

- 175 Well fed, warmly clothed; next comes desire and
passion.
Get a woman and shelter her in a gilded mansion.
But I am broke and constantly toiling;
How can I think of loving fragrance and indulging
myself in jade?
Trapped in this impoverished valley—
Bowels twist in sorrow, brows twitch in pain.
To live without pleasure is to be a piece of wood or a
clod of dirt.
Yet, with not even a grain to eat at home, what can
a man do?

飽煖思淫慾。買姬藏金屋。
我乏錢財勞碌碌。奚理憐香兼惜玉。
困窮谷。腸愁額又蹙。
快樂拋離如土木。家裡奈因無粒粟。

JSGJ II.25a

NINE

*Songs of the
Young at Heart*

In old China, a male-dominated, gerontocratic society, a man of advanced age commanded respect, authority, and special privileges. It was acceptable for a man of wealth and nobility to have more than one wife and common for him to acquire one or more concubines to "entertain" him during his retirement. Moreover, instead of scandalizing his neighbors, he would be known as "an old man but young at heart" (*ren lao fengliu*). Of course such a society was extremely unfair to women, as the latter were not accorded similar privileges. In such a gerontocracy, young women became the means by which "old fools" recaptured their lost youth and reclaimed the youthful spirit and vitality that was contradicted by their chronological age. Not having a young one beside him would be an admission that an old man's days were numbered. With her by his side, he might be an old fool, but he was young at heart. He still had energy and vitality of life; chronological age did not matter.

The Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 left many Chinese workers stranded in the United States. They were afraid that if they ever made a short visit to China, new American immigration regulations would not allow them to return. Thousands upon thousands of those who had come as laborers during the earlier period were sent back to China, either voluntarily or involuntarily, under the exclusion provisions. For them, leaving the United States meant losing their means of economic survival. Those who could not afford to go home permanently dared not leave at all. Those who had married before coming to the United States faced prolonged separations until they earned enough to finance a journey home. But those who had not married faced lifelong bachelorhood. This situation persisted until after the 1906 earthquake and fire, when some immigrants were able to claim the status of native-borns, hence obtaining the right to return to the United States. In the late 1890s, there was a large population of older Chinese men in Chinatown. Unlike their countrymen who settled in the deep South and married outside of their race, these Chinatown men had few social opportunities. They were the true bachelors of this bachelor society. With their deaths, their generation simply died off.

Some of them finally made sufficient financial gain. Many of these older men decided to go back to China for good, realizing that their only alternative would be to die a lonely death in the United States. The return of the older *Gamsaan haak* (*Jinshan ke*) or "sojourners from Gold Mountain" led to a common nuptial phenomenon in the Pearl River delta starting in the 1880s. It was commonly known as *ga lou long* (*jia lao lang*), meaning "to wed an older groom"—marriage between an

older returnee and a young woman. Of course, behind this marriage relationship lay an economic incentive, a hefty dowry from the groom to the bride's parents. The young woman was thus merchandise in exchange. It was not uncommon for a returnee groom to be scores of years older than his bride. This was truly a cynical version of a young woman marrying for "maturity" and "security." For the man, such a marriage meant winning a trophy. His long years of hard work abroad had finally been rewarded by marriage to a young woman. His youthful manhood, much of which was lost in his prolonged stay in America, was reclaimed.

Not much is known about the life of those early bachelors who remained in Chinatown. These vernacular rhymes about the older men's womanizing craze, written in the early 1910s, are perhaps the only extant pieces of creative writing by members of that generation about themselves. They vividly bring to life the fantasies of these older men, as they, recognizing that they have lost their youth, desperately try to make up for lost time via the companionship of their young brides.

They can't have
and they don't
make a move

- 176 It's a darn shame just talking about it.
I'm already eighty this year.
For my whole life, I have despised going around to
brothels;
Never once did I make myself a foolish john
among whores.
I must be under a spell;
Why have I become so restless lately?
At this old age, I don't seem to know what to do
with my life;
And now, I am totally taken by the sight of
flowers.

(一) 園：作「園」；打水園：亦作「打茶園」，
在妓院作樂
(二) 撞鬼：見鬼
(三) 嘈閑：吵鬧不安
(四) 唔得：不能

講來都失禮。今年八十齊。
平生最憎打水園。(一) 亦無做過波蘿鵝。
真撞鬼。(二) 因何咁嘈閑。(三)
臨老就唔得過世。(四) 至到今日被花迷。

JSGJ I.17a

- 177 I've lived more than half of a century.
Only now do I start chasing after skirts.
Dressed like a handsome lad, I take a stroll along the
willow lanes.*
When I spot a lovely face, thoughts whirl in my mind,
Heart throbs.
I must come up with a clever scheme:
If I could only redeem the fair one all for myself;
This old fool would be willing to empty his purse of
silver and gold.

(一) 柳陌：指柳巷；花街柳巷：
妓院

年已大半百。始學偷香客。
扮成靚仔遊柳陌。(一) 瞥見嬌顏多思索。
心勒索。想條妙計策。
若使佳人能贖得。老夫願傾囊黃白。

JSGJ I.16b

* "Willow lanes"—brothels.

- 178 The pair of mandarin ducks is wrongly matched.*
 Their age difference is way too great:
 ▶ An eighty-year-old grandpa, with his eighteen-year-old wife—
 Why, why such a nice young lass married to such an old fellow?
 And that long beard of his!
 O, you should be ashamed of yourself in front of the young woman.
 I ask you, in the nuptial suite, under the bright wedding candles,
 What can become of a rouge-faced woman with a white-haired man?

(一)
 伯父：年老男人

鴛鴦配錯譜。年紀差得多。
 八十公公十八婆。咁好佳人嫁伯父。
 兩筆鬚。應漸對少婦。
 試問洞房花燭事。紅顏白髮果如何。

JSGJ L18a

* "Mandarin ducks," see song 49.

- 179 A rouge-faced young woman weds a white-haired old man,
 What can she do with such a marriage arrangement?
 Husband, already many years past sixty;
 ♫ Wife, barely sixteen, a fine maiden.
 Alas, cut out the long-winded fuss!
 You, have you had enough fun with women?
 In this arranged marriage, she could not put in a word of her own;
 It's a fair bet that compatibility and love were never once of concern.

(一) (二)
 有能較：參看歌#2
 撈：嘈唆

紅顏配白叟。嫁着有能較。
 檀郎甲子已回頭。二八佳人成匹偶。
 少長撈。風流知足否。
 婚姻憑媒難開口。料無意合與情投。

JSGJ L19b

- 180 My head is going completely bald;
 I am marrying the charming young one.
 This marriage is supposedly my prayers come true;
 Who would expect that she is disgruntled over my age so advanced?
 When we retire to bed,
 She always turns her buttocks toward me,
 As if she is angry, all the time like this;
 O, how can I get her to just compromise and have some fun?

頭已光(一)。配合阿嬌娘。
 姻緣估話遂心腸。誰想佳人嫌壽長。
 歸床上。常把臀相向。
 呼氣裝成這個樣。怎能得佢好商量。

JSGJ 1.19b

(一) 己作「已」
 (二) 細作「晒」；光晒頂：

完全光頂

- 181 I look like a pickled plum
 When I marry a woman of willowy charm.
 I was late in meeting this fine partner to tie the lover's knot;
 In the nuptial chamber, under bright wedding candles, she's the very answer to my prayers.
 I'm bent as an old pine tree.
 In excitement, I turn to her happily.
 I'm most afraid that she'll resent my old age.
 Inside the hibiscus tent, no negotiation is deemed necessary.*

貌似霜梅像。始配柳嬌娘。
 晚逢佳耦結鴛鴦。洞房花燭真合想。
 蒼松樣。喜得含笑向。
 最怕蘭閨嫌尊長。芙蓉帳裡少商量。

JSGJ 1.18b

*“Hibiscus tent,” see song 149.

- 182 A shrunken old man am I,
 Lucky enough to marry a young and lovely woman.
 Don't ever laugh that a man in his late years has no
 talent;
 The nuptial union under brilliant candlelight is
 celebrated in cheer.
 Marvelous, isn't it?
 A wonderful union consummated tonight.
 My hair is white, but my vitality, like spring;
 My lips on her rouged face, I love her all the more.

(一) 公仔：年老男人
 (二) 有人材：沒有才能

雖屬亞公仔。猶幸阿嬌配。
 漫笑年暮有人才。花燭洞房高喝彩。
 得意哉。良緣今晚會。
 白頭春事依然在。嘴交紅粉倍恩愛。

JSGJ 1.18b

- 183 At first I thought it might not be fun:
 An old man paired with a young woman.
 It's not exactly a perfect match in the bedroom,
 Yet it turns out like fish and water, our brows
 beaming in joy!*
- As long as we like each other,
 Why bother with our age?
 Marriage is predestined in a former life;
 I tease my young love, born just a bit late.

祇估有趣味。伯爹配小姬。
 誰知魚水樂齊眉。雖則房中非兩美。
 合意氣。何必計年紀。
 姻緣有譜前生註。戲笑細君出世遲。

JSGJ 1.18a

* "Fish and water," see song 130.

- 184 Indeed my age is advanced—
 A withered willow tree, but growing new wands.
 Like a young lad, wearing a pair of fancy shoes,
 I enter the nuptial suite and consummate the
 wedding rites.
 I am satisfied,
 Having a young and beautiful wife.
 I pray that Heaven will look upon me with special
 favor:
 Let me live a hundred years before we part!

雖則年紀邁。枯楊幸生梯。
 猶如童子着花鞋。走入洞房成婚禮。
 安樂細。得個美少艾。
 但願皇天另眼睇。賜吾百歲亦和諧。

(一) 細：作「晒」；安樂晒：很滿足
 安心了

JSGJ L19a

- 185 I'm sixty, this autumn.
 White hair on my temples, but I am not worried.
 I dress in red and green, all fine silk;
 When I walk, my body moves like a bending willow.
 I indulge in wine,
 And seek out a playmate in Laamkung.*
 Tipsy, I turn to Seung Ngo and examine her fine
 details.†
 The clouds and rain atop Wu Mountain are the
 wonders of making love.‡

重逢甲子秋。鬢白不知憂。
 穿紅着綠又穿綢。舉步身搖如擺柳。
 性嗜酒。臨邛尋愛友。
 醉向嫦娥細研究。巫山雲雨樂優游。

JSGJ L16b

*In a Han dynasty anecdote, and later in popular tales, the talented scholar Sima Xiangru (ca. 179–117 B.C.) and Zhuo Wenjun, the widowed daughter of the rich and powerful noble Zhuo Wangsun, cloped to Laamkung (Linqiong) to live together without her father's blessing. However, the reference here to Linqiong is to a place of loose women, namely prostitutes.

†“Seung Ngo,” see song 56.

‡“Clouds and rain” and “Wu Mountain,” see song 42.

- 186 An old man am I: crane-white hair, weather-beaten,
 Face wrinkled like a rooster's layered skin.
 I am indeed an old crow, but with a desire to linger
 around nests of magpies
 And to enjoy my last years paired like mandarin ducks
 in the wild.*
 Like a homeless pigeon
 I look for a pleasure mate by moonlight.
 The gaily dressed orioles and swallows cover up
 their mouths to hide their giggles;
 Dear ladies, don't you laugh at my white hair!

鶴髮蒼顏叟。面似鷄皮縐。
 老鴉偏貪戀鵲巢。露宿鴛鴦暮景樂。
 形類鴿。月明尋歡偶。
 紅粉燕鶯齊掩口。粧台莫笑我白頭。

JSGJ L16b

* "Mandarin ducks," see song 49.

- 187 Already senile, still hanging around the north alley,*
 Embracing young women and paying for their smiles,
 Instantly forgetting his wrinkled skin and crane-white
 hair,
 Once bewitched by the charm of foxy women.
 Like a starving hawk,
 Enjoying the taste of the wild—
 Hugging the beautiful one, not ashamed of his
 hunched back.
 What a lovely sight is an old man, walking cane in
 hand, leaning on a young and lovely woman.

龍鐘遊北里。買笑擁雛姬。
 頓忘鶴髮與鷄皮。一旦遭逢狐獻媚。
 恍鷹飢。野鶩嘗滋味。
 駘背否慚偎彼美。最憐鳩杖倚蛾眉。

JSGJ L16a

* "North alley" refers to a red-light district.

- 188 So, just follow your impulse:
 Enjoy the company of a beautiful woman.
 With enough money, you can shelter the beauty
 in a gilded mansion;
 With too much indulgence your back will become
 hunched and waist bent.
 Obsessed with lust,
 Spending nights in the whorehouses much too
 often;
 Don't you ever worry about your age, a lit candle
 in a gusty wind?
 You don't know your limits, you just don't!

(一) 娼寮：妓院
 (二) 幾：作「紀」

而從心所欲。尚戀美人局。
 多則阿嬌藏金屋。弄得駝背又腰曲。
 好色慾。往往娼寮宿。
 唔顧年幾當風燭。不知足兮不知足。

JSGJ I.16a

- 189 I never tire of the lust for women;
 At seventy, what do I care about destiny.
 Loose with passion, wild with desire, just like
 my younger days,
 Brothels and whorehouses are places of my
 mad indulgence.
 Am I a crazy old fool?
 But I do care if people see me there.
 So, I'd rather hide myself amidst beautiful
 flowers, look around to my heart's content,
 And ask every lovely creature to spend the night
 as my companion.

嗜淫心未倦。七十不知天。
 縱情肆慾比英年。妓館娼寮志貪戀。
 發老癲。恐怕人見面。
 潛入花叢飽眼癮。偏求淑女伴同眠。

JSGJ I.17b

- 190 With this long beard already reaching to my belly,
 You wouldn't think I'd be affected by lust or
 desire.
 But I'm still chasing after fragrant skirts;
 Leaning on my cane, bent and bowed, I make love
 with women.
 A solace to my dire wishes—
 The sisters celebrate my longevity with a banquet.
 A white-haired man with blushing young women, all
 drink to the Golden Valley,*
 O, that's a heavenly life, don't you agree?

(一) 延：作「筵」
 (二) 話：參看歌 #14

鬚已長過腹。只話忘色慾。
 乃向羣芳肆微逐。策杖偷香躬又鞠。
 慰衷曲。姊妹壽筵祝。
 白髮紅顏醉金谷。汝話享福唔享福。

JSGJ 1.17a

*“Golden Valley” refers to the Golden Valley Villa built by the wealthy Shi Chong (A.D. 249–300) of the Jin dynasty, where Shi entertained his beloved Lüzhū.

- 191 Searching for the Peach Blossom Cave,*
 This old man asks for directions.
 He comes to the kingdom of fragrance and visits
 the charming faces;
 He entertains himself with clouds and rain among
 the flowers.[†]
 Amidst the beautiful bushes,
 He teases at will, like a butterfly.
 The tender petals, soft and light, emit a heavy
 fragrance;
 An old man's indulgence is all the more a fanatic
 passion.

臨覓桃源洞。老翁問跡踪。
 入來香國訪嬌容。花底歡娛雲雨共。
 叢芳中。任他蛱蝶弄。
 嫩蕊輕盈風味重。白頭痴戀益情濃。

JSGJ 1.16a

*“Peach Blossom Cave” is a utopia. The term originated in the writings of Tao Qian of the Jin dynasty. He depicts it as a secluded community of tranquility and peace. In this rhyme, however, the term does not carry the original connotation.

[†]“Clouds and rain,” see song 42.