

About “In a Faraway Place” (Popular Chinese Folk Song),  
and Wang Luobin (researcher, collector, and songwriter)  
an introduction written for a collection of folk songs  
and link to “Music and Lyrics I Love”

Notes by Stefan Pasti

(I thought I would have songs in the Shangri-La novel--as they are traveling  
so I have a file folder of songs which may lead to the ones I make up)

A. About “In a Faraway Place” (Popular Chinese Folk Song),  
and Wang Luobin (researcher, collector, and songwriter)

1) Wang Luobin (December 28, 1913—March 14, 1996) was a well known songwriter, and a researcher and collector of Western Chinese folk songs. He graduated from the Music Department of Beijing Normal University in 1934.

In 1938, in Lanzhou in Gansu Province, Wang published his first Xinjiang-inspired song, "The Girl from Dabancheng". During the many years he was in northwestern China, he devoted much of his time to transcribing, adapting, collecting and revising western Chinese folk songs. In all, Wang wrote seven operas and edited six songbooks, and published some 700 Xinjiang-style songs

“In That Faraway Place” is one of the best-known and most loved of all Chinese songs. Wang Luobin wrote the song in 1939 while he was assisting a friend in Xining, Qinghai Province, in a movie-making project. He met a young Tibetan girl, and she was like the sunshine, making everyone around her happy. He wrote the song as a way of remembering the beautiful impression that she left upon him and all those around her. The song is set to the tune of a Kazakhstan folk tune entitled "Thinking of You When I'm Lying Amongst the Sheep Flocks" that Wang had collected in the area. It became one of the most popular songs in China and one of the best known Chinese songs in many countries. Over the years, it has taken on many forms and settings. Fei Mu's 1948 film "Spring in a Small Town", voted in 2005 by the Hong Kong Film Critics Association as the greatest Chinese film of all time, features the song.

2) "In a Faraway Place" lyrics (not sure where I found these either)  
(I usually keep track of sources...)

In a faraway place, there is a good girl  
When people pass by her tent, they all look back with longing

Her smile is as radiant as the morning sun  
Her energetic, penetrating eyes are like a moon in the night sky

I wish that every day I could see her lovely face  
And see her walking among the sheep in her beautiful gold-trimmed dress

I would give up all my wealth just to herd sheep with her  
I would even become a small lamb so I could always be by her side

3) "In a faraway place" sung in Chinese Language (beautiful folk song)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wqUZYqVM2qU&list=PLwPxF19Fj3sIcT8w2743zCsRT9zcQRkS8&index=7> ]

B. "The true folk song has travelled a long way."

[From "[One Hundred Folk Songs \(from many countries\)](#)" Selected, Edited, and Arranged by Henry F. Gilbert (The Laurel Music Series) C.C. Birchard and Company Boston 1910 (Excerpt is Introduction, p. 3-4)]

## INTRODUCTION

DEEP in the heart of a people lie many wonderful and beautiful things. Fragments of great poetry, traditions of godlike heroes, and legends of many a noble deed are enshrined in story and song. Every race has an accumulation of tradition, which, as it has passed through many minds and been thereby unconsciously moulded, can be said to express the spirit of the people rather than that of an individual. Running like a golden thread through this mass of tradition are many beautiful melodies; melodies of an elemental simplicity akin to that of the wild flower and having a directness of appeal which touches our hearts at once. These are Folk-Songs; the songs of a Folk or People.

The true folk-song has travelled a long way. Beginning possibly with the extemporization of some ancient minstrel, it was caught up by some of his hearers and treasured in the memory as a dear reminder of a happy time. As it was sung by the people to one another it lost much of its original character, but in turn it gained some characteristic common to all the minds through which it passed. Dimly, and often inaccurately remembered, it passed from generation to generation, unconsciously altered, a little here, a little there. Gradually it was perfected until every note became golden in melodic value. Only those notes of the melody were retained in the popular mind which were absolutely necessary to express the musical idea. All superfluous ones dropped silently away. So at last we have a product which is far more expressive of the mind of the people than of the mind of the ancient minstrel who first sang the song. Thus is a true folk-song born; and the secret of its wonderful appeal and heart-touching power lies in the fact that it has been practically composed by the spirit of a People, which is deeper and more sincere than the spirit of an individual.

The foregoing remarks apply more particularly to the true folk-song; the song whose origins are lost in the distance of time. There is, however, another important class of popular song which must be considered as folk-song inasmuch as it also expresses truly the spirit of the folk. These are simple songs composed in the style of the true folk-song which have immediately become popular and have retained their popularity. Many of them are true folk-songs in the making. "Way Down upon the Swanee River" is a good example of such a song.

The Germans specify yet a third class of folk-song. These are songs by great composers which, owing to their simplicity or directness, have been adopted by the people as their own. Mendelssohn's "Hunter's Farewell" is an example of this kind of song.

There is usually a distinction drawn between Art music, so-called, and Folk music. Art music is complex in structure as compared with folk music, which is simple. It addresses itself more to the intellect than folk music, which speaks almost wholly to the heart. The fundamental difference, however, appears in the fact that Art music is regarded as individual expression, whereas Folk music is the expression of a race. But in so far as the music of the individual composer is truly great, it will be found to have drawn its deepest inspirations from that spirit of the folk which gave birth to the folk-songs, and to bear a deep and fundamental relationship to the latter. When we hear the music of a truly great composer we become conscious that herein is the flowering of the spirit of a race, of which the spirit of the individual composer is an integral part. In the music of Beethoven, for example, we find expressed in a mighty and wonderful manner the same spirit which breathes in elemental simplicity in the German folk-songs. For it is the function of Genius to contribute to the growth of that folk spirit from which it sprang, that the Folk may ever rise to broader horizons of power and beauty.

This little book has been prepared with the desire to bring before the school boys and girls of America some of the beautiful melodies of popular tradition. An acquaintance with the world's folk-songs educates and ennobles the musical sense, and unconsciously develops in the mind an appreciation of the elements of musical form. In the preparation of this collection several thousand folk-songs have been examined, and much thought has been taken that the songs which are here presented shall be characteristic and truly representative of the folk music of the country from which they come. As the book is intended for use principally in the schools, the editor has studied to make the arrangements eminently practicable for this purpose. In harmonizing these folk melodies care has also been taken that the harmony used may not conflict with the spirit of the original melody. The original words have been used in many cases, and where translations or adaptations have been made, it has been with the earnest desire to reproduce the spirit of the original as faithfully as possible. In the case of the original words having been lost, or being unsuited for a book of this nature, new words have been written, with the aim of expressing as nearly as possible the mood of the melody.

HENRY F. GILBERT.

C. [“Music and Lyrics I Love 150 Titles”](#) (collected by Stefan Pasti)

Alphabetical by Title Selections of Lyrics Included