

Analysis of an angel island poem

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Analysis of an Angel Island Poem Many writings and carvings in various languages were discovered on the walls of the Angel Immigration Station, ranging from simple carvings to complex writings awaiting translation and comprehension today. Between 1910 and 1940, San Francisco witnessed the proliferation of Chinese immigrants with at least 175, 000 immigrants arriving to earn a living in America (Lai, Lim, and Yung 28). The problems posed to the country owing to increased arrival of Chinese immigrants were unforeseen. Subsequently, it led to the restriction of Chinese immigration, especially by Angel Island where the carvings and writings of Chinese immigrants were discovered. It is apparent the carvings and writings are remaining evidence demonstrating the experiences of Chinese immigrants and occurrences at Angel station in San Francisco.

The poems discovered at the station are the most dramatic discoveries in American literature. Today, at least scholars are translating and interpreting poems across the world (Lai, Lim, and Yung 12). Carved on wooden buildings by Chinese immigrants who never became laborers in America following Exclusion Act, the poems expose the unusual detention of immigrants for weeks and months on the island awaiting clearance by American immigration officials (Lai, Lim, and Yung 20). In addition, these poems exposed the labor conditions and economic conditions in California in the 20th century. By providing a detailed account of the plight of Chinese immigrants in San Francisco, the collection of poems questioned American ideologies of unlimited and equal opportunity floated in the 20th century. It is apparent the poems expose various themes not limited to immigration, alienation, race, and labor in America. An immigrant from Heungshan wrote a prominent poem that fuses the experiences and occurrences in San

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Francisco to demonstrate several themes. The poem was translated into English by Lai, Lim and Yung (1991) and organized into prose.

There are tens of thousands of poems on these walls

They are all cries of suffering and sadness

The day I am rid of this prison and become successful

I must remember that this chapter once existed

I must be frugal in my daily needs

Needless extravagance usually leads to ruin

All my compatriots should remember China

Once you have made some small gains,

You should return home early (Ancestors in the America pg 1).

According to the poem, Angel Island Immigration Station was a place of suffering and sadness. The Chinese immigrants were seeking labor opportunities in order to earn a living in America. The Exclusion Act in late 20th century that prohibited increased Chinese migration led to sufferings and problems. Many immigrants stayed in unhygienic and deplorable conditions awaiting clearance from immigration officials, and the carvings and writings demonstrate the bitterness and resentment among immigrants. However, many Chinese immigrants endured and withstood conditions at Angel Island Immigration Station with a promise of success once in America. Even though, many immigrants never became laborers in America following the Act, many more immigrants are arriving in America early did not realize aspirations and desires are inspiring them to leave home. American ideals of equal labor and opportunities were not realized, as racial discrimination and segregation characterized relations between Americans and Chinese immigrants. As a result, America quickly changed from a land of opportunity

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to a country of injustice because unnecessary differences instituted by government institutions prevented equal realization of the American dream. For this reason, it is apparent the plight of immigrants remains an issue of public debate today and in the future.

Works Cited

Lai, H M, Genny Lim, and Judy Yung. Island: Poetry and History of Chinese Immigrants on Angel Island, 1910-1940. 2014. Ancestors in the America. Angel Island Immigration Station Poetry 1910 - 1940. Web. 1st February 1, 2015.