

A Tiger's Heart --- Reading Group Guide

1. When she was born, the author's father named her Mei Yun, but her mother rejected this name and called her Juanjuan instead. Juanjuan never liked this name and later changed it to Aisling. Over the course of the book, she goes by several other names as well. What is the significance of a name? How is it important to the author's identity?
2. Do you think being born in a different family would have changed Juanjuan's personality and her subsequent life choices? Or was she born a fighter, someone who would always struggle for the life she wanted? How do you think her life would have been different if she had been born in an educated middle-class family in China, or even in the US?
3. Do you think Juanjuan's mother loves her and has always loved her? Do you believe her explanation that the neglect toward Juanjuan was because of poverty, not because of Juanjuan being a product of rape? Do you think her mother did the best she could under the circumstances?
4. Did Juanjuan's mother have a positive or negative impact on her? During her childhood Juanjuan disdained her mother, but do you think that she resembles her mother in some ways?
5. What do you make of the relationship between Juanjuan and her father? Do you agree that he is emotionless, or do you think he has feelings that he just doesn't show? From what do you draw your conclusion?
6. Juanjuan seems confused about her feelings toward Honor. What was his role in her childhood? What impact did the ten-year affair between her mother and Honor have on her personality?
7. Juanjuan and her sister, Spring, both made a lot of bad choices with men. Do you think it's a coincidence that both sisters made similar mistakes, or is it the result of the psychological effects of their childhood? How would you characterize the relationship between the sisters? Discuss the contrast between their lives and choices.
8. Do you think it was the right decision for Juanjuan to go through with an abortion? What choices did she have? What would you have done in her situation? What psychological impact do you think the abortion had on her?

9. In the South, Juanjuan slept with her future boss so that he would work with her. What do you think of this kind of behavior? What could have done to achieve her goal without sleeping with him? She also betrayed her former boss by stealing away his clients. Was this immoral? Would you characterize Juanjuan as the kind of woman who would do anything to get what she wants?
10. When she lived there, Juanjuan felt that China was a suffocating place. Do you think this feeling is unique to her, or does it reflect the experiences of many Chinese people? How does the picture of China that you got from this book compare to what you have read and heard about the country elsewhere?
11. Juanjuan's life story reflects the story of China's rapid growth over the last three decades. Do you think the changes in China happened too fast for its people to cope? How was Juanjuan's life shaped by broader social and economic forces?
12. What do you like most about this book? What do you dislike? Is the author too honest, and did the book ever make you feel uncomfortable? Was there anything in the book that you think the author should have left out?