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Scotland is not a large place but it has been much admired for its immortal literary works, especially for its poems and songs. Such great names as William Dunbar, Allan Ramsay, Robert Fergusson and Robert Burns are well-known to everyone who can read and write in China. The famous novelists Sir Walter Scott and John Galt of the nineteenth century and the contemporary story-tellers and poets, such as George Mackay Brown and Edwin Morgan, are all familiar to those who read English, not to mention the popular writer Conan Doyle, whose detective stories made a sensation first in the forties and then again in the middle of the eighties.

It is through various genres of literary works that the heroic deeds of Sir William Wallace and the inspiring story of Robert Bruce, King of Scotland, have been widely known all over a country whose territory measures 9.6 million square kilometers.

China is a country with the longest continuous civilization, but it was physically secluded from other parts of the world for a long time in the past, and even more so culturally. Although in the fifteenth century the remarkable voyages of the Ming court eunuch Zheng created opportunity for Chinese maritime expansion, China was soon invaded by another nomadic steppe people, the Manchus, and became once again locked into continental Asia. What is more, most of the Chinese emperors, from the fifteenth century downwards, discouraged foreign contacts and regarded, together with their courts, all the foreigners as "barbarian." Perhaps they would have been less obstinate if there had been a great poet like William Dunbar who wrote so many remonstrative verses. It was the Opium Wars of 1836-42 and 1856-60,

Du Fu (712-770)

Pen drawing by ZHOU GUO-ZHEN

easily won by the British with their superior weapons, that started the "opening up" of China. That is to say China's protracted isolation from the rest of the world did not come to an end until the middle of the nineteenth century. If this can be regarded as a time China began to develop foreign trade through sea ports open to western merchants, then it is conceivable that the Chinese people came into contact with foreign literatures seventy or eighty years later. More precisely, it was in the twenties and thirties of this century that Western literary classics began to be translated and published by some students returned from England, and more and more people in China began to read Chinese versions of foreign literature. From then on quite a number of these works, including those written by Scottish poets and novelists, have been introduced and very well received. But systematic research in the field of foreign literature in China has had a history of just a few decades; as for Scottish studies, they have been being carried on through the English language. There have been few in our country whose Scots is good enough to read Allan Ramsay or Robert Fergusson in the original.

Of all the poems translated and published in the past few decades, Robert Burns' are best understood and really appreciated in our country where people have a special taste for poetical works because the first notable work in China's history was an anthology of poems (*Book of Poems*) which can be traced back to the eleventh century B.C. in the west (the Zhou Dynasty), three centuries earlier than the blind poet Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey*. It is not very easy for a foreign poet to enjoy great popularity in this land, but Robert Burns has done so ever since some of his poems were translated and published in a magazine for the first time in the twenties of this century. And then, in 1959, for the bicentenary of his birth, two collections of Burns' poems were published, one translated by a famous Chinese poet Yuan Ke-jia, the other by a professor Wan Zuo-liang, who, years later, translated and published another anthology of poems entitled *Selected Scottish Poems*, which consisted chiefly of Burns' works. These books were all very well received and have been republished many times.

The reason why the readers in China love Burns' poems so much has two causes. First, the immortality of themes—love and friendship, equality and fraternity, democracy and freedom, and last but not least, patriotism.

Of course, not all the poets who deal with these themes are remembered by us, but Burns is. This is because in his love lyrics and poems depicting friendship (e.g., "A Red, Red Rose," "Auld Lang Syne"), he described real persons, women he loved dearly and intimate friends. Most of them were rustic toilers, primitive and uncultured, simple and honest, yet unsophisticated. Their character was admirable enough to inspire him with the finest poetry. He was encompassed by them; they almost forced themselves on his

attention. He knew them so well that he could sing of them with unequalled sympathy and insight. His songs, for the most part, were direct transcriptions from personal experience. So it seems that his works of this group, owing to their deep and sincere feelings, express not one single mood or temperament, but the moods of thousands. Therefore, it is only natural that "A Red, Red Rose" is still sung sometimes by college students even in school gardens in China where English is not spoken except in the departments of English in universities.

Burns was a genuine democrat; he loved liberty as the breath of life. He wrote quite a number of poems on social equality and human fraternity. The best known of all in China are "Is There for Honest Poverty?" and "The Slave's Lament." Burns' poems of this group find echoes in the hearts of Chinese readers, because democracy and freedom have always been lofty ideals for the Chinese people in general, and with the intelligentsia in particular, on account of the country having long been ruled by emperors from different races and invaded by foreign countries. Poetry, as Wordsworth said, comes from the heart and goes to the heart. The truth of this saying is never more convincing than when the Chinese are reading Burns. Of the fundamental elements of human society he deals with in his poems, Burns analyzed in "The Tree of Liberty" and came to a conclusion that liberty is the most important. Only when liberty is guaranteed will there be peace, equality and fraternity:

> Wi' plenty o' sic trees, I trow,
> The warld would live in peace, man;
> The sword would help to mak a plough,
> The din o' war wad cease, man.
> Like brethren in a common cause,
> We'd on each other smile, man;
> And equal rights and equal laws
> Wad gladden every isle, man.[1]

This idea with its philosophic theory expressed in a poetical form is especially appealing to most Chinese readers.

Of the numerous Burns poems of patriotism, the most familiar to the readers in China are "My heart's in the Highlands" and "Robert Bruce's March to Bannockburn" (Scots wha hae). The former is a full revelation of the poet's deep patriotic sentiments for his native Scotland in his powerful expression of yearning for the Highlands, the latter an inspiring and heartening call, encouraging enthusiasm from the heart of the reader in simple but

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[1] *The Poems and Songs of Robert Burns*, ed. James Kinsley, 3 vols. (Oxford, 1968), II, 912-3; hereafter *Poems*.

effective words and with strongest emotions. With "Robert Bruce's March" Burns immortalized not only the national hero of Scotland, but also the unconquerable spirit of its people.

More than once Burns laid stress on the same idea expressed here in other poems such as "The Tree of Liberty" and "For a' that and a' that." With this group of poems Burns evokes a strong response in Chinese readers, especially in the younger generation.

The second reason for Burns' popularity is the magnetism of his poetry—simplicity, directness, enthusiasm and optimism. Burns deals with a great variety of themes. But no matter what he writes he is always vividly concrete and straightforward, with affection and hope for the future. These characteristics of his works make him a poet quite different in the method of thinking and in technique from most of his Chinese counterparts, either before or after him, even though they sometimes wrote on the same subjects; hence, Burns appears to the Chinese reader to be an entirely new type of poet with an exotic attraction both in ideological content and in style and manner.

Here are some comparisons made between Burns' works and those of the most famous Chinese poets Li Bai, Du Fu and some others of the Tang Dynasty (A.D. 618-907) when classical Chinese poetry reached its perfection. The comparison is made so as to show the distinction in the mode of thinking, breadth of vision and means of artistic expression when they are dealing with the same or similar themes.

On Fergusson

Ill-fated Genius! Heaven-taught Fergusson,
  What heart that feels and will not yield a tear,
To think Life's sun did set e'er well begun
  To shed its influence on thy bright career.

O why should truest Worth and Genius pine
  Beneath the iron grasp of Want and Woe,
While titled knaves and idiot-greatness shine
  In all the splendour Fortune can bestow?
(*Poems*, I, 323)

Dreaming of Li Bai

by Du Fu

Parted by death, I swallow my sobs.
Parted in life, I swallow incessant.
South of the River, that pestilential place,
The wanderer's gone, and no word comes.
Old friend, you come into my dreams,
* * *

But you are caught in their nets now,
How could fly free?
Falling moon fills the room to the beams,
And almost lets me glimpse your shining face.[2]

Burns is lamenting for another great poet of Scotland whom he calls elder brother elsewhere; Du Fu is thinking of the late poet, his contemporary, who was even more famous at the time. Burns, after showing sympathy with Fergusson who was so talented but died so young, begins his second stanza crying out against unfairness and injustice, and regards them as social evils. Du Fu, on the other hand, confines himself to sorrow over his friend's death, and writes on until he expresses his anxiety about the safety of Li Bai's ghost along the way from the dream back to the grave. The Scottish poet connects Fergusson's misfortunes with human society and condemns it, while the current of thought of the Chinese poet runs deeper and deeper into his own personal affection.

Robert Bruce's March to Bannockburn

By Oppression's woes and pains!
By your Sons in servile chains!
We will drain our dearest veins,
  But they *shall* be free!

Lay the proud Usurpers low!
Tyrants fall in every foe!
LIBERTY's in every blow!
  Let us Do—OR DIE!!!
(*Poems*, II, 708)

Outlook in Spring

by Du Fu

The nation is sundered; the mountains, the
  rivers, remain.
The city's spring; trees and grass, deep.
Touched by times passing; flowers drip tears,
Pained at this separation: birds jar the heart.
Beacons of war burn now into the third month.
One note from home: I'd give lumps of gold.
White hair, scratched even thinner,
Not enough left for a hairpin.[3]

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[2]*Selected Poems of the Tang Dynasty*, ed. Yu Shou-Zhen (Beijing, 1957), p. 33.

[3]*Ibid.*, p. 175.

Both poets are dealing with national affairs. Burns' lines rush along like a torrent; the poet is delivering a resolute and encouraging speech, calling on his compatriots to rise in arms for liberty and a happy life in future. Du Fu starts his poem in a slow and pensive vein; he is just brooding over the fate of his country, bewailing the times and sighing mournfully, his thought going from the state to the family and then back to himself. This is typical of its kind. Many of the patriotic classical Chinese poets expressed themselves in the same way; we can hardly find anything in hundreds of poems of the Tang Dynasty that is so passionate, inspiring and straightforward as Burns' verses.

As Robert Burns is first of all famous for his pastoral poems, a comparison should be made between him and another well-known Chinese poet who is noted for this kind of work, too.

The Cottar's Saturday Night

But now the Supper crowns their simple board,
The healsome *Porritch*, chief of SCOTIA's food:
The soupe their *only Hawkie* does afford,
That 'yont the hallan snugly chows her cood:
The *Dame* brings forth, in complimental mood,
To grace the lad, her weel-hain'd kebbuck, fell;
And aft he's prest, and aft he ca's it guid;
The frugal *Wifie*, garrulous, with tell,
How 'twas a towmond auld, sin' Lint was i' the bell.

The cheerfu' Supper done, wi' serious face,
They, round the ingle, form a circle wide;
The Sire turns o'er, with patriarchal grace,
The big *ha'-Bible*, ance his *Father's* pride:
His bonnet rev'rently is laid aside,
His *lyart haffets* wearing thin and bare;
Those strains that once did sweet in ZION glide,
He wales a portion with judicious care;
'And let us worship GOD!' he says with solemn air.
(*Poems*, I, 148-9)

The Happy Farmer

by Chu Guang-xi

My little farm fivescore of silk trees grows
And acres five of grain in ordered rows.
Thus having food and clothing and to spare
My bounty often with my friends I share.

The summer brings the Ku-mi rice so fine;
Chrysanthemums in Autumn spice the wine,

My jolly spouse is glad my friends to see;
And my young son obeys me readily.

At eve I dawdle in the garden fair
With elms and willows shaded everywhere.
When, wine-elated, Night forbids me stay,
Through door and window grateful breezes play.

Bright, shoal and plain I see the Milky Way;
And high and low the Bear o'er Heaven sway.
As yet intact some Bottles bear their Seal.
And shall tomorrow their contents reveal?[4]

The Chinese poet, with love and passion, paints a picture of rural life with a family as its center and ends his work with a question which implies that there is no lack of good wine for his guest; Burns is doing the same in some of his stanzas but he does not bring his poem to an end until he has connected this theme with his love of Scotland:

Oh SCOTIA! my dear, my native soil!
For whom my warmest wish to Heaven is sent!
Long may thy hardy sons of *rustic toil*
Be blest with health and peace and sweet content!
And O may Heaven their simple lives prevent
From *Luxury*'s contagion, weak and vile!
Then howe'er *crowns* and *coronets* be rent,
A *virtuous Populace* may rise the while,
And stand a wall of fire, around their much-lov'd ISLE.
(*Poems*, I, 151)

If we take another even more famous piece on the same subject from classical Chinese poems and compare it with "The Cottar's Saturday Night," we will see more clearly the fact that the subject matter dealt with by the Chinese poets was usually simple and their visual field relatively narrow. More often than not in their works they take the reader into the circumstances in which they were writing, and give him continual glimpses into the emotional climate of their own.

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[4]Lu Shou-Xiang, *A Comparison of English Versions of Ancient Chinese Poems* (Shanghai, 1980), p. 151.

A Farm House in the Wei River
by Wang Wei

In the slant of the sun on the country-side,
Cattle and sheep trail home along the lane;
And a rugged old man in a thatch door
Leans on a staff and thinks of his son, the herd-boy.
There are whirring pheasants, full wheat-ears,
Silk-worms asleep, pared mulberry-leaves.
And the farmers, returning with hoes on their shoulders,
  Hail one another familiarly,
No wonder I long for the simple life
And am singing the old song, "Oh, To Go Back Again!"[5]

Unlike Burns who, after painting a picture of the rural life of a happy family, carries on to comment on religion and sing the praises of his motherland (stanzas 19-21), Wang Wei, having told his readers how lovely and peaceful rurality is, thinks of his own troubles and disappointments, saying he himself is to go back to lead such a life, singing a song along the way.

Thinking fondly of one's own home is also a theme depicted by many poets. Burns dealt with it when he was collecting and revising folk songs. "My Heart's in the Highlands" is one of them:

My Heart's in the Highlands

My heart's in the Highlands, my heart is not here;
My heart's in the Highlands a chasing the deer;
Chasing the wild deer, and following the roe;
My heart's in the Highlands, wherever I go.—

Farewell to the Highlands, farewell to the North;
The birth-place of Valour, the country of Worth:
Wherever I wander, wherever I rove,
The hills of the Highlands for ever I love.—

Farewell to the mountains high cover'd with snow;
Farewell to the Straths and green vallies below:
Farewell to the forests and wild-hanging woods;
Farewell to the torrents and loud-pouring floods.—

My heart's in the Highlands, my heart is not here,
My heart's in the Highlands a chasing the deer:

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[5] *Ibid.*, p. 149.

Chasing the wild deer, and following the roe;
My heart's in the Highlands, wherever I go.—
(*Poems*, II, 527-8)

Along with his fondness of the Highlands the poet reveals his love and intimate knowledge of Nature. His imagination is passionate and concrete, and at the same time the tune is so lively that it arouses a kind of yearning for the Highlands.

The well-known poem on this subject by Li Bai which has been passed down from generation to generation is entitled "Night Thoughts":

I wake, and moonbeams play around my bed,
Glittering like hoar-frost to my wandering eyes;
Up towards the glorious moon I raise my head,
Then lay me down-and thought of home arise. [6]

Compared with Burns' work Li Bai's seems to be far more implicit, or brief; it stops short, so to speak, leaving much room for the reader's imagination. This is not only because Burns' is a song and Li Bai's is a poem, but because brevity is regarded as the soul of a classical Chinese poem, which sometimes is valued not so much for what it says as for what it suggests. In the present day, however, the younger generation knows less and less about ancient writings and can hardly understand the suggestions in classical Chinese poetry, which, we may say, can only be appreciated by the learned in China now. But Robert Burns' poetry appeals to both the more and the less cultured.

The comparisons made above suffice to show why Robert Burns has had so many readers in China now and will have even more in the future.

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[6] *Ibid.*, p. 104.