

Ideological and Poetological Tensions: Wu Mi's Enterprise of Imitating and Translating George Gordon Byron

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Abstract : The English Romantic George Gordon Byron (1788-1824) was widely celebrated by men of letters in early republican China as a Satanic freedom fighter challenging classical poetics and traditional values. However, Wu Mi (1894-1978), the most persistent critic of contemporary iconoclasm, perceived Byron as a paragon of self-righteous poet-exiles who maintained moral integrity and achieved poetic excellence during times of frustration, just like canonized classical Chinese poets. Wu Mi not only composed lengthy imitations of the third canto of Byron's *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* (1816) but also patronized a rendering of the canto. Taking André Lefevere's rewriting theory as a framework, this paper explores the interplay of ideology and poetics by examining Wu Mi's imitations against Byron's original and its Chinese translation patronized by Wu Mi. Textual analysis shows that Wu Mi's approach to Byron's poetry was informed not only by his endeavor to invigorate classical Chinese poetics, but also by his program to preserve China's cultural traditions and integrate Western new humanism, a theory proposed by his Harvard mentor Irving Babbitt (1865-1933). This study reveals how Byron was appropriated to serve conflicting poetic and ideological purposes in early republican China and suggests that imitation as a type of rewriting merits further attention.

Keywords : George Gordon Byron, ideology, imitation, poetics, translation

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