

FOUR

Nostalgic Blues

Chinese men of letters have long written both poetry and prose expressing the sojourner's nostalgia for home, which is evoked by certain scenes and events. For example, to the poets Li Bo (701–762) and Su Dongpo (1036–1101) a full moon would automatically evoke fond memories of home and family. A seasonal festival made the sojourner's solitude more intense than ever, as another poet, Wang Wei (701–761), lamented: "A stranger alone in a strange place / All the more I think of my family on a festive occasion." Later, vernacular stories express both the happiness and the sorrow of a man being away from home. His departure often led to events, great and small, that would ultimately change the individual as well as his family. For instance, in Feng Menglong's "Pearl-Sewn Shirt," a man's family and the life of his wife all went to ruin due to his prolonged absence from home, as the wife succumbed to sexual temptation. Being away from home has thus always been a negative notion unless the sojourner will ultimately return.

Home, or family, is always the most important part of the Chinese societal structure. A Chinese family is seen as a tree that grows with many branches extending and outreaching; but every branch is physically part of the tree. Once a branch is cut off from the tree trunk, it cannot survive on its own. There is even a Chinese proverb that says: "Fallen leaves return to the roots of the tree." Along with that sense of belonging, of course, comes the responsibility to safeguard the welfare of the family. Each member must do his part to protect its well-being, sacrificing his own personal comfort and happiness, even his own life, for its preservation or honor.

In Chinese perception, home is not just a man's castle. It is also his ultimate "security blanket." Without it, he would be at a loss during a time of crisis. With it, he finds security among the stormy and unhappy events of life. It provides its members with comfort and the true sense of belonging. When Tao Qian (372?–427?), the famous poet and prose writer, was totally frustrated by life outside his home, he declared in indignation, "Why don't I go home!"

This sense of returning home and belonging to the family is central to the Chinese way of life. A person cannot stay away from home throughout the year. Traditionally, he must rush home by the end of the year for the grand family dinner on New Year's Eve, an occasion no less significant than the family reunions at Thanksgiving or Christmas in American society. Absence from such an occasion occurs only if it is absolutely impossible for the sojourner to make it home. Without the presence of every family member, the reunion is not complete; the happiness and joy for the New Year celebration cannot be total. On such an occasion, members of the

family will then express their wishes for the sojourning member's early return.

In old China, no one leaves home if he can make a decent living in his native place. In fact, there were only three common situations in which a person would have to leave home. The first was the education expedition in preparation for the imperial examination, success in which would bring fame and honor to the family name. The second was exile, if a person had disgraced his family and was expelled from home as a punishment. The third was to seek a living outside, when a person could no longer survive on the means available at home. This last situation was, in fact, also a form of exile, one in which the sojourner took the burden and responsibility for the economic survival of the family. His triumphant return with economic success would be a vindication of having had to leave the family under such circumstances.

- 69 Though I've journeyed to the very ends of the earth,
I cannot forget my ancestral home.
The traveler, in the still of night, thinks of his
family,
Tossing and turning, thoughts whirling, asleep,
awake.
In dreams, my soul flies
Back to the village.
Fields and gardens seem barren and abandoned.
O, why didn't I go home? Why don't I go home?*

天涯遍作旅。難忘舊祖居。
遊人夜靜憶庭幃。展轉縈懷興復睡。
夢魂飛。返到故里處。
恍恍田園將荒廢。胡不歸兮胡不歸。

JSGJ I.11b

*The last two lines are borrowed from the prose work "Homecoming" ("Gui qu lai xi ci") by the Jin dynasty poet Tao Qian (372?-427?), who chose to retire to a rustic life rather than humiliate himself as a petty bureaucrat.

- 70 Since my departure in Hong Kong,
 She and I are each in different places.
 A long separation makes a person even more miserable.
 How can one ever forget home, sweet home?
 Stranded in a foreign country,
 In dreams my soul encircles my village home.
 Words to wife and children: don't worry, you won't
 have to wait too long.
 Once I amass the gold, I will be on my way.

自從離香港。伊人各一方。
 離泰與梓豈能忘。久別故園添苦況。
 羈異邦。夢魂繞鄉黨。
 寄語妻兒休掛望。黃金大有就回唐。^(一)

(一)
 唐：參看歌^{#21}

JSGJ II.41b

- 71 My loved one is far away.
 Alone, by the railing, I look around aimlessly.
 Many times, depressed by a bright, full moon,*
 My body aches and twists with ninefold grief and
 pain.
 A heart left hanging.
 A deep love that cannot be severed.
 Just how can we be reunited and share companionship
 again?
 Spare me from sleeping with only a cold quilt and
 pillow.

意中人隔遠。獨自倚欄看。
 幾回惱煞月團圓。令我腸回更九轉。
 掛胆肝。癡情難割斷。
 怎得重逢同伴。免吾寡宿枕衾寒。

(一)
 回：作「迴」

JSGJ I.43a

*“Full moon,” see song 49.

- 72 Ever since I've arrived in Gold Mountain,
 Not one day have I dared forget my family.
 My mind is chaotic, like hemp fibers, with constant
 thought of home;
 Each meal is hard to swallow, because of sorrow.
 My dear woman:
 Don't ever think your husband has betrayed your
 love.
 It's hard enough to share my words with you in
 dreams;
 My soul is wandering, every night, my tongue
 tightened.

自抵金山也。無日敢忘家。
 心懷桑梓亂如麻。每飯因愁難咽下。
 亞卿呀。莫作夫情寡。
 難夢與儂同講話。遊魂夜夜舌交加。

JSGJ I.12b

- 73 Living stranded under the Flowery Flag
 Is like shouldering a heavy cangue.*
 Never for one moment do I stop wishing to go
 back to China,
 But the road is long and I cannot gallop away.
 A heart left hanging—
 Wife at home sends me these words:
 You have been there across the ocean for a long,
 long time;
 By all means, remember to come home soon.

鵲居花旗下。身如荷重枷。
 無時不欲返中華。可惜路遙難策馬。
 心掛掛。室人曾有話。
 漫向外洋來久假。千祈記緊早回家。
 (一) 千祈：千萬
 (二) 記緊：緊記

JSGJ I.12a

* "Cangue," see song 6.

- 74 My body aches; my heart pains me all the more.
 Separation brings even more remorse.
 Away at the edge of the horizon, everything seems
 remote;
 In vain I long for my virtuous wife and my filial
 children.
 For a husband and his wife—
 The two sorrows share the same origin.
 I endure sleepless nights thinking of home.
 I wonder if anybody at home ever thinks of me?

身苦心猶苦。別離恨益多。
 天涯遠隔事荒蕪。空憶賢妻和肖子。
 婦與夫。兩愁同一路。
 我記家人難夜度。未識家人記我無。

JSGJ L12b

- 75 Who could have guessed the sojourn would last
 so long?
 Had I known, I wouldn't have come at all.
 Separated by many mountains and vast seas,
 I have forsaken wife and children to seek my fortune.
 Heart bleeds in pain.
 A sojourner thousands of miles from home.
 Time passes ever so quickly, but a reunion is so
 hard to come by;
 I just don't know when I can start my homebound
 journey.

誰估流咁奈。^(一)當初準唔來。
 遠隔重山又重海。拋妻別子為求財。
 傷心哉。作客千里外。
 光陰易過人難會。未知何日起程回。

(一) 奈：作「耐」；長久

JSGJ L12b

- 76 My friends, remember by all means:
 Don't let yourselves be stranded in a foreign country.
 Brows besieged by sorrow from frequent worries
 of home;
 Thousands of miles of clouds and mountains further
 impede a gloomy stay.
 Separation brings out misery.
 Have your belongings always packed and ready.
 A journey to America is only a search for wealth.
 Return to the old country quickly, to avoid
 going astray.

(一)
 裡：作「李」

勿困他邦地。同人要緊記。
 家居復望鎖愁眉。暗滯雲山千萬里。
 睽生悲。速整隨行裡。^(一)
 只爲求財經旅美。早回故國免流離。

JSGJ L11b

- 77 The folks are still there, waiting by the gate.
 This traveler at the edge of the world has yet to
 return.
 It's hard to find the key to fortune.
 Thoughts of home are a grief multiplied hundredfold.
 I encountered an unusual disaster:
 The City fell victim to red flames.*
 When can I go back with songs of bountiful success,
 And spare the aged ones from becoming senile while
 they wait?

倚閭人尚在。天涯客未回。
 此因利鎖實難開。思到家鄉愁百倍。
 遇奇災。埠劫紅陽害。
 幾得東旋歌捆載。免致年老望痴呆。

JSGJ L15b

*The fire that destroyed San Francisco after the 1906 earthquake.

- 78 I bid farewell to Father and Mother.
Throughout the journey I worry and worry about
them.
To get food, I have no choice but to hurry about;
My thoughts of them are all in a tangle, like hemp
fibers.
Unable to return—
When will I again sit beside their knees?
An endless horizon severs family happiness.
As I long in vain for my parents, my eyes turn blurry.

(一)
唔係：參看歌#68

別却爹和媽。條腸一路掛。
爲口奔馳唔係假。庭幃牽念亂如麻。
未歸家。幾時依膝下。
天涯間斷天倫也。陟岵徒勞眼望花。

JSGJ I.14b

- 79 To chase after a pin-head gain,
I endured the separation from my mother.
Drifting on a voyage of thousands of miles,
I reached the Flowery Flag Nation to take my
chances.
Sorrow is to be so far away from home.
I must burden Mother to send me clothes for my
stay.
Unable to prepare the homebound whip, stranded
in a foreign land,
O, when can I repay her kindness in raising me?

(一)
花旗：參看歌#3

爲逐蠅頭利。萱堂忍別離。
飄泊水程數萬里。精神冒險抵花旗。
遠堪悲。征衣勞母寄。
未整歸鞭留異地。恩懷鞠育報何期。

JSGJ I.14b

- 80 I've come, because of poverty, to a foreign country,
 Cherishing the memory of my home state.
 Again and again, I wish to go back, but am unable
 to set a date,
 Tossing and turning, I am restless in a sojourner's
 bed.
 Alone, sighing.
 Thrice asleep, thrice awakened.
 I pray tomorrow morning I can amass a hefty gain.
 Then I'll buy a boat and return to Canton
 smiling in satisfaction.

因貧來異地。懷念我邦畿。
 屢欲旋歸未有期。展轉旅床難入寐。
 自歎歎。三眠又三起。
 但愿明朝得大利。買舟回粵笑微微。

JSGJ I.13a

- 81 Now that I've thought everything over:
 I am all confused.
 Needless to say I feel concern for my parents,
 I am also burdened with thoughts of my wife and
 children.
 Why so?
 'Cause I cannot make it home.
 I look around—north, south, east, west—and
 I don't know which direction is home.

如今細想呀。心事亂麻麻。
 懷念高堂唔在話。更有妻兒牽掛掛。
 非無他。未得回歸也。
 東南西北望過吓。莫知何處是唔家。

JSGJ I.13a

(一) 唔在話：不必說
 (二) 唔：作「吾」

- 82 A long time away from home:
My family, an unavoidable concern.
In pain I left my parents to journey ten thousand
miles away.
Many times I wish to go back and be with them
again.
Autumns come and go.
I haven't succeeded in amassing silver and gold.
I pray Heaven will bless me:
Let me one day return in splendid clothes and spare
myself being thus detained.

離家日已久。難免內顧憂。
苦別雙親萬里遊。每欲旋歸同叙首。
秋過秋。黃白唔成就。
但願皇天常眷祐。他年衣錦免羈留。

JSGJ 1.13a

- 83 Letters from home are frequent and urgent:
Urging me to return to China.
I hesitate: my purse is not full.
I am ashamed; I have no excuse for my fault.
But, how am I to explain it all?
So my homebound journey is postponed.
I'm only afraid my parents will be waiting with
ever-longing eyes.
O, why don't I just pack up for home now, while
there's still time?

家信催緊板，速我返唐山。
私囊未愿進退難。自問多慙難以挽。
言不堪。歸期因此慢。
只恐高堂望穿眼。不如趁早把鄉還。

(一)
唐山：參看歌²¹

JSGJ. 1.12b

- 84 Often I dream of the moment I return to South
China.
When the dream ends, my eyes are in a daze.
In dream after dream, I'm back in Sunning:*
Wife, children, the village well—all in my dreams.
O, let the dreams never end.
Dream again, another wonderful dream.
But dreams of my prolonged incarceration here
set my heart aflame.
Dream, dream—how I would like to dream of being
home again!

(一)
新寧：台山縣舊名

常夢回唐景。夢完眼睛暗。
夢返夢去到新寧。(一)夢妻夢兒夢村井。
夢未清。再夢仍美境。
每夢尚誣心火盛。幾時夢得到家庭。

JSGJ I.12a

*Sunning (Xinning) is the former name of Toisaan (Taishan).

- 85 The world outside my village is vast, without a
boundary in sight.
I'm cut off from my village by mountains and seas.
Away from my village, searching for gold and
silver,
In melancholy, I long for the sight of the village
gate tower.
I think of things back in the village.
Since leaving my village, I haven't returned.
Messages from the village are filled with ten
million complaints.
Remembering my village, I wish to follow the
geese home.*

(一)
迴：作「回」

外鄉無限恨。鄉里隔河山。
睽違鄉境覓金銀。惆悵鄉臺空望眼。
想鄉間。離鄉身未返。
鄉音責我言千萬。迴憶鄉間逐雁還。(一)

JSGJ I.11b

*“Geese,” see songs 28 and 53.

- 86 The journey is thousands of miles of vast distance.
 From afar, I remember my home garden.
 My dear wife must be tossing and turning in her sleep,
 waiting for me.
 O, how I wish my business will bring me fortune.
 To South China, I would return:
 My young son would stare at me by the door;
 Brothers would meet, like geese after a long journey.
 And, my parents would beam happily in the living
 room.

(一)
 唐山：參看歌#21

程途里數萬。遙憶故園間。
 嬌情寤寐望子還。但愿生金多賺。
 返唐山。(一)迎門稚子盼。
 兄弟相逢如鴻雁。椿萱堂上笑開顏。

JSGJ 1.12a

- 87 Drifting all this way to seek some gain,
 I've forsaken my family for a long time.
 No need to linger in the Flowery Flag Nation,
 Pack up my belongings and go home!
 This is truly my wish:
 Leave this barbaric land on the earliest possible
 day.
 It can't be compared to the warmth of home;
 My heart cares only for the day of my return.

(一)
 花旗：參看歌#3

漂身來寬利。家人久拋棄。
 何須依戀在花旗。(一)收拾行裝旋故里。
 僕所冀。早離番邦地。
 桑梓殷情無可比。一心懷念轉歸期。

JSGJ 1.12b

- 88 Held stranded many years in a travelers' lodge,
 The sojourner harbors a restless mind.
 With prolonged anxiety, I remember the fields and
 gardens back at home:
 A lingering emotion spans the two continents, and
 my heart is nearly broken.
 Mind and soul are full of worry.
 An empty purse always depresses me.
 Suddenly, in a dream, I'm back in the village;
 But alas, my body still remains in the Golden
 Gate!

(一)
 掛心肝：掛在心頭

多年羈旅館。遊子志難安。
 悠悠我念故田園。兩地情牽腸欲斷。
 掛心肝^(一)。囊空常抱悶。
 徒然夢裡回鄉轉。誰知身尚在金門。

JSGJ II.40b

- 89 A sojourn in Canada:
 A duckweed's trace, my stay uncertain.*
 Looking back, home is way beyond the horizon;
 Ambitions are unfulfilled, sorrows unresolved.
 In debt, up to my neck.
 I wonder if prosperity ever comes after extreme
 misfortune.
 I wish to raise the homebound whip, but with an
 empty purse—
 Cloudy mountains seem so distant; my bosom aches
 with emotion.

(一)
 周身：滿身

旅居加拿大。萍踪靡定棲。
 故園回首隔天涯。壯志莫伸愁莫解。
 周身^(一)債。難逢否極泰。
 欲整歸鞭囊若洗。雲山渺渺感予懷。

JSGJ II.41a

*“A duckweed's trace” alludes to a person's living in a transient state.

- 90 Since I came to San Francisco,
 Father and Mother are with me in dreams.
 No longer can I attend to them piously morning and
 evening;
 Family needs force me to become a wanderer.
 Wounded with silent grief,
 A traveler stranded on this American sojourn.
 Each festival arouses my feelings of home.
 For parents' love and health, a son must show his
 concern.

自抵三藩市。嚴慈夢寐依。
 几杖晨昏難奉侍。無何家計迫飄離。
 暗傷悲。客行羈歐美。
 佳節每逢情觸起。親心善體是爲兒。

JSGJ I.15a

- 91 This wanderer left home long ago.
 Who is taking care of the ancestors' graves?
 When Cold Food Day comes each year, I alone am
 in tears.*
 Unwilling to fawn upon the rich, I maintain
 myself in poverty.
 Stranded on the American continent,
 How can I be with my family again?
 I wish to set sail for home, but my fortune is
 not yet made.
 My parents' kindness, my wife's faith—I grieve
 I might not be able to repay them.

遊子離鄉久。祖墓倩誰修。
 每逢寒食淚偷流。媚富不甘貧自守。
 困美洲。家人奚聚首。
 欲買歸舟財未就。親恩妻義恨難酬。

JSGJ II.55b

* Cold Food Day is the day before the Qing Ming festival (Pure-Bright Day, usually around April 5 or April 6), the day to pay respects and offer sacrifices to the deceased of the family. No cooking with fire is done on Cold Food Day.

- 92 Months and years, like a current, flow along.
 Counting on my fingers, I realize it's now the middle
 of the eighth month.*
 Tonight is marvelous, moonlight at the doorsteps;
 The moon, crystal-clear, so round and full.
 I view the moon.
 But seeing the moon arouses my sorrow.
 The moon makes me long for home, so far away.
 Leaning by the rail before the full, round moon,
 all in vain.

歲月如流轉。屈指八月半。
 斯宵佳景月臨門。皎皎月輪分外滿。
 對月觀。見月生愁想。
 因月思鄉鄉隔遠。倚欄空帳月華圓。

JSGJ I.49a

*Referring to the "Mid-autumn Festival," celebrated on the fifteenth day of the eighth lunar month. A full moon symbolizes a union, especially of families or lovers.

- 93 Although it's a long time since I came to the West,
 My homeland is truly my heartfelt concern.
 Her mountains and passes, ten thousand miles away,
 beyond the mist and fog;
 She is now a bean split, a melon carved—O, what
 a horror! *
 Fellow countrymen:
 Please end all partisan disputes!
 A united republic of north and south would be
 so grand;
 How can you tolerate civil strife and chaos in China?

西來雖久假。祖國實心掛。
 關山萬里隔烟霞。豆剖瓜分真係怕。
 同胞呀。消融黨界罷。
 南北共和如此雅。那堪內訌亂中華。

JSGJ II.44a

*"Bean split" is an allusion to internal disputes; "melon carved" refers to annexation by outsiders. These are specific references to the political turmoil at the founding of the Republic of China in 1911.