

ROCK PAPER TIGER READER'S GUIDE

1. Central to *Rock Paper Tiger* is the concept of the Surveillance State, in which one's every move is observed. In what ways does Ellie believe she is being watched? To what extent are these beliefs rational? What are the different forms that surveillance takes? What are the similarities and differences between the Chinese and Western surveillance states?
2. Throughout the novel, flashbacks are used to show Ellie's past. How does Ellie's backstory illuminate what she's going through in the present? How does her past influence her decisions?
3. What impact does Ellie's economic situation have on the story? How does this affect her decision making? Similarly, how do the economic situations of Ellie's mother and Trey affect their decisions?
4. The American Suits who are after Ellie don't work for the government but for a private company that may be a front for government intelligence. The Chinese Suits who detain her in Taiyuan take her to a "Black Jail," an unofficial facility. Private contractors were also involved in the interrogations Ellie witnessed in Iraq. What is the significance of this blurring of lines between government and private authorities? What effect might this blurring have on civil rights and civil society?
5. The China portrayed in *Rock Paper Tiger* contains many of the trappings of modern Western capitalist democracies—shopping malls, fast food chains, consumer goods—and yet political freedom is strictly regulated. What does this suggest about the relationship between modern capitalism and democracy?
6. The chain restaurant concept was created in America to allow travelers to visit a place that would be familiar no matter where they went. Ellie initially was happier in China because it was so different from what she knew in the States and Iraq, yet she seeks out things that are culturally familiar, such as Starbucks, whenever she is particularly stressed. What does this suggest about Ellie's psychological state?
7. What is the role of artists and art in a society where political freedom is limited? How does Lao Zhang fit into an art scene where so many Chinese artists have found wealth and popularity? What does art mean for "common" people like Ellie, who readily admits that she doesn't quite "get" the art that she sees?
8. Ellie's odyssey through China takes her to many tourist destinations, including the Great Wall and the fictionalized Daoist mountain, Changqing Shan. How does selling a cultural or historical experience change it? How does this relate to the treatment of art and artists in the novel?
9. Part of Ellie and Trey's relationship is based on their religious faith. Trey keeps his

faith; Ellie loses hers. Why did two people with similar beliefs and wartime experiences come to such different conclusions? How do you think Trey reconciled his faith with his wartime actions? How did Ellie's questioning of her old beliefs affect her decision making?

10. The Great Community within the online game is a nod to Qing Dynasty reformer Kang Youwei (for more information, visit <http://www.lisabrackmann.com/books/rock-paper-tiger>), whose "Great Community" was a utopian one world state characterized by sweeping egalitarianism and the elimination of class distinctions and private property. What do you see as the ideals behind the novel's "Great Community"? How do Lao Zhang's ideas about community differ from Harrison Wang's?

11. Online games and communities are extremely popular in both the United States and China. Why have virtual communities become so attractive to so many people? What does this say about the nature of real-life communities today? What are the limitations of virtual communities? Does Ellie find a "home" online, or is this an escape from the "real" world?