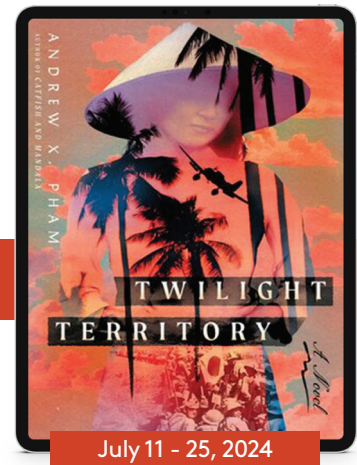


## DISCUSSION GUIDE

1. *Twilight Territory* begins at the end of World War II, when the occupation of Vietnam passed from the French to the Japanese then back to the French after the Allied victory. The book then continues into the years of the First Indochina War, during which the French fought the Viet Minh, the national Vietnamese resistance, for control of Vietnam. Though the French wanted to reclaim their control of the country in some part for access to important rubber plantations, many historians agree that they were mostly interested in reinstating themselves as a global power after their humiliating surrender to the Germans in 1940. How is this theme of repossession and revenge portrayed in the novel's French characters? What about the Japanese and Vietnamese characters?
2. *Twilight Territory* dedicates more space to the experiences of civilians than the experiences of soldiers on the battlefield. Did the novel illuminate anything about the effects of war on colonized countries and citizens for you? Why do you think the author chose to focus on everyday people's lives?
3. When Tuyet is considering whether Takeshi's gift of food, shampoo, and soap has an ulterior motive, Coi says, "When possible, believe in the good intention of others." Tuyet replies, "No truth more convincing than the lies one tells oneself" (p. 10). By the end of the novel, do you think the author aligns more with Coi's opinion or Tuyet's opinion about people's intentions?
4. Takeshi states that "Power and corruption go hand in hand" (p. 31). Do you believe it is possible to have power without becoming corrupt? In your view, are there any powerful yet moral characters in this story? Does Takeshi himself always use his power for good?
5. The author writes that Tuyet and Takeshi share a "language of loss and loneliness," (p. 70) and that their love had been a "long, gradual surrender" (p. 87). What do these quotes, marking the beginning of Tuyet and Takeshi's love story, say about their destiny? Do the characters ever overcome their loss and loneliness? What is Tuyet surrendering to by finally giving in to Takeshi's advances?
6. Why, in your opinion, does Takeshi join the Vietnamese resistance instead of returning to Japan with his men?
7. A major theme of *Twilight Territory* is sacrifice. How does the concept of sacrifice change as the plot progresses, as Tuyet and Takeshi's circumstances worsen? What do you view as the greatest sacrifice in the novel?
8. There are several abrupt shifts in pace, tone, and action throughout the events of the book, such as when the chaos of the violent French mob punctures Takeshi and Tuyet's trip to Saigon and when Tuyet's conscription to the garrison ends the family's steady life in the mountains. Relative peace turns quickly to devastating violence. What do you think the narrative purpose of these sudden shifts is? What do they say about the tumult of wartime?



9. Throughout the novel, Tuyet has several foreboding premonitions of dangers to come. Why do you think the author wrote the character with this unusual gift? How would the novel be different if she did not have this foresight?
10. The author adopts a straightforward tone when depicting great violence, such as Tuyet’s assault at the garrison or Takeshi’s vengeful counterattack. What effect does this direct, almost unemotional voice have on your experience of reading these scenes? What do you think the author is implying about the nature of violence?
11. From the dunes to the forest, the author presents Vietnamese landscapes with rich, almost sensual descriptions. How do these descriptions serve the central plot and character relationships? How do they compare to the descriptions of the war-torn human world?
12. After Takeshi avenges Tuyet by attacking the garrison and beheading her abuser, Tuyet recites a Confucian proverb to him: “Before you embark on a journey of revenge, dig two graves” (p. 313). What did she mean by this? How can this proverb be applied to the bigger picture of World War II, the First Indochina War, or colonization in general?
13. Why do you think the author uses the imagery of a mortar and pestle as a symbol for Tuyet and Takeshi’s relationship?
14. Consider the female characters in the book, from major players such as Tuyet, Coi, and Anh, to minor characters like Second Sister, the cook at the garrison; Mother Nam, the nun at the shrine of the Lady Buddha; Huyen, the captured medicine courier; Tam, Captain Moreau’s wife; and the other women in prison with Tuyet. These women can be seen as occupying the “Twilight Territory” of war, not participating in battles directly but suffering disastrous consequences from the outskirts. What did this novel teach you about how women factor into the economy and progress of war? How did the burden of war differ for women than men at this time, and does it differ today? How does the author depict the women’s relationships with each other? What are their primary objectives? How are these objectives different or similar to the male characters’ objectives?
15. Were you surprised that Tuyet chooses to stay in Vietnam rather than join Takeshi in Japan at the end of the novel? Why, in your opinion, does she make this choice? What does this mean for her future?