



Happy Lim. Photograph from a published program.

The Many Sides of Happy Lim:  
aka Hom Ah Wing, Lin Jian Fu, Happy Lum,  
Lin Chien Fu, Hom Yen Chuck, Lam Kin Foo,  
Lum Kin Foo, Hom, Lim Goon Wing, Lim  
Gin Foo, Gin Foo Lin, Koon Wing Lim, Henry  
Chin, Lim Ying Chuck, Lim Ah Wing, et. al.

Gordon H. Chang

Known to the FBI, INS, and IRS as Mr. Ah Wing Hom, he was also Lin Jian Fu, Jian Fu (Tough Guy), or just Fu to the readers of the many poems and short stories he published in Chinese over four decades in the twentieth century. And to still others, primarily English-readers of his writing, he was Happy Lim, an ironic, even tragically bizarre name, as his life was far from pleasant. On New Year's Day 1986, he died alone in a dingy San Francisco Chinatown bachelor hotel suffering from a bacterial infection and a chronic blood disorder that had required the amputation of all his toes the year before. He was seventy-eight years of age and had spent most of his life within blocks of where he died.<sup>1</sup>

Though he is not as widely read today as he was during his lifetime, he is still celebrated, even revered, as an inspiring voice from an older generation of Chinese American social activists and radical cultural workers. In fact, he has acquired a new audience of primarily English-readers interested in voices from the past. He wrote for more than half a century, producing an extraordinarily rich and unusual body of poetry and nonfiction writing, based loosely on his own difficult life as a poor service worker in San Francisco. He was affiliated with the organized left for most of these years and wrote about life in a capitalist society, international events, and personal tribulations. He called for revolu-

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tionary courage and sought sympathetic understanding for his own difficulties that he faced in life. Since his death, songs and odes have been written of him and pieces of his writing continue to be reproduced.<sup>2</sup> In the late 1960s and early 1970s, when the emerging Asian American movement searched for heroes from the past who could inspire a new generation of antiracist, anti-imperialist activists, Happy Lim and others emerged as living evidence of the history of resistance to oppression, proof that the newborn Asian American radicalism was not anomalous but deeply connected to history and community. Lim assumed an honored place alongside Yuri Kochiyama, Karl Yoneda, Carlos Bulosan, Philip Vera Cruz, and other ideological ancestors.

Unlike the others whom many of today's activists befriended or studied, Lim remained aloof and enigmatic. There were several reasons for this: for one, he communicated almost exclusively in Chinese and he preferred to keep mainly to the poor, male residents of San Francisco Chinatown. For another, even to those friends who thought they knew him, Lim always remained a "mystery man." The FBI and INS, which had expended an extraordinary effort to investigate Happy Lim over many years, were also never confident they really knew who he was. One of his employers once told the INS that Lim had "no friends or enemies because he doesn't mix with anyone." An old friend of Lim, questioned by a federal agent, described him as a "lone wolf type."<sup>3</sup>

Happy Lim offered many accounts of his coming to America and life here, but the information he gave, such as dates and affiliations, varied widely, and not just to government agencies but to friends as well. The following biographical sketch appears to be reasonably accurate, however, and draws from family correspondence, government documents, recorded interviews with Lim, and his own writing. Still, many questions about his life remain and will probably never be fully resolved.

According to information he provided the Immigration Service on many occasions under interrogation or in legal applications and to friends, Lim was born in November 1907 in Nam How Village, Hoy Ping District, in the Pearl River Delta of Guangdong Province, China. He first came to the United States at the age of sixteen, in 1922, under the name of Hom Ah Wing, and requested admission as a United States citizen by virtue of the native-born status of his father. Lim was held at the immigration processing station at Angel Island in San Francisco Bay, where on June 22, immigration agents interrogated Lim and his father. At the hearing,

Lim's father claimed, and produced considerable supporting evidence, including statements from "reputable" whites, that he, the father, had been born in 1880 in Marysville, California, the entry point to the Sierra Nevada Gold Country, and that Lim was his true son. The hearing went well and Lim was admitted to the country as a U.S. citizen. His legal status allowed him to travel out of the country easily and he visited China twice, once from 1923 to 1926 and a second time from 1927 to 1929. During the first trip, he apparently started a family, though his wife and son never came to the United States. Over the years, American officials consistently accepted his citizenship and allowed him to re-enter the country with few questions. He apparently never again left the country after 1929.<sup>4</sup>

Happy Lim says he lived in Marysville and San Francisco in the 1920s. He received just a few months of schooling in English in a Christian church-run school and had not much more education in China. But he decided to use Chinese as his primary language and, by personal choice, he never developed his English, even as he worked among English-speakers for most of his life. As late as the 1980s, he still spoke only rudimentary English, wrote entirely in Chinese, had a preparer complete his simple annual income tax return, and relied on the bilingual services of San Francisco's Chinese Hospital to attend to his failing health.

Little is known about his life during his early years and about how he affiliated with the left in the United States but there are some tantalizing suggestions. Late in life, Lim claimed that he had attended the famed Sun Yat-sen University for the Toilers of China in Moscow, which was a center of Soviet efforts to influence Chinese revolutionaries, for a year in the late 1920s.<sup>5</sup> The Russians had opened the school in the fall of 1925 to honor Sun and hundreds of hopeful and energetic Chinese traveled to Moscow to enroll; many future leaders in both the Chinese Communist and Nationalist Parties attended as students. Among them were Deng Xiaoping, Ye Jianying, Chen Boda, Yang Shangkun, and even Chiang Ching-kuo, Chiang Kai-shek's son. The school offered a general university-level curriculum as well as courses in communism but was short-lived and closed in late 1930. There is little confirming evidence for Lim's claim about attendance, but it is entirely plausible. Immigration records do show him as being away from the United States for almost two years, from 1927 to 1929 and Canton, where he went, was a center of revolutionary activity in China at this time. Students, supported by money

from the Chinese Communist Party, traveled by ship from Canton to Vladisovtok and then by train to Moscow. Interestingly, Lim's family in China has no record or memory of him being in China during this time,<sup>6</sup> but Lim might have deliberately never informed his family of his journey. The memoirs of one who had attended the University mention that some of his fellow students had in fact come from the United States and countries other than China.<sup>7</sup> Though the released FBI documents on Lim do not reveal an affiliation between Lim and Sun Yat-sen University, and even mention that the CIA had nothing on Lim, the well-known Japanese American communist Karl Yoneda claimed in fact that Lim had attended Sun Yat-sen University.<sup>8</sup>

As for his writing, Lim recalled that he began to write poetry around 1930 and sent his work to *Chinese Vanguard*, the organ of the All-America Alliance of Chinese Anti-Imperialists which began publishing in New York City in 1930. It was the "national voice" of the Chinese Marxist Left for a number of years, according to Him Mark Lai.<sup>9</sup> In the 1980s, Lim said that he had turned to the left because he had lived in "hunger and cold and felt deeply depressed" but was inspired by those who sought change. He said that he "admired the ambitions and progressive thoughts of this great time, as well as the people of high character who lived them." He remembered:

I could not but believe and follow them to fight for the truth and a brighter future. I remember that on a silent night, I decided to dry my tears and start to write, epitomizing, in my poems, the rigor and bitterness of reality, as well as advocating that we must work with the suffering and progressive people of our time to strive for a better place to live. As for myself, I had to continue to write.<sup>10</sup>

He said that he joined the Communist Party, USA in 1930, although he later told the FBI he had been in the Party for just several years during World War II. Other sources say that he was in the Party into the 1950s and Lim himself once said that he was in the Party until 1959.<sup>11</sup> Although it is difficult to reconstruct an accurate history of Lim's organizational affiliations, it is clear that he affiliated himself with the Left in the early 1930s. Karl Yoneda, who joined the CP in the mid-1920s, recalled that he met Lim in Alaska, where Lim worked in the salmon canneries. Yoneda says he met Lim in a communist cell meeting in Alaska at the end of 1935 and the two often went out to have

meals together. Yoneda said that Lim had already been traveling to Alaska for several years. A problem with Yoneda's account, however, is that according to his memoir, *Ganbatte*, Yoneda first went to Alaska in 1938.<sup>12</sup>

Lim in one of his own memoirs recalled his involvement with various leftwing Chinese organizations after the start of the Great Depression in 1929 and suggests a specific reason for his turn to the Left. The Chinese community in those years, he recalled, "was one full of economic oppression. It was a hard time to find a job and it was a time of racial discrimination." In a recollection published in 1982, Lim remembered, "many of the scenes of that time still stir up strong feelings within me. My strongest impression is one of many people out of work and little shops unable to survive. Even for myself who was single, I did not know where I would stand from one day to the next. It was this kind of hardship that threw me into struggle and led me to follow a revolutionary path." He said that he even helped organize the Chinatown contingent in the 1934 San Francisco general strike demonstration.<sup>13</sup>

Happy Lim remembered that young activists staged "propaganda forums on the street corners [of Chinatown] to educate people about exploitation, oppression and the unemployment suffered by workers." One of these activists was a man named Javier Dea (Ja Chong), one of the early leaders of the Chinese left in the United States who rather than face deportation left the country for the Soviet Union in 1932. In 1981, Ja Chong poignantly recalled the difficulties the Chinese community in San Francisco faced during the Depression. "Chinese were living out of Portsmouth Square and on the Streets," he wrote. "Little babies had no milk to drink." He staged street forums, which he says eventually attracted crowds of hundreds who would hear him explain that "the capitalist system caused unemployment by exploiting workers, over-production and surplus value."<sup>14</sup>

In October 1937, Lim and other young activists organized the Chinese Workers Mutual Aid Association, which became the most important political organization of the Left in San Francisco's Chinatown. Returned cannery workers from Alaska, like Lim, formed the core of the organization, which attracted a membership of 600. "Workers from the restaurants, laundries, sewing trades, farms, seafaring workers and longshoremen joined," Lim recalled. It was a "workers mass organization" and engaged in "propaganda and education for Chinese workers." Lim served as the organization's secretary.<sup>15</sup> A few years later he helped organize

the New Chinese Alphabetized Language Study Society that was more cultural in orientation. The group promoted the modernization of the Chinese language and the reform of the writing system, in themselves radical propositions at the time. The group, which was the first left-wing youth group in Chinatown, quickly attracted a wide following and expanded its activities beyond language reform. The group sponsored singing and drama groups, which performed for the public, including a play named "Drifting Life." According to Lim, it told about the bitter life of the Chinese in America and received a "tremendous reception by the people," when it was staged in Chinatown. Lim proudly remembered that "We didn't waste our time on parties or in the midst of red-and-green light drinking. We spent our youthful time [doing] some meaningful work."<sup>16</sup> About this same time, Happy Lim was also arrested by the San Francisco police in a Pine Street hotel for smoking opium. Though he denied the charges, he was thrown in jail overnight and placed on probation for thirty days. He never mentioned this embarrassment to interviewers later in life, but he did once say that he had been arrested for "disturbing the peace."<sup>17</sup> He had no other local criminal record.

Happy Lim and other Chinatown leftists engaged in a variety of political and cultural work during these years. They worked with the organized labor movement to seek improvements in the lives of Chinese working and unemployed people; they held English and Mandarin classes and organized singing, dancing, and other cultural groups to promote what they understood of the emerging revolutionary culture in China and in America. They also worked to support China's resistance to Japanese aggression. Among the prominent intellectual influences on him that Lim listed were the famous scholar of modern Chinese linguistics, Chao Yuen-ren (who later pursued his career at Harvard and UC Berkeley), and Chinese writers such as Mao Dun, Ba Jin, Guo Mojo, Lu Xun, and Mao Zedong. He admired Maxim Gorky and mourned the writer's mysterious death in 1936. Lim's "In Memory of Gorky," begins:

As if a star has fallen from the sky,  
As if the sun has forever set.  
Gorky,  
You departed us so suddenly.

Among American writers, Lim favored Jack London and Ernest Hemingway, but it was Walt Whitman whom he most cel-

ebred. In a preface to a collection of his own poetry that he had hoped to publish, Lim called Whitman, “the most important poet in the history of American literature.” “The poet is the voice of freedom,” Lim cites Whitman from the *Leaves of Grass*.<sup>18</sup>

In his own poetry, Lim wrote in free verse and eschewed classical Chinese styles, though in his later years he occasionally introduced classical allusions to his writing. He wrote exclusively in colloquial, simple, Chinese. His audience, especially in his pre-1970s writing, was other leftwing “overseas Chinese” who supported the communist movement in China and were deeply alienated from America. His writings reveal one who was remarkably self-taught, widely read, and deeply devoted to the discipline of writing. Happy Lim was perhaps the most important organic intellectual among Chinese in America.

With the outbreak of war in 1941, Lim registered for the draft but never served in the military.<sup>19</sup> In the war years, Happy Lim found employment outside of his familiar Chinatown. He worked as kitchen help in downtown restaurants, uptown elite men’s clubs, and naval shipyards at Hunter’s Point, in southern San Francisco, and in Marin County. He worked in unskilled occupations (bus boy, dishwasher, fitter) his whole life. At the same time, he wrote regularly during the war years, the subject of his poems being major events such as the fall of Rome and Berlin and the liberation of

Happy Lim during the Chinese Workers Mutual Aid Association Period.



Paris. He wrote about the Chinese people's resistance to Japan's invasion and the subsequent civil war between the Nationalists and Communists. He wrote about the life and struggles of Chinese in America. But it was his celebration of the victory of the Chinese Communists that appears to have brought him to the attention of the FBI, which then monitored him regularly afterward. In August 1949, Lim published "Welcoming the Free and Independent Democratic New China," which the agency translated for its records. In the long article, Lim hailed the triumph of the Chinese Communists: "The Chinese democratic revolution—opposing imperialism, feudalism and a wealthy class of officials—must complete its advance," he wrote. "The new China is being born!"<sup>20</sup> On October 9, a week after Mao Zedong had proclaimed the founding of the People's Republic of China, Lim and other members of the Mutual Aid Association organized a public celebration of the event at the Chinese American Citizens' Alliance Hall in San Francisco. Rightwing thugs broke up the meeting and attacked the audience. The next day, rightists passed out flyers marking fifteen leaders of the left by name for death. Happy Lim's name was prominently listed among them.<sup>21</sup>

Several months later, Lim published several fictional vignettes about the Korean War that broke out in June 1950. His stories encouraged support for the communist cause or sympathy for those Americans who had lost loved ones in what he saw as an unjust, imperialist war of aggression. But local federal authorities couldn't establish the basic facts about Lim's identity. San Francisco FBI agents reported to their superiors in Washington that they had "encountered considerable difficulty in ascertaining the identity of Lim insofar as birth or naturalization, previous employment, and residence in the United States" and asked the central office for help. It could provide none.<sup>22</sup>

Nevertheless, the FBI, because of his political views, placed Lim on its "Security Index," which identified communists and other leftists the agency deemed possibly dangerous in the event of international conflict. In 1955, when Lim was placed on the Security Index, he joined 104 other "individuals of Chinese extraction," mainly in New York and San Francisco, whom the FBI determined it would monitor closely and constantly. In order to be able to "move immediately" against the thirty-six aliens and "increase and intensify the coverage" of the sixty-nine citizens, the FBI's central office directed its field agents to report on the first of every month the "exact whereabouts of each subject" or

the efforts being made to locate the subject.” The FBI removed and then reinstated Lim on the list, as it was concerned about possible domestic repercussions arising from the 1955 offshore island confrontation between the United States and China. The agency kept him on the list until 1966 when it deemed he no longer fit their threat profile.<sup>23</sup>

In April 1956, FBI agents, seeking to gather more information on Lim, walked right into the CMWAA headquarters and directly questioned Lim. They asked a variety of probing questions of a personal and political nature. Lim tried to deflect their interrogation by claiming that he was interested only in “folk dancing” and not politics. He offered them fictions that he had a son who was in the U.S. Air Force, though he did not know his current whereabouts and had no contact with him, and two other sons, one in China and another in the United States, but had no contact with them either. He denied ever being in the Communist Party or in the Communist Political Association and said, as he had a poor memory, that he could not remember any of the names of individuals involved in the Mutual Aid Association. Lim’s behavior heightened the suspicions of the agents, who reported to their superiors that they found Lim “very evasive.” Though they conceded it was “unprofessional,” the agents gave their own personal impressions of Lim: he was, in their way of thinking, “perhaps a ‘mental case’ due to his peculiar reactions, emotions, and in general, the manner in which he conducted himself physically.” Years later, Happy Lim himself described this meeting with the FBI agents. He said they asked about his financial support of the *China Daily News*, the leading Chinese leftist newspaper in the country and in which he had published, and what he thought about “New China.” He said that he simply answered that he was not interested in politics, but only in literature, writing, painting, and dancing. “Good for us, good for you,” the FBI agent responded, according to Lim.<sup>24</sup> His problematic effort to deceive the FBI however only served to increase the agency’s concerns. They continued to monitor his activities, including watching his coming and going from his Chinatown residence and intercepting his personal mail.

But how he described himself was not totally false. He was deeply committed to his cultural work and was devoted to his social dancing. Karl Yoneda intimated that Lim was actually never a political leader or organizer. And many years later, one of his female dance partners shared recollections of him that provide curious insights into a part of the non-political side of his life. It

Happy Lim, circa 1930s.

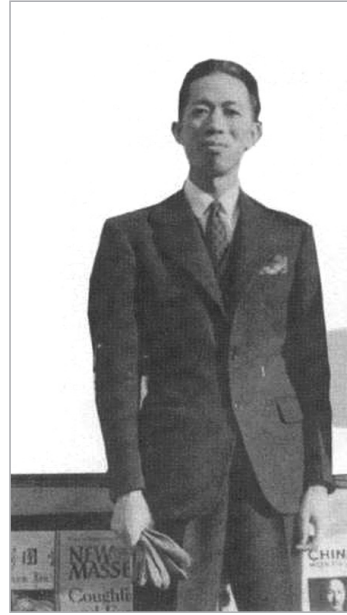
was not only the FBI that found him hard to understand and enigmatic, but so did his “lady friends.”

Though temporally unspecific in recollection, Helen Herrick recalled Happy Lim very well when she wrote me in 1989. He was “Happy Lim” to her when they knew each other as regular members of Changs International Folk Dancers, founded in San Francisco in 1938 as the first club devoted to understanding and practicing folk dancing from around the globe, especially from Central Europe and the Balkans.<sup>25</sup> As early as 1956 Lim had told the FBI that he was an “avid folk dancer” and danced “every night of the week.”

At some point, Happy Lim and Herrick became regular partners at the club functions, though they seemed to have had no contact with one another away from the dance floor. “He was a quiet man, unobtrusive, but determined to learn the dances,” recalled Herrick. “This he did, and when dancing with him, a partner must never question his lead. He said not a word, grimaced slightly, and led his partner where she was supposed to go without comment, a sort of a ‘Pardon me, Lady, but we will do it this way.’”

He was very polite but seldom uttered a word, always smiled, and at Christmas time, came bringing (to the club’s Christmas party) a card for each of his favorites, and each card, in an envelope, contained a dollar bill. If he was pathetic, he was also admirable, and though I felt many club members pitied him, I always felt that there was a very interesting story, that his life had been beset by many problems, and that he had not always been the man I knew. I thought he was perhaps emotionally shredded by incidents in his past life, that he had been a victim of uncontrollable events, and that he was simply making the best of what was left of his person, his personality and his physical health. Happy Lim was gracious to everyone, he simply came to Changs for the recreation and it may have been his only outlet.

Herrick, herself a writer on western history and California Indians, was clearly very fond of Lim, but offered no other specifics about his life. “I am aware that many considered Happy Lim just another old Chinaman, but to me, and to my [autistic] son, he was always someone very special.”<sup>26</sup>



Lim's platonic relationship with Herrick raises a dimension of Lim's life that has never been examined previously: his continuing infatuation with women. A good many of Lim's poems and prose are melodramatic stories of relationships he has with women, mainly white women from the physical descriptions he gives, and sometimes Asian, notably later in his life when he encountered Asian American women activists. Most of his tales are quite sentimental, even romantic, though none ever narrate or even suggest any physical involvement. Lim idealized his women friends, and embroidered them with warmth, kindness, beauty, and political sentiments that moved his heart. For him, they appeared to embody all that was good and beautiful in life. One of his poems, "Dream of a River," typically interweaves his fascination with a woman with his own political ideals, and ends:

You deeply care for the sorrow of the destitute  
Truthful feelings spill from your heart  
On the path to go forward  
I recall the wave of your red skirt.<sup>27</sup>

Lim's attitude toward his women subjects is reminiscent of Carlos Bulosan's encounters with some of the white women in *America Is In The Heart*, though without the sexual component. Unlike Bulosan, almost all of Lim's female subjects are political co-travelers though occasionally a white woman appears as a grieving lover or relative of an American serviceman killed overseas. She serves as a device for Lim to condemn the price of imperialism for everyday Americans. Many of Lim's subjects appear to be flights of fancy, though some of his latter poetry does seem to be based on actual individuals. White American male subjects rarely appear in his work.

By the early 1960s, the FBI's suspicion of Happy Lim and the INS's Confession Program that sought to dismantle the elaborate historical structure based on "paper sons" and illegal entry into the country, joined together; the state began deportation proceedings against Lim on January 12, 1962. Federal agencies accused Lim of having ties with the Communist Party and related groups far beyond the World War II years and of falsely claiming United States citizenship when he first entered the country in 1922. Happy Lim, who entered the country with the name Hom Ah Wing had claimed that his father, Hom Aw Wing (aka Hom Ah Lim), had been born in the United States, which made him a native-born citizen. Happy Lim, therefore, had claimed a derived U.S. citizenship

status through his alleged American-born father. The immigration authorities countered, claiming that Hom Aw Wing was a fictitious name for a man named Lim Fung Guey, who had *not* been born in the United States and in fact was himself in the country fraudulently as the “paper son” of a man named Hom Hock Fun.

Here I must interject a side-note: Hom Hock Fun is a true name and true person. In addition to being Happy Lim’s claimed grandfather, he was in actuality my maternal great grandfather, who lived in Marysville, California from the 1850s until his death in 1907. He was a storekeeper and leading member of the Chinese community in Marysville for years, had had four wives, and many children, one of whom Lim said was his father. According to his claims, Happy Lim, therefore, was my granduncle. Although he and I were acquainted with one another through our involvement in the San Francisco Chinatown left in the 1970s and 1980s, we never had any idea that we were “related” and “family.” I learned of the fictive relationship (the government seems to have gotten it right) only after Happy Lim had died and I had obtained his government files, which revealed that in the 1960s the INS had questioned a number of people, whose the names and identities I recognized immediately, about Happy Lim.<sup>28</sup> Unexpectedly reading the names of my aunts and uncles in FBI and INS reports on Happy Lim was shocking. What interesting conversations Happy Lim and I could have had!

The problem with the government’s case, however, was that it had accepted Lim’s claim back in 1922 when he had first entered and then twice again when he re-entered the country from trips to China. The government acknowledged that Lim had then resided in the country continuously since 1929. Federal authorities also considered trying to deport Lim on the basis that he was a subversive, but did not proceed as they were aware they had a weak case. The FBI was unwilling to release the most vital information it had on Lim as it was “confidential” and from sources the agency did not want to reveal. The government vigorously pursued the case for four years, during which it questioned scores of persons across the country, from New York to Oregon about what they knew about Lim. The INS interrogated Lim himself repeatedly, including in September 1964 when Him Mark Lai, then a young member of the Chinatown left and today the pioneering historian of Chinese Americans, served as his translator. Ultimately, the government dropped its case when Happy Lim conceded his questionable identity in exchange for the government accepting his own

application in June 1965 for regularized, permanent resident status under provisions contained in the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1957. This legislation was popularly known as the Refugee-Escapee Act, which Congress had passed principally to assist immigrants from Communist nations, but the Act also contained provisions that allowed the Attorney General to grant permanent residency status to those individuals who had falsely claimed U.S. citizenship if they confessed their perjury and fraud. Whether Lim was troubled by his own use of provisions in this Cold War legislation is not known. As late as 1985, he told an interviewer that he was not a U.S. citizen and had no U.S. passport.<sup>29</sup>

The birth of a new leftwing movement in Chinatown in the late 1960s must have delighted Lim, who along with the other activists of the older generation gradually associated themselves with the various organizations that operated out of storefronts and basements along Kearny Street in San Francisco. The old and new activists embraced one another: for the old activists, the young radicals vindicated their long-held and beleaguered visions. For the new activists, some from the local community and others who came from college campuses, the old activists provided direct ties to history and community. The old and young inspired each other and shared their idealized notions of communist possibilities, which included visions of class, national, and anti-racist struggle in America and of anti-imperialist victory and socialism in Asia.

Happy Lim enjoyed the new attention he received, as one who could offer personal recollections about past struggles, old organizations, and long-held dreams. He wrote about the glory days of the Alaska cannery workers movement and the Chinese Workers Mutual Aid Association. He found new outlets for his poetry and short stories and he enjoyed the camaraderie and social life offered by the new activists. His writing, heavily influenced by the florid rhetoric from China's Cultural Revolution of the late 1960s, celebrated the so-called proletarian culture emanating from China as well as the activism of the young radicals he saw around him. But by the latter 1970s, his writing assumed a more subdued and reflective tone and he began to write nostalgically about his past experiences and his continuing hopes for a better future, long delayed. He became a contributing editor to the political/cultural periodical *East Wind* and wrote regularly for *Shidai bao*, a major left newspaper in San Francisco. In 1985, in one of his last essays before he died, he wrote, "I have long discarded decadent romanticism and any imaginary hopes to console my-

self. Instead, I devoted myself to calling for help for the poor and the needy while living under the same conditions they do, sharing their hardships and happiness."<sup>30</sup>

Though in his seventies, he continued to work as kitchen help in downtown restaurants and as a service worker at the St. Francis Hospital. He passed much of his free time frequenting the political organizations along Kearny Street beneath the International Hotel, where he cut an unusual and anomalous figure among the pea-coated, long-haired young radicals and the old-time Chinese and Filipino bachelor workers. He favored dressing smartly, favoring an early 1950s style of well-cut woolen suits, ties, and two-tone leather dress shoes. In public, he looked like he just came out of a Humphrey Bogart movie. He never spoke publicly at the many rallies, celebrations, and cultural events held along Kearny Street and often seemed a bit amused by the new, young, Left.

In the early 1980s, he appeared less and less frequently along Chinatown's streets and few knew that he was suffering from an increasingly debilitating blood disorder that destroyed his toes and his dancing feet, and eventually contributed to his death. He lived alone in Room 109 of the St. Paul's Hotel, a seedy residence hotel at 935 Kearny Street, just a block away from the famed International Hotel and where he had lived for most of the past forty years. When he died, an old friend wrote a brief obituary on him, saluting him as a longtime fighter for Chinese Americans. He was impoverished, the obituary said, and asked friends to donate funds for his funeral, as Happy Lim had lived only on a meager pension during the five years before his death. Lim, the obituary stated, "was single and had no relatives by his side." His death certificate and income tax filings found in the things that he left behind provided a different story however. Lim long claimed Wan Yan Ng in China as his wife. He had a son in China too. A grandson in China wrote that Happy Lim had sent money back to China to support his wife and relatives up to a year before his death.<sup>31</sup> Lim was cremated and his ashes sent to China for burial.

Happy Lim wrote simply, with occasional allusions to Chinese or western canonical writing. He composed free verse poetry, vignettes of experiences, cultural commentary,<sup>32</sup> and memoir. His writing was strongly personal in tone and drew seemingly from personal experience and current events. Though he usually used first person voice in his writing, it is impossible to know to what extent his accounts were based on his actual experiences.

## Notes:

The author especially thanks Mabel Teng for making Lim's papers available and reading a draft of this essay. Teng had collected and stored Lim's possessions from his hotel room after he had died. The author also thanks Him Mark Lai for his support and for conversations about Happy Lim.

1. Unless noted, the sources for the biographical information on Happy Lim are federal documents released through the Freedom of Information Act. The file contains material generated principally by the FBI and by the INS. It is in the possession of the author who made the request for release in 1986. In 1991, the government began to release documents, eventually numbering approximately 1,500 heavily redacted pages. About 200 pages were withheld in their entirety. The released file contains documents from 1950 to 1966. In the interests of space, I provide citations only to major documents. All of Happy Lim's writings are in Chinese but are presented here in English translation.
2. The most recent publication is "Song of Chinese Workers" (1938) in Judy Yung, Gordon H. Chang, Him Mark Lai, *Chinese American Voices* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006): 196–199. In the late 1980s, The 4 in One Quartet, which included Jon Jang and Francis Wong, recorded "Hymn to Happy Lim" in its album *The Ballad or the Bullet*, which was dedicated to Malcolm X and Thelonious Monk. The song continues to be included in the background music of "Yan Can Cook" in Australia. Jon Jang to author, January 31, 2008, in author's possession.
3. Him Mark Lai, who had known Lim as part of the San Francisco Chinatown Left since the 1950s, and Mabel Teng who worked closely with him during the heyday of Kearney Street activism both recall he was very difficult to know. Memorandum, SAC, SF to Director, FBI, Oct. 6, 1950; Memorandum, Director FBI to SAC, SF, Dec. 6, 1950; and INS Report of Investigation, January 31 and March 9, 1966.
4. Memorandum for File, INS, Rough Draft, nd; author's interview with Mabel Teng, January 1, 1990.
5. Fred Ho notes from an interview with Happy Lim on March 14, 1985. Copy of notes in author's possession.
6. Application of alleged American citizen of the Chinese race for reinvestigation of status, April 26, 1927; Action Sheet, First day landings, June 12, 1929; and letter to author from Happy Lim's grandson, Xue Shengsu, Dec. 3, 1990.
7. Yueh Sheng, *Sun Yat-sen University in Moscow and the Chinese Revolution: Personal Account* (Lawrence: University of Kansas, Center for East Asian Studies, 1971): 68.
8. INS administrative page, March 9, 1966; and notes, author's interview with Karl Yoneda, September 12, 1995(?).
9. Him Mark Lai, "To Bring Forth a New China, To Build a Better America: The Chinese Marxist Left in America to the 1960s," *Chinese America: History and Perspectives* (1992): 3-82.
10. Happy Lim, "Literature, Art and Practical Struggle," (translated by Eunice Chen), *East Wind*, 1985 (Winter/Spring 1985): 18-19.

11. Ho notes; and Mabel Teng interview.
12. Karl Yoneda interview. In *Ganbatte*, Yoneda says he went to Alaska for the first time in 1938, as a union delegate of the Alaska Cannery Workers Union, AFL, 89. He recalled that he often ate there with the Chinese workers, who, because of their experience with food preparation, prepared a better table.
13. "Happy Lim," *East Wind*, 1982 (Spring/Summer): 29-31 and reprinted under the title, "Organizing Chinese Workers in the 1930's," in *Gidra* (Special Anniversary Issue) 1990: 8-9; Teng interview.
14. Typeset notes of a talk with Ja Chong [probably Xavier Dea] for *Unity*, ca. 1981, in author's possession. After living in the Soviet Union, Ja Chong joined the communist underground in China and after 1949 became a mid-level government official. He visited the United States in the 1980s to improve relations with "overseas Chinese" here. For more on the 1930s in Chinatown and Dea, see Lai, "To Bring Forth a New China," 17-21. On early communist activities among the Chinese in America, see Josephine Fowler, *Japanese & Chinese Immigrant Activists: Organizing in American & International Communist Movements, 1919-1933* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2007).
15. "Happy Lim," *East Wind* 1982 (Spring/Summer): 29-31. Also see, "My Personal Account of the History of Chinese Workers in the US," *Chinese-American Workers: Past & Present*, nd, 25-27.
16. Happy Lim, "Scattered Memories of the China New Language Study Group," n.d., in author's possession and Lai, "To Bring Forth a New China," 40.
17. Teng interview.
18. "Forward" to "In Brilliant Sunshine," unpublished manuscript, Nov. 2, 1962, 1.
19. Report, SF FBI, August 1955.
20. Report, SF FBI, February 8, 1951.
21. Lai, "To Bring Forth a New China," 47 and 70-71, n.117.
22. Memorandum, SAC, San Francisco to Director, FBI, October 6, 1950 and Memorandum, Director, FBI to SAC, San Francisco, December 6, 1950.
23. Airtel, Hoover to selected SACS, March 11, 1955. Other instructions in the highly redacted document indicate that there were approximately eight subjects in San Francisco and twenty in New York. One to three subjects were identified as living in each of the cities of Albany, Cleveland, Detroit, Honolulu, Los Angeles, Newark, Philadelphia, San Diego and Seattle. Director, FBI to William F. Tompkins, Assistant Attorney General, May 5, 1955 and July 19, 1955. As of May 1962, the FBI continued to list Lim on the Security Index. The San Francisco office informed the central office that in its opinion Lim "could be a dangerous individual who would be expected to commit acts against the best interests of the United States in a time of emergency involving the United States with Red China." The reasons for this conclusion were redacted. SAC, SF to Director, FBI, May 7, 1962. Lim was removed from the list in 1965. It is unclear when the FBI first compiled a "Security Index." As early as 1946, J. Edgar Hoover sought powers to detain identified U.S. citizens in the event of war. In 1950, just after the outbreak of the Korean War, Hoover sent a plan to imprison possibly 12,000 Americans

- of suspect loyalty. See *New York Times*, Dec. 23, 2007, 30.
24. Report, FBI, May 4, 1956 of an "interview" with Lim on April 9, 1956; SAC, SF to Hoover, May 7, 1956; and Fred Ho notes.
  25. The club was the first of its kind in California and in a few years some 400 folk dance clubs appeared in the state. The club was founded by a man known in folk dance circles as Song Chang, a Chinese American, who apparently took up folk dancing when he traveled in Europe in the early 1930s. It is said that the "warm feeling of camaraderie, the disdain for racial barriers and the fun spirit," were what attracted Chang to the pastime. The club's early activities occurred in basements and clubs around the Chinatown and North Beach areas in San Francisco. Song Chang's full name is Dai Song Chang who had studied architecture at UC Berkeley. He and his wife, Fai Sue Chang, ran the Ho-Ho Tea Room. Their son, Wah Ming Chang, became an accomplished artist in Los Angeles, Honolulu, and Carmel. Chang's International Folk Dancers continues today and claims to be the oldest continuing folk dance club in the country. Larry Getchell, "A History of the Folk Dance Movement in California," <http://www/folkdance.com/html/history.htm> (November 17, 2006) and Michael D. Brown, *Views From Asian California, 1920-1965* (San Francisco: Michael Brown, 1992): 14.
  26. Helen S. Herrick to author, July 26, 1989, in author's possession. Herrick is the author of *Tales of an Old Horsetrader: The First Hundred Years*, University of Iowa Press (Iowa City, IA: 1987). Herrick's name and address were among many in Lim's personal phone book that was in his remaining possessions. The "little black book" was filled with women's names and numbers. Herrick was the only one who responded to inquiries.
  27. "Dream of a River," *Gidra*, (20th anniversary issue) 1990, 8.
  28. Memorandum, Inspector Webber, Marysville, Dec. 5, 1906; Transcript, Inspection of Hom Ah Lim, April 7, 1920; Angel Island; Rough Draft, Memo for File, nd; Statement of Tom Na Hong, New York, April 3, 1962; and Transcript, Inspection of Hom Ah Lim, Angel Island, Oct. 28, 1931.
  29. INS, Transcript of hearings, April 24, 1962, May 14, 1962, Nov. 12, 1964, June 9, 1965; transcripts of interviews of Tom Na Hong, April 3 and 12, 1962; Memorandum for file, nd; and interview with Fred Ho.
  30. Happy Lim, "Literature, Art and Practical Struggle."
  31. Letters from China to author.
  32. See for example, "Follow Up on the *Red Detachment of Women*," "On *Swan Lake*," "War and Peace, and "I Need to Be as Strong as an Evergreen Pine," all originally in *Getting Together* and republished in translation in *Chinese-American Workers: Past & Present*, (San Francisco: Getting Together Publications, 1972): 88-94 and 98-100.

## Appendix

### The Poems

The following poems, all written in free verse, were among dozens that Happy Lim kept in his personal papers. In addition to poetry, Happy

Lim wrote many vignettes and a few short stories, each numbering only a handful of pages. Like the verse, Lim's prose is highly personal, though it is unclear as to the extent they were closely autobiographical. Almost all his writing was written as first person narratives and most appear to be based to some degree on direct personal experience. He once wrote that his purpose in writing was to express his "inner most emotions." Much of the subject material, including certain incidents in the 1970s-1980s, is familiar to this author and conforms to his recollections about events, persons, and places. Though awkward word choices and constructions appear in his earlier pieces, Lim's writing became more sophisticated and polished through the years. Happy Lim regularly used simplified versions of characters, with occasional traditional renderings. Some characters are illegible or were incorrectly written.

These poems were selected with consideration given to presenting a sense of Happy Lim's long writing career, representative subject matter, quality of writing, style, and social and political views, in addition to their possible appeal to today's audience. Unless noted, the translations are my own, completed with the assistance of Yi-ren Chen and Philip Thai.

### **"Mother" and "Tokyo Elegy"**

These are two of twenty-five poems that Happy Lim gathered together to publish in a volume entitled "Under the Bright Sun," though it appears never to have been completed and never published. His Introduction to the volume, which is dated November 2, 1962, says that he completed most of these poems during World War II. Several had been published before. The poems describe his longing for home (their titles provide an idea of their content: "On the Shore of the Ocean," "To the Motherland"), his feelings about the anti-fascist struggle around the world ("Mourning Rome," "An Elegy to Berlin," "Remembering Paris") and his admiration for the revolutionary movement in China and its victory in 1949 ("Unforgettable Memories," "Looking toward the Distant Motherland"). The volume ends with several poems supporting the communist forces in Korea and condemning U.S. imperialism.

It is not known when Happy Lim wrote "Mother," though it may have been in the mid- or late 1930s. In the volume that he intended to publish, he grouped it with several other poems with the same title and which expressed his anguish in hearing of Maxim Gorky's death in 1936. Gorky was a giant in Russian literature and a strong supporter of Bolshevism. He is credited as being the founder of socialist realism in writing. Gorky's novel "Mother" appeared in 1906 when Gorky was touring the United States. The story recounts a peasant woman's growing sympathy for the radical visions of her son and the rise of her own revolutionary consciousness during the Russian Revolution of 1905. "Mother" appeared in a Chinese translation at least in 1930 and Happy Lim most likely read it in Chinese. Lim probably wrote his poem sometime in the 1930s. —Gordon Chang

### Mother

Outside my window the moon's dim light falls  
 All is still without a sound  
 At moments like this most are sound asleep  
 As I read Gorky's "Mother" I think of my own mother.

Mother, my loving, dear mother,  
 You are anxious for your child wandering rootless!  
 But your child adrift thousands of miles away  
 What can he do to comfort your lonely heart?

Who knows how many years have passed  
 Since your child left your embrace;  
 Who knows how many years have passed  
 Since your child wandered away into the distant world.

The circumstances in a foreign land  
 Have moved me to enter the battlefield of life;  
 The circumstances in a foreign land  
 Have also made your mark on me indelible.

Mother, my loving, dear mother,  
 You have nourished me;  
 Even though I now wander in a foreign land,  
 I do not forget you for a moment.

Your earnest teaching I will never forget  
 Your sad, gentle voice, heartfelt, I will never forget.  
 Oh, mother loving, dear mother  
 You taught me to go forth to cherish others, to have compassion for others,  
 to help others.

### Tokyo Elegy (August 1945)

The paper carried good news,  
 It says that the last fortress of the Axis powers has surrendered,  
 With overwhelming joy in my heart,  
 I read this piece of good news.

Ah, Tokyo, you were truly a wonderful, famous city,  
 Rich with refinement and romance,  
 But in the hands of the sadistic war mongers,  
 You walked toward the abyss of extinction.

The various war lords before boasted "bushido" before the world,  
 Now they all one by one shrink back like docile sheep,  
 Is this bravery, is this bushido?  
 We must wait for a later generation's judgment.

It is you war mongers who filled the sky with wind and clouds,

It is you who [filled] the wind with the stench of carrion and the rain of blood,

It is you who filled China's vast lands everywhere with desolation,  
It is you who made World War II drag on and on.

How many people under your hands were made homeless,  
How many cities were reduced to ashes under your hands,  
How many children lost their fathers and mothers under your hands,  
How many souls weep and cry, wailing, suffering under your hands.  
Ah! You have oppressed and bullied the Chinese people for more than half a century,  
You have used armed violence to violate China's lands for over 8 years,  
However, before the powerful counter offensive of the Chinese people and the heroic People's Liberation Army,  
You finally submitted, forced to surrender.

This is a great victory for humanity,  
This returns the world to light,  
This is the downfall of the dark age,  
This is the end of the instigators of war. . . .

Ah, Tokyo, on this day that you surrender on your knees,  
The memories of cruel and savage actions from the past surface,  
I do feel sadness at your disgrace,  
But I also rejoice for the rebirth of the Japanese people.

Ah, Tokyo, I am now thinking about the growing ranks of the Japanese people,  
They will stand up indomitably,  
To rebuild a democratic and free Japan,  
Which will protect the peace of the Far East and of the world.

### **This Happened in America**

This is Happy Lim's account of the horrific murder of Emmett Till, a fourteen-year-old African American boy killed in a small Mississippi delta town in the summer of 1955. Till, who was from Chicago and unfamiliar with the racial order in the deep South, was visiting relatives when he, as the standard account goes, whistled at a white woman. Four days later in the middle of the night, the woman's husband and his half-brother drove up to the home of Till's uncle, where the boy was staying, and abducted him. Several days later, Till's brutally disfigured body was found in the Tallahatchie River. He had been shot, beaten, and his face mutilated. Till's mother returned his body to Chicago and decided to hold an open-coffin viewing to display the savagery of the racism that killed her son to the world. Thousands attended and *Jet* magazine published photographs of Till's tortured face. Their dramatic publication is now described as the initial spark of the civil rights movement. Though Till's murderers were tried, an all-white jury acquitted them. The two men later publicly admitted their guilt.

Happy Lim wrote this poem on the back on some scrap paper and it appears to be a work in progress; some words and lines were crossed-over and a few phrases are incomplete. The handwriting is quick and rough; there is no date. Although Happy Lim's account generally follows what he could have learned from reading press accounts of Till's murder, the poem also deviates significantly from the known events, especially in the description of Till's encounter with the racists and his abduction. The poem appears to have been written not long after the end of the trial, which was at the end of September 1955. I thank Chao Fen Sun for reading a version of this translation. —Gordon Chang

### **This Happened in America** (ca. 1955)

In Mississippi's north  
 The Tallahatchie River flows freely,  
 Murmuring and singing,  
 Reflecting images of the verdant forest along its two banks. An endless melody,  
 It was early morning in late summer,  
 When a child's corpse suddenly came forth from the river's depths,  
 Waking the meadow from its dreamy slumber,  
 The Tallahatchie River is given a song of despair.  
 Naked, his clothes were ripped away,  
 His body covered with wounds,  
 Iron wires trussed his body,  
 The killers must have wanted the corpse at the river's bottom.  
 Aiiieeee, a child of just fourteen years,  
 Suddenly ripped away from the warmth of life,  
 The river's eternal flowing  
 Mourned the unspeakable tragedy of his end.  
 Sadly, this child's name was Till,  
 But oh, any name would do,  
 Because, as it is, this happened in America,  
 And he is a symbol, you know, of every black person.  
 He was a youngster from Chicago,  
 Who came down South to visit his great-Uncle Wright,  
 He helped his Uncle Wright pick cotton  
 So he could bring some money back home to his mother.  
 One day after work  
 He went to Leonardo's store to buy candy,  
 Jeering erupted all around him as he walked the street,  
 His ears smothered, it seemed, by derision,  
 Hearing people insult him.  
 But he just ignored them,

And alone walked straight ahead,  
With darkness descending over the town's streets,  
He hoped to be able to return to his Uncle's safe home.  
Then, late that night,  
Violent pounding on the door woke Till from his dreams.  
There was wild shouting and screaming,  
Waking everyone who had been soundly sleeping.  
"I'm coming!"  
Uncle Wright forcefully responded from the next room.  
He hurriedly dressed,  
And went into the child's room.

"Where's that kid from Chicago?"  
"Where's the little nigger who whistled at Mrs. Bryant?"  
The two whites grew more and more fierce,  
Like hungry wolves finding prey to satisfy their hunger.  
"What are you up to?  
Is whistling a crime?"  
The two thugs pulled out weapons from their pockets,  
And dragged Till from his bed.

Oh, the bleakness of night  
Swallowed up the spirit of this young one from an oppressed race,  
Only from the flashlights that the two thugs held  
Could one make out the path ahead.

Uncle Wright stepped up his pace,  
Rushing to follow the tracks of the wolves.  
But, searching high and low,  
Where could he find the boy in the darkness?

Uncle Wright's fear mounted, like a driving rain,  
His heart bearing indescribable pain.  
He lifted his head into the piercing wind, calling out  
"Till, my boy, oh will you ever be able to return?"  
He damned the threat to young Till's life.

How could one have known that in the morning three days later,  
The Tallahatchie would give up a body of one from an oppressed race;  
It was Till's!  
Uncle Wright's suffering was unbearable, like daggers piercing his heart.

When the child's body was sent back to his home in Chicago,  
Crowds of people surrounded the boy's corpse and mourned,  
Crowds of people were furious at the brutality displayed,  
Tears without end streamed down from his mother's eyes.

Child, your death was so cruel and barbaric,      Child, what crime did you commit?  
How could your killer be so savage,              Your death so pointless,

How can I bear the pain!                      Oh, how could the killer be so crazed?  
 How can I bear the pain!                      How could you endure it?

Till's eyes were opened wide,  
 As though he might have been thinking: this atrocity must be avenged!  
 His lips were stiff and unmoving  
 Perhaps saying: the murderers must be brought to justice!  
 But incredibly the killers were found not guilty,  
 The police let the murderers free,  
 How can it be that the lives of black people are worth nothing?  
 How can it be that black people live to be butchered by others?  
 What kind of society is this? What kind of world?  
 I too was born unto this human world,  
 I too am someone!  
 Why is it then that I just suffer unspeakable pain and anguish?

### **Caribbean Dawn**

In 1971, Happy Lim collected a number of his poems that he wished to publish. "Caribbean Dawn" and "Slowly Flows the Sacramento River" are included in the volume he entitled, "On the Soil of a Strange Land."  
 —Gordon Chang

#### **Caribbean Dawn** (April 1959)

The good news of the Cuban revolutionaries' victory arrived today,  
 Before my eyes, a Caribbean tidal wave roils forward,  
 Thunder and lightening break out amidst the surging waves,  
 A windstorm sweeps over the ocean.

Ah, that struggle in the Sierra Maestra,  
 That declaration in Havana Square,  
 That heroic roar of the people of the entire country,  
 How much more can I describe the surging emotions from my heart!

Oh heroic Cuba!  
 That righteous sound plays on my ear,  
 My heart flies with the white clouds over the ocean,  
 And is together with you to hail and rejoice.

Oh fighting Cuba!  
 You have encountered much cruel oppression,  
 You have experienced a hard and bitter life,  
 But, you also are bringing forth revolutionary fighters.

From the time that Columbus wrote your name on the map,  
 For their freedom, your people have continuously struggled against the colonizer.  
 Indeed, every inch of your land

Is dyed with red blood spilled for freedom and independence.

This is it!

You have smashed Batista the dictator,  
Having endured long, and bitter years,  
You finally walk the glorious road of sovereignty and independence.

Ah, Cuba, you are raising the banner of revolutionary struggle,  
Your banner has flicked away long years of gloom,  
Your banner has strengthened the resolve of the Latin American people,  
Your banner has beckoned the Caribbean dawn!

Ah, Cuba, I hail your new life!  
You are a glorious member of the new world!  
How brilliant is the example you are setting for the people of Latin America!  
You will quickly forge ahead on the road of prosperity for the people!

### **Slowly Flows the Sacramento River**

Slowly flows the Sacramento River,  
Winding through the mountain passes,  
Flowing along the sides of the rocky and rugged embankments,  
Arriving at that distant, vast Pacific Ocean.

Slowly flows the Sacramento River,  
Not far from the river bank,  
There are jade-green trees,  
But also houses, many and dense.

Flow, moving water, like a drifting ribbon from an auntie's dress,  
Gently pass beneath my feet,  
Then flow softly to that distant place,  
Spill not even a small ripple of your torrent.

Flow, river water, send forth a sound like silver bells,  
Drifting past the sides of my ears,  
Just like a supple, gentle breeze,  
Blowing the fragrance from atop a thicket of wild roses.

Slowly flows the Sacramento River,  
The river banks hold the footprints of many of us overseas Chinese,  
They are farmers of the fields and lumberjacks,  
They are fishermen of the oceans and restaurant workers.

Tell me! Sacramento River,  
In this era of "all are created equal,"  
Is it that they love segregation still?  
Is it that they relish yet the taste of discrimination?

Slowly flows the Sacramento River,  
How long have you flowed?

How many young in the spring of life have you sent forth?  
Left behind for me are unhappy memories.

I love the Sacramento River,  
I love that slow moving waterway,  
It endlessly weaves the beauty of nature,  
Yet, the bitterness of the human world imbues it still.

Oh, slow-flowing Sacramento River,  
Through your rushing waters, can you hear?  
That joyous sound rising from the East,  
That battle cry on the Yangzi River.  
Slowly flows the Sacramento River,  
Crashing through the dreary waves,  
To that distant, joyful Yangzi River,  
And return with the fresh scent of happiness.

### Freedom

A clipping of this poem from a newspaper is in Happy Lim's papers. It may have originally appeared in the newspaper *Tuan jiebao*, perhaps in the late 1970s. —Gordon Chang

### Freedom

I love life,  
I believe the future should promise to eliminate sorrow and hold happiness in store.  
But living at the turn of time,  
I live a life of privation and vagrancy.

I have been abused and maltreated,  
My heart is filled with many bitter memories,  
I have been a victim of humiliation,  
But I have never felt sorry for myself.

In the whirl and storm of struggle  
I have been tempered and become stronger!  
I see a majestic pine tree towering above all,  
And feel that life should be as grand.

As I wander up and down the bustling street,  
I seem to hear the energetic voices of progressive people,  
The masses' exuberance helps dispel my melancholy,  
And moves me from again indulging in self-delusion.

I am unwilling to be an oppressed slave,  
I am unwilling to have my chaste body abused.  
In order to obtain glorious freedom  
I am willing to sacrifice all that I have for that day.

I don't know whether you are the prophet of that day,  
Creating the most beautiful red clouds in the vast sky!  
Or if you are a lone cold star  
Illuminating only yourself.

With fervent enthusiasm  
On the road of life I seek justice!  
With resolution and courage  
I continue to strive for freedom.

Freedom is not rhetoric,  
And certainly it is not self-indulgence.  
Like the penetrating light of the universe,  
Freedom enters everyone's soul.

Branches and leaves will wither away in the forest,  
And the human body finally will also one day decay,  
But let the young enter the heat of battle,  
Let our lives shine like the rosy clouds in the sky.

Why just sit quietly by yourself?  
Why just feel alone and sad?  
Don't you know you are an able person,  
One day you will create a bright universe!

Watching the activists marching on the boulevard of time,  
My heart feels boundless joy!  
Friend! You will one day have the magnificence of freedom,  
You will enjoy the dignity of freedom.

### **On Third Street**

Happy Lim lived most of his life in a residence hotel on Kearny Street in San Francisco. About a mile's walk down Kearny one would encounter Third Street, at one time one of the seediest areas of the city. Today, after twenty years of redevelopment, the old Third Street has disappeared, replaced by the Moscone Convention Center, the Museum of Modern Art, and high-rise apartment complexes. Happy Lim would not recognize the street today. —Gordon Chang

### **On Third Street**

The last rays of the sun have set in the west,  
Fragments of sunset's glow float in the sky,  
Then when twilight descends,  
I walk slowly on Third Street.

I have walked along many lonely alleyways,  
I have walked beneath drifting leaves on shadowed lanes,  
Moonlight drapes the building facades,

The night wind plays on my body.

Here there are no skyscrapers,  
Here there are no dazzling neon lights,  
Here there are no fluttering skirts,  
Here there are no wealthy.

I saw many poor folk,  
Engaging in small-time hustling;  
There were also the jobless and destitute wandering the streets,  
My heart was filled with sorrow.

I walked along a small alley,  
Stepping on winding stones,  
In front of awnings long weathered and peeling,  
A fellow in tattered clothes on the curb sings for money playing a  
stringed instrument.

The fragments of the folksong,  
Merge with the miserable conditions of the street;  
The plaintive tune,  
Cannot wipe the sorry from the pedestrian's heart.

I am not the wandering Ruan Ji,  
Nor am I the grieving Byron;  
But your forlorn tune  
Deeply moves me.

How lonely and quiet is the night,  
How dark is the night,  
Following the dim street lights,  
I start on the road back.

### **Am I So Easy to Forget**

At a joyful international dance,  
Amidst red flowers and light ribbons  
You flew;  
But now, I don't know your  
whereabouts,  
Am I so easy to forget...

By a quiet little creek,  
Together we watched the sunset,  
And enjoyed a beautiful time;  
But now, I can't find  
a mere trace of you,

Am I so easy to forget. . .  
Under the blue sky, we met on the hills,  
You called for freedom,

adored democracy;  
But now, you have drifted far away,  
Am I so easy to forget. . .

You showed boundless sympathies  
for the poor,  
You expressed sincerity  
for future ideals.  
You could turn darkness  
into brightness.  
You could change this shape  
of this world.

Whether I am remembered or forgotten,  
I am still as active as before.  
My heart is filled with struggles  
against this ugly world,  
Even though I still have plenty  
of memories to recall.  
In front of our eyes lies reality,  
not illusions,  
I give my whole life  
to the liberation of humanity.  
Every effort to rid the oppressed of their miseries,  
Let the sun shine all over the world.