

魯迅：略談香港

On Hong Kong

By Lu Xun

Translated by Zhu Zhiyu with Don J. Cohn



Lu Xun in 1936

WHEN I WAS in Hong Kong in January, I was not able to stroll the streets because my injured foot was not completely healed yet, and would go back to my lodgings immediately after my lectures. Consequently, my impressions of Hong Kong are very vague, and I had already forgotten everything about it until I read Chengjiang's letter in issue No. 137 of *Yusi* today. It reminded me of a few things which I'll jot down here as a way of joining in the fun.

It is evident that the people sponsoring my lectures were going through a lot of trouble about them at the time, but I never learned the details. I was aware that in the beginning, people were opposed to my lecturing, and that some of them sent their men around collecting all the entrance tickets to prevent people from attending. Then they wouldn't allow my lectures to be published in the newspapers; when they were finally published, much of what I had said was either expurgated or altered.

But the contents of my lectures were really old hat, and seven or eight years old at that.

Something funny happened on board the ship from Guangzhou to Hong Kong. One of the crew had heard of me somehow and was very worried that I might be

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murdered in Hong Kong. As a Cantonese, he would have felt particularly sorry if I should die a violent death there, after having made such a long trip to Guangdong to teach. He busied himself the whole way making plans for me: how I could escape if I were denied permission to land; how to escape from the clutches of the police if I were pursued by them. When I finally disembarked without any trouble from the police, he still couldn't put his heart at ease. He told me over and over again before we parted where I could hide if I should be in danger.

I was very grateful for his concern although I found it all a little ridiculous. I can still recall the serious look on his face.

Three days later, I left Hong Kong without incident. But I offended certain people there because I had made some critical remarks about Chinese culture in my lectures. In retrospect, perhaps there was no real danger for a person like me in Hong Kong. But that doesn't mean Hong Kong is a safe place. A few trivial events may prove my point; for instance, two news items in today's edition of *Circulation Daily News*:

Chen Guo has been charged with stealing a pair of cotton trousers from the ground floor of 157 Wuhu Street. Magistrate Smith set the punishment yesterday at twelve strokes of the rattan whip.

Late last night, two men in suits . . . were searched by a British police officer at Shek Tong Tsui. One of the men spoke in English to the officer, but the latter ignored him and warned him by saying XXX. Finally they ended up at the police station

The first item is self-explanatory, and we learn that Chinese are still being whipped in Hong Kong. The so-called Magistrate (*si*) is an official title; the same word (*si*) appears in *fan si*, Provincial Commissioner, and *nie si*, Provincial Surveillance Commissioner. "Smith" is an English surname. What the Hong Kong newspapers call the "Government" and "Police Department" often refer to the British authorities in Hong Kong, though it is easy to mistake these terms if you are unfamiliar with them. It's a lot more straightforward in Shanghai, where a lock-up is called a lock-up.

The second piece relates to a dispute over a body search, which is nothing extraordinary in Hong Kong. But those three Xs are still a mystery. Why were they expurgated? Perhaps there's something fishy going on here. The three Xs seem to have been a result of the suits the men wore and the English they spoke. The British officer hated these two things; the language and dress belong only to the master race. Gone are the days when Yan Zhitui could expect to survive during the Xianbei rule by learning the barbarians' language and playing their music on a *pipa*.

I met a very well educated gentleman in Hong Kong, who said that he had once defended himself against a British official. The official could not refute his arguments, but in the end, the man lost the case. The official severely reprimanded him: "You're wrong, because *I* say you're wrong!"

It is also difficult to take books into Hong Kong. If you are not careful, they can claim that the books are "dangerous documents". As for the precise definition

of the word “dangerous”, I have no idea. In any case, the slightest suspicion can land you in a lot of trouble. The first step is to lock you up, and you will remain locked up until your books have been translated into English. The translation process is quite something in itself. I remember a story about the way the Mongols tried court cases with the help of translators when they ruled China during the Yuan dynasty. A monk accused a man of not repaying a debt. But the debtor colluded with the translator, who changed the contents of the plaint to say that the monk wished to be burnt to death. The judge agreed, and so the monk was thrown into a big fire. I mentioned the Yuan dynasty in passing in my lectures in Hong Kong. But later I learned that this had annoyed a certain Magistrate X. It seems as if the British are eager students of the Chinese classics and history.

Speaking about the Yuan dynasty not only offended Magistrate X of the “Government”, but it also upset some of our “compatriots”. I knew this was going to create trouble, and that sooner or later I would receive my retribution. And sure enough, after I left Zhongshan University in order to get away from the “scholars” there, the *Commercial Post* reported this, saying that I had fled because of the “12 April purge in the KMT”. Later, using literature as a pretext, an article in the *Circulation Daily News* mentioned my case, saying that I used to be a “special reporter” for the *Morning Post Supplement*, and that I had “arrived in Hankou”. I knew the danger of this kind of propaganda, because it implied that I was first a friend of the KMT’s research department and now a follower of the Communist Party. Perhaps I wouldn’t be shot in the street for this, but it would certainly do me no good. At worst I might be put in jail. Thus I wrote a letter to correct these notions:

I read, in the 10 and 11 June issues of the Circulation Daily News, the article by Mr Xu Danfu entitled “Literary Cliques in Peking”. Mr Xu, like everybody else, is entitled to his own point of view, way of thinking, and means of expression, none of which I want to interfere with. But there are three points about me in his article that I believe I am quite clear about, which I would like to correct as follows:

- (1) I have never been a “special reporter” for the Morning Post;*
- (2) I didn’t stop contributing articles following the attack on Chen Dabai; and*
- (3) I am still in Guangzhou; I have not “arrived in Hankou”.*

It is exactly one month since I posted this letter, but they have yet to publish it. I suppose it’s a case of “You’re like this, because I say you’re like this!” We are fortunate that there are such magazines as *Yusi* in China, otherwise where could you complain if you got “twelve strokes of the whip” or were confronted with “XXX”!

Sometimes I recall that Cantonese sailor on the ship. Although he was a bit over-sensitive, he certainly couldn’t be accused of making a fuss over nothing. He had seen things like this before.

The efforts being made in "Fragrant River" [an elegant name for Hong Kong] to revitalize Chinese culture are indeed remarkable. The 25 June issue of *Circulation Daily News*, for example, carried the following under the title "Tea Party at the Governor's Residence Yesterday Afternoon":

(...) Mr Lai Zhaoxu, a former member of the Hanlin Imperial Academy, made an impromptu speech, emphasizing the extraordinary importance of Chinese studies in Hong Kong University. Traditional Chinese morality, Mr Lai said, was intimately related to Chinese culture; neither could be overlooked, and it would be a great pity if these fields were not encouraged. . . . Sir Zhou Shouchen also spoke of the urgent need to promote Chinese studies, as this was a matter of individual as well as national honour. Later, the Governor of Hong Kong, speaking in Chinese, said that he deplored the idea of Chinese people lacking proficiency in their own language and literature. The Governor said that the relationship between China and Great Britain would be significantly enhanced if Chinese were well versed in both the Chinese and English languages. He concluded by emphasizing the importance of Chinese studies in Hong Kong University. . . .

I also remember reading the text of a speech about Chinese culture given by a "Governor Jin" in the Cantonese dialect. I paid little attention to it at the time because of difficulties with the language and besides I thought this "Governor Jin" must be one of the die-hard adherents of the deposed Qing dynasty whose articles all sound the same. Only after reading Chenjiang's correspondence did I realize that "Governor Jin" was none other than Cecil Clementi, Governor of Hong Kong.* This came as quite a surprise, and I immediately started poring over some old newspapers. Luckily enough, I found the speech in the 28 June issue of the *Circulation Daily News*. Because this was ironclad proof that Chinese culture had to be revitalized, and because it would form an important chapter in some future *History of the Revitalization of Chinese Studies*, I cut it out and here present it in its entirety, along with my own explanations of some of the dialectical usages. I also asked a Cantonese friend to correct some printing errors. Lastly, I don't know what "Governor Jin" means by quoting, at the end of his speech, four lines from *Wenxuan*, the great literary anthology by Xiao Tong, which differ slightly from the original, and I am not in a position to guess, so I have left it as it is. It is my sincere wish that the editors of *Yusi* will print this material, for the sake of China's future.

Governor Jin's Speech at the Tea Party at the Governor's Residence on 24 June

Gentlemen,

The Honourable Mr Zhou and Academician Lai have already explained thoroughly the importance of promoting Chinese studies, so I will say no more about it. What I would like to discuss with you is the three reasons why we must promote these studies:

*1925-1930.

1) *The Chinese should pay closer attention to their own national studies. The population of Hong Kong is mostly Chinese, and the majority of the students in Hong Kong University are Chinese as well. I see it as a matter of great regret if we were to place special emphasis on the study of Western science and literature while disregarding China's venerable tradition of classical learning, and treating it as mere trivia. Thus, for the benefit of the Chinese residents of Hong Kong, and of the Chinese students in our university, Chinese studies should be instituted.*

2) *Chinese people should organize their cultural legacy, for it is indeed a precious thing. But the abstruseness of its language deters most people from access to its profounder mysteries, with the exception of a small number of people from scholarly families or those who are specially gifted. For this reason, in recent years, the call of Chinese scholars to systemize the cultural legacy has become louder and louder. Hong Kong and China are separated by a narrow river. Nothing would be more rewarding than to establish a department of Chinese studies, as we are advocating today, and organize a group of accomplished scholars to solve the problems of the ancient texts so as to facilitate the work of later generations. Chinese studies should be instituted in our university if for no other reason than promulgating the glory of Chinese culture.*

3) *Knowledge about Chinese morality and scholarship should be disseminated throughout the world. Although a good number of versatile Chinese scholars have mastered foreign languages since China began engaging in foreign trade, the number of foreigners proficient in sinological studies, and Chinese knowledgeable about Western science who are able to translate difficult scientific materials into Chinese, is still very small. This is not because foreigners and Chinese students who have studied abroad have been unwilling to study the Chinese language, but rather because the language itself has not been reformed by modern scientific methods. So these two groups, the foreigners and the Chinese, are left sighing with frustration. If [the Chinese Department of] Hong Kong University were able to establish a complete curriculum, all the above-stated problems can be solved. Eventually students, both foreign and Chinese, will be competing for places in Hong Kong University, and the relationship between China and the West will grow closer and more friendly, with no more barriers between them. Thus we must institute this programme in order to disseminate Chinese learning for the benefit of the entire world.*

Gentlemen, I remember about ten years ago, a number of Chinese students who had studied abroad founded a magazine [Hanfeng zazhi] devoted to research in Chinese studies. Inscribed on the cover of this magazine were four very inspiring lines from Wenxuan. I would like to recite these four lines to you in the hope that you will act upon them and give your full and continued support to this [the Chinese Department of Hong Kong University] to ensure its success. The four lines read:

With nostalgia for the past
 And meditation upon ancient days
 Carry forward the divine spirit of our ancestors
 Giving heavenly voice to the grandeur of Han.

[Here Lu Xun gives explanations of some Cantonese terms, which are omitted in this translation.]

Having annotated this, I cannot restrain myself from commenting on these last lines. I haven't read *Hanfeng zazhi*, but I remember something which bears some relation to it. This is something I personally experienced during the last years of the reign of the Guangxu emperor (1875-1909) of the Qing dynasty when I was studying in Japan. At that time, many of the Chinese students there had revolutionary ideas, though this revolution was in fact a racial one, with the goal of recovering China from Manchu rule and restoring to it its original masters. Some of the students were activists, while others ran newspapers, or hand-copied old books, most of which had been banned by the Manchu government and were unavailable in China. The latter included books from the late-Ming and early-Qing periods, the sort of works that could inspire young people. Eventually, these were compiled in book form and published under the title *Han sheng*, "The Voices of Han", since it was a special issue of the magazine *Hubei Student Life*. The book cover had four lines of classical prose on it:

*To express our nostalgia for the past
 And meditate upon ancient days
 Carry forward the divine spirit of our ancestors
 Strike up the heavenly voice of Han grandeur*

Evidently, this was supposed to remind us of the former greatness of the Han people and allow us to make a comparison with the present: we must "recover our ancient treasures". Or to put it more explicitly, the idea was to "expel the Manchus", and by extension, "expel the foreigners". But twenty years after this was published, it has become a slogan for Hong Kong University's attempt to preserve Chinese culture and make "the relationship between China and the West grow closer and more friendly". It's hard to imagine these four lines from *Wenxuan* being quoted by a foreigner.

In China today, once you start with emotional outbursts like this it's hard to stop. So it would be better for me to end this article by saying something more interesting as a bit of an encore. Commenting on my stories, Congyu (under the pen-name Duyi) wrote in the magazine *Yiban*:

The author's style . . . is too witty and humorous, which in many cases makes the reader feel that his writing is only casual and funny. In other words, because of this, the reader learns much less about life than he should.

Sad but true. Some people do “only” feel that way. But one of my weaknesses is that I cannot take anything seriously. Even when I’m having my own emotional outbursts I’m never thorough about it, but I certainly have my own reasons for restraining myself. Since I’m like this all the time, if I were insincere, wouldn’t it be a silly waste of time? And if I were sincere, I probably should have died of grief and frustration long ago, and then I’d have nothing to get emotional about in the first place. I guess it’s difficult to be alive and be a martyr at the same time.

Something I have found interesting and would like to introduce to the reader is the following advertisement. There are many curious advertisements in the Hong Kong papers, but this is the oddest of them all. The first time I read the *Circulation Daily News* I spotted it on the front page, and it continued to appear there every day. I’ve tried to make some sense out of it, but still haven’t succeeded.

POETRY FOR SALE
—Couplets, Inscriptions and Scrolls—
by Yu Hui of Hong Kong
Available at
Harmony Hotel

Couplets about Hong Kong
Heptasyllabic regulated verses about Hong Kong
Heptasyllabic quatrains about Hong Kong
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Couplets about Dihai
Heptasyllabic quatrains about Dihai
Heptasyllabic quatrains about Huadi
Heptasyllabic regulated verses about Huadi
Heptasyllabic quatrains about Japan
Heptasyllabic quatrains about the Bible
Heptasyllabic regulated verses in honour of the King of England
Poems in honour of the Prince of Wales
Heptasyllabic quatrains about opera singers
Couplets about Guangchang

Prices: \$3.60, \$5.50, \$7.40 (double the price for sets of scrolls)

Respectfully submitted by
The Manager
Harmony Hotel
Number 118, Connaught Road
Sheung Wan
Hong Kong

11 July [1927], Dongdi, Guangzhou