

19TH CENTURY FOLK SONGS FROM “GOLD MOUNTAIN”

The following folk songs were collected and first written down by a literary society in San Francisco’s Chinatown. The songs reprinted here express two common themes, the Chinese immigrants’ longing for those left at home and frustration with their treatment in the United States.

Since you left for North America,
You haven’t thought of me for twenty long years.
You’ve banished me to solitude and to my knitted
brows.
It’s wrong for lovers to be separated in two places.
O, you are bad!
You don’t feel a thing for your poor wife.
You care only for your fun and games outside.
And I must live with the fate of separation for the
rest of my life!

(一)
唔念：不想念

自君遊北美。廿年不我記。
丟像孤寡鎖雙眉。枉屈鴛鴦分兩地。
可惡汝。唔念諧連理。
在外風流顧一已。虧奴半世守生離。

What is the tone of the narrator in this song?

What “fun and games” does she think her partner has chosen instead of returning to his family in China?

Would you wait for someone for “twenty long years”?

Fellow countrymen, four hundred million
strong;
Many are great, with exceptional talents.
We want to come to the Flowery Flag Nation
but are barred;
The Golden Gate is firmly locked, without even
a crack to crawl through.
This moment -
Truly deplorable is the imprisonment.
Our hearts ache in pain and shame;
Though talented, how can we put on wings and
fly past the barbarians?

(一)
花旗：參看歌#3

同胞四萬萬。豪傑在其間。
花旗欲入被他攔。緊鎖金門無路趨。
這一番。拘囚真可恨。
縱有奇才心痛報。怎能插翼越夷蠻。

Why does the narrator refer to the Golden Gate as being “firmly locked”?

Who are the “barbarians” mentioned in the last line?

Pitiful is the twenty-year sojourner,
Unable to make it home.
Having been everywhere - north, south, east,
west -
Always obstacles along the way, pain knitting
my brows.
Worried, in silence.
Ashamed, wishes unfulfilled.
A reflection on the mirror, a sudden fright:
hair, half frost-white.
Frequent letters home, all filled with much
complaint.

廿年悲作客。猶未返故宅。
遍歷東南又西北。所爲輒阻常蹙額。
愁默默。自慙志不得。
對鏡乍驚頭半白。家書屢接頻交謫。

How long do you think the author of this folk song expected to stay in the United States when he arrived?

What may have prevented him from going home?

What are some of the obstacles he might have encountered?

What are the complaints he is sending home to China?

After we wed,
I am lacquer and husband glue.*
At sixteen my life is in full blossom;
A hundred delights fill us to our hearts' content.
Sadly I am forsaken,
Living for a long time in solitude.
The way parents-in-law behave is hard to explain.
O, what can I do but live through these days of
prolonged delay?

婚期于歸後。共郎漆與膠。
百般快活遂心頭。及并幾年花正貌。
惜丟拋。冷淡多時候。
爹媽施爲譽啟口。推延日子有能較。
(一) 有能較：參看歌#2

*"Glue and lacquer" is a conventional metaphor used for an ideal marital relationship.

From whose point of view is this song written?

What do you think this "forsaken" narrator's prospects are for a happy future? What options are open to her?

Why does she mention her "parents-in-law"?

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