather than his ideas and beliefs, his life might have been more peaceful, happier and more complete.

It's important to note, however, that Pao got there anyway. Even though he was deluded by his belief in "the revolution" and his role in it and was corrupt and selfish and greedy, he did finally manage to get past all that he thought HAD to define him and came to an awareness of what actually DID - a need for respect born of affection, rather than enforced loyalty. His musings that the life had gone out of Jamaica can be seen as a reflection of this, particularly when one considers that by "life," Pao actually means the drive for status that fueled BOTH the "revolution" and the desires and intentions of the oppressors. In that sense "the life," the need for such status, has indeed "gone out" of him, but has been replaced by a form of "life" based on the above mentioned status defined by affection. The question implied, therefore, by the novel's conclusion is this - has Jamaica as a country reached its own place of peace with status defined by identity rather than drive? Whether it has or it hasn't, Pao has achieved peace ... which, it could be argued, is the ultimate goal not only of any life but of the life sought by Sun Tzu, whose book *The Art of War* might, at least in this context, be subtitled "The Way of Peace."



# Characters

## Pao

Pao is the novel's first person narrator, its central character and protagonist. The book documents and explores events and circumstances over fifty years of his life, from childhood to late middle age. He is the child of social revolutionaries, both biologically and ideologically. Both the internal (emotional, psychological, intellectual, moral) and the external (where he lives, how he earns a living) circumstances of his life defined by what his elders believe about the relationship between the working classes and the monied classes - in Pao's mind, the oppressed and the oppressor, the exploited and the exploiters. He becomes involved in organized crime (see "Objects/Places") at a very early age, working his way through the ranks of the organization run by mentor Zhang and taking his place at the head of the organization by the time he is twenty-one years old. Think about it - a widespread, multifaceted organization with a substantial number of affiliated employees and businesses (never mind the fact that it's all about criminal activity) run by a young man barely out of his teens. This circumstance alone says a great deal about who Pao is and what motivates him - power, status, a need to provide for his loved ones, and a desire to undermine and/or fight the power of the capitalist oppressors which, the young Pao would argue, is his primary intention in doing what he does in the way he does it. Over time, however, he becomes more and more aware of the value of living with compassion and integrity and of personal relationships (as opposed to status within the community). In doing so, he embodies the narrative's primary thematic interest in redemption - see "Themes."

## Zhang

Zhang is Pao's father's best friend, the two men fighting together in the armed resistance to oppression that arose in China in the early part of the 20th Century, a resistance that eventually evolved into the Communist Revolution. Following the death of Pao's father, Zhang brings Pao and his family to Jamaica and takes them under his wing, providing for them and acting as a mentor to the willing Pao and his more reluctant brother and, eventually, turning control of his organized crime syndicate over to Pao. Over the years, Pao relies on the passionately socialist Zhang for advice, and in particular, learning from him the value of following the teachings of Sun Tzu (see below), the author of *The Art of War* (see "Objects/Places"), a textbook on military operations that both Zhang and Pao utilize for inspiration and guidance in running the syndicate. Zhang has more boundaries around what he considers right and appropriate than Pao but is, in general, unconditionally supportive of him. He is portrayed in the narrative as not necessarily criminal and/or exploitative in basic nature, but as doing what he believes to be right and necessary in order to protect and defend his fellow oppressed from further exploitation by the capitalist system.



## Hampton, Finlay

Hampton and Finlay, both black, are Pao's two best friends and closest allies, making friends with him almost as soon as he arrives in Jamaica and remaining close to him throughout all three of their lives. Hampton is particularly close to him, moving into his home in Matthews Lane and serving as something of a personal bodyguard.

## Gloria, Esther

Gloria is a black woman, a beautiful prostitute whom Pao helps out of a difficult situation and with whom he develops a close relationship, although he is unable to move as far into the relationship as Gloria would like. He, as Gloria points out, is too concerned with what she is and what she does, paying little or no attention to how she makes him feel and how they are together. Their relationship, for the years of Pao's ascent to, and maintenance of, power within the organized crime syndicate, is mostly business, although Gloria does serve as Pao's confidante from time to time. Esther is their daughter, raised almost entirely by Gloria away from the crime-filled environment of her father. Pao supports Esther, but has almost nothing to do with her until later in life, when he awakens to the importance and value of both female figures to his personal life. Eventually, he reconnects with both of them, his feelings for and about family finally transcending what he knows, and comes to discover, about Gloria's past. In other words, his relationship with her becomes more defined by what she means to him rather than what he believes about what she once did.

## Fay

Fay is the daughter of wealthy Chinese businessman Henry Wong and his black wife Cicely, marrying Pao after his intense, manipulative courtship of her mother. Strong willed and in constant conflict with her mother, spoiled by her father, Fay's relationship with Pao is generally volatile and resentful, Pao getting only glimpses of her vulnerability and need. Her resentment of him and the domestic situation into which he brings her (she calls it "squalid") explodes into confrontation and, eventually, into kidnapping of their children.

## Mui, Karl

Mui is Pao and Fay's daughter; Karl (originally named Xiuquan) is their son. Karl, who goes by the anglicized name given to him by his mother, is sullen and resentful of his father, while Mui is watchful, intelligent and outspoken. Both are taken from Jamaica by their mother and moved to England, partly because she believes they will be safer there and partly out of a vengeful desire to hurt Pao for exploiting her family and wealth. Karl's relationship with his father is never good, but Mui's childlike curiosity and affection mature into a willing, longing connection with her dad that Pao comes to value greatly.



Her continued presence in his life, and his desire to connect/help her in any way, are both important triggers/factors in his evolution into a life of compassion and integrity.

## Henry and Cicely Wong

Chinese Henry and black Jamaican Cicely are Fay's parents, each concerned in their own way with status. Henry's concern manifests in a desire for money and a respected business, while Cicely's manifests in a more racism-defined desire for respect. Pao sees Cicely in particular as the real power in the relationship, working through her to gain access, and eventually marriage, to what he sees as the trophy of Fay. Later in the narrative, secrets about their marriage and relationship are revealed to Pao, and he comes to realize their situation was both more complicated and more connected to his own than he previously understood.

## Daphne and Kenneth Wong

Daphne is the younger daughter of Henry and Cicely and Kenneth is their youngest child. Daphne is quiet and plain, Kenneth ambitious and selfish. Daphne, dominated by Fay's stronger personality, helps her sister kidnap the children. Pao gets the sense, later in the narrative, that she was in love with him. Kenneth aggressively seeks out status within Pao's organized crime syndicate, is eventually removed from the syndicate, goes to work for Pao's rival, and in spite of Cicely's attempts to reform him, remains irresponsible, selfish, and ultimately dead. He can perhaps be seen as a narrative and/or thematic contrast to Pao, in that his path takes a similar external direction to Pao's (i.e. into organized crime) but takes a different internal direction (i.e. more deeply into selfishness) and he ends up dead while Pao lives and prospers.

## Ma, Xiuquan

Ma is Pao's mother, a somewhat shadowy figure throughout much of the narrative, functioning primarily as a representative and/or manifestation of traditional Chinese life and attitudes. Late in the narrative, however, when Zhang falls ill and dies, she devotes her time and energy to taking care of him. Pao never fully understands or describes why, but he does come to recognize her sort of compassion as a part of his life that has remain underdeveloped, and a part that, as he enters the latter years of his life, he wishes to develop. Ma is an important embodiment and/or manifestation of the narrative's thematic interest in the often secretive relationship between the inner and outer life of an individual.

Xiuquan is Pao's brother. In the early stages of their life in Jamaica, he is a reluctant, almost resentful, recipient of Zhang's generosity and guidance, realizing early on that Zhang is essentially a criminal and that he (Xiuquan) wants nothing to do with Zhang's livelihood. Early in Pao's career as the head of Zhang's organization, Xiuquan leaves Jamaica and moves to America, where he makes a life for himself and, as a result,





describes himself in a letter to Pao as free from shame, a clear and pointed comment on what he (Xiuquan) feels should be Pao's perspective on his own life.

## **Father Kealey**

Kealey is a Roman Catholic priest who befriends Fay and whom Pao, in an effort to determine exactly what the relationship between the two actually is, himself later befriends. Over the years Kealey, by both example and by active teaching, inspires Pao to live a better, more compassionate, and less criminal life, even though he (Kealey) himself is not as fully moral as his position requires. Kealey, in another manifestation of the novel's thematic interest in the tension between an individual's inner and outer life, has long-standing romantic and/or sexual feelings for Fay. Ultimately, though, and as a manifestation of the novel's similarly thematic interest in redemption, Pao forgives Kealey for his feelings for Fay and some of his other transgressions, his actions manifesting his personal transformation into a more open, compassionate human being.

## **Clifton Brown, George Morrison, Ethyl**

These three individuals are people whom Pao recruits into his organization. Brown is a black, homosexually oriented police officer who would lose his job (and possibly his life) if his sexual desires became publicly known. Pao discovers this, and uses the power he gains over Brown as a result to his own advantage. Morrison is a physician and gambler, whose life would be ruined if all the debts he owes were to be collected. Pao takes over those debts, and in return Morrison offers free medical service to Pao, his family, and those he protects. Ethyl is one of the servants in the home of Henry and Cicely Wong. Pao, knowing of her ambitions to leave service, funds her education in return for her providing information on what goes on in that house. The relationships between Pao and all three characters serve as evidence that Pao, blind for many years to what he is actually doing to these people, is as much of an oppressor and/or exploiter as the people he claims so consistently to be fighting.

## **Merleen Chin, Marguerite Lopez**

These two young women are helped out of difficult situations by Pao. Merleen is impregnated by a British military officer (Meacham - see below) when she is twelve, while Marguerite is, several years later, placed into a life-threatening situation as the result of her involvement with Meacham's daughter, Helena. Pao helps both women out of their initial situations, setting them up in new lives and, later, in new businesses that are, to some degree, fronts for his criminal activities. As Pao, later in life, divests himself of those activities, he hands over greater control of the businesses to the women, his actions in that context manifesting the movement of his character from a more exploitative identity and philosophy to one more defined by compassion and integrity.



## Captain Meacham, Helena Meacham

Meacham is the upright, self-righteous British marine who impregnates Merleen Chin and who, as the result of Pao's defense of her, is not prosecuted. Several years later, as a result of an illicit sexual relationship with Meacham's daughter Helena, Marguerite Lopez is implicated in a murder. As a result of Pao's defense of Marguerite, Meacham ends up paying him a regular fee to ensure he remains silent. Still more years later, the grown Helena ends up working in the same law firm as Pao's daughter Mui and, much to Mui's discomfort, persecutes her. Again, as the result of Pao's intervention, both Meacham and his daughter back down. In all three cases, the British Meacham (and later Helena) can be seen as direct, personal manifestations and/or representations of the sort of oppression and exploitation from which Pao as a person and Jamaica as a country are both struggling to free themselves.

## De Freitas

De Freitas is the leader of a rival organized crime syndicate. Several times in the narrative, he and Pao come into direct conflict, with each striving for advantage over the other. Late in the narrative, Pao convinces the devious De Freitas to arrange for Pao's son-in-law, who had been harassed by a relative of De Freitas, to be left alone. In short, Pao's relationship with De Freitas can be seen as manifesting, at least to some degree, Pao's journey from immoral thug into compassionate patriarch.

## The Two Constables

These two corrupt police officers appear several times throughout the narrative, throwing roadblocks and obstacles in Pao's path as the result of their own criminal activities. Drug dealers, violent and opportunistic, they represent and/or reflect the dark side of Pao's criminal dealings, a side to which Pao could easily be drawn if he didn't have a fundamentally compassionate nature (i.e. as manifest in his relationship with, among others, Merleen Chin and Marguerite Lopez).

## Sun Tzu

Medieval warrior and writer Sun Tzu is the author of the book *The Art of War*, used by both Zhang and Pao as a manual and/or inspiration for how they run their criminal organizations, business, and personal relationships. He never actually appears in the book, but his presence is strongly felt by both Pao and the reader, as the former seems to rarely, if ever, make a decision without considering Sun Tzu's teachings and the latter is exposed, several times, to the book's thematic and/or metaphoric implications by Sun Tzu's interjected comments.



# Objects/Places

## China

Pao and his family immigrate to Jamaica from China. Its cultural revolution, which resulted in a Communist government that freed it from the oppression of outside, mostly British influences, is both the inspiration and ideal for Pao's social and political philosophy.

## Jamaica

The tropical island country of Jamaica is the novel's primary setting. The country's struggle to free itself from a long history of socio-political oppression at the hands of white European immigrants, primarily British, provides the cultural and societal context within which Pao's personal story plays out.

## Kingston

The capital of Jamaica is portrayed in the narrative as racially and economically divided, and troubled for many years by ethnically motivated violence. Almost Pao's entire life is lived in Kingston, its troubles combining with and/or triggering his political beliefs and what he perceives as the need for his illegal, but necessary, activities.

## Cultural Revolution

China's cultural revolution, in which the workers seized power and control of the country from economic and cultural oppressors, is viewed by Pao and his mentor (Zhang) as a socio-political ideal. Their life and activities in Jamaica are governed and motivated by the dream of a similar revolution that will one day take place there.

## Organized Crime / The Mafia

"Organized crime" is the legal term for what is essentially a crime syndicate, an organization that oversees, controls, and participates in multiple sorts of crime (drugs, prostitution, extortion, money laundering) in a particular city or region. "Mafia" is another commonly used term for such a syndicate, originating in Italy but also used to refer to similar syndicates in other cultures. Although the term is rarely, if ever, used in the narrative, the term can be seen as applying to Pao's organization (i.e. as the "Chinese Mafia").



## **The House in Matthews Lane**

This is the house where Pao and his family live. In the tradition of many Chinese families, it becomes a multi-generational, multi-family dwelling. Pao's mother, uncle, friends and children all live there at one point or another in the narrative. The area of Kingston in which the house stands, Chinatown, is lower middle class and troubled.

## **The House on Lady Musgrave Road**

This is the house where the Wong family (Henry, Cicely, Fay, Daphne and Kenneth) live. In contrast to the house in Matthews Lane, the house on Lady Musgrave Road is in a wealthier part of Kingston, is expansive and richly furnished, is maintained by servants, and is a symbol of the wealth and status of the family.

## **Ocho Rios**

This resort area of Jamaica is the setting for a pair of important scenes, one at the beginning of the narrative and one at the end. The former is Pao's honeymoon with Fay, during which he discovers some previously unrevealed truths about his new wife. The latter is the birthday party for Pao's granddaughter, at which he realizes some previously not contemplated truths about his own life.

## **The House at Ocho Rios**

Late in the novel, Pao buys Gloria a house at Ocho Rios, a house which, the narrative hints, was the place where she had an ongoing relationship (as his mistress) with Henry Wong. The house is the setting for the birthday party for Pao and Gloria's granddaughter, a place where Pao realizes important truths about his past, his present, and his future.

## **The Art of War**

This book on the theory and practice of warfare, purportedly written several centuries before the Birth of Christ by Chinese warrior Sun Tzu has, over the centuries, become not only a reference for military leaders around the world but also a point of reference for philosophers, businessmen and many others. Its aphorisms and teachings can be seen as useful guidelines to life as well as to battle, and are used as such by Pao throughout the novel.

## **Helena's Knife**

Helena Meacham, the daughter of a British soldier, uses a butcher knife to kill a couple of boys who interrupted her while she was engaged in a surreptitious lesbian affair.



Even though he hushes up Helena's role in the murder, Pao keeps the knife, and later uses it as leverage to get Helena's father to help him help both a friend and also his (Pao's) daughter.

## Mui's Diary

About to move out of his home and as he is removing Helena's knife from safekeeping, Pao discovers that his daughter Mui kept her diary in the same secret place. He only glances at it, but doing so makes him realize just how much Mui was aware of during her tumultuous childhood, and how her life has been shaped as a result.

## Money

Money plays an important role in the lives of several people throughout the narrative. Pao learns from Zhang the importance of money in ensuring goodwill between themselves and the citizens of Chinatown, and is the motivating and defining force in several key relationships. Perhaps most importantly money, its acquisition and retention as well as its function as a source of power, is a key component of the social, cultural, political and economic oppression Pao sees as corrupting Jamaican life.



# Themes

## Oppression

There are two main sorts of oppression manifest throughout the narrative. First, there is personal oppression, one person deliberately dominating or assuming power over another in an individual relationship. Examples include Cicely's oppression of Fay, Pao's oppression of Fay, and Fay's oppression of Mui. Other, relatively minor forms of this sort of oppression include Meacham's oppression of Merleen Chin and Helena Meacham's oppression of both Marguerite Lopez and Mui which, in the eyes of protagonist Pao and, apparently, of the author, are personal manifestations of the second sort of oppression at work in the narrative, the sort upon which Pao bases his entire philosophy. This is societal oppression, that of a poor or working class by a wealthy ruling class with status, power and influence. This particular aspect of oppression is a dominant force throughout the story. As mentioned above, Pao bases his entire personal and professional philosophy on the premise that the lower classes, to which he and his family belong (not to mention the vast majority of the Jamaican population) are being oppressed and exploited by external forces greedy for money and status. These forces are primarily, albeit at different times, the British and the Americans, and manifest not only in terms of economics (i.e. the rich oppressing the poor) and status (i.e. the influential oppressing the manipulated) but also in terms of race; the oppressors are, for the most part, almost entirely white. The interesting irony about the narrative, and about Pao's journey of transformation (which simultaneously defines, and is defined by, events of the narrative) is that he too is an oppressor, exploiting and taking advantage of those who do not have his personal ambition, intelligence, and capacity for manipulation. His personal journey of transformation can, therefore, be seen as a thematic expression of hope that in the same way as he transcends his tendency towards oppression and lives a life more anchored in compassion, so too can socio-cultural oppressors like the white Americans and British. This, in turn, makes *Pao: A Novel* something of a manifesto of leftist, socially-oriented values.

## Redemption

As previously discussed throughout this analysis, the novel's story is anchored and defined by Pao's transformation from oppressor to compassionate family man, from someone driven by a desire for power to someone driven by a desire for intimate human connection defined by affection and integrity. In other words, Pao is REDEEMED. A man with a very dark, almost corrupt perspective on what it means to be human becomes, over the course of several decades and a number of defining experiences, a man who defines his relationships more by what people need rather than by what he THINKS people need (i.e. protection from the oppressor which, he thinks, only he can provide). Yes, he has that tendency in him throughout the story - witness his treatment of Merleen Chin and Marguerite Lopez. But for most of his life, and indeed for most of the novel, he



tends to exploit people's vulnerability for the sake of building his own power - witness his treatment of Clifton Brown and George Morrison.

In other words, Pao moves from being an oppressor who doesn't REALIZE he's oppressing people (he thinks he's helping them while he's helping himself) to being someone who, the novel contends, recognizes the value of person to person relationships, especially those built on and defined by integrity and mutual respect. Not only does he discover that such relationships are ultimately more valuable when it comes to surviving and transcending oppression than combating it with violence and/or subterfuge. He also develops a broader world view. He comes to realize that there will always be people with more financial, social and political status and people with less, but the people with less of THAT sort of status can attain a higher SPIRITUAL status through the practices and application of dignity, respect, affection, and honesty. Here again, he is redeemed. The darkness of his perspective and experience is transformed, and ultimately released, by an experience of discovering, and enacting, positive, affirming, nurturing values associated with community and integrity.

## **The Relationship between Inner and Outer Life**

Pao's story embodies and dramatizes the contention that paying too much attention to the external forces that shape a life (i.e. politics, economics, power in all its manifestations) draws energy from what is truly important. This is defined by the narrative as relationships with family and friends, paying respectful and loving attention to people as opposed to searching for ways to control and/or dominate them. This is true, the novel further contends, on the personal level and on the larger socio-political level - Pao's journey of transformation, from power broker to sensitive, responsible human being, is portrayed as a microcosm of what, the novel contends, is a transformation necessary for society itself (see "Oppression", above).

On another level, there is another important way in which the work dramatizes the tension between the inner and outer lives of individuals. This is through the number of characters who have secrets to keep, secrets about their identity (i.e. Clifton Brown's homosexuality, George Morrison's gambling addiction), their relationships (i.e. Gloria's apparent relationship with Henry Wong), their involvement in crime (i.e. Marguerite Lopez, Captain and Helena Meacham), and their past (i.e. Cicely's history of being incestuously raped by her father). These secrets are by definition aspects of each character's inner life that, in one way or another, define circumstances and/or actions in their outer lives. In other words, they make certain choices and behave in certain ways as a result of their need to keep their secrets. Sometimes those secrets are discovered and exploited (as in the case of Brown and Morrison as well as of the Meachams) and sometimes they are revealed after the fact (as in the case of Gloria's and Cicely's relationship histories). It could be argued, however, that in all cases, secrets and people's desperate desire to keep them are at the core of an experience of oppression. In other words, someone with a secret is easily manipulated and used, prevented from realizing a full, free experience of life by others or, as in Cicely's case, by herself, oppressing her own freedom (and that of her children) by determining that she is going



to rise above her secret, refusing to let it define her or her children's lives. As a result of having her secret, she oppresses Fay and Daphne for sure, probably Kenneth, and also probably Henry, her husband, who seeks a non-oppressive relationship with a woman in the arms, and the home, of Gloria who, interestingly enough, has been honest with herself ABOUT herself and the implications of her life all along.





# Style

## Point of View

The story is told from the first person point of view of Pao, its narrator and protagonist. As is the case with many first person novels, the narrative is limited in its perspective, exploring only the feelings, perceptions and actions of a single character while observing and interpreting those of other characters only from his particular, uniquely personal standpoint. It is, in other words, a subjective point of view, defined by Pao's political, emotional, and intellectual position, experiences and beliefs. That position is, throughout much of the narrative, both defined and motivated by Pao's leftist, socialist values - specifically, the idea that the poor and working classes must, and one day will, rise up and revolt against the oppressions placed upon them by the wealthy and upper classes. Everything he does, essentially, is motivated by this perspective and this belief. As he ages, however, and as the narrative progresses, he comes to believe that this personal point of view is flawed - that what is ultimately most important is living a life of compassion, emotional openness, and personal integrity. This, in turn, can be seen as manifesting the narrative's primary thematic points of view. See "Themes - Oppression" and "Redemption."

All this is not to suggest that the narrative is not engaging. On the contrary, because the narrative's overall point of view is so closely tied with one individual (i.e. its narrator and protagonist), the reader is drawn thoroughly and intimately into his experiences, making discoveries as Pao makes them, being exposed to his uniquely personal experiences and being invited to identify with them, and therefore with him. It is, like many other first person narratives, an experience of immediacy and closeness to subject matter both internal and external.

## Setting

The novel is set in Jamaica, its narrative unfolding over the course of more than fifty years. This setting in time and place both defines and adds weight to the work's primary thematic considerations - specifically, its contemplation of the nature and effects of oppression, both personal and social. As the evidently well-researched narrative suggests, Jamaica during that time underwent a significant, wide ranging process of transformation, a process constantly referred to (at times almost heavy handedly) throughout the narrative in considerable detail. Specifically, from the late 1930's to the early 1990's (the time within which the action of the narrative unfolds), Jamaica moved from being oppressed by social, political, and economic forces from outside the country (primarily British, but also American) through a long, tumultuous, and often violent period of social unrest and revolution. That period of unrest and uncertainty led to a new, uneasy, but ultimately healthier condition, a set of socio-economic-political circumstances in which a balance, often fragile but for the most part increasingly



functional, was struck between what was necessary for both a strong economy and broad-based social well being.

Within this socio-economic-political setting, Pao undergoes his own process of transformation - in other words, and as previously discussed, the external in this novel mirrors the internal, and vice versa. Pao's personal movement from being both an oppressor (of those whose will he bends to his own) and oppressed (by the social, economic, and political circumstances to which everyone in Jamaica is subjected) to an open, more compassionate freedom is the same movement as that of his adopted country.

## Language and Meaning

The language used in the work is one of its most engaging and intriguingly shaped characteristics, and can perhaps be seen as having resonances with theme and setting. This is because the language of the narration is tied inextricably to the identity of the book's central character (Pao - see "Characters") and its point of view (see "Point of View" above). The vocabulary, sentence structure and syntax utilized throughout are all reflective of who Pao is - relatively uneducated, with English as a second language and a sometimes surprising poetic streak. There are times when the narrative language feels as though it's veering dangerously close to what in the past has been described as "pidgin English," a derogatory term describing the fractured structure and inappropriate word usage of immigrants for whom English is not the mother tongue (the term has most often been applied to Asians - Chinese, Japanese, Koreans). It must be remembered, however, that the author is herself a Chinese immigrant of Pao's generation, and as such seems to have recreated the linguistic and conversational style of individuals with whom she is familiar.

It's also essential to note that Pao's style of narrating is not the only style in which the author writes. Characters of higher social status (Cicely, Fay) and greater education (Kealey) all speak in much more formal, much more educated language, with more sophisticated syntax and vocabulary. There is, perhaps, an echo here of the novel's thematic and contextual interest in oppression - that status, either real or perceived, also manifests in language, in the words people use and in how they use them. In other words, is Pao's struggle for respect and his own status a reflection, at least in part, of how he is spoken to? And are his eventual personal reconciliations with characters like Cicely and Kealey reflective of his eventual transcendence of both linguistic and material oppression?

## Structure

The narrative's structure is essentially linear, with events, for the most part, following one after the other over a period of over fifty years. Generally, there is a sense of cause-and-effect about those events - actions on the part of one character lead to reactions on the part of another, that reaction leading to action, leading to reaction, and so on, all



within a relatively tightly knit time frame. It is, in many ways, a fairly traditional, standard, narrative structure, generally both effective and engaging. That said, there are also sections in which the narrative follows a structural pattern that is often referred to as episodic, moving between incidents that take place with several weeks, months, or even years in between with little apparent cause-and-effect relationship between them. Finally, there is a six-chapter long section early in the narrative which functions as a flashback, a diversion from the time frame of the main narrative line into the past which, as flashbacks do, explores and documents the backstory, or history, of the characters. The overall effect of this variety of structural techniques is to create a sense of collage about the work, of images, events, relationships and circumstances both personal and national, at times even global, all juxtaposed with one another and causing meaning to emerge as much from the juxtaposition as from the particular relationships between the events themselves. In other words, the story's themes are explored through the placement of specific events in Pao's life (narrative) as much as through the placement of those events within the socio-political environment of his adopted homeland, Jamaica (context).



## Quotes

"Marriage is not for celebrating. It is something you do to give your children a name."  
Chapter 1, p. 6 - Judge Finlay.

"You keep thinking all the time about what I am. But maybe you should concentrate on who I am, the sort of person I am, and maybe that way you might get to know how you feel. I see the way you look at me ... and how when you have to come close to me you hold your breath like you think something bad is about to happen. Well maybe you just need to let yourself breathe." Ibid, p. 7 - Gloria.

"She chat with them maybe two or three minutes and after she move on I look at them and see how they sorta sink deeper into their chair, like they can rest easy now because Fay recognize them" Chapter 2, p. 16

"What I see is someone who know they belong. She know it for sure. One hundred per cent. Fay not got, not even in the smallest corner of her mind, any doubt whatsoever 'bout her place in this world ... she just take it for granted that they going love her and that she going take them in her stride, whoever they are." Ibid, p. 16 (2)

"I am not a Chink and these boys are not Niggers. We are Jamaicans. We are brothers." Chapter 4, p. 33 - Pao

"To change things the masses must rise up. They must seize their ideal and take back their land. For it is the masses who will shake off the yoke of oppression, not individual men like you and me. That is what your papa died for, the right of the ordinary woman and man to live a decent life free from the tyranny of warlords and the domination of foreigners." Ibid, p. 34 - Zhang.

"After that I just do what Zhang tell me to do, and hope that maybe one day I become like him, a man that believe in something. A man that is loyal to a cause. A man that people can count on. Sun Tzu say 'The wrong person cannot be appointed to command. This is like gluing the pegs of a lute and then trying to tune it.'" Chapter 7, p. 51

"It was like a little kindness turn the key to a floodgate that open up and let everything pour out. So I reckon it was some heavy burden that she was carrying there, but I didn't say nothing. Truth is I didn't know what to say to her. So I just carry on holding her tight and hoping that would be enough." Chapter 10, p. 62/3.

"And the longer I am holding his hand, and the longer I am looking him in the eye, the more he is realizing that we have a bond now and I will be relying on him to fix any little problems we have. Because just the way we recognize him, is just the same him recognize me." Chapter 11, p. 67



"They can make anything happen or not happen, disappear, come back, turn upside down when you flash them a few bills of old George Washington, or even better Mr. Abraham Lincoln. And if things get really serious then you just pull out Mr. Andrew Jackson for them. Because with the police, these is the faces you know you can always rely on." Ibid, p. 68

"Women are not like men, Pao, they change with the wind. That is why we men have to steady ourselves. Make a firm anchor with a good business and work hard." Chapter 12, p. 75 - Henry Wong.

"I still pick up the money from her. I still giving her protection. I still drinking ... tea with her ... I still talking to her 'bout things because Gloria is the only person who ever care to listen to me talk 'bout myself and what this life mean to me." Chapter 13, p. 78

"Not that Fay see Miss Cicely that way, but she treat the house at Lady Musgrave Road like a sanctuary and now that was mine because Miss Cicely and Daphne and Ethyl belong to me. Just like Father Kealey was coming to me with his God and his hope to find some goodness in me. And the same way Henry Wong would take me in as a full son-in-law, because that was my next move." Ibid, p. 88

"Whatever service you providing for them you get the same look, like they think you a cockroach and you lucky they don't just lift up their foot and pulp you." Chapter 14, p. 91

"...even though I start up with all of this just to cut 'cross Fay, it seem like it worth something to me. It worth something to have somebody who always look at you like they think you OK. Who never got a look in their eye like they 'fraid of you. And who treat you like they believe you mean well. They believe you have good intention and a true heart." Chapter 15, p. 102

"...maybe it not so simple for those of us that too white to be black, or too black to be white, or too Chinese to be either. And what I realize from Fay is that it not just to do with the colour of your skin. It to do with how you feel about yourself and what you think about your life." Chapter 17, p. 115

"...Morrison just want to shush me because he don't want me getting on the subject 'bout how the English only want to know you when it suit them. Or more like, then they got some little job need doing that they don't want to soil they little white hands over. Is 1963, but we still servicing them." Chapter 18, p. 125

"And I think to myself well that is the first big thing I manage to do without thinking in the back of my mind that Zhang was there to fix all of it if it all go wrong. The first big thing that I fully responsible for. It seem like I change today. I grow up. I am forty years old and I finally become a man. It feel good to watch the smoke curl outta the window and drift away on the gentle afternoon breeze." Chapter 20, p. 138

"... and right then I just get up and I raise Michael up outta the chair and I hug him. I hug him close because he was the only man on this earth who understand how I feel, the



only man who understand what we lose. Not just because we lose Fay. But because we both lose the children as well." Chapter 25, p. 175

"I think to myself I know two Yang Xiuquan, and both of them betray me. One with the tales him tell to Zhang, and the other one with the plotting he do with Fay. And both of them leave me ... so maybe it was a mistake me naming the boy Xiuquan. Maybe Fay was right when she decide to just start call him Karl." Chapter 28, p. 197

"I can't get over how much they got to say to one another, because in all these years I can't remember ever seeing them talk to each other, not even once ... some nights I even lay there awake on purpose, just listening to them hushed voices. Just so I can marvel at it. Because even though I can't make out what they saying I can hear the tone of it, and I can hear them laugh. And that, the laughing, I never hear before, not from either one of them." Chapter 30, p. 204

"I look across the table at him and I remember that first day I meet him when Mr. Chin tell him to carry the bags on the hand cart, and then afterwards when him follow me 'round town all day and make a friend outta me even though I didn't want to pay him no mind. And I say 'Thank you, Hampton.'" Ibid, p. 208

"It make me start think that maybe this is how it suppose to be with a man and a woman. Ordinary, just calm and regular. That maybe this is what it would have been like all these years if I just go marry Gloria in the first place. If I never let myself get distracted by what she was, and what everybody else think 'bout it. If I never set my sights on being married to Henry Wong's daughter like that was going to lift me outta being a second-class citizen from Matthews Lane." Chapter 31, p. 210

"I sit there and I look at him in all his glory and I think we tread different paths ... but we travelled through this life together ... I know that Michael always going to be there. We bonded to each other ... afterwards he tell me ... he think to himself maybe he got a brother ... then him laugh and say to me 'even if we have very different ways of communing with our Father.'" Chapter 32, p. 216

"...in the old days everybody could see that it was the British that was responsible for the slavery, whereas now it seem like we are the ones responsible for this mess we in. Nowadays it hard to see how we being controlled by foreign powers because this new kind of imperialism come wrapped in a cloak that look like help." Chapter 37, p. 242-3

"And I look at this tiny little African, Chinese, Indian baby and I think to myself, Sunita, you are Jamaica. Out of the many, you are the one. And you won't have no need to go back to Africa, or China, or India because this is where you belong, with your own identity and dignity." Chapter 40, p. 259

"... I think to myself sure enough Sun Tzu right 'bout all these things, but maybe life not just a matter of strategy. Maybe it about something more than that, or something different anyway ... something that got more to do with what Zhang say 'bout benevolence and sincerity, humanity and courage." Ibid, p. 262



"It was almost like the whole island move into a different phase of life. We live through our turbulent youth and come out the other side. And that other side was a place of acceptance. Not a place of contentment, it didn't feel as happy or as comfortable as that. Maybe it was a place of resignation. We became resigned to how things was, and we just decide to try to do our best with that." Chapter 41, p. 265

"How many other countries been through what we been through? How many of them still going through it like us? All because some long time back somebody decide to pick themselves up and sail halfway 'round the world to come colonize us. And it not just about the English and the slaves. It about the Americans and the money." Ibid, p. 266

"Like Gloria was always telling me, not everybody had their sights set on building a nation. Some people just wanted to put food on the table." Chapter 42, p. 269

## Topics for Discussion

Examine and consider the events of each chapter for their relationship to that chapter's title. What are the resonances between what happens in each chapter and its title? Following the example of Pao in the narrative, discuss how events and title alike might relate to war.

Over the years, *The Art of War* has come to be viewed as a textbook not only for conducting an effective battle that ultimately and/or inevitably will lead to victory, but also for business and interpersonal relationships. Again following the example of Pao in the narrative, in what ways do you see the techniques from *The Art of War* referred to here at work in your world - In politics? In culture? In religion? In business? In friendships? In other institutions and/or organizations with which you are involved?

Consider Gloria's comment (see "Quotes," p. 7) on how she thinks Pao is basing his attitude towards her more on what she does than on what she is. Discuss whether it's appropriate of Pao to define his choice of what to do about his feelings towards her on these terms (i.e. in terms of what she does). Discuss your own perspective on this aspect of relationships - do you believe that it's appropriate to base an attitude towards, and/or experience in, a relationship based on what someone does for a living?

Discuss whether Pao, in not following through on his attraction to Gloria because she is a prostitute, is being hypocritical. Does the leader of an organized crime gang, or anyone who participates in what is generally viewed as illegal, corrupt and/or immoral, have the right to judge and/or negatively view someone else who participates in a similar sort of activity? Or is Pao correct to base his relationships on his own personal moral code?

Research socialist theory and philosophy. What aspects of its basic beliefs and values do you agree with? Why? What aspects do you disagree with? Why?

What is your experience of personal oppression, of being controlled and/or dominated by someone who wants power over you and utilizes it for their own advantage? How does that feel? How did/you break free of it?

Discuss the difference between leadership and oppression, between being protected and being dominated. Where do Pao and his actions fall on each of these continuums?

Consider the quote on p. 67, taken from the narration of the first meeting between Pao and Clifton Brown (Part 2). What is it, do you think, that Pao recognizes in Brown, and what does he think Brown recognizes in him?

Consider the relationship between Pao and Michael Kealey. Discuss whether you believe it's possible for two people with such different moral, spiritual, and intellectual values to have the kind of friendship these two characters develop. Do you have an





experience of such a relationship, i.e. a friendship with someone very unlike yourself? What is the value of such a relationship?

Consider the quote from p. 262, with Pao's comment on the realization that life doesn't have to be all about strategy. Consider also your experience with strategy and planning, and its relationship to living a life based on what Pao discovers to be the important values of honesty and compassion. What do you think is the balance between the two? At what points in your life has strategy overwhelmed integrity, and vice versa?