

A NOTE ON MODERN JAPANESE POETRY: WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO ENGLISH INFLUENCE (I)

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On the history of Modern Japanese Poetry there appeared and are still appearing in various forms so many studies that there seems to be nothing to add anew. And yet, none can be expected to be exhaustive in such a vast field as our new poetic movement, especially about its beginnings. I believe there are some curiosities still buried and awaiting new explorers to come to dig up. The following is a supplementary note of some facts which seem of some use or interest to the students of Modern Japanese Literature, at home and abroad.

No one can deny that Modern Japanese Poetry began with the publication in 1882 of *Shintaishi-Sho* ("Selection of New-Style Poetry"). Though the editors, three in number, were not so-called men of letters but young scholars of different specialities and abilities, and their original compositions or translations were crude and clumsy, yet what they did was the pioneer work in the virgin soil, and had a profound influence on their contemporaries and succeeding generations.

English poets included in this anthology are Shakespeare, Tennyson, Thomas Gray, Thomas Campbell, Robert Bloomfield, and Charles Kingsley; while American Poetry is represented by Longfellow, with his *Children* and two different Japanese versions of the *Psalm of Life*, done by the editors, Toyama and Inoue, respectively. Of Shakespeare, three passages from three different dramas (namely, *Hamlet*, *II Henry IV*, and *II Henry VIII*) are

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translated, and one of them is Hamlet's well-known soliloquy —“To be or not to be, that is the question”. From the literary point of view, the most successful of all is Gray's *Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard*, done by Yatabe the bontanist. This and Hamlet's soliloquy were most popular, and awakened among Japanese readers a new and lasting interest in English poetry. One of Tennyson's poems chosen here is *The Charge of the Light Brigade*, and we may notice in passing that it gave rise to a new kind of war song. But, as all these things have so often been told before and made well known, there is no need to speak further about them. However, there is one thing which seems to have passed unnoticed hitherto. That is the fortune of Thomas Campbell in Japan.

I am not sure when his name or works were first introduced to Japan. In his prime he was hailed as the “Pope of Glasgow” and his poems were quite popular in the first quarter of the last century in English speaking countries. And, “Ye Mariners of England” was once considered one of his representative poems as *The Golden Treasury* shows. It may be by this sample that a young Japanese poetry-lover began to pay attention to him and chanced upon his famous *Soldier's Dream*, perhaps in the same or some other anthology. Anyhow, when another Japanese anthology, *Shintaishi-Sen* (“Spencimens of New-Style-Poetry”), edited by a rising man of letters, Yamada-Bimyo, came out in 1886, it included a new poem entitled *A Soldier's Dream*, by Maruoka-Kyuka, a friend of the editor's. Though without acknowledgement anywhere, it is nothing but an adaptation or imitation of the namesake work of Campbell. The reason why this plain fact was never noticed by anybody before, is, in my opinion, merely because the author was not seriously considered as a poet or as a reader of any English work. However, the imitation is very cleverly done with some additions or alterations of some scenes and situations more suitable to the Japanese taste. It may fairly be admitted that it reads as an original composition. But, the more important and interesting thing is the fact that such an alien poet as Thomas

Campbell was eagerly and widely read at such an early period; for, to-day, I do not think there are many people who will read his poetical works even in Scotland and England.

In the first and second numbers of a small magazine *Iratsume* ("Young Lady") for July, 1887, appeared a free translation or adaptation by Yamada-Bimyo of Campbell's *Lord Ullin's Daughter* under the title of *Mayoi-no-Fuchi* ("The Gulf of Dilemma"). Its revised version is included in the second series of an anthology, *Seinen-Shōka-Shū* ("Songs and Lyrics for Young Men"), edited by the translator himself and published in 1891. This is far more excellent than his friend's *Soldier's Dream*, but I think it did not receive a proper estimate for its merits.

It is quite noteworthy that this poem seems to have appealed to some Japanese readers of English poetry, as its translation and adaptation appeared one after another in succession. For, three years later there appeared a three volume anthology of European and American poetry in a Japanese version, entitled *Ōbei-Meika-Shishū*, compiled by the translator himself, Owada Tateki, and in the second volume of which his own rendering of *Lord Ullin's Daughter* was included. This was in 1894, and in 1896, there appeared in the September number of a monthly magazine *Teikoku-Bungaku* (II. 9) a short narrative poem entitled *Shiosebune* ("A River Boat in the Eddy") by Takeshima Hagoromo. Though Takeshima did not acknowledge anywhere the source of his poem, it is undoubtedly an adaptation of the above mentioned piece by Campbell. As he was a young scholar of Japanese classics, he wrought it up with much elegance and refinement of tone and expression as a tragic love episode in the feudal times. However, if compared with the original, there are some omissions and changes of the important items which should have remained intact, and the result cannot be said to be very successful. A little before this, Takeshima made a brilliant adaptation of Bürger's *Lenore* from the English imitation by Sir Walter Scott, *William and Helen*. The Japanese poem was entitled *Sayoginuta* (The Sound of Fulling Cloth at Night). In this, the feudal or medieval atmosphere of

the original was changed into that of a homely life in the country. Though he kept well the eerie effect and supernatural setting of the original throughout, he introduced some changes more suitable to the Japanese landscape. For example, the owl in the original became a deer in the Japanese, and the heroine in the original seems to be a daughter of high station as she lives in a turret or tower with a drawbridge nearby. But in the Japanese version, she is a wife of lowly class living with her old pious mother in law, waiting for the home-coming of her husband who went to the front some years before. When this "imitation" appeared in the magazine, his indebtedness to a foreign poem was pointed out by Takayama-Chogyu, who was a rising critic, later known as the devoted Nietzschean. In spite of this, *The Sound of Fulling Cloth at Night* met with a very favourable reception for a long time.

Cambell's *Ye Mariners of England*, *The Soldiers' Dream*, *Lord Ullin's Daughter*—all these are included in the Fourth Book of *The Golden Treasury*. This anthology has been very frequently reprinted since its publication in 1861, and it must have been imported to Japan even as early as the seventies of the last century. The Japanese versions of his poems which have hitherto appeared in anthologies or magazines may have been done from this famous collection. However, there is evidence which shows clearly enough that Campbell's *Poetical Works* were possessed by some Japanese already at that time. For, when the second volume of *The Notes and Commentaries on the Seven Great English Authors* by Katori-Shunsuke was published in April, 1874, in Tokyo, besides Tennyson's *Enoch Arden*, Macaulay's *Horatius*, *Impeachment of Warren Hastings*, and some extracts from Thackeray, it contained Campbell's *Exile of Erin*, *Hohenlinden*, *Lord Ullin's Daughter*, *Lochiel's Warning*, *The Last Man*, *Ye Mariners of England*, *The Soldier's Dream*, and from *the Pleasures of Hope*, three excerpts with such separate titles as: *'Tis Distance lends Enchantment to the View*, *Unfading Hope*, and *The Destruction of Poland*, respectively. The poems above mentioned, with the exception of four:—*Ye Mariners of England*, *Hohenlinden*, *The Soldier's Dream*, and *Lord Ullin's Daughter*, are

not included in *The Golden Treasury*, nor in Ward's *English Poets*, nor in *Chambers's Cyclopaedia of English Literature*. And the *Pleasures of Hope* is too long to be included in any anthology. Hence we cannot but conclude that the annotator must have had a copy of Campbell's *Poetical Works*, or, at least, he must have had a chance to examine one. And here, again, we come across *Lord Ullin's Daughter*. Nor is this all.

At the beginning of this century, in 1902, Yamagata-Isoö, one of the great masters of English in Japan at that time, annotated *Lord Ullin's Daughter* and *Hohenlinden* in his *Simpler English Poems*. And three years before this, in 1898, his *To the Rainbow* was annotated by another veteran English scholar, Takahashi-Gorö in his *Short English Poems with Notes and Commentaries*, published by Masukoya Bookstore in Tokyo.

This rough sketch is enough to show that Campbell was once quite popular with the Japanese readers of English poetry, though he cannot be said to have very much influenced Japanese poetry.

The most profound influence in the twenties of the Meiji Era (1887-96) was Lord Byron. His name and the titles of some of his representative poems might have been known to our advanced readers before that time, but the true interest in this romantic poet of the "Satanic School" was aroused for the first time through Taine's *History of English Literature* somewhere at the beginning of that period. The visible traces of his influence are found in a poetic drama, *Horai-no-Kyoku* ("The Sacred Mountain") by Kitamura Tökoku. This tragedy is really a hybrid between Goethe's *Faust* and Byron's *Manfred*, or more correctly, a grandchild of the German masterpiece, as Goethe himself considers the English work as his spiritual son, though the English poet denies any indebtedness to it. But the closer resemblance can be found between Kitamura's poem, *A Prisoner* and its progenitor *The Prisoner of Chillon*. In Byron's poem, the motive of the imprisonment is religious or a matter of faith—the prisoner's father and brothers were all put in prison because they refused to believe what the governor tried to force them to. All of them died in turn and only

the youngest survived. When the religious oppressor was compelled to retire and set all the prisoners free, this young one declined to go out of the black walls because the gloomy atmosphere had become so intimate with his soul. Here is the note of *ennui* which is to grow into some pessimistic vein. On the other hand, in Kitamura's poem, the hero was imprisoned on a charge of some political offense. Though he had become quite familiar with the heavy and impenetrable walls of his cell, he felt very happy and in high spirits when he was discharged and welcomed by his betrothed who was waiting for him at the gate of the jail. He had a bright future before him. Thus the concluding scene or situation of the Japanese poem is just opposite to its prototype, but there is no doubt that it was modelled on the English piece.

But, the more striking case is in another direction. Though it is not an imitation or adaptation, it is a very curious instance of the fortune abroad of a foreign writer.

In the summer of 1889, a pamphlet entitled *Omokage* ("Images") was published in the form of a supplement to the then popular magazine, *Kokumin-no-Tomo* ("The Nation's Friend"). Though it contains one extract from the Japanese historical prose romance rendered into a Chinese poem, and two Chinese poems translated into Japanese verse, the rest are all translations from English and German poetry. From Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, only Ophelia's song beginning with "How should I your true love know" is taken, while from Byron's *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, first ten stanzas of "Childe Harold's Good Night," First Canto, and two stanzas in the first scene of the First Act of *Manfred* are taken, one of which is turned into Chinese poetic form.

Nobody has pointed out yet, so far as I know, that the Japanese versions of two extracts from *Manfred* were rendered from Heine's German translation. It is really very interesting to see that the result of this second-hand translation produced an unexpectedly wonderful effect on the Japanese readers of literature, especially upon some young aspirants after poetry at that time.

Byron's lines run as follows:—

In my heart
There is a vigil, and these eyes but close
To look within.

Heine translated them in quite a striking way:—

Im Herzen pocht mir's
Gleichi wie ein Wecker, und mein Aug' schliesst
Sich nur, einwärts zu schaun.

In the original there is nothing which corresponds to *Wecker*, that is, *watch* or *alarm clock*. This is undoubtedly a mistranslation. Of course, no one can tell whether it is intentional or not. But it is quite clear that the German version struck an entirely new note. And it is noteworthy again that the Japanese translation based on Heine's German rendering did succeed in striking a surprisingly modern note. In my opinion, such an introspective bent expressed in such a novel mode was never seen, and, perhaps, no instance could be quoted in our former poetry of such an expression as the eyes close only to look inwards.

And this modern note sounded so modern and novel, reverberating for a long time far and wide, and attracting especially the younger generation quite rapidly to the English poet himself.

There are two aspects in Byron which appealed to the young Japanese readers at that time. The one is as the poet of *Childe Harold*, and the other as the author of *Manfred*. The former is congenial to any Oriental reader who is accustomed to the theme and subject-matter treated in the English poem, as they are so often sung in Japanese and Chinese poetry.

But the key-note of *Manfred* is quite different. It is the remorse of some sin which the hero of the drama had committed. This solitary spirit cannot escape from the everlasting agony which gnaws his heart day and night. Hence his world is full of gloomy atmosphere where no voice of help or comfort can be heard. He is buried alive in Hell.

As I indicated before, the interest in Byron was apparently awakened by Taine's *History of English Literature*, in which the

author called him the "poet of the individual." The reason why the Japanese younger generation was attracted by this poet is that they were now passing through the first throes of the consciousness of *ego* or *self*. And the first victim was Kitamura, and his intimate friend Shimazaki Tōson was also enthralled by Byron for some time, though no visible influence can be traced in his poetical works.

But the most remarkable fact is the profoundness and continuity of his influence upon the general reading public, for his scepticism or pessimism developed the tendency towards it especially among young men. And this tendency was further strengthened by the writings of Shiga-Shinsen. I cannot tell offhand what his fundamental ideas were at present, but one example of the most striking effect of the prevailing tendency of pessimism can be seen in the fact that a young girl who was affected by the disease of the modern age drowned herself, singing Ophelia's song, "How should I your true love know," of which the translation is found, as I mentioned above, in the *Omokage*.

How strong and wide-spread this pessimistic tendency was can be gathered from the editorial in the leading magazine of the time, entitled the *Taiyo* ("The Sun"), in which the writer requested the government to ban the works of Byron from the public libraries and bookstores as harmful to young people. The Japanese reading public, however, welcomed Byron for more than two decades, for three or four long poems of his, such as *Parisina*, *Mazeppa*, *Corsair*, *Cain*, were translated in rapid succession, and at least two biographies of him were published by the end of the Meiji thirties (1906).

Though I cannot find visible traces of Byron in the prose or verse of Kunikida-Doppo, one of the most promising novelists, he seems to have read Byron very eagerly with keen sympathy. In his *Journaux Intimes—Azamukazaruno-ki* ("Mon Coeur mis à nu")—he very often mentions or quotes Byron's name or lines. Doppo was suffering from a love-affair with a girl at that time, and he thought to have found a similar psychology in this English

poet. He seems to have read Byron in the selection edited by Matthew Arnold, and he found such poems as *Venice* and *Rome* (both from *Childe Harold*), etc. most appealing to him. Even the first symbolist poet in Japan, Kambara-Ariake, was greatly attracted by Byron in youth, though in his own poetical works no Byronic note can be heard.

If I were asked to mention the Japanese poet who has many affinities or community with Byron in spirit and style, I would name, without hesitation, Tsuchii-Bansui. His *Tōkai-Yūshi-Gin* ("A Japanese Poet's Pilgrimage") may fairly be called a Japanese edition of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*. I am sure that the author himself was quite conscious of the fact.

Next to Byron, the great influence in Japanese poetry was Wordsworth. His life and work were known to the *Bungakukai* group at the beginning of the twenties of the Meiji Era, for, Shimazaki Tōson, who was still fresh from Meiji Gakuin and teaching in Meiji Jogakkō (a girls' school), published in a school magazine a translation of Wordsworth's *To the Cuckoo* in prose, together with a short biographical sketch of the English poet. But what he learned from him was a poet's attitude towards life and poetry, chiefly concerning its subject-matter and language. Shimazaki was specially affected by Wordsworth's definition of poetry stated in the Preface to the Second Edition of the *Lyrical Ballads*, that is, "Poetry takes its origin from emotion recollected in tranquillity," though he interpreted it in his own way. Shimazaki as a theorist declared that the poet's duty is to renovate the language he uses in his art; in other words, to emancipate it from the lifeless conventional usage and reanimate it with daily speech. On the other hand, he, as a practitioner, widened the poetic field incomparably, choosing his subject-matter chiefly from our daily life. But his discovery of Wordsworth as his guide in the new attempt may be seen to date from the time when he was at Sendai as a teacher of English in the Tōhoku Gakuin, that is, the last two years of the third decade of the Meiji Era.

But the younger poet who was most profoundly influenced by

the Lake poet was Kunikida-Doppo. He seems to have had the first contact with the English poet through Matthew Arnold's *Selection* in the twenty-fifth year of the Meiji Era (1892). Since then the author of the *Excursion* had become a great favourite poet with him. In his *Journaux Intimes* (which I mentioned above in connection with his liking for Byron) he often quotes from the *Excursion* the famous phrase "the still sad music of humanity", and he seems to have wished to make it the keynote of his own poetry. However, the most palpable influence of Wordsworth is not found in his poetical works, but in some of his short stories. For example, his novel entitled *A Spring Bird* is a prose adaptation or expansion of a poem beginning "There was a Boy: ye knew him well." Not only is the plot of the story similar to the episode in the *Prelude*, Book V. but near the end of it, the author confesses that he is very fond of reading this passage, and, when he thinks of the life and death of Rokuzō, the hero of the tale who is the old idiot, he finds it more tragic and meaningful than the fate of the English hero. It was in the year 1893 that Doppo most eagerly read and reread Wordsworth's *Poems*.

What Doppo learned from Wordsworth was the value of *sincerity*. Before this, he often came across this word in Carlyle, but it was not until he became a devoted student of Wordsworth that he thought he realized its real significance. Together with this, by reading Wordsworth, Doppo seems to have understood for the first time the harmony of Nature and Human Life by Poetic Thought.

Besides those mentioned above, Doppo's favourite pieces were *Michael*, *To a Skylark*, *Immortality Ode*, "I Wandered lonely as a cloud", *The Cock is crowing*, *Resolution and Independence*, *Sonnets*, "Five Years have passed", and so on.

Another Japanese poet who was profoundly influenced was Miyazaki-Koshoshi who not only wrote the first biography of Wordsworth in book form in Japan but translated his *The Fountain* and *We are seven*. In his poetical works we can sometimes hear faint echoes of the English poet, especially of *Lucy Gray* in his *A*

Girl lost in the Snow. Though this fact has not been pointed out by any body before, so far as I know, Wordsworth's influence on Doppo and Koshoshi has been so often told that it has become almost proverbial, and there is no need to repeat it here.

And yet, there is one thing worthy of particular attention, that is to say, Wordsworth's *Solitary Reaper* suggested fundamental idea of a very beautiful lyric, *Omoide* ("Remembrance"), by Susukida Kyūkin. The echo of a song sung by a highland girl reaping in the field is changed here into a horse driver's song heard at night in a brougham bound to a small country town. Though the travellers, an old nun, a young girl, merchants and a pilgrim, and so on, parted with each other at the destination, that rustic song heard by the way reverberates in their ears forever. (To be continued.)