



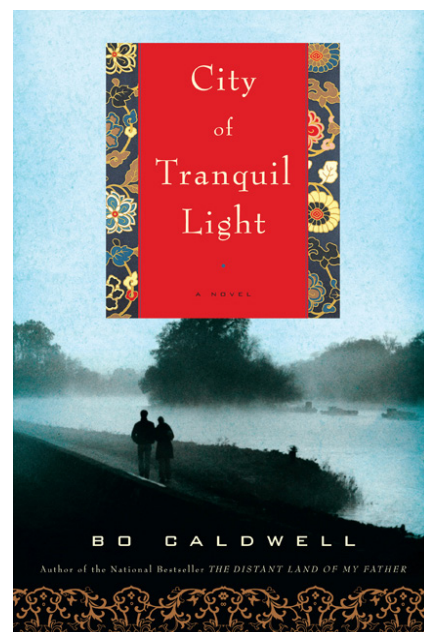
Reading Group Gold

City Of Tranquil Light

Bo Caldwell

Questions for Discussion

1. *City of Tranquil Light* is framed at both ends by an elderly Will narrating from California. What does this structure lend to the novel? What is the effect of having key information early on about the story to follow—that Katherine predeceases Will, for example, and that they do not live out their lives in China—instead of learning it at the end?
2. Will and Katherine both note that they feel they are returning home, rather than leaving it, when they depart the United States for China for the very first time. What do you think makes them feel this way? Have you ever experienced a similar sensation? In what ways does the novel talk about home?
3. Edward and Will have a close bond; Katherine and Naomi do as well. What makes these connections so strong? Since we don't see the characters together that often, how are these ties shown? How do Edward, Will, Katherine, and Naomi lend support to one another?
4. Consider Chung Hao and Mo Yun, Will's first converts. Will and Katherine intend to help both of them, which they do. But how do Chung Hao and Mo Yun end up helping them? What about the rest of the people of Kuang P'ing Ch'eng? Are Will and Katherine surprised to be the beneficiaries of this assistance? How are the themes of giving and debt dealt with?
5. In what ways are the American missionaries a modernizing force? How do they alter the ways of the people of Kuang P'ing Ch'eng? Is it always for the better?
6. How does Lily's death test Will and Katherine's faith? What enables them to recover? Do you believe that they do fully recover? Do they ever give in to despair entirely?



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7. What were your initial impressions of Hsiao Lao? What does his treatment of Will as a prisoner indicate about his character? What do you think of the assistance he gives to Will and Katherine later on? By the end of the novel, in what ways has he changed, and in what ways has he remained the same?
8. How are cultural differences portrayed? Certainly many of the Chinese people Will and Katherine encounter do things that would be considered odd—or outright wrong—in the West. Do you think the novel passes judgment on these differences? Do Will and Katherine? Does the novel help you to understand why things were the way they were in China at this time?
9. What role does fate play? Do Will and Katherine believe that in some sense, their destinies have already been laid out for them? What lends support to that idea?
10. What is it that ultimately pushes Will and Katherine to leave China? They consider it their home—how do they deal with the transition?
11. When Katherine passes away, Will finds himself distraught and asks, “What had been the point of all my years of believing if my trust faltered when I needed it most?” What do you think? Has Will’s faith failed him? How is he able to find solace?
12. Upon their final departure for the United States, Will notes, “We had tried to dress up for our journey, but I saw how shabby we looked, how bereft, and what a contrast our appearances were to the rich lives we had led in Kuang P’ing Ch’eng.” Would you agree that Will and Katherine led rich lives, despite their poverty? Were their lives ultimately happy ones, in spite of the sadness and many trials they faced?
13. Does Will and Katherine’s faith change in the course of the novel? In what ways?