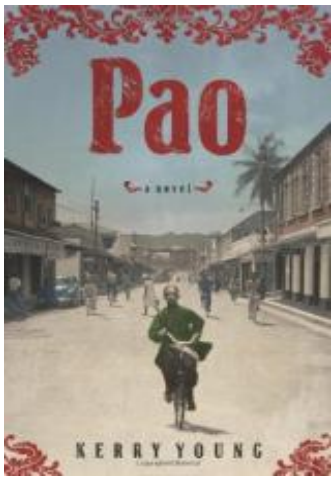
Pao

by Kerry Young



About the Book

Pao is about to marry the wrong woman. Seven years after he immigrates to Jamaica from China, he meets Gloria, a beautiful Jamaican prostitute who steals his heart. But Pao?s beloved mentor, Zhang, from whom he inherited the Chinatown ?family business,? does not approve of Gloria. So Pao decides to marry Fay Wong, the elegant daughter of one of Kingston?s richest Chinese men. Suddenly Pao is running not only the Chinatown underworld, but also many legitimate businesses too, thanks to his profitable marriage.

But Fay is miserable in Chinatown; she plots an escape to England, taking her two children with her. Although Pao is devastated to lose his family, he realizes that his children are safer far away from Kingston --- after Jamaica gains independence from England, all hopes of unity and brotherhood soon dissolve into violence. As chaos overtakes the streets of Kingston, Pao must face his part in Jamaica?s struggle to overcome its great divides: between Chinese and African, capitalist and communist, wealthy and poor.

Discussion Guide

1. The novel begins in 1945, when Pao first meets Gloria, then flashes back to his immigration to Jamaica seven years earlier. Why does the novel open with the love triangle of Pao, Gloria, and Fay, instead of at the beginning of Pao?s life in Kingston?

2. Pao is written in dialect, with words spelled as Pao pronounces them. What is the effect of reading the novel in Pao?s voice? What would the novel be like without Pao?s distinctive voice as narrator?

3. Consider Pao?s first impressions of Jamaica as he arrives from China by boat. How does the city of Kingston look to Pao? How does he quickly make Kingston his home?

4. When Pao falls in love with Gloria, Judge Finley tells him, ?Marriage is not for celebrating. It is something you do to give your children a name? (6). Why does Pao choose to marry Fay Wong, and what price does he pay for his choice? How does he eventually reconnect with Gloria?s daughter, Esther, even though he has not given her his name?

5. Compare the two Yang brothers, Pao and Xiuquan. How are the brothers similar and how are they different? Xiuquan declares, ?I want something better. Something better than being a Chinaman in Chinatown? (45). Does Pao, too, want something better? Explain.

6. Consider Pao?s inheritance from Zhang. What does Pao learn from the older man? Pao hopes 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? (51). How does Pao grow up to become like Zhang, and how does he remain different from his mentor?

7. Discuss the impact of Sun Tzu?s The Art of War on Pao?s decision making. How does he put Sun Tzu?s strategies to action? At the end of the novel, Pao realizes, ?And then I think to myself sure enough Sun Tzu right ?bout all these things, but maybe life not just a matter of strategy?Something that got more to do with what Zhang say ?bout benevolence and sincerity, humanity and courage? (262). How does Pao strike a balance between Sun Tzu?s teachings and Zhang?s principles?

8. According to Zhang, ?the Jamaicans same as the Chinese, poor and exploited and oppressed? (30). If the Jamaicans and Chinese are ?brothers in arms,? as Zhang believes, why are there tensions between these two groups? How does Pao strive to overcome the ethnic tensions of Kingston, and when does he fail?

9. Discuss the ongoing conflict between Fay and her mother, Miss Cicely. How does Miss Cicely treat her daughter? Why does Fay rebel against her mother, even as an adult? What are the origins of their dispute, and why are they unable to resolve it?

10. Pao narrates, ?When Michael Manley win the general election in 1972 I celebrate more than I done for Independence ten years earlier, because this time it really seem to mean something? (200). Why is Pao skeptical of the 1962 celebrations of independence from England? Why is he more interested in politics in the 1970s? Does Pao do his part to improve the living conditions of all Jamaicans? Why or why not?

11. Discuss Father Michael?s involvement in Pao?s life. What is the basis of the friendship between these very different men? What attracts Father Michael to Fay, and what price does Father Michael pay for his temptation?

12. Consider Fay?s escape to England. How does Pao react to his family?s disappearance? What steps does he take to get his children back, and how does he realize that they are better off in England than in Jamaica?

13. When Pao arrives from China as a boy, he becomes Philip Yang; when his son Xiuquan settles in England, Pao agrees to call him Karl. What is the significance of these name changes?

14. Consider the long rivalry between Pao and Louis DeFreitas, the gangster who controls West Kingston. How do these two powerful men conduct business differently? How do Samuels and Kenneth Wong fall victim to the gang war? How do Pao and DeFreitas finally resolve their rivalry?

15. Kerry Young, the author of **Pao**, moved from Jamaica to England in 1965, much like Pao?s daughter Mui. How does Young portray Mui in the novel? Why does Mui remain attached to her father and to Jamaica, even as a barrister in England? The novel ends just before Mui?s homecoming to Jamaica. How does this ending feel?

Author Bio

Kerry Young was born in Kingston, Jamaica, to a Chinese-African mother and a Chinese father --- a businessman in Kingston?s shadow economy, who provided inspiration for **Pao**. Young moved to England in 1965 at the age of ten. She earned her MA in creative writing at Nottingham Trent University. This is her first novel.

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