

A Laundry Song 洗衣歌

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Written in Chicago 1922-1923

Laundry is a career common for American Chinese,
so Chinese students are often asked: "Is your
father a laundryman?"

洗衣是美國華僑最普遍的職業
因此留學生常常被人問道：
你爸爸是洗衣裳的嗎？

(One shirt, two shirts, three shirts,)
Shirts must be washed clean
(Four shirts, five shirts, six shirts,)
Shirts must be ironed smooth.

(一件,兩件,三件)
洗衣要洗乾淨
(四件,五件,六件)
熨衣要熨得平

I can clean handkerchiefs soaked with tears
I can whiten sweaters black with crime
Grease of greed, dirt of desire
And all the filthy things you have at home.
Give them to me to wash, give them to me.

我洗得淨悲哀的濕手帕
我洗得白罪惡的黑汗衣
貪心的油膩和欲火的灰
你們家裏一切的臟東西
交給我洗,交給我洗。

Money stinks so, blood smells so
Those dirty things you cannot leave unwashed
Even cleaned laundry will be soiled again.
How can you, men of patience, ignore it?
Wash for them, wash for them!

銅是那樣臭,血是那樣腥
臟了的東西你不能不洗
洗過了的東西還是得臟
你忍耐的人們理它不理?
替他們洗,替他們洗!

You Americans say the laundry business is too base
Are Chinamen alone willing to stoop so low?
Yet your preacher tells me
Christ's father was once a carpenter.
Don't you believe it? Don't you believe it?

你說洗衣的買賣太下賤
肯下賤的只有唐人不成?
你們的牧師他告訴我
耶穌的爸爸造木匠出身
你信不信?你信不信?

Soap and plain water can't make big splashes
Washing clothes is not like building warships
I too ask what great prospect lies in
Sweating blood for other's sweat?
Would you Americans do it? Would you do it?

胰子白水耍不出花頭來
洗衣裳原比不上造兵艦
我也說這有什麼大出息 --
流一身血汗洗別人的汗?
你們肯干?你們肯干?

Year comes, year goes, the homesick tear falls
Midnight, late night, the laundry lamp glows
Don't you Americans worry that the job is menial
Just find where it is not clean or smooth, and
Call the Chinaman, call the Chinaman.

年來年去一滴思鄉的淚
半夜三更一盞洗衣的燈...
下賤不下賤你們不要管
看那里不乾淨那里不平
問支那人,問支那人,

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I can whiten sweaters black with crime,
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And all the filthy things you have at home.
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English translation by Chuimei Ho and Bennet Bronson, modified from that of Hsu Kai-yu (Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies, 1958 (21), p.147-148.)