

**"REMEMBERING THE JUNGLE: THE WORDS OF THE TIGER IN THE ZOO"**  
**By The Lu**

**Introduction**

In the first three decades of the twentieth century, as politics and the literary scene changed, there emerged new forms of writing, using the newly official Romanized script (Quoc ngu). As the French imposed stringent censorship on such writings and as Vietnamese writers, such as the poet The Lu (1907-1989), who also wrote fiction, gained access to new Western genres and styles, literary work became territories of expression and contestation both against the French and among the Vietnamese themselves.

**Document Selections with Questions** (Longer selection follows this section)

From *Understanding Vietnam*, by Neil L. Jamieson (University of California Press, 1993), 159-160.

**"Remembering the Jungle:  
The Words of the Tiger in the Zoo"**  
**By The Lu**

Where are those golden nights beside the bank of a stream,  
When, intoxicated with the hunt, we stood to drink the melting  
    moonbeams?  
Where now are those rainy days that transformed the  
    surrounding scene,  
As we silently admired the renewal of our homeland?  
Where now are the dawns with green trees bathing in sunshine,  
Our radiant naps to the lullaby of singing birds?  
Where now are the afternoons overflowing with blood beyond the  
    jungle?  
We awaited the death of the irksome sun to seize possession of  
    our privacy.  
Alas! Where now are those glorious times?

**Questions:**

1. Was this poem realistic or fanciful?
2. How did The Lu see the jungle?
3. How autonomous was the subject of the poem?

**Longer Selection with Questions**

From *Understanding Vietnam*, by Neil L. Jamieson (University of California Press, 1993), 159-160.

**“Remembering the Jungle:  
The Words of the Tiger in the Zoo”  
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Gnawing upon our resentment, we stretch out in an iron cage  
Watching the slow passage of days and months.  
How we despise the insolent crowd outside,  
Standing there foolishly, with tiny eyes bulging,  
As they mock the stately spirit of the deep jungle.  
Here by misfortune, shamefully caged,  
We are no more than a novel sight to amuse them, some  
    plaything,  
Forced to endure exhibition, just like the oafish bears,  
Put next to a penned pair of panthers, carefree in their captivity.

We sustain ourselves with fond memories of days long past,  
A time of freedom and assertiveness . . . .

When in dark caves we crinkled our god-like eyes,  
All creatures fell silent,  
And we knew we were lord of all living things,  
In a garden nameless and eternal.

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When, intoxicated with the hunt, we stood to drink the melting  
    moonbeams?  
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    surrounding scene,  
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    jungle?  
We awaited the death of the irksome sun to seize possession of  
    our privacy.  
Alas! Where now are those glorious times?

We now embrace the rancour of a thousand autumns,  
Hating these never-changing scenes,

Scenes that are altered, commonplace, and false.  
Flowers tended, grass trimmed, trees planted in tidy rows,  
Trickles of black water with pretensions of being brooks,  
Barely flowing down the crevices of these puny elevations.  
A few Leafy areas, meek, without mystery,  
Seeking to imitate the wild visage  
Of a realm steeped in a thousand years of nobility and darkness.

O stately soul, heroic land,  
Vast domain where yesteryear we freely roamed,  
We see you no more.  
But do you know that during our days of frustration  
We follow a great dream, letting our souls race to be near you,  
O formidable jungle of ours!

**Questions:**

1. Whom did the tiger represent? The cage? The jungle?
2. Why would The Lu have written such a poem in such a way?
3. What role did his metaphor play in Vietnamese society?
4. How political was this literary composition?