

## GEORG BRANDES AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE CHINESE LYRICAL TRADITION<sup>1</sup>

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### ABSTRACT

Georg Brandes (1842–1927) has had a significant influence on the development of the Chinese lyrical tradition since the beginning of the 20th century. During a panel on comparative literature at the Association for Asian Studies (AAS) in 1971, Chen Shih-Hsiang said that the “Chinese literary tradition as a whole is a lyrical tradition,” offering another perspective for interpreting the Chinese literary tradition. The Chinese lyrical tradition emphasizes expressing deep feelings (or embodying lyricism) in various art forms. When tracing the trajectory of the development of the Chinese lyrical tradition, one finds that Lu Xun’s “Moluo shi li shuo” (On the Power of Mara Poetry) (Mara Poetry) has had a profound impact on the formation of the lyrical tradition, which was proposed by Chen Shih-Hsiang in 1971, and has been consolidated by Chan K. K. Leonard since the 21st century. However, the important role that Brandes played in Lu Xun’s analysis in “Mara Poetry” has not received the attention it deserves. In fact, Lu Xun’s article is deeply indebted to Brandes’s *Poland: A Study of the Land, People and Literature (Poland)*. In order to bridge this research gap, the aim of this paper is twofold. Firstly, it attempts to examine the degree to which Brandes helped develop the Chinese lyrical tradition by identifying his influence on Lu Xun. Secondly, it traces the development of the tradition by delineating both Chen’s and Chan’s contributions. Chen’s research helps highlight the characteristics of A. Mickiewicz’s poetry introduced by both Brandes and Lu Xun, which were considered the major characteristics of the Chinese lyrical tradition by Chen later on. Chan’s study further suggested that the characteristics embodied in Mickiewicz’s poetry can also be found in Lu Ji’s (261–303 AD) “Wen Fu” (Essay on Literature).

**Keywords:** Georg Brandes; Lu Xun; Chen Shih-Hsiang; Chan K. K. Leonard; Chinese lyrical tradition

Georg Brandes’s (1842–1927) influence on the development of Chinese literary criticism,<sup>2</sup> and the Chinese lyrical tradition in particular, has been significant since the beginning of

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<sup>2</sup> In addition to Lu Xun’s “On the Power of Mara Poetry” (1907), there are numerous relevant works; to provide only a few examples here: Chen Gu. 1920. “Bu lan dui si” (Brandes). *Dongfang Zazhi*

the 20th century. The Chinese lyrical tradition refers to the literary tradition as proposed by Chen Shih-Hsiang in his opening address, “On Chinese Lyrical Tradition”, at the AAS Meeting in 1971. Generally speaking, the Chinese lyrical tradition refers to a literary tradition that puts emphasis on “an intense personal quality expressive of feeling or emotion, an engagement with temporal caesura and self-reflexivity, or an exuberant manifestation of subjectivity in an art form such as music or poetry” (Wang, 2015, 1).<sup>3</sup> When tracing the trajectory of the development of Chinese lyrical tradition, one finds that Lu Xun’s<sup>4</sup> “Moluo shi li shuo” (On the Power of Mara Poetry) (Mara Poetry) has had a profound impact on the formation of the lyrical tradition. Although Brandes is mentioned by Lu Xun in his “Mara Poetry”, he does not cite his sources properly in “Mara Poetry”. Nevertheless, judging from the poets discussed in “Mara Poetry” – among others, A. Pushkin, M. Lermontov, A. Mickiewicz, J. Słowacki, and Z. Krasinski – and subsequent confirmation by Zhou Zuoren and Kitaoka Masako (Kitaoka, 1983, 114), we have good reason to believe that Lu Xun drew directly from Brandes’s *Impressions of Russia* (1889) and *Poland: A Study of the Land, People and Literature (Poland)* (1903). Brandes in fact examined these Russian and Polish poets in these two works, which blend travelogue and cultural history. Despite all this, the important role that Brandes played in Lu Xun’s analysis in “Mara Poetry” has not received the attention it deserves. One of the aims in this paper is to fill this research gap. To do this, the degree to which Brandes helped develop the Chinese lyrical tradition will be examined by identifying his influence on Lu Xun. Another aim of the study is to trace the development of the tradition by delineating both Chen Shih-Hsiang’s and Chan K. K. Leonard’s contributions to the topic. I will not only demonstrate how Chen’s research helps highlight the characteristics of A. Mickiewicz’s

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(The Eastern Miscellany), Vol. 17, No. 5, 75–85. Shen Zemin, 1921. “Bu lan dui si de eguo yinxiang ji” (Brandes’s Impressions of Russia). *Xiaoshuo Yuebao* (Short Story Monthly), Vol. 12, Extra issue, 484–488. Zhu Shoutong, 1993. Kuanrong de mochuang: *Shijiu shiji wenxue zhuliu daoyin* (A Forging Magic Bed – An Introduction to *Main Currents in Nineteenth Century Literature*). Nanjing: Jiangsu jiaoyu chubanshe, 1993. Xie Mian, 1998. *1898: Bainian youhuan* (A Hundred Years of Misery). Shandong: Shandong jiaoyu chubanshe. Yang Dong, 2009. “Bainian Zhongguo piping shi zhong di Bo lan dui si wenti: guanyu Bo lan dui si zai Zhongguo de yijie yu jieshou” (A Study of Brandes in the Centennial History of Chinese Literary Criticism: The Reception and Translation of Brandes in China). *Wenyi Zhengming* (Contentions), No. 1, 6–12. Yamaguchi, Mamoru, 2013. “Zuwei qiji de xiangtu wenxue” (Local Literature as an Opportunity). *Chung Wai Literary Quarterly*, Vol. 24, 21–42. Zhang Yingjin, 2018. “Introduction Chinese Worlds of World Literature”. *Modern Chinese Literature and Culture*, Vol. 30, No. 1, 1–12.

<sup>3</sup> The concept of the Chinese lyrical tradition could be seen as difficult to define due to the fact that Chen Shih-Hsiang died the same year that he presented the concept at the AAS Meeting. The definition proposed by David Der-wei Wang, which I adopt in this article, can only serve as an entry point for the study of the concept. Further information on the topic of the Chinese lyrical tradition can be found in Chan K. K. Leonard’s “The Conception of Chinese Lyricism: Průšek’s Reading of Chinese Literary Tradition” (2008), Chan K. K. Leonard’s *Shuqing Zhongguo lun* (The Conception of Lyrical China) (2013), and Chan K. K. Leonard and David Der-wei Wang’s *Shuqing zhi xiandaixing* (The Modernity of Lyricism) (2014).

<sup>4</sup> Lu Xun (1881–1936) was arguably the most significant writer-cum-critic to introduce this well-known Danish literary critic to Chinese readers. In addition to “Mara Poetry”, in his “Preface to *Zhongguo xin wenxue da xi* (Compendium of Modern Chinese Literature) Fiction II”, Lu Xun refers to the first volume of the *Main Currents of Literature in the Nineteenth Century*, which has a subtitle: *The Emigrant Literature* (Lu Xun, 2009, vol. 18, 105). It is fair to say that Lu Xun’s understanding of nativist literature was inspired by Brandes. As Lu Xun’s legacy spread in the 1970s, his idea of nativist literature exerted a certain degree of influence on the development of Taiwan’s nativist literature (Yamaguchi, 2013, 21–42).

poetry introduced by Brandes via Lu Xun, which are highly similar to those embedded in the Chinese lyrical tradition, but also show how Chan's study suggests that an uncanny resemblance between the characteristics embedded in Mickiewicz's poetry and Lu Ji's (261–303AD) "Wen Fu" (Essay on Literature).

This article will be divided into three main sections followed by a short concluding paragraph. The main objective of the first section is to examine Lu Xun's understanding of Brandes's *Poland*, with a focus on Lu Xun's "Mara Poetry". I will start by comparing Lu Xun's interpretation of Mickiewicz with those depicted in Brandes's *Poland*. Among other things, special emphasis will be placed on the two themes – bringing people together, and searching for light in the darkness – embedded in Mickiewicz's poetry. It is fair to say that Lu Xun was not aware that his reception of Brandes's *Poland* and his discussion on Mara poets could have contributed to the development of the Chinese lyrical tradition. Nor did Chen Shih-Hsiang aim at developing the concept of the Chinese lyrical tradition in his article "Polish Literature in China and Mickiewicz as 'Mara Poet'" (Polish Literature). When Chen studied Mickiewicz's influence on Chinese literature in the 1950s, he had not yet formally established the concept of the Chinese lyrical tradition. However, Lu Xun and Chen had a knack for identifying the essence of Chinese lyricism, and both critics were drawn to the quasi-Chinese lyricism embedded in Mickiewicz's poetry. In "Polish Literature", Chen helps highlight the themes and poetic elements embodied in Brandes's and Lu Xun's analyses of Mickiewicz, which would then become the essential qualities of the tradition decades later. I will discuss these essential lyrical characteristics in section two.

In section three, Chan K. K. Leonard's contributions to the development of the Chinese lyrical tradition will be discussed. In his article "Lyricality and Revolution: Chen Shih-Hsiang on the Light of Literature and the Power of Mara Poets" (Lyricality and Revolution), Chan underscores the intertwined relationship between Chen's interpretation of Mickiewicz, his translation of Lu Ji (261–303 AD), and his conception of the Chinese lyrical tradition. Chan highlights the two themes embodied in Mickiewicz's poetry, which had previously been identified by Brandes, Lu Xun, and Chen, and finds a striking resemblance to those embodied in Lu Ji's "Wen Fu". Indeed, Chan's discovery sheds new light on the role Brandes played in the development of the Chinese lyrical tradition, which will be revisited in the conclusion.

### **Georg Brandes's *Poland* and Lu Xun's "Mara Poetry"**

"Mara Poetry" consists of nine sections, and Brandes is mentioned in sections seven and eight (Lu Xun, 2009, vol. 1, 267, 269). Although Lu Xun does not make explicit the sources for his writing, his brother Zhou Zuoren writes in his memoir that when Lu Xun wrote "Mara Poetry", especially those parts dealing with Mickiewicz and Słowacki, he made references to *Poland* by Brandes (Kitaoka, 1983, 114). *Poland* consists of two major parts. In the first part, entitled "Observations and Appreciations", Brandes delineates his visits to Poland in 1885, 1886, 1894, and 1899. In the second part, entitled "The Romantic Literature of Poland in the Nineteenth Century", Brandes introduces the most remarkable characteristics of the Romantic literature of Poland to his readers. Three leading figures –

Mickiewicz, Słowacki, and Krasinski – are divided into two categories. While the first two poets are considered the poets of vengeance, the last is seen as the poet of love. Among these three Polish poets, it is apparent that Mickiewicz sheds more light on the development of the Chinese lyrical tradition. In fact, both Chen Shih-Hsiang and Chan K. K. Leonard focused on Mickiewicz in their studies decades later; thus, the focus will be on him in this section. Before we proceed to examine Lu Xun's understanding of Mickiewicz, we will first explore Brandes's ideas about this Polish poet.

Brandes was invited to give lectures in Russian Poland in 1885. Poland had been split between Prussia, the Habsburg monarchy, and Russia since 1795. As the Danish critic rightly observes, “[t]here was no longer any kingdom of Poland. But there was still a Polish people” (Brandes, 1903, 24). Despite the desolate situation of Poland, Brandes reminds us that the Poles “worshipped independence to the point of insanity, freedom to the extent of the *liberum veto*, and who even now, when they had lost independence and freedom, had remained faithful to their old love” (Brandes, 1903, 24). To do so, the Poles clung to things that could keep their past alive – Polish poetry, historical writings, and Polish paintings are some significant examples. Among these things, Brandes seems to place more weight on poetry, going so far as to say that “[p]oetry in the Polish home has the same importance as religion” (Brandes, 1903, 39). Nevertheless, the best works were forbidden. Brandes uses the young Levitoux's story as a sad case in point. The young boy was found in possession of Mickiewicz's *Dziady* and was put into a dungeon in the Citadel in Warsaw. After being tortured, Levitoux was on the verge of a nervous breakdown, afraid that he would eventually reveal the names of his comrades. Despairing, he burned himself to death (Brandes, 1903, 39).

Among other issues, one major problem that Brandes tried to resolve in *Poland* was: When Poland had vanished from the map of Europe, its language had been suppressed, and a large number of Poles were in exile, including some of the most important poets, what could the Polish people do? Brandes seems to suggest that the poetry of exiled poets played a significant role in helping to create a sense of unity. Mickiewicz is a case in point. Being regarded as “the recognized laureate of a whole nation in the first half of the nineteenth century” (Brandes, 1903, 202), Mickiewicz is mentioned throughout *Poland*. Although Brandes also introduces other poets and artists in Poland, he always refers back to Mickiewicz.

Mickiewicz was born in 1798 in Lithuania. Apparently, both Napoleon Bonaparte and Lord Byron exerted great influence on Mickiewicz in his early years (Brandes, 1903, 231, 203–205). When the poet was thirteen years old, he saw Napoleon's armies march through Polish territory on the way to Russia. This episode probably planted a seed of political hope in the young poet's mind, which was the inspiration for his famous epic poem *Pan Tadeusz*, published in 1834 (Brandes, 1903, 231). A lifelong patriot, Mickiewicz joined a secret student society at university, and he was arrested and sent into exile in St. Petersburg in 1824 due to his participation in patriotic activities.

Mickiewicz turned to Byron due to his first unrequited love. When the poet studied at the University of Wilna, he fell in love with Maria (Maryla) Wereszczaka, who was introduced to Mickiewicz by his friend Thomas Zan. Unfortunately, despite the mutual attraction, since Wereszczaka was already engaged to a rich young man, she had no choice but to turn Mickiewicz down (Brandes, 1903, 232; Lednicki, 1944, 165). Mick-

iewicz sank into despair. Brandes remarks that “[i]n the condition of erotic desperation, which he was now experiencing, Byron became his only reading” (Brandes, 1903, 232). This love affair became a source of inspiration for certain parts of Mickiewicz’s *Dziady*, in which a victim of unhappy love is depicted. Despite the fact that Mickiewicz’s interest in Byron seems to lie elsewhere at that particular moment, Brandes reminds his readers that, generally speaking, “the Poles found in the poetry of Byron the common European despair and thirst for liberty” (Brandes, 1903, 206).

As mentioned at the beginning of this section, Mickiewicz is considered a poet of vengeance by Brandes. Like his fellow poets, Mickiewicz always dwells on “prison scenes, scenes of banishment, and harsh punishments” (Brandes, 1903, 257). Indeed, both Poland’s suffering and the poet’s personal experience of being jailed prior to his deportation to Russia contribute to the development of the theme of vengeance embodied in his poems. *Dziady* and *Konrad Wallenrod* are two examples. The protagonists, or to be specific, the victims depicted in the poems believe that if God does not avenge them, the Poles will eventually avenge themselves (Brandes, 1903, 257, 261). It is noteworthy that Brandes does not think either taking revenge against an enemy, or loving your enemy as in Krasinski’s case, can help solve Poland’s crisis. The Danish critic suggests an alternative way to tackle the problem, which is to be stronger than your enemy by strengthening your talents (Brandes, 1903, 268).

As a world-renowned Polish poet, despite being labelled the poet of vengeance, and although some of his poems do indeed advocate revenge, Mickiewicz was concerned with more than vengeance alone. Certain characteristics embodied in Mickiewicz’s poetry in fact remind us not only of Brandes’s suggested alternative but also of the foremost traits of the Chinese lyrical tradition proposed by Chen Shih-Hsiang and Chan K. K. Leonard decades later. For one thing, Mickiewicz was able to earn the respect of his enemies. Pushkin, among other Russian poets, treated Mickiewicz as an equal. In comparing Pushkin and Mickiewicz, Brandes seemingly puts more weight on the Polish poet. According to the Danish critic, both poets were deeply influenced by Byron in their early years – being rebellious and patriotic – but eventually, Pushkin submitted to Tzar Nicholas, whereas Mickiewicz remained faithful to his original ideals (Brandes, 1903, 235).

For another, in order to overcome his despair and darkness, Mickiewicz from time to time “turned back to the land of his childhood, Lithuania, in which he had seen the light, which he had not visited since the years of his early youth, and which he, the exile, was never to see again” (Brandes, 1903, 285). Searching for light in the darkness and uniting people through poetry are two dominant themes of the Chinese lyrical tradition proposed by Chen and Chan, which will be discussed in sections 2 and 3 below. But perhaps more importantly, before going into further discussion, it is essential that we understand the extent to which Lu Xun, though not to his knowledge, helped develop the Chinese lyrical tradition by introducing Brandes, Poland, and Polish poetry to the Chinese people.

Although it has become clear in recent years that well over eleven sources were used to write “Mara Poetry” without proper citation, including Brandes’s *Impressions of Russia and Poland* (Chen, 1956; Kitaoka, 1983, 1–2; Wang, 2011, 38; Chan, 2018, Kowallis, 2021), I would like to highlight the fact that Brandes and his book *Poland* made a strong impression on Lu Xun and his brother. Zhou Zuoren elaborates that both he and Lu Xun were thrilled to find books about Poland and Polish literature in the Japanese book market

(Chen, 1956, 574). According to Lu Xun's brother, the reference sources on Mickiewicz and Słowacki, the so-called poets of vengeance, are drawn from Brandes's *Poland* (Kitaoka, 1983, 114). Thus, it is safe to say that *Poland* and the poets of vengeance, Mickiewicz in particular (Chen, 1956, 580), play a significant role in "Mara Poetry". The reasons why Lu Xun and his brother were interested in Poland may be numerous, but one of them was probably related to the fact that both Poland and China (Qing dynasty) faced an existential threat from imperial powers. Perhaps the situation of the former was worse than that of the latter: Poland had already vanished from the map, having been torn apart by Prussia, the Habsburg monarchy, and Russia. China, by contrast was on the verge of being torn to pieces. Lu Xun found in Polish literature a precedent and a model for the future of Chinese literature.

In "Mara Poetry", Lu Xun tries to delineate a genealogy of the so-called "Satanic School", in which Byron is considered the head of the School. Nevertheless, since Lu Xun aims to use the term in a broader sense, he looks for a term that can encompass all poets, "who were committed to resistance, whose purpose was action but who were little loved by their age" (Lu Xun, 1996, 99). He settled on the term "Mara" (celestial demon), which he borrowed from India. Following the discussion on Byron and Shelley, Lu Xun introduces other Mara poets to his readers, including Pushkin, M. Lermontov, Mickiewicz, Słowacki, Krasinski, and S. Petőfi. With some modifications, the definition of "Mara poets" and the Mara poets list remind us of Brandes's discussion on Polish poets. Chen was apparently the first critic who spotted the difference between facts and Lu Xun's version (Chen, 1956, 577), followed by Kitaoka's meticulous and detailed study of the sources of influence and Lu Xun's modifications to the original sources identified in "Mara Poetry" (Kitaoka, 1983, 114–180). The latter juxtaposes Brandes's version with Lu Xun's rendering of the text, which not only helps us better understand Lu Xun's "Mara Poetry" but can also inspire us to further examine the extent to which Brandes's *Poland* exerted a subtle influence on its structure and major themes.

In addition to the excellent existing research mentioned above, I will suggest that we can find other discrepancies and similarities in the works of Brandes and Lu Xun which are more relevant to the current study. For instance, as far as Byron's influence on Mickiewicz is concerned, Brandes suggests that the Polish poet was drawn to Byron's poetry involving love and even sex (Brandes, 1903, 232), whereas Lu Xun seems to propose that Mickiewicz is fascinated by Byron's being a resistance fighter (Lu Xun, 2009, vol. 1, 271). Further to this, Brandes's subtle influence on Lu Xun resonates in the structure and one of the themes of "Mara Poetry". Despite differences in scale, structurally speaking, both *Poland* and "Mara Poetry" consist of two major components: an introduction covering historical background, followed by a discussion on numerous poets. As mentioned before, while Brandes describes three types of Polish poets, Lu Xun concentrates on one of the categories described by Brandes – the poets of vengeance – and further substantiates the idea by creating a new label, Mara poets, and modifying Brandes's poets list. In other words, although Poland and China were in similar historical contexts, while Lu Xun advocated provocative actions, Brandes proposed surpassing one's enemies instead.

Evidently, one significant theme embodied in *Poland*, which is inspired by Mickiewicz, became the most important idea in "Mara Poetry". In *Poland*, Brandes uses Mickiewicz's *Pan Tadeusz* (1834) as an example to tell us that the poet possesses the imaginative



power to manipulate both time and space in order to overcome these barriers and to bring people together. As the exile, Mickiewicz “dreamed himself back to his childish impressions of nature [...] he succeeded in making the ancient old Lithuanian forest speak [...] the natural sounds of the animals [...], the choir of all the human voices. He rises from the quiet whispering [...] as if he had the voices of all the deceased generations of the land therein [...], as if the whole heaven of Poland were filled by his song” (Brandes, 1903, 293). According to Brandes, the Polish national epic *Pan Tadeusz*, which had been read by the Poles since 1834, would continue to be read in the years to come. In brief, the epic unites people (Brandes, 1903, 43, 294). This idea is not expressed in clear and logical prosaic language but in poetic language. By contrast, Lu Xun makes this similar idea clear at the beginning of “Mara Poetry” by referring to Thomas Carlyle’s lecture:

The man born to acquire an articulate voice and grandly sing the heart’s meaning is his nation’s *raison d’être*. Disjointed Italy was united in essence, having borne Dante, having Italian. The Czar of great Russia, with soldiers, bayonets, and cannon, does a great feat in ruling a great tract of land. Why has he no voice? Something great in him perhaps, but he is a dumb greatness [...]. When soldiers, bayonets and cannon are corroded, Dante’s voice will be as before. With Dante, united; but the voiceless Russian remains mere fragments. (Lu Xun, 1996, 97–98)

Carlyle’s idea bears a striking resemblance to those of Brandes. By using this as his thesis statement, Lu Xun is endorsing the idea that during times of national crisis, countries that have a rich literary tradition are likely to survive the crisis. Among various literary forms, Mara poetry is the most important one.

Before starting to discuss Brandes’s and Lu Xun’s influence on Chen Shih-Hsiang’s development of the concept of the Chinese lyrical tradition, I think it is necessary to reiterate that there is another theme, apparently less prominent, but recurring, embodied in Brandes’s and Lu Xun’s analysis of Mickiewicz, which is essential in Chen’s discussion: searching for light in the darkness. When Mickiewicz was in despair after the revolution of 1831, in order to overcome his depression, the poet imagined returning to his homeland, Lithuania, where he had once seen light before (Brandes, 1903, 285). It is noteworthy that Lu Xun ends his article with the image of light. He uses a passage quoted from V. Korolenko’s *The Last Ray* to conclude his discussion on the topic of Mara poetry. In this story, when an old man teaches a boy to read in Siberia, the boy cannot imagine the cherry and the oriole mentioned in the book. “The old man explained: ‘It’s a bird that sits on a cherry branch and carols its fine songs.’ The youth reflected” (Lu Xun, 1996, 109). Intriguingly, the passage is in fact a lyrical one.

### **Lu Xun’s Mara Poet and Chen Shih-Hsiang’s Mickiewicz**

Apparently, some of the most important ideas embodied in “Mara Poetry” helped shed light on the early development of the Chinese lyrical tradition in the 1950s, which was formally proposed by Chen Shih-Hsiang in 1971. “Polish Literature” is definitely the most significant article on this topic. Two articles – “The Cultural Essence of Chinese

Literature”<sup>5</sup> (The Cultural Essence) (1953) and “Chinese Poetry and its Popular Sources” (Chinese Poetry) (1961) – are equally important as far as the establishment of the conception of the Chinese lyrical tradition is concerned. It is noteworthy that Chen accurately pointed out at least two discrepancies that Kitaoka did not notice in her study in the 1980s. For example, Lu Xun writes that Mickiewicz’s first love is “the daughter of a neighbour”, which is actually inaccurate (Chen, 1956, 577). Maria Wereszczaka was the “daughter of the deceased ex-marshal of the nobility of the District of Nowogrodek” – in Brandes’s words, “a young girl of good family” (Lednicki, 1944, 165; Brandes, 1903, 232), who was not merely the girl next door. In addition, Chen also reminds us that Mickiewicz and Pushkin did not exchange their poems, entitled “St. Petersburg: Monument of Peter the Great” and “The Bronze Horseman” respectively, upon their first meeting (Chen, 1956, 579). Chen does not provide further information regarding the publication date of Pushkin’s “The Bronze Horseman”. Brandes suggests in *Poland* that the poem was published posthumously in 1841 (Brandes, 1903, 237); nevertheless, the publication date of Mickiewicz’s “St. Petersburg” was not mentioned. Not until decades later did Chan K. K. Leonard provide other relevant information: While “St. Petersburg” was written in 1832, “The Bronze Horseman” was composed in 1833 (Chan, 2018, 35).

Since Chen did not have a chance to read Brandes’s *Poland*, the Danish critic’s influence on Chen was an indirect one, mainly via Lu Xun’s “Mara Poetry”, but at the same time based on his literary convictions. The theme – searching for light in the darkness – is one example. In “Polish Literature”, Chen highlights a factual description regarding Mickiewicz’s imprisonment before being sent into exile that neither Brandes nor Lu Xun chooses to emphasize: “For more than ten months he stayed in the prison cell, where all windowpanes were covered with wooden boards, so that he could not distinguish night or day” (Chen, 1956, 578). The critic further elaborates, not without using his imagination, that: “To the many anti-Manchu Chinese who, as political prisoners, had had a taste of dark dungeons, this part of the picture of Mickiewicz’s life presented a realistic scene; and to the people of the whole nation who longed for light, it had a symbolic meaning” (Chen, 1956, 578). It is fair to say that both Brandes and Lu Xun associated light with Mickiewicz – or the so-called Mara poets in Lu Xun’s case (Brandes, 1903, 285; Lu Xun, 2009, vol. 1, 249; Chen, 1956, 574–575) – but they did not make this explicit or raise the importance of light to the level that Chen did. Chen compares the Poles with Chinese people at the beginning of “Polish Literature” by noting that both nations faced the most extreme persecution by foreign powers in the 1930s. In order to survive, the persecuted nations must have faith in the future. To put it figuratively, “we shall thus more firmly believe that beyond the darkness ahead of us is bright light” (Chen, 1956, 569).

Interestingly, Chen was also drawn to Mickiewicz’s *Pan Tadeusz*, especially the scene that depicts the ancient Lithuanian forest. As mentioned earlier, Mickiewicz’s poetry helps unite all generations. In Chen’s words, “Mickiewicz is the one who will live in the everlasting echoes to his poetry, ever without end” (Chen, 1956, 578). Chen remarks that although Lu Xun advocates Mara poetry in his article, the passage extracted from *Pan*

<sup>5</sup> “The Cultural Essence of Chinese Literature” was published in 1953 by Dr. Mei Yi-Chi, who was the representative of China to the UNESCO committee of Experts on Intercultural Relations, under the title *Interrelations of Cultures* (Chen, 1961, 320).



*Tadeusz* by Lu Xun (and Brandes as well) is most lyrical and idyllic, which resonates with Chinese readers (Chen, 1956, 578, 583).

Chen affirms that Lu Xun and his fellow writers followed in the footsteps of the Mara poets (Mickiewicz in particular) but rebelled against their oppressors instead of against God. On the one hand, Chinese writers (Lu Xun in particular) take action and become belligerent. On the other hand, “Polish Literature” ends with Chen’s reiteration of the major characteristics of Mickiewicz’s poetry – “the beautiful, brilliant, and sympathetic phases” – that strike a chord with Chinese readers (Chen, 1956, 586). These different, if not contrasting, ideas were boiled down into one single feature two decades later. Meanwhile, almost at the same time, Chen wrote “The Cultural Essence” and “Chinese Poetry” in addition to “Polish Literature”. These two articles, among others, are considered essential for the development of the Chinese lyrical tradition (Chan, 2013, 82). Another article, “Literature as Light Against Darkness” (Literature as Light), published in 1948, is equally important in its own right but contributes to the development of the tradition in a subtle way. The article in fact includes a comprehensive study of Lu Ji’s (Lu Chi) life, an English translated version of his “Wen Fu” (Essay on Literature), and some translation notes, and provides some background information about the origins of Lu Ji’s (perhaps even Chen’s) literary convictions (Chan, 2021, 82). Chen’s untimely death in 1971, the same year he presented the concept of the Chinese lyrical tradition in his opening speech at the AAS Meeting, deprived him of the opportunity to further explain his ideas. As far as “Literature as Light” is concerned, it was not until 2018 that Chan K. K. Leonard explored the relationship between the article and the concept of the lyrical tradition. Thus, I will discuss “The Cultural Essence” and “Chinese Poetry” below, followed by “Literature as Light” in the next section.

As the title of the article suggests, the major purpose of “The Cultural Essence” is to highlight the important features of Chinese literature, in which two striking points stand out, by reminding us of those of “Polish Literature”. For one thing, according to Chen, “literature in praise of war, or characterized by a militant patriotism, is very scarce, whereas anti-militarist literature abounds” (Chen, 1953, 48). For another, the special features of the Chinese language help it become a lyrical one (Chen, 1953, 49) in which people can reconnect with their past through the lyricism permeating Chinese literature. In “Chinese Poetry”, Chen compares Chinese poetry, lyric poetry in particular, with secular religion because it brings people together (Chen, 1961, 321). It is clear that the role poetry played involved more than uniting people. In an age when political upheavals and social crisis seem inevitable, modern people struggle to find a place where they feel at home. Chen apparently shares with Mickiewicz the belief that poetry can bring them home (Chen, 1961, 325), and this is where Mickiewicz finds light (Brandes, 1903, 285).

The extent to which Chen Shih-Hsiang was referring to Lu Xun’s and Chen’s own study of Mickiewicz when he made his seminal 1971 speech, which was called “On Chinese Lyrical Tradition”, is not easy to determine. Nevertheless, as Chen points out in his speech, “[w]hen we say what is typical of one literature, we are already implying a comparison with other literatures” (Chen, 1971, 18). When Chen proclaims in his speech that “Chinese literary tradition as a whole *is* a lyrical tradition” (Chen, 1971, 20), he is actually juxtaposing Oriental literature with Occidental literature, of which Mickiewicz’s famous epic is probably an example. Despite the uncertainties one thing seems guaranteed: among all

the characteristics inspired by Lu Xun's "Mara Poetry", lyricism is the only feature that remains intact in spite of everything.

### Chen Shih-Hsiang's Lu Ji and Chan K. K. Leonard's Lyricality

Almost fifty years after Lu Xun wrote his "Mara Poetry", Chen Shih-Hsiang examined the characteristics of Lu Xun's Mara poetry by putting emphasis on Mickiewicz's works, at the same time, seemingly downplaying the significance of the characteristics of Mara poetry by comparing them with those of the Chinese literary tradition, though it took him another fifteen years to formally label this the Chinese *lyrical* tradition. History repeats itself: it took another sixty-two years before Chan K. K. Leonard revisited the relationship between Lu Xun and Mickiewicz, but from the perspective of Chen Shih-Hsiang. Picking up the threads of the discussion about the Chinese lyrical tradition, Chan wrote "Lyricality and Revolution", in which, among other things, he concentrates on the image of light and the idea of poetry playing the role of religion. Chan underscores the image of light conveyed in Chen's "Polish Literature". As previously stated, Chen was inspired by Lu Xun's (and in fact Brandes's) depiction of Mickiewicz's imprisonment, imagining the inmates (the patriots) longing for light in a dark cell (Chen, 1956, 578; Chan, 2018, 35). Chan traced the image back to Chen's "Literature as Light", a study of Lu Ji and his "Wen Fu", and suggested that Chen's obsession with the image came from his own suffering (Chan, 2018, 36). Interestingly, by placing stress on Chen's study of Lu Ji in his "Lyricality and Revolution", Chan helps illuminate our understanding of the reason Chen's "Polish Literature" seems to indicate that he put more weight on lyric poems than poems of vengeance: Chen's literary preferences, laid down in his early years, significantly contributed to his formation of the conception of the Chinese lyrical tradition.

The title of Chan K. K. Leonard's "Lyricality and Revolution: Chen Shih-Hsiang on the Light of Literature and the Power of Mara Poetry" in fact calls our attention again to the relationship between "Lyricality" (the Light of Literature) and "Revolution" (the Power of Mara Poetry) described at the very beginning of the article. Nevertheless, Chan is different from his precursors in that he tries to offer some answers about what may cause the ambivalence. Chan first discussed the significance of "Literature as Light" in 2008, in which the Hong Kong critic put more weight on the discussion of Chen's life than that of Lu Ji (Chan, 2008, 225–251). In "Lyricality and Revolution", however, Chan not only shifts the emphasis from Chen's life to Lu Ji's, but also helps explain the complexity of the concept itself. On a broader level, when Lu Xun writes "Poets are they who disturb people's minds" (Lu Xun, 1996, 102), he is actually referencing *shi yan zhi* (Poetry expresses will), *shi yuan qing* ("the Lyric, born of pure emotion") (Chen, 1948, 56), and *fafen yi shuqing* ("I vent my anger and give my thoughts expression") (Wang, 2015, 5), which are closely related to the discourses on the Chinese lyrical tradition, though "Mara Poetry" focuses on process and action, recommending stronger, more intense activities (Chan, 2018, 36). Chan continues: Chen's understanding of Lu Xun's concept of revolutionary literature is an empathetic one; he knows very well that the so-called lyricism embedded in Chinese literature and culture has two aspects, namely, stillness and motion. Neverthe-

less, while at a mature stage of the development of the Chinese lyrical tradition, according to Chan, Chen is inspired by Lu Ji's life and "Wen Fu" and concludes that the ultimate goal of the tradition is to achieve serenity and harmony, which is the state of transcendence (Chan, 2018, 36). Chan's astute comments merit further elaboration.

Taking a closer look at Lu Ji's life as it is introduced by Chen, we find a striking resemblance between Lu Ji's path through life and the stages of development of the Chinese lyrical tradition. Lu's relatively short lifespan (261–303) can be roughly divided into two stages. He was born to a prominent family in arguably the darkest age of ancient China – the Wei Jin period. Lu's grandfather (Lù Xùn) and father (Lu Kang) were both great generals of the collapsing Wu Kingdom. The young Lu Ji was, among other roles, a soldier and a poet. Chen considers the first twenty-nine years the first stage of Lu Ji's life and the remaining fourteen years the second stage (Chen, 1948, 2). In the second stage, Lu Ji moved to the north to serve the new empire. As a foreigner (or outsider), Lu's talents helped him make a lot of friends and just as many enemies. Eventually, Lu Ji was executed by his enemies during a military operation (Chen, 1948, 2). Lu Ji's life reminds us of the life of Byron, who was also both a poet and a soldier. The English poet died during the Greek war of independence, though of a fever. It is worth mentioning that Byron is considered the head of the Mara school advocated by Lu Xun. At first glance, Lu Ji can also be considered a Mara poet, especially when he writes in "*Bian wang lun*" (On the Fall of a Kingdom, I and II), after the fall of the Wu Kingdom: "Heavenly opportunity is less reliable than strategic terrain; and strategic terrain is still less so than concerted human effort" (Chen, 1948, 5). Despite the collapse of the Kingdom, Lu still had a fighting spirit. Nevertheless, the poet-cum-soldier's attitude changed tremendously in the second half of his life.

According to Chen's meticulous study, a decisive event that contributed to the change in Lu Ji's perspective on life – a *coup d'état* – took place in 300 AD. Lu took part in the bloody coup, though we do not know the role he played. Numerous people were killed, including villains and innocent people. Lu Ji's good friend, Chang Hua, was one of the victims. According to Chen, Lu felt overwhelmed by Chang's death. He thus wrote six significant literary works shortly after the coup, perhaps the most significant of which is "Wen Fu" (Chen, 1948, 17). The main theme of "Wen Fu" is how Lu finds certainty during uncertain times, or to put it figuratively, finds light in the darkness, as Chen and Chan suggested. To do so, in "Wen Fu", Lu not only stresses the ideal "order" or rules in literature but also elevates literature alone to an immortal status due to its capacity to mitigate the problems of mortal life, if not eliminate them (Chen, 1948, 2). At the end of his introduction, Chen quotes John Milton's *Paradise Lost* to conclude: "At his seconding bidding darkness fled, / Light shone, and order from disorder sprung" (Chen, 1948, 20). In other words, harmony (light) emerges out of chaos (darkness) (Chan, 2018, 33; Chan, 2021, 82). Simply put, three years before his execution, Lu Ji was already fully aware that literature could help him reach a transcendental state. By comparison, Byron's works always remind us of his restlessness, among other things.

In addition to the image of light, the idea that Chinese poetry played the role of religion, which is discussed in detail in Chen's "Chinese Poetry" (Chen, 1961), can be traced back to "Wen Fu" as well. In the last part of "Wen Fu", when Lu Ji explains "[t]he use of literature", he writes:

Lies in its embodiment of every truth / It expands the horizon to make space infinite, / And serves as a bridge that spans a myriad years. / It maps all roads and paths for posterity, / And mirrors the images of worthy ancients, / That the tottering Edifices of the sage kings of antiquity may be reared again, / And the faint admonishing voices, wind-borne since of yore, may resume full expression. / No regions are too remote but it pervades, / No truth too subtle to be woven into its vast web. / Like mist and rain, it permeates and nourishes, / And manifests all the powers of transformation in which gods and spirits share. / Virtue it makes endure and radiate on brass and stone, / And resound in an eternal stream of melodies ever renewed on pipes and strings. (Chen, 1948, 70)

If we juxtapose Lu Ji's passage with an extract from Chen's "Chinese Poetry", the latter will sound familiar. It almost looks like a conclusion drawn from Lu's explanation, though Chen refers to Chinese poetry in particular. As stated by Chen,

Thus poetry emancipates men, each from his narrow self, and binds them together on a higher level of being. In the absence of any organized ecclesiastical authority, Chinese poetry, with the other arts adjoined to it, has in its social function indeed become almost the sole institution whereby man's spirituality has been nurtured and expressed, as it might have been in religion. (Chen, 1961, 321)

In his "Lyricality and Revolution", Chan traces the genealogy of the concept of the Chinese lyrical tradition, uncovering not only the intricate relationship between Lu Ji and Chen Shih-Hsiang, but also that between Lu Xun, Mickiewicz, and Brandes. The Hong Kong critic quotes a passage from Mickiewicz's *Pan Tadeusz* which is also quoted by Brandes, Lu Xun, and Chen Shih-Hsiang. The Polish poet writes that the horn blown by the Wojski (an official in medieval Poland) would never stop. The Poles believed that the echoes of the sound of the horns could pervade everything, transcending all time and space (Brandes, 1903, 293–294). When Mickiewicz wrote this passage, he might only have had his fellow countrymen in mind. The Polish poet would never have imagined that this lyrical passage from his epic could also resonate with Chinese people of all generations. Chan identifies the spirit of this lyrical passage in several literary works. For example, in addition to Lu Ji's "Wen Fu" mentioned earlier, Lu Xun's "Mara Poetry" is also a case in point. Lu Xun writes – "Poets are they who disturb people's minds. [...] his voice pervades the soul, and all things animate raise their heads as though witness to dawn, giving scope to its beauty, force, and nobility, and it must thereby breach the stagnant peace. Breach of peace furthers all humanity" (Lu Xun, 1996, 102) – which reminds readers of traditional Chinese poetics. As pointed out by Chan (2018, 34), the above quote from Lu Xun features similar ideas to "The 'Great Preface' to the *Classic of Poetry*": "In the mind, it is 'being intent' (*zhi*); coming out in language, it is a 'poem'" (Owen, 1996, 65). The poetic theory – "Poetry expresses intents" – is shared by all generations and, not unlike religion, brings people together.

## Conclusion

After having examined Lu Xun's, Chen's and Chan's contributions on the growth of the Chinese lyrical tradition, we can conclude that Brandes has undoubtedly played an important role in the development of the tradition, though in a different way than might have been expected. Brandes identified the lyrical style and two themes – poetry as light helps against darkness, and poetry unites people – in Mickiewicz's poetry, which were highlighted by Lu Xun and subsequently suggested by Chen and Chan as the major characteristics of the Chinese lyrical tradition. Nevertheless, Chan's study reminded us that the characteristics embodied in Mickiewicz's poetry are similar to those of Lu Ji's idea of literature, which have been promoted since the 3rd century AD. Perhaps it is fair to say that Brandes has played a significant role in the development of the Chinese lyrical tradition by helping illuminate the essence of Chinese literature rather than introducing something new to it.

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