

ANGEL ISLAND POEM #42

(ANONYMOUS—WRITTEN BETWEEN 1910 AND 1940)

LANGUAGE: CHINESE

蛟龍

JIĀO LÓNG

蛟龍失水螻蟻欺，

jiāo lóng shī shuǐ lóu yǐ qī,

猛虎遭囚小兒戲。

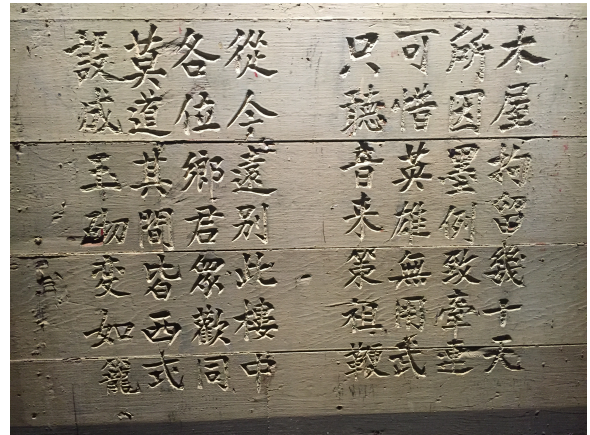
měng hǔ zāo qiú xiǎo ér xì.

被困安敢與爭雄，

bèi kù ān gǎn yǔ zhēng xióng,

得勢復仇定有期。

dé shì fù chóu dìng yǒu qī.



The Angel Island Immigration Station became the first stop for many Chinese immigrants who came to the U.S. between 1910 and 1940. After long voyages, would-be immigrants were held for weeks, months, or even years in the island's chilly barracks, awaiting news from the authorities as to whether or not they would be admitted to the U.S. While they waited, the detainees composed poems expressing their loneliness, frustration, and longing for loved ones. Almost all of the poets were anonymous, and they carved their poems into the wooden walls. The classical poetic style, rich use of figurative language, and references to Chinese history suggest that many of these immigrants were well educated. This particular poem was carved backwards so that others could make rubbings and take copies of the poem with them.

(The pinyin version has been included below the Chinese characters.)

| TRANSLATOR'S GLOSSARY | | | |
|-----------------------|-------------------|--|---|
| CHARACTER | PINYIN | DEFINITION | POSSIBLE SYNONYMS |
| 安 | ān (adv.) | in what way or manner; by what means | how |
| 被困 | bèi kù (v. + n.) | to put in prison or a place like a prison | to be imprisoned, to be incarcerated, to be detained, to be held captive, held under lock and key |
| 得勢 | dé shì (v. + n.) | the capacity to influence the behavior of others or course of events | gain power, have an advantageous position, have the upper hand |
| 定 | dìng (v. + adv.) | to be without doubt; with firm belief | will surely, will definitely, will certainly, will undoubtedly |
| 兒 | ér (n.) | a young human being below the age of puberty | child, youngster, little one |
| 復仇 | fù chóu (v. + n.) | to have the desire to inflict retribution | get revenge, avenge, avenge a wrong, seek retribution |
| 敢 | gǎn (v.) | to defy or challenge | dare, challenge, provoke |
| 虎 | hǔ (n.) | a very large, solitary cat with a yellow-brown coat striped with black, native to Asia but becoming increasingly rare | tiger |
| 蛟龍 | jiāo long (n.) | flood dragon, a symbol of power and strength in the Chinese tradition; an ancient four-legged reptile that lives in rivers | flood dragon, aquatic dragon, crocodile, alligator |
| 螻蟻 | lóu yǐ (n.) | small insects, often with a sting, that usually live in a complex social colony with one or more breeding queens | ants |

| CHARACTER | PINYIN | DEFINITION | POSSIBLE SYNONYMS |
|-----------|-------------------------------------|---|---|
| 猛 | měng (adj.) | having or displaying an intense aggressiveness | fierce, ferocious, vicious, savage, violent |
| 欺 | qī (v.) | to deliberately annoy or taunt someone | baited, taunted, goaded, tormented, persecuted |
| 囚 | qiú (adj.) | confined, as in a cage | captive, caged, confined, fenced in |
| 失水 | shī shuǐ (v. + adv. + n.) | taken out of the transparent liquid that is the basis of the fluids of living organisms | is no longer in the water, is removed from the water, without the river |
| 戲 | xì (v.) | to deliberately annoy or taunt | baited, teased, tormented |
| 小 | xiǎo (adj.) | of a size that is less than normal or usual | small, little, puny, tiny, meager |
| 有期 | yǒu qī (v. + n.) | to occur; to happen; to take place in some moment | there will come a time, there will be a time, will come to pass |
| 與爭雄 | yǔ zhēng xióng (v. + prep. + n.) | to make great efforts to achieve or obtain something | strive for supremacy, search for power |
| 遭 | zāo (v. + n.) | to meet by chance | happens by chance, meets with, befalls, encounters, suffers |

NAME: _____

DATE: _____

PHRASE BY PHRASE

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Dé shì fù chóu dìng yǒu qī. _____

REFLECTING AND FINDING MEANING

Group Member Names:

Date: _____

Pick a scribe for the group, and work together to answer the questions.

What are the best parts of this translation, and why do you think they are good?

What elements of the original poem did you lose in the translation? What did you manage to keep?

Did you achieve something new with your translation, and if so, does it make sense in the poem or not?
