

Bones of the Master

1. Do Tsung Tsai and George Crane make natural traveling partners? What makes this arrangement work? What strains the relationship? Why do you think Tsung Tsai chose George as his companion back into his homeland and his past?
2. Early in the book, Tsung Tsai points out that "Chinese make [maps] opposite," with the "North at bottom" (p 32). George further explains that, "In terms of feng shui, China is the perfect county. Their maps prove it" (p 33). What other Chinese and American cultural "opposites" reveal themselves? As the book progresses, do other cultural beliefs that are taken as fact become evident?
3. One aim in Buddhism is to release oneself from attachment and desire. In what ways is Tsung Tsai successful at this? In what ways does he fall short? Does the fact that Tsung Tsai practices Ch'an Buddhism explain Tsung Tsai's approach? What attachments does George have?
4. At one point, George calls himself a "parody of a disciple" (p 145). What brings about George's self loathing in that moment? Do you think George is being fair to himself? Given that Tsung Tsai later tells George that he "make many [mantras]" for George (p 173), how do you think Tsung Tsai views George?
5. Tsung Tsai calls his nephew a rich man. In what ways is Linn rich? In comparison to whom? How does George perceive Linn's status?
6. Travel often prompts reflection: How does the journey affect George? Tsung Tsai? Are either of the men changed by this journey?
7. Does Tsung Tsai's quest for his master's bones remind you of other religious quests? How is it different? Did Tsung Tsai accomplish what he set out to do?
8. There are several conversations that occur in **Bones of the Master** in which superstition, religion and cultural beliefs are discussed by Tsung Tsai and George (i.e. the discussion of the Fox God, or the talk about Lei's black magic). Do you agree with how the various beliefs or superstitions are defined? What, in your mind, determines sufficient evidence to prove whether a concept or thing is real or fictional? Is proof relevant?

9. How does Tsung Tsai use metaphor in his teaching?
10. Examples of suffering are given repeatedly through this story. Which examples most moved you? How did Tsung Tsai respond to those moments? George?
11. Why does the author choose the interaction between Tsung Tsai and Lei as the focal point of the last chapter? How does the Epilogue and the Acknowledgements affect the ending of the book?