

Reading

Angel Island Poetry

Angel Island Poem #1

Instead of remaining a citizen of China, I willingly became an ox. I intended to come to America to earn a living. The Western styled buildings are lofty; but I have not the luck to live in them. How was anyone to know that my dwelling place would be a prison?

Angel Island Poem #2

The sea-scape remembers lichen twisting
and turning for a thousand li.¹

There is no shore to land and it is
difficult to walk.

With a gentle breeze I arrived at the city
thinking all would be so.

At ease, how was one to know he was to
live in a wooden building?

Angel Island Poem #3

There are tens of thousands of poems on these walls
They are all cries of suffering and sadness
The day that I am rid of this prison and become successful
I must remember that this chapter once existed . . .

Angel Island Poem #4

America has power, but not justice.
In prison, we were victimized as if we were guilty.
Given no opportunity to explain, it was really brutal.
I bow my head in reflection but there is
nothing I can do.

Angel Island Poem #5

Leaving behind my writing brush and removing my sword, I came to America.
Who was to know two streams of tears would flow upon arriving here?
If there comes a day when I will have attained my ambition and become successful,
I will certainly behead the barbarians and spare not a single blade of grass.

1 A Chinese unit of measurement.

Angel Island Poem #6

Just talk about going to the land of the Flowery Flag² and my countenance fills with happiness.

Not without hard work were 1,000 pieces of gold dug up and gathered together.

There were words of farewell to the parents, but the throat choked up first.

There were many feelings, many tears flowing face to face, when parting with the wife.

Waves big as mountains often astonished this traveler.

With laws harsh as tigers, I had a taste of all the barbarities.

Angel Island Poem #7

This is a message to those who live here not to worry excessively.

Instead, you must cast your idle worries to the flowing stream.

Experiencing a little ordeal is not hardship.

Napoleon was once a prisoner on an island.

Angel Island Poem #8

In the quiet of night, I heard, faintly, the whistling of wind.

The forms and shadows saddened me; upon seeing the landscape, I composed a poem.

The floating clouds, the fog, darken the sky.

The moon shines faintly as the insects chirp.

Grief and bitterness entwined are heaven sent.

The sad person sits alone, leaning by a window.

Angel Island Poem #9

I clasped my hands in parting with my brothers and classmates.

Because of the mouth, I hastened to cross the American ocean.

How was I to know that the western barbarians had lost their hearts and reason

With a hundred kinds of oppressive laws, they mistreat us Chinese.

² A Cantonese colloquialism for the United States.