

## 0BYRON IN CHINA AND JAPAN

The literature of neither of these nations shows any major Byronic influence, although Byron was admired by one of twentieth-century China's most important writers, Lu Hsün. Even in his peripheralisation, however, Byron functions as an effective icon, no matter how many veils of translation, misreading, idealisation, myth and wish-fulfilment bar the way to a clear view of him.



### CHINA<sup>1</sup>

Around 1870, China, long isolated from the rest of the world, was forced, in order to survive, to go through what has been called “the period of translation”. The first western book literally to be translated was *La Dame aux Camélias*, which was an immediate success. The first of the “romantic” poets to be translated was Byron, whose perceived calls for resistance to oppression, and for social change, played an important role in the events of the time, China being badly in need of social change, and being severely oppressed both by the alien Manchu dynasty and by western nations. As in Europe, the more a national identity was threatened, the more important Byron became to the culture in question. After 1906, several writers, working independently, created the first translations of his work.

An important part of the revolutions which changed China in the twentieth century involved the rejection of the old, elitist, mandarin-centred literature in favour of more popular idioms. A minority culture, in which only trained aristocrats, bureaucrats and hermits could participate, was rejected in favour of one available to all. A stationary world-view which focussed on continuity at all costs was rejected in favour of a dynamic one focussing on change at all costs. In so far as Byron, writing (for example) *Childe Harold*, published by John Murray, wrote for an elite, and Byron, writing (for example) *Don Juan*, published by John Hunt, found sudden access to a much broader readership, he embodies in his own career the same revolution: but the lesson – which has only recently been acknowledged in the West – was not available in early twentieth-century China, where the difference between the formal rhetoric of *Childe Harold* and the demotic, conversational style of *Don Juan* was not perceived. Nevertheless, the impact Byron had was paradoxically positive: here was a writer from a western imperialist culture whose writings could be turned into a fine anti-imperialist weapon.

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<sup>1</sup>: This is an adapted version of my own translation and expansion of *Byron en Chine*, by Michelle Loi, Honorary Professor of Chinese at the University of Paris, a paper given at the 11th Annual Byron Conference at Paris in 1984, and first published in the *Bulletin de liaison* of the French Byron Society, Vol 1, no 1, September 1987. My version appeared in the *Newstead Abbey Byron Society Newsletter*, Winter 1998, 30-9. I have also consulted *Selected Stories of Lu Hsün*, tr. Yang Hsien-yi and Gladys Yang (Foreign Languages Press Peking 1960), *Lu Hsün and the New Culture Movement of Modern China* by Huang Sung-K'ang (Amsterdam 1957), *Lu Hsün's Vision of Reality* by William A. Lyell, jr (Berkeley 1976), and Patricia Uberoi (ed.), *China Report* (XVIII) March-April / May-June 1982, special number on Lu Hsün. I am grateful to Charles Aylmer and Itsuyo Higashinaka for their help.

A much-favoured Byronic text was *The Isles of Greece* from *Don Juan* III, read naively as a call to overthrow the Turks, the Turks being the equivalent – so it was imagined – of the hated Manchu dynasty.

The earliest translator of Byron was Su Manshu. He came from the mountain regions of Canton, where he had retreated for some time into a temple as a Buddhist monk; he discovered Byron when he was on a journey to Japan. In 1906 he translated parts of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, *The Isles of Greece*, and other poems, all included in his work *My Literary Affinities* (Tokyo 1908). He compiled the first proper Byron anthology, *A Choice of Byron's Verse*, which appeared in Tokyo in 1909,<sup>2</sup> and *Voices of the Tide* appeared in 1911. He writes in wenyān, the classical language which had held sway in literature since the time of Confucius, concentrating the thought and emotion of Byron's verse into the strait-jacket of classical Chinese pentasyllabics. He writes his own preface, comparing Byron's poems with ancient Chinese patriotic and erotic songs, and provides English translations of the most beautiful of these, to make his comparison more striking.

Su Manshu (named by his contemporaries “the Chinese Byron”, in part because of his colourful personality) worshipped in Byron the solitary, active hero whom he wished to take as a model while not daring to being too attached to a melancholy hermit's tranquillity of his own (though he had fought against the Manchus in his youth). This lonely image of Byron would be repeated just as often as would that of the indomitable hero of oppressed peoples. *The Isles of Greece*, the title of which normally comes out in Chinese as *I lament for Greece*, or *Alas for Greece*, would subsequently be favoured by several other translations. Su Manshu's version ignores the irony of Byron's original, and “uses many obsolete expressions that even his contemporaries found difficult to understand”.<sup>3</sup>

Liang Qichao, a famous reformer, journalist and teacher, who in 1913 founded the Progressive Party, knew little English, but translated *The Isles of Greece* from an oral version provided by his pupil Luo Chang. His version appears not in an anthology of translations but in a novel, *The Story of New China*, published in 1902. Having heard fragments of the song being sung in English from a neighbouring room in an inn (an improbable idea), one character, Mr Huang, explains to another, Mr Li:

Byron loves freedom above everything else. He seems to have been born a great writer and a lover of Greece ... he died in the Greek army fighting for the independence of Greece. He can be regarded as the first great hero among writers. He wrote this passage [not *The Isles of Greece*, but from *The Giaour*] to encourage the Greek people, but it sounds to us now as if the passage were addressed to China.<sup>4</sup>

Though Liang Qichao had only a slight acquaintance with Byron's work (he seems to think that *Don Juan* is a play)<sup>5</sup> the passage shows clearly the mythical status Byron enjoyed amongst Chinese intellectuals at the start of the twentieth century. The fragments he translates may readily be heard as resembling lyrics from Peking operas.<sup>6</sup>

Ma Junwu, then a student in Japan, translated *The Isles of Greece* in 1905, inspired by the partial translation of Liang Qichao. He did know English, and the style he chose was vernacular – that is to say, he was fourteen years ahead of his time, for the idea of writing poetry in common speech (even journalism in common speech) is associated with the radical Fourth of May movement of 1919. Ma Junwu's verses are rendered accurately into

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2: All it contained were the Ocean stanzas from CHPIV, Childe Harold's Farewell, *The Isles of Greece*, *Maid of Athens*, and *To a Lady, who presented the author with the band which bound her tresses*.

3: Chi Chi Yu, *Lord Byron's The Isles of Greece: First Translations* in D.E. Pollard (ed) *Translation and Creation: Readings of Western Literature in Early Modern China, 1840-1918*, Amsterdam 1998, p. 93. This excellent essay explains many of the problems faced by Chinese translators of Byron. For example, the line from *The Isles of Greece*, “There, Swan-like, let me sing and die”, needs a note in Chinese culture, where the idea of the death-song of the swan has no currency.

4: *Ibid*, p. 81.

5: *Ibid*, p. 82.

6: *Ibid*, p. 95.

heptasyllabics, and keep to a western rhyme-scheme; though, inevitably, what they do is paraphrase Byron rather than translate him, rendering the work more nostalgic than ironic, less ambiguous, and more forthright in its radicalism.<sup>7</sup> Thus the following stanza ...

The Tyrant of the Chersonese  
 Was Freedom's best and bravest friend;  
*That* Tyrant was Miltiades! –  
 Oh! that the present hour would lend  
 Another Despot of the kind!

... becomes

A tyrant rose among the Chersonese  
 When freedom had not yet died  
 He destroyed huge Persian armies  
 Even today people talk about Miltiades  
 Alas  
 If native tyrants deserve death  
 What about foreign tyrants today?<sup>8</sup>

The idea of a domestic tyrant being preferable to a foreign one was too strange for Man Junwu.

Hu Shih, pioneer of modern Chinese poetry, was the first who translated Byron's lyric into a contemporary idiom. His English was excellent – he did his version while a student at Cornell. However, though beautiful, his is even more of a paraphrase than those of his predecessors:

The Scian and the Teian Muse,  
 The hero's harp, the lover's lute,  
 Have found the fame your Shores refuse;  
 Their place of birth alone is mute  
 To Sounds which Echo further West  
 Than your Sires' "Islands of the Blest." –

I recall things a long time ago  
 Homer and Anacreon  
 Singing about fervent and gallant heroes  
 Relating moving stories about love  
 They enjoy fame through ten thousand years  
 But their place alone is silent  
 Their songs started from the west of  
 The Thousand Islands  
 Why is their place alone mute?<sup>9</sup>

The recurring choice of *The Isles of Greece* is ironical, for its attitude to nationalist struggle is far from whole-hearted. As with many other cultures, China discovered the Byron she needed – or thought she needed. It is not just a matter of translation problems – though with two languages as rhythmically distinct as Chinese and English, these are, in the case of poetry, considerable<sup>10</sup> – but of historical blindness to the twisted tone of the original. The Chinese patriots of the first decade of the twentieth century were not to understand how much Byron, much as he wished to liberate Greece, despised the Greeks themselves.

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7: See examples at *ibid*, p. 84.

8: *Ibid*, p. 86.

9: *Ibid*, p. 91.

10: Chinese poetry has no equivalents to alliteration, or internal rhyme.

### Lu Hsün.

However, the best partisan of Byron in China was not one of his translators, but the man who “imported” him before any of the translations had been published. We know about the way in which Lu Hsün, the Father of Modern Chinese Literature, first came into contact with Byron, from his essay *Varied Memories*:

It is said that many young people love Byron’s poetry, and I believe there to be much truth in that. I still remember how enthusiastic I felt on reading these poems, and above all when I looked at the portrait showing him in his multi-coloured turban, at the time when he was aiding Greece in her struggle for independence. This portrait was unknown in China until the year before it appeared in *The Novel Monthly*. What a pity I knew no English, and only read translations ...



At once a problem of interpretation is shown. The portrait of Byron in his turban reminds us of his visit, not to Greece in 1823, but to Albania in 1809, before he even understood the need for a Greek revolt.

Lu Hsün then laments that the Japanese translations he read were in the obsolete language of the old literary establishment. When he wrote *Varied Memories*, in 1925, he had been introducing young Chinese readers to Byron for eighteen years. He studied first as an engineer, then as a doctor, and turned only thirdly to literature, as being, politically, the most effective of the three. In an earlier essay, *The Power of Mara Poetry* (1907), the young Lu Hsün, then studying at the Kobun Institute in Tokyo, had portrayed a Byron motivated by nationalist duty:

In fact there was another reason for the relatively good knowledge of Byron possessed by the Chinese of that time [other than the qualities of his poetry as perceived through translations]: he had aided Greece in her struggle for independence. It was the end of the Manchu dynasty, and the revolutionary tide attained its full flood in the hearts of one part of Chinese youth; every work which called to resistance and vengeance found in them a ready echo ...

*The Power of Mara Poetry*, written in 1907 and published in 1908 in *Henan* magazine,<sup>11</sup> presented not only Byron (though he took first place), but also Shelley, Mickiewicz, Pétöfi, Pushkin, Lermontov, Gogol and Nietzsche – most of whom died in violent circumstances. Lu Hsün had been reading Byron since 1902, from the start of his studies in Japan, and knew of Southey’s insult, in the preface to *A Vision of Judgment*, about the “Satanic School” of poetry – the title of his essay refers to this, except that he implies approval, where Southey implies the reverse. Mara is the Hindu god of destruction and revolt: Lu Hsün reverses the Hindu evaluation of him, and interprets him as an admirable, cleansing force. The “Poets of Mara” represent revolt against their own decadent societies, and thus can be recruited as icons in the contemporary revolt against old, atrophying feudal China, in which a small, selfish, hypocritical mandarin class oppressed and exploited the vast mass of servile peasantry.

Lu Hsün became famous for his caustic independent wit, his hatred of hypocrisy, his refusal to accept established reputations, and the cosmopolitanism of his literary outlook:

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**11:** A Beijing publication for students from Henan province (where Lu Hsün came from).

In my opinion, read as few as possible – or rather no – Chinese books; instead read as many foreign writings as possible.<sup>12</sup>

He is described as “individualistic, quarrelsome, trivial, haughty, moody and self-conscious”.<sup>13</sup> No wonder he liked Byron. Chen Mingsu, in his essay *Lu Hsün and Byron*, remarks on the Byronic spirit of the earliest work of the young Lu Hsün, *The Spirit of Sparta* (1903). In a later preface to this work, written thirty-three years later on the eve of his death, at the time of the Japanese invasion, Lu Hsün again evokes the frenzy of his “romantics”, their verses hurled into the chaos of the winds, opposed alike against upper-class self-serving and lower-class inertia. For Lu Hsün, a poet is to be valued above all for his effect on society. “Literary writings,” he says, “are as essential in life as clothing, food, shelter, religion and morality”.<sup>14</sup> *The Spirit of Sparta*, which focuses on the sacrifice made by the soldiers of Leonidas, is inspired by *Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage*, and is, like *Childe Harold*, composed in an archaic style. It will, Lu Hsün wishes us to know, be in China, just as previously on the banks of the Eurotas, that the dignity of a free people will grow: and the violence of the “Mara” poets will urge it to do so.

In 1903, there were no Chinese translations of Byron, and Lu Hsün got to know him via Japanese versions.<sup>15</sup> When Lu Hsün arrived there in 1902 (he stayed until 1910), the first Japanese “romantic” school had closed with, in 1894, the suicide of the Byronic poet Kitamura Tokoku (see next section) and the literary apostasy of his friend, Shimazaki Tōson who, in 1906, went over to realism and naturalism. Lu Hsün found himself isolated from his fellow Chinese students in Tokyo, few of whom were interested in literature or indeed anything except study as a means of material advancement at home.

There is an invisible Byronic echo in a poem which he composed on the back of a photograph which he had taken of himself when, on arriving in Japan, he had had his mandatory pigtail – symbol of his serfdom to the Manchus – cut off. It opens:

My heart knows not how to dodge  
the arrows loosed by love of country;  
Storms weigh down like boulders and twilight  
the gardens of my native land.

The arrows image in line two is, we’re told,<sup>16</sup> a reference to the death of Lara, killed by an arrow as he leads his peasant revolt.<sup>17</sup> It’s a reference easy to miss.

An important literary event at the time was the diffusion of the ideas of the Danish literary historian, Georg Brandes, whose *Main Currents in Nineteenth Century Literature* contains an entertaining section on the life of Byron. Arriving in the Orient, *Main Currents* formed an ideology for Chinese and Japanese writers, who were, no matter how radical, always anxious for theories, authorities, and precedents – as well as what we would call study guides. Brandes confounded “romanticism” and “realism” under the banner of “naturalism”. At the end of Brandes’ fourth volume Lu Hsün would have read the following:

... like Achilles arising in his wrath after he has burnt the body of Patroclus, Byron, after Shelley’s death, arises and lifts up his mighty voice. European poetry was flowing on like a sluggish, smooth river; those who walked along its banks found little for the eye to rest on. All at once, as a continuation of the stream, appeared this poetry, under which the ground so often gave way that it precipitated itself in cataracts from one level to another – and the eyes of all inevitably turn to that part of a river where its stream becomes a waterfall. In Byron’s poetry the river boiled and foamed, and the roar of its waters made music that mounted up to heaven. In its seething fury it formed

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**12:** Quoted Xiangyu Liu and Hailang Ma, *Byronism in Lu Xun*, in Hua Meng and Sukehiro Hirakawa (eds), *Images of Westerners in Japanese and Chinese Literature* (Amsterdam / Atlanta, 2000) p. 75

**13:** Tan Chung, *Ah Q or Superman? An Appraisal of the Appraisals of Lu Xun*, at Uberoi, op. cit., 10.

**14:** Quoted N.M.Pankaj, *Lu Xun: A Cultural Movement*, at Uberoi, op. cit., 115.

**15:** Lu Hsün was fluent in Japanese, and could read German and Russian.

**16:** Lyell, op. cit., 56 and n.

**17:** *Lara*, II 381 (CPW III 248).

whirlpools, tore itself and whatever came in its way, and in the end undermined the very rocks. But, “in the midst of the infernal surge”, sat such an Iris as the poet himself has described in *Childe Harold* – a glorious rainbow, the emblem of freedom and peace – invisible to many, but clearly seen by all who, with the sun above them in the sky, place themselves in the right position.

It presaged better days for Europe.<sup>18</sup>

Brandes’ sensational version of Byron informed the position of the young Lu Hsün when he wrote *The Power of Mara Poetry*.

*Main Currents* was the first work by Brandes known in China, and its fourth volume, the one in which he analysed the life and work of Byron, was translated in 1924, on the centenary of Byron’s death. But Lu Hsün had got to know Brandes’ ideas after his 1902 arrival in Japan, where he came to study medicine, and with the help of his brother Zhou Jianren, who translated Brandes from the German. All the essays which Lu Hsün wrote around 1907 derive the same idea from Brandes: that of a Byronic power which leads peoples towards liberty, a generous idealism which weans them from the belief that anything can be obtained by power and money, two things which can never represent a country’s salvation. *The Power of Mara Poetry* is the hopeful contribution of the young Lu Hsün to the salvation of China. Byron would probably have been flattered by it, and by Brandes, even as he queried some details: after all, he was not inspired by Shelley’s death to write anything.

Written in wenyān (classical Chinese) more than ten years before the first vernacular writings, *The Power of Mara Poetry* is the first Chinese work about western writers. From Nietzsche, who influenced him deeply and whom he uses as epigraph, Lu Hsün borrows the idea of a savage force which exists, voiceless, like a secret light, beneath the “immobility and abysmal silence” of a crushed people, which make the human heart “a withered forest”. Speaking of Byron, the *übermensch*-originator<sup>19</sup> of this demon, via the same force “without palpable end”, Lu Hsün proposes to reanimate the cry for human progress:

Byron, named George Gordon, was descended from the clan of the pirate Burun, from the seas of Scandinavia<sup>20</sup> ... Thus, confronted by death, everything which Byron had thought possible evaporated like a dream, and he realised that the enslaved descendants of a free people are not so easy to save.

There follow enthusiastic pages on the humane virtues of Byron, extraordinary even in their contradictions:

Arrogant, but smitten with compassion when he beheld others reduced to slavery; a leader, but pushing others towards freedom without fear of the uncontrolled waves; full of courage, but terrified at mounting a horse. A merciless adversary, but compassionate over the sufferings of prisoners. Is it not thus that we should envisage “a Mara”? ... Byron bore the surname of Mara (of Satan) yet he was but a man, and there was nothing extraordinary about him ...

They [*the Mara poets*] all have strong, healthy, unconquerable spirits, sincere and true. They do not fawn on the masses in order to conform with old customs. They speak out with powerful voices so that they may create new life in their people, and make their countries great in the eyes of the world.<sup>21</sup>

Another problem of interpretation arises. Byron did *not* have, as part of his ambition, to “make his country great in the eyes of the world” (any more than he was scared of horses). In his analysis, after 1815 she was much *too* great. But Lu Hsün took, as he thought, from Goethe, the idea that “the lesson of Byron” lay in his will, a ferocious will which he

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**18:** Brandes, *Main Currents in Nineteenth Century Literature* (1905 English translation), IV 366.

**19:** The Nietzschean Superman looks quite different from the perspective of feudal China than he does from that of the bourgeois-capitalist West. See Ravni Thakur, *Lu Xun’s Foreign Inspirations*, at Uberoi, op. cit., 59.

**20:** The error comes from a misreading of Brandes, IV 255.

**21:** Last passage from Sung-K’ang, op. cit., 37.

unleashed against hypocrisy, “this poison which still kills today”. Civilisations are carried by “the voice of the heart”, and Byron possessed that voice:

Each of his words, each of the poet’s phrases, are the forms taken by his breath and by his spirit; it is this which goes straight to the heart of man, and the fibre of his intelligence vibrates immediately in response. The extent of Byron’s influence throughout Europe cannot be matched by that of any other English poet ... if one asks where that influence was to be found ...

... Lu Hsün tells us: Italy, Greece, Spain, Germany. The section devoted to Byron stops at this point, but his praises do not, for there follow the other “Maras”, all those who received from his hands the flame of revolt, all those who “have Byron as their master”.<sup>22</sup> Shelley, himself a “demon” fired by the ideal, Pushkin, who, claims Lu Hsün, modelled his first poem, *A Prisoner of the Caucasus*, on *Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage*. He too struggled against hypocrisy, but did not finish his struggle. Adam Mickiewicz, Poland’s greatest poet, also read Byron, and started to combat after his example, and after him his successor Juliusz Slowacki, whose character, ideas and style were those of Byron. The Hungarian poet Sandor Pétöfi studied the poetry of Byron and Shelley, and was as passionate as they. Like them, he lived a vagabond existence. Lu Hsün is not concerned with making distinctions between these writers (Pétöfi is especially dissimilar to Byron), but with drawing out what he sees as their revolutionary essence: “The images of the ‘Mara’ poets are not faithful ones when judged by the conventions of literary criticism and history; instead, differences in nationality, period, biography and even poetic diction and style are filtered away so that each poet appears in the image of the ‘master’ Byron”.<sup>23</sup>

“If we search through all China,” Lu Hsün then asks, “who can be compared with him?” No-one. But still all hope must not be abandoned:

... the Mara were simply men. They were just people who listened honestly to their conscience, where they heard an enthusiastic and sincere voice, men in unison, endowed with the same enthusiasm and the same sincerity. This is why each of their lives resembled the others so strangely, they who, for the most part, took arms and spilled their blood like gladiators, fighting before the eyes of the public, filling it with trembling and pleasure when the time for their release came.

Lu Hsün was ready for the same moment of release. Like Byron, he was at once a traditionalist and an innovator, a nationalist and an internationalist, and was to become the greatest writer in modern China, named after his death “the Soul of the People”, described by Mao Tse-tung (a considerable Mara himself) as “the greatest and most courageous standard-bearer of China’s new culture”.<sup>24</sup> His essay was published in a review created expressly for it, of which the title represented a programme for him alone: *Vita Nuova* (in Italian). Why? “Because,” he wrote, “one day rifles, sabres and cannon will crumble to dust, while the voice of Dante will remain intact. The people who possessed Dante are now a united people, while the Russian people, deprived of all voice, has” (writes Lu Hsün, with insight) “no destiny but dismemberment.” That which, as Carlyle wrote, Dante had succeeded in performing for the unification of Italy, Lu Hsün would perform for China. But not yet: *Vita Nuova* found no readership, its funding was withdrawn, and it folded.

Sun Yat-Sen’s revolution of 1911 got rid of the old Imperial system, without replacing it with a republic strong enough to stand up either to foreign encroachment or to internal chaos. Warlords ruled, not the people. Lu Hsün, at first an enthusiastic supporter of Sun, spent eight years in silent disillusion, if not collaboration. Then the Fourth of May movement of 1919, which started as a student protest against the unfairness of the Versailles settlement,

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22: Quoted Xiangyu Liu and Hailang Ma, op. cit. p. 79.

23: Ibid, 80.

24: Mao could not have valued Lu Hsün more highly: “Confucius was the sage of the feudal society; Lu Xun is the sage of modern China”, he said (quoted Tan Chung, *Ah Q or Superman? An Appraisal of the Appraisals of Lu Xun*, at Uberoi, op.cit., 12).

broadened swiftly to encompass a host of allied issues. In its aftermath were created the two great literary societies of “Romanticism” and “Realism”. Both were active in presenting western writers to the public during the 1920s. Lu Hsün also admired Ibsen, and Shaw. He met Shaw in Shanghai in 1933.

Tian Han, one of the founders of the “Romantic” society (*Creation*) expounded an “evolutionary” theory of new literature. Reversing the French model, he linked classicism confidently to feudalism, and romanticism to democracy, and took over from Tsubuchi Shoyo, the first modern Japanese literary critic, the idea of the “romantic socialist”, which sprang directly from an admiration for Shelley and Byron. *Creation* planned a special number on Byron, but it was not the “romantics” who did him this honour, but their antagonists, the “realists.”

In December 1921, the journal of the “realists”, *The Novel Monthly* (also known as *The Short Story Magazine*) translated an article by the Japanese writer Shimamura Hogetsu, a disciple of Shoyo and leader of the Japanese naturalist writers. In it the *œuvre* of Byron was offered, with doubtful congruity, next to that of Zola, as the highest expressions of “naturalism”, a literary theory of social progress, of the scientific spirit, critical of complacent social thinking.

In April 1924 (the centenary of his death) *The Novel Monthly* devoted almost an entire number to Byron.<sup>25</sup> It included a complete *Manfred*, translated into vernacular Chinese by Fu Donghua; plus translations of Medora’s song from *The Corsair*, *There’s Not A Joy, I Saw Thee Weep, To a Lady, Oh! Weep for Those, Maid of Athens ere we Part, There be none of beauty’s daughters, Stanzas to Augusta*, and *Oh talk not to me of a name great in story*.

The materials assembled here were rich and varied, and from this moment the “Satanic” image of Byron, which had been complete and whole since Lu Hsün wrote, was mercifully in fragments. If he was still the great rebel against injustice, the way in which his Chinese admirers could interpret his revolt gained, from now on, greater diversity. In this number, Mao Dun, founder of the “realist” school and chief editor of *The Novel Monthly*, made way for a poem by Xu Zhimo, a poet already famous for his modern style of romanticism.<sup>26</sup> Written especially for the Byron Centenary, Xu’s poem expresses above all his own ideals, which were, he asserted, incarnate in the English poet – Love, Beauty and Liberty.

The poem offers itself as prosaic and conversational: a friend mocks Xu – “Byron may be in fashion, but what can a Chinese poet make of this aristocrat?” Xu springs at once to the defence of his hero, who is not dead, and will never die. The Chinese poet piles image upon image to give some idea of the tragic beauty of such a life. If at first he insists on the beauty of the man (the mouth, the eyes, the curls of Apollo) he concludes with the splendour of that death, in, and for, freedom. Xu appears to see himself standing like Byron, “on the shores of Missolonghi,” his face bathed in Greek sunlight, embraced by a supreme “Liberty”. At this point Xu strangely confuses the death of Byron with that of Goethe, “that eighty-year-old, who cried when dying ‘Mere [*sic*] Licht!’”

Xu Zhimo’s poem is not lacking in formal beauty. Several years after his death it was discovered that it had first been written, all in one outburst, in English, then “transfused”, so to speak, into Chinese, in which he had worked and fashioned it to ensure its fidelity to the original. Thus, one can say, Byron contributed to the creation of modern Chinese poetry.

In presenting Byron as a god, Xu was doing nothing unusual. Numerous references to Byron are to be found in the writing and poetry of the time – at least, in intellectual circles.

Many young Chinese dilettante “romantics” insisted on the image of Byron the beautiful rebel, and launched into new love-affairs in complete, Shelleyan (not Byronic) “freedom”. These young amateur Occidentalists saw themselves as delivered from the “marriage-market”. Among the Chinese poets of that time, several gave themselves Byronic idylls at Florence, or at Rome – a luxury few Chinese could afford. Hand-in-hand with their taste for Byron went a distaste for many Russian writers. Lu Hsün satirises such opportunist poseurs in

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25: It is Volume 15 No.4.

26: Xu Zhimo studied at King’s College Cambridge and was a friend of I.A.Richards.



his short story *A Happy Family*. His protagonist is a writer, desperate to be published, but panicking about what (a) the public and (b) his publisher will find acceptable:

“It doesn’t matter,” he thought, turning back again. “‘Twenty-five catties’ of what? ... They are the culture élite, devoted to the arts. But because they have both grown up in happy surroundings, they don’t like Russian novels. Most Russian novels describe the lower classes, so they are really out of keeping with such a family. ‘Twenty-five catties’? Never mind. In that case, what books do they read? ... Byron’s poetry? Keats? That won’t do, neither of them are safe. ... Ah, I have it: they both like reading *An Ideal Husband* ...”<sup>27</sup>

He ends up writing nothing at all, but uses the paper to wipe his daughter’s eyes.

Such games, however, were still not able to erase the still more strongly engraved image of the “Lonely Pilgrim” which Su Manshu, and later Lu Hsün, had created of Byron, the image of a great hermit at the service of the people. Here is one of the strengths which Byron and his heroes held for China: they had refashioned themselves in the image of the “virtuous bandits,” poetical Robin Hoods. In 1907 the young Lu Hsün had summoned these Nietzschean “super-individualists”, generous even to the ultimate sacrifice, these atypical personalities who become decisive forces in the histories both of their own and of other peoples, to come to the aid of humiliated China. Twenty years later he continued to summon them, but in a tone of increasing pessimism: China would destroy itself, he concluded, despite anything any genius could do.

Lu Hsün died of T.B. in 1936, despairing over the struggle between the Nationalists and the Communists (from which latter group he was alienated, despite Mao’s words, quoted above, for he was not a Marxist). He had excelled in writing satirical short stories (*The Diary of a Madman*, *The True Story of Ah Q*): but had concentrated more on essays, as having more political effect. However, he maintained to the end that “the life of irony is reality”,<sup>28</sup> a sentence from which Byron would not have dissented.

There are no obvious traces of Byron’s influence in Lu Tsün’s fiction; but I hope to show that their satirical target is the same.

Lu Tsün’s most famous short story, *The True Story of Ah Q*, is about the value society puts on people, and how, in pre-1911 China at least, society has no steady perception of people, and thus no standards at all by which to judge their value. It depicts a country steeped in moral blindness and sloth. Ah Q, the protagonist (that *may* be his name – the narrator doesn’t know, any more than he knows where he comes from), is an illiterate nondescript odd-job man, with no permanent social role and thus no permanent identity. By small-scale confidence tricks he can cause *some* of his neighbours to feel in awe of him sometimes: but just as often he blunders, and causes *some* of his neighbours to despise him sometimes. He is a coward and a bully, and will beat people up if he knows he can win, except that he rarely does win: but he always convinces himself retrospectively that he has won. One day, for example, he makes a pile at gambling, has his money stolen, slaps himself on the face as if he is the thief, and goes to sleep convinced that he is the victor.

One day he returns (no-one had noticed his departure) well-dressed and clearly well-off. Everyone thinks most highly of him, until he boasts that he made his haul as a petty thief, and left the trade when it became too dangerous. This last detail causes the townsfolk to despise him all over again. Being a thief is fine – but to stop when the going gets tough!!

He despises the son of a local bigwig who has gone to Japan, had his pigtail removed (see above), and now that he is back, has to wear a false one. According to Ah Q, such “a man could scarcely be considered as human”.<sup>29</sup> To be Chinese, he thinks implicitly, is to be a slave. Yet he would like to join the revolutionaries, for then he would be able to bed all the attractive women in town (he has no sex-life). Suddenly the revolutionaries do turn up (forcing everyone to coil their pigtails on their heads) but won’t accept Ah Q as one of

27: *Selected Stories of Lu Hsün*, 205. A catty is a measure of weight, 1 1/3 lbs.

28: Quoted Ravni Thakur, *Lu Xun’s Foreign Inspirations*, at Uberoi, op. cit., 62.

29: Yang Hsien-yi and Gladys Yang, op. cit., 109.

themselves, and chase him off. Later they arrest him, for a crime which he has not, in fact, committed, and he is carted off to execution. The villagers are disgusted that he is not beheaded but shot (beheadings are more dramatic) and that he does not sing snatches from operas on his way to his death. That is what you are supposed to do before being executed.

Many of the jokes remind one of *Waiting for Godot* rather than anything by Byron; but to see that Lu Hsün had imbibed satirical insight from his study of Byron, we need look no further than the first stanza of the first Canto of *Don Juan*:

I want a Hero: an uncommon Want,  
 When every Year and Month sends forth a new one,  
 Till, after cloying the Gazettes with Cant,  
 The Age discovers he is not the true one;  
 Of such as these I should not care to vaunt –  
 I'll therefore take our ancient friend Don Juan;  
 We all have seen him in the Pantomime,  
 Sent to the Devil, somewhat ere his time.<sup>30</sup>

England, says Byron, has only cant, journalistic clichés and lies, with which to measure supposedly “great men”. So Byron, like Lu Hsün, admitting that heroism is hard to assess, will take someone damnable in cliché, and use him as the hero, by way of experiment. In each case the “hero” is not at all admirable morally, but is admirable theatrically. He provides a spectacle, not a role-model, spectacles being more marketable than role-models. The jokes work equally well in both cultures, especially in Lu Tsün’s case, for Ah Q, though not an interesting spectacle, and neither marketable nor marketed, is the best the area has to offer.

Meanwhile, other candidates for the title of “The Chinese Byron” were not lacking. Along with Xu Zhimo, and more passionate even than him, there was Jiang Guangci. Founder on the one hand of the society and of the literary review *Sun*, and on the other the first of the poets “returned from the U.S.S.R.”, he saw no contradiction between “romanticism” and working-class revolution. Since April 1923 he had been stealing into the glorious roles of “political poet” and of “the Chinese Byron”. In poem entitled *Recalling Byron*, he wrote:

Ah Byron!  
 You are the rebel against the darkness,  
 You are God’s prodigal son,  
 You are the singer of freedom,  
 You are the fierce enemy of tyranny,  
 Wandering, calumny –  
 Was this your fate,  
 Or the tribute paid by society to genius?  
 ...  
 I was born in an oppressed country in the East.  
 My soul is filled with the fury of humiliation!  
 A hundred years ago you mourned the weakened Greece,  
 A hundred years later I bemoan the sinking of my native land.  
 ...  
 We are both friends of the oppressed,  
 We are both men who love justice and righteousness,  
 In those years, in the solemn House of Lords,  
 You step forward to protect the workers who broke up the machines.  
 Today in the red proletarian country,  
 I sing of the world’s proletarian revolution.  
 Ah Byron!  
 You of the nineteenth century, ...

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**30:** Byron, *Don Juan*, Canto I, Stanza 1 (my edition).

In the same group, but at the extremity of the last Chinese “romantic” movement, Qian Xingcun, influenced by Schiller’s *Die Räuber*, distinguishes between “two kinds of bandit”, the “economic”, such as Conrad in *The Corsair*, and the “philosophical”, such as Ruy Blas, and from this he develops a theory of the “literature of power”. At the 1928 *coup d’état*, after which Chang Kai-Shek’s White Terror forced most of the left-wing writers either underground or into exile, the movement became radical. Romanticism came to seem out of date, and the glory of Byron faded. Yin Fu, a young poet from the Association of Left-Wing Writers, murdered by the Kuomintang with twenty-one of his colleagues and friends, had announced it in 1928:

The romantic epoch is over  
With its Byron,  
Its noble ladies, its nightingales –  
We need another kind of song. (*Romanticide shidai*)

In the next period of Chinese history (World War II, and the subsequent civil war, revolution, and period of internal violence, all of which fulfilled Lu Hsün’s grim prophecy) the image of Byron in China was static. After Lu Hsün and the May the Fourth movement, Chinese writers remembered nothing of Byron but his posturings. They paid no attention whatever either to *Don Juan* or to *Cain*, and – if they thought of him at all – went on glorifying the image of the Seducer and of the Rebel, the Satan, the “Mara”. There was a lone translation of *Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage*, by Yuan Shui-Pai, published in Chungking in 1944.

After Mao Tse-Tung’s victory in 1949, occidental influences weakened as the culture turned inward, and translators marked time for a while. Then, in 1954, a “Pan-China National Congress on Work and Translation” re-launched the ambitious programmes of Lu Hsün and his friends when they had founded the review *Translations* in 1934 – but now politically-expedient translations from Russian far outweighed all others. Between 1949 and 1960 translations from non-Russian European languages represented only 1.2% of those done, and Byron was in thirty-second place with four titles only. Heading the translations list were Balzac, Hans Andersen, and Shakespeare.

Subsequent Byron translations have been many: Du Bing-zhen, between 1949 and 1951, published his translation of *The Corsair* (two editions) and a volume comprising *The Siege of Corinth*, *The Prisoner of Chillon*, *Darkness*, *The Dream*, two short poems, and a chronology. In 1950 he had published his translation of *Cain*. In 1955 Liu Rangyan published another version of *The Corsair*, plus *Manfred*. In 1955 and 1957 Zha Liang-zheng published *A Choice of Byron’s Lyric Poetry*, in two editions and 37,000 copies. Yang Xi-Ling published *Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage* in 1956, and this was reissued twice before 1958, once in paperback and once in hard covers, then reissued in 1959 in another edition (30,300 copies in all: it was issued again in 1990). Zhu Weiji published, at last, a translation of *Don Juan* between 1956 and 1959, with three reissues, one in 1978.

After the Cultural Revolution, between 1960 and 1970 (a terrifying lacuna), Byron research, and new translations, or reissues of old translations, recommenced. In June 1978, Zhu Weiji’s *Don Juan* was reissued (20,000 copies); in July 1980, a new verse translation of the same work appeared, by Zha Liang-zheng, who had been active in the 1950s; this was hailed as a new achievement. It was reprinted in 1988 and 1994. In February 1980 Qiu Congyi and Shao Xunmei published *A Choice of Byron’s Satiric Poetry*, comprising *The Vision of Judgement*, *The Irish Avatar* and *The Age of Bronze*. In September 1981 Yang Deyu published *Seventy Lyric Poems of Byron* (reissued 1991) and in 1988 Li Jinxiu published *Oriental Tales I (The Giaour and The Corsair)*. In 1991 Yuan Xiang-shong published *Selected Longer Poems of Travel*. The most recent substantial volume of which is Yang Deyu and Zha Liang-zheng, *Highlights of Byron’s Poems* (1994). The Letters and Journals, so important for establishing a full picture of the man, have not as far as I know been translated into Chinese.

The article on Byron in the Chinese encyclopaedia *Cihai* (1979) is carefully on guard against his individualism, but its gist remains very positive, for the same reasons which have always, since the start of the century, given Byron an audience in China. The collection *Biographies of World Writers*, in the Hunan People's Edition, features a biography of Byron translated from the Japanese. In the section on Foreign Literature in *The Great Chinese Encyclopaedia* (1982) the article on him is by Wang Zuoliang, one of Mao's English translators. It takes the refreshing line that Byron's real originality lies in his conversational satires; and even gives space to Hu Shih, mentioned above, a hitherto-despised follower of Chiang Kai-Shek<sup>31</sup> who had nevertheless been an important advocate of poetry in the vernacular.

## JAPAN<sup>32</sup>

When Japan was "opened up" in 1853, and after the Meiji Restoration in 1868, the study of western literature, like the wearing of western clothing and the adoption of western architecture, became *de rigeur*. Japan was not, however, as China was for decades, an imperialist punchbag (this fate was not hers until 1945). Rather the reverse, as she adapted to imperialist methods and rose quickly to the rank of an imperialist power herself, so that, by the Sino-Japanese War of 1894 and the Russo-Japanese War of 1905, she was able to give a frighteningly effective account of herself. Japanese nationhood was at no time under threat: the influence of Byron on her literature and culture was, correspondingly, much smaller. The importance of Japan as a centre for the education, and publication, of revolutionary Chinese writers has, however, been noted in the previous section.<sup>33</sup>

Western literature was seen first as a means to material success, only later as a source of inspiration and pleasure. Hence, translations by Naotaro Nakamura of Samuel Smiles' two books *Self-Help* and *Character* in 1859 and 1871 gave Byron his first introduction to Japanese readers in the unusual guise of a man who, through his talent, had risen through the ranks of society, or succeeded despite a physical handicap. But Wordsworth's subject-matter approximated more closely to the Japanese idea of what a poet ought to write about, and much of his work was studied and translated at the end of the nineteenth century; although the simplicity of his style remained foreign. Byron was neglected.

In the 1890s the leading publishing company Minyusha produced a series called *Twelve Men of Letters*: Byron was one of the Twelve, along with Wordsworth and Shelley.

Byron's narrative poems and *Manfred* caught on first in Japan, because of the exoticism of the former and the spiritual suffering and alienation portrayed in the latter. Ogai Mori, an army doctor, in his 1889 pioneering and popular anthology *Omokage*, translated (even though from Heine's German versions) Manfred's opening speech, and Childe Harold's Goodnight. Original poems by Heine, and by Nicholas Lenau, were also included.

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**31:** "Hu Shi – the less his name be mentioned, the better – for he was by universal consent epitomized as an outright reactionary and comprador intellectual who had sold himself at the Three Great Enemies of the Chinese Revolution" (quoted N.M.Pankaj, *Lu Xun: A Cultural Movement*, at Uberoi, op.cit., 114).

**32:** Some of the information here is from Akiko Okada, *Reception of Romanticism in Japan before World War II, Keats-Shelley Review* (2001) 88-106.

**33:** On his visit to Japan in November 1998, Jiang Zemin, the Chinese President, visited Sendai and Tohoku University in northern Japan, where Lu Hsün studied, as a tribute.

Kitamura Tokoku.



The poet and editor Kitamura Tokoku published two original, but Byronic works: *Soshu no shi* (*The Poem of the Prisoner*: printed privately, 1889 when Tokoku was twenty) based on *The Prisoner of Chillon*, and *Horaikyoku* (*The Drama of Mount Horai*: 1891) an unfinished drama based on *Manfred* – Kitamura had read *Omokage*. *Soshu no shi* follows Byron's gloomy prison-

poem in many details; though the fact that the prisoner has a beloved, with whom he is, on being released, reunited, gives the work a sentimental feel missing from its grim original. Tokoku's prisoner does not "regain his freedom with a sigh". He is, while incarcerated, nostalgic for his homeland:

Ah, blue firmament! Are eagles still soaring there?  
 Ah, deep stream! Are fish still jumping there?  
 Spring? Autumn? Cherry blossoms? The moon?  
 Are all these things still there?  
 What has happened to the fields and hills  
 Where my love and I used to roam?  
 Wild flowers we picked? Wild music of glens we heard?<sup>34</sup>

Flower-imagery proliferates in *Soshu no shi*, as it does not in *The Prisoner of Chillon*.

Just as Lu Hsün read Byron in part through the theories of Georg Brandes, so Kitamura read him via the historical survey of Hippolyte Taine. The support of a critical authority was vital in both cases.

Viscount Yanagida Motoo, the Manfred-like protagonist of Kitamura's play *Horaikyoku*, has progressed beyond such attachment to the beauties of this world as keep Tokoku's prisoner going:

The pleasures of men were not my pleasures. I could not glory in what they gloried in. The desires and needs of others were not mine, nor their sorrows and joys. For no reason at all I would burst out laughing at things that others did not find funny and shed bitter tears at things they did not find sad.<sup>35</sup>

Such a strong sense of the self apart from the selves of others is un-Japanese in its obsessiveness. Motoo's alienation takes him on a quest for meaning over Mount Horai, in fact a Chinese, not a Japanese, promontory, where paradise may be located. He is in mourning for the death of his love Tsuyuhime ("Lady Dew"), with whom he longs to be reunited: "To die is to return", he says; "to meet one's beloved, thus to be blessed". Unlike Manfred, he is not responsible for her death, and guilt forms no part of his motivation. He is accompanied by his *biwa* (a stringed instrument) and by his loyal retainer – two comforts unavailable to Manfred. He meets a Buddhist monk, whose complacency he rejects, as does Manfred that of the Abbot. Tsuyuhime appears to him, invites him to accompany her, but at once vanishes – a variation on Manfred's encounter with the more uncompromising figure of Astarte. He encounters Daimao, the evil principle (a Japanese Arimanes), and refuses to kneel to him. He meets a simple forester, who is bewildered by his metaphysics, but who does save him from

**34:** *Soshu no shi*, Stanza 13, tr. Itsuyo Higashinaka in *Politics or Cherry Blossoms? A Comparison of Byron's Prisoner of Chillon and Kitamura Tokoku's Soshu no shi*, in M. Byron Raizis (ed) *Byron and the Mediterranean World, Proceedings of the Twentieth International Byron Conference in the University of Athens 20 - 21 September 1995*, Athens 1995, pp. 131-9.

**35:** Tr. Francis Mathy, in *Kitamura Tokoku and Byron*, in *Literature East and West*, January-December 1975, (XIX) pp.55-63.

suicide, as the Chamoix Hunter does Byron. He climbs Mount Horai, and experiences a quasi-Faustian moment of timeless exaltation, as Manfred does before the sunrise; though finally he destroys his *biwa*, and drops dead anyway, through an overwhelming sense of his dust-like insignificance. It is this sense of the passing, insubstantial quality of all things, rather than, as in Manfred's case, a need to defy the powers of the universe, which motivates Motoo's wandering, and his self-destruction.<sup>36</sup>

Tokoku, a democrat with a strong sense of social duty, became a Christian, veering from Presbyterianism to Quakerism before settling back into a version of Buddhism. As has been said, he committed suicide, in disillusion with literature, marriage, and religion, trying without success to cut his throat in 1893 and then hanging himself in 1894.

No Japanese writers beside him show any signs of having been influenced by Byron.

### Later developments.

The first lengthy study of Byron was *Byron* by Minoru Yoneda, published in 1900. Yoneda, who had studied in America, relies on John Nicol's volume in the *English Men of Letters* series, although he does not deal with the poetry in detail. He stresses the heroism of Byron's death in Greece.

Between 1890 and 1930 Byron was much read by Japanese, as by Chinese, liberal intellectuals, and for the same reasons: the sense of release from tradition which reading him gave, the cliché awareness of him as a fighter for freedom, his "liberal" attitude to love, and so on.

In 1902 Yotaro Kimura published *Byron: Satan of the Literary World*, an enthusiastic study based, despite its title, on Moore. Perhaps Lu Hsün was influenced by this work in his *Poets of Mara* essay. Kimura also translated *Parisina* (1903), *The Corsair* (1905), *Mazeppa* (1907), and *Cain* (1907): although these versions were not well received.

In 1907 the socialist poet Kagai Kodama published *A Collection of Byron's Poems*, containing about forty pieces.

As in China, Byron's reputation reached a high point in the 1920s. In 1921 a collection of his and Shelley's verse appeared translated by Oyo Masatomi; and in 1924, to mark the Centenary, Bansui Doi (Bansui Tsuchii) translated *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*. There were, as in China, several articles and whole issues devoted to Byron in the Centenary Year 1924, with much translation included. The translations, however, being, as Lu Hsün had lamented, in archaic language, are hard for modern Japanese students to read. There is a much bigger gap between the Japanese literary language of the nineteenth and early twentieth century and modern usage than there is between the language of the corresponding periods in English-speaking countries.

In the 1930s education spread, and a readership for poetry developed. The publisher Kenkyusha brought out a large series, *English and American Men of Letters*, of which the Byron volume (1937) was by Tomoji Abe, who laments the interest in Byron's life at the expense of his works. All of Byron's poetry, except *Don Juan*, which was done only in selections, had been translated in a five-volume collection of 1936 edited by Seiki Okamoto and others, and Abe himself produced a volume, *Byron's Poetry*, in 1938. As Japanese militarism triumphed throughout the decade, Byron's reputation underwent a natural eclipse, just as it did in China, as we have seen, in the face of the same phenomenon.

After World War II *Don Juan* was at last translated, first by F. Hayashi (in prose: Kyoto 1953); then by K. Ogawa (Tokyo 1954, reprinted 2 vols 1993).

In 1984, in Kyoto, Itsuyo Higashinaka published his translations, into contemporary Japanese, of *Beppo* and *The Vision of Judgement*, in 1989 *Hints from Horace* and *English Bards*, and in 1994 his translation of all four cantos of *Childe Harold*: in the same year Takehiko Tabuki brought out his edition, in English and Japanese, of *Childe Harold* I and II.

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**36:** See Itsuyo Higashinaka, *Byron's Manfred and Kitamura Tokoku's Horaikyoku*, *Literary Relations East and West*, ed. Jean Toyama and Nobuko Ochner, University of Hawaii 1990, pp. 207-14.

Itsuyo Higashinaka is currently (2003) embarked on a translation of *Don Juan* into modern Japanese.

The 2002 International Byron conference was held in Kyoto with great success.