The present paper briefly discusses the role Friedrich Nietzsche’s (1844-1900) thought played for the Chinese writers Mao Dun [1] (1896-1981), Guo Moruo [2] (1892-1978), Lu Xun [2] (1881-1936), and Yu Dafu [4] (1895-1945) who, sociologically speaking and in Karl Mannheim’s terms, all belonged to the same generation of intellectuals, commonly grouped under the label of “May Fourth”. This means neither enjoyed specialized philosophical training according to Western models of academe, nor were they staying in the splendid isolation of traditional scholarly studies in China, but have absorbed some of Nietzsche’s ideas and works as committed intellectuals with a strong sense for political practice.

0. Introduction

There are many reasons to investigate the ways Nietzsche’s thought took with Chinese intellectuals from the beginning of this century on. First of all Nietzsche was among the Westerners who were at source of the most important catch-word for May Fourth Movement: His “transvaluation (of all values)” (Umwertung der Werte, in Chinese chongxin guding jiazi [5]) was frequently applied to the Confucian tradition, then regarded as the most impeding obstacle to any social modernization; and his “overman” (at the time usually rendered as “superman” in English; Übermensch, Chinese chaoren [6]) focused all hopes that the morally developed individual might initiate liberation from traditional values, furthermore integrating a concept of progress as taken from natural sciences, namely from Darwinism. None among those modern authors who were to become labelled as “noted” (zhuming [7]) had not read Nietzsche, and many of them have drawn considerable inspiration from his works, most prominently the four authors I shall discuss here: Mao Dun, Guo Moruo, Yu Dafu and Lu Xun. And last but not least as a more recent event, Nietzsche’s philosophy has been largely discussed again since the late 1970s, to the extent that in the aftermath of June 4th, 1989, party

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1 The formula of the title is taken from a Nietzsche’s aphorism in Menschliches, Allzumenschliches, quoted in full below. – The present article is a grossly abridged version of my “Die Last der Kultur: Vier Fallstudien zur chinesischen Nietzsche-Rezeption”, minima sinica 2/1989, 1-42, and 1/1990, 1-40.
ideologists identified Nietzsche’s ideas, along with Sartre’s and Freud’s thought as prototypes of Western “bourgeois liberalism” that had allegedly turned an inspiration for the “counter-revolutionary rebellion” just bloodily oppressed.2

Others, as Bing Xin who in 1921 wrote a story “Chaoren” [The Overman], or the philosopher Li Shicen who has been labelled “the first Chinese Nietzschean author”, are deliberately excluded from this inquiry. The latter’s works reflect a more individualized pattern of discussing Nietzsche, not very common for his time.3 Bing Xin as a writer did not leave any critical remarks on the German philosopher, whereas Li Shicen was a professional philosopher who underwent a Western-style systematic education in his field. In this respect he already belongs to the generation of Chinese intellectuals next to May Fourth, whereas the former represents a transitional litteratus attitude of universally oriented scholarship and strong social commitment.

As for many other Western thinkers likewise, the first Chinese to have ever mentioned Nietzsche is probably Liang Qichao who in 1902, when in his Japanese exile journal Xinmin congbao [8] he wrote on the then popular British tempered social Darwinist Benjamin Kidd as a synthesizer of idealism and materialism. Surprisingly, his example for idealism is Marx, whereas Nietzsche is called a materialist “whose teachings of social Darwinism and egoism are very influential all over Europe and can be considered a fin-de-siècle religion”.4 It was just the time when “Aesthetic Life Debate” was going on in Japanese papers and periodicals, provoked by an article from Takayama Chogyû [9] (1871-1902) and in fact mainly concentrated on Nietzsche and some of his basic concepts, though his name was hardly referred to.

It was Wang Guowei [10] (1877-1927), however, who as the first took serious and philosophically well-based interest in Nietzsche, i.e. as a sort of successor and adversary of Schopenhauer in his own set of philosophical ideas that could be generalizingly subsumed as pessimistic. In 1904 he wrote several articles on Nietzsche’s philosophy, mainly contrasting it with Schopenhauer’s ideas.5 Among the writings on Nietzsche published before 1919, we also find a text by the pre-May Fourth his-

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4 Zhongguo zhi xinmin [68] [‘New Citizen of China’, i.e. Liang Qichao], “Jinhualun gemingzhe Jiede zhi xueshou” [69] [The Teachings of Kidd, a Revolutionary of the Evolution Theory], Xinmin congbao no 17 (Sep 15, 1902), 17-28; repr. in Yinbingshi wenji [70] (Shanghai: Zhonghua shuju, 2nd ed. 1925), 12: 78-86.
5 One of these articles, “Nicai shi zhi xueshou” [71] [Nietzsche’s Teachings], Jiaoyu shijie [72] no 78 (July 1, 1904), 13-26, is basically an abridged translation from Nikhe-shi rinrisetsu ippan [73] [Essentials of Nietzsche’s Ethical Thought] (Tôkyô: Ikuseikai, 1902) by KUWAKI GENYÔKU [74] (1874-1946). For details on this very first book-length critical study on Nietzsche in Japan, see H.-J. BECKER, Die frühe Nietzsche-Rezeption in Japan (1893-1903). Ein Beitrag zur Individualismusproblematik im Modernisierungsprozess (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1983), 151-171.
torian of Chinese literature (1918) and philosophy (1919) Xie Wuliang [11] (1884-1964), and by Cai Yuanpei [12] (1868-1940) who during his stay in Germany had personally experienced the then virulent Nietzsche fever there and therefore could not help but taking ambiguous position towards one of the sources abused for German propaganda during a war sometimes dubbed “Anglo-Nietzschean”.6

1. Mao Dun

In one of his earliest articles on “Students and Society”,7 Mao Dun makes use of Nietzsche’s concepts of “master morality” (Herrenmoral, guizu daode [13]) to describe the qualities enabling an individual to be independent and courageous. He contrasts this attitude “expressed by the great German philosopher Nietzsche” to traditional modesty and obedience as “slave morality” (Sklavenmoral, nuli daode [14]). The role of an avantgarde Mao Dun had attributed in particular to the young generation, thus taking up the very core ideals of the May Fourth Movement, now began to shift gradually to the writers. As their most important duty he sees the propagation of “new ideas” and the introduction of the works by great authors, i.e. Western writers, such as Rousseau for individualism, Nietzsche for the philosophy of overman, and Shaw and Gerhard Hauptmann for socialism.

“When new ideas are emerging, it is mainly due to writers (wenxuezhe [15]) who form their avantgarde, rousing the deaf and awakening those sleeping by means of their stories and prose (sanwenxue [16]).”8

It is out from this context that Mao Dun himself writes a lengthy article on Nietzsche, published in four installments in the beginning of 1920.9 In his introduction he elaborates his understanding of a “critical” approach, proposing eclecticism and pragmatism towards Nietzsche’s teachings from which “only those of common use should be selected and kept, whereas the useless one should be left out”. Regarding the former teaching he repeatedly refers to them as “weapons”, mainly as “weapons against traditional morality” (wuqi fandui jiu-udaode [17]). Therefore he pinpoints Nietzsche’s iconoclasm and considers the concept of “transvaluation” as instrument for “destroying the old morality”, i.e. those then labelled “Confucian”. In Mao Dun’s view “overman” is the most important postulation in Nietzsche’s ethical ideas. He equates this ideal with a “progressive man”, an overtly Darwinian character since, in Mao Dun’s words, “The overman has the same relation to the present man, as the present

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6 D. THATCHER, Nietzsche in England, 1890-1914 (Toronto & Buffalo, 1970), 44.
7 “Xuesheng yu shehui” [75], Xuesheng zazhi [76] 5,1 (Jan 1918), 1-5; repr. in Mao Dun quanji [77], Ye Ziming [78] & al. eds. (Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe, 1986ff), 14: 9-13.
8 Peiwei [79] [pseudon.], “Xianzai wenxuejia de zeren shi shenme” [80] [Which Is the Duty of Present-Day Writers?], Dongfang zazhi [81] 17, 1 (Jan 10, 1920), 94-96; repr. in Mao Dun quanji 18: 8-11.
9 “Nicai de xueshuo” [82] [Nietzsche’s Teachings], Xuesheng zazhi 7, 1-4 (Jan-Apr, 1920), 1-12, 13-24, 25-34, 35-38; not reprinted yet and likely to be excluded from Mao Dun quanji, if judging from the editors’ proposed division of that edition according to genres of writing.
man has to the ape.” In other words: Mao Dun requires a biological, i.e. scientific, legitimation for any morality, and clearly rejects Nietzsche’s conclusions rendered as “The masters become stronger, the slaves weaker.” Nevertheless, Mao Dun attempts to draw a positive meaning from Nietzsche’s concept of “will to power” (quanli yizhi [18]), saying that the weak should be inspired by it and then implement a “transvaluation”, opposing it to the Darwinian “struggle for life” which finally results in adaptation and surrender, i.e. in the passivity of “slave morality”. – Unlike Nietzsche, Mao Dun comprehends “will to power” as a normative concept with the namely including “will to political power”, not as an analytical one that might contribute to the understanding of social processes.

This understanding of Nietzsche’s “overman” as a basically political concept comes also out clearly when Mao Dun selects a section from Zarathustra for translation. The chapter “Of the New Idol” is commonly considered the most important source for anarchist ideas in Nietzsche and concludes as follows:

“Only there, where the state ceases, does the man who is not superfluous begin [...]. / There, where the state ceases, look there, my brothers. Do you not see it: the rainbow and the bridges to the Superman [overman].”10

It is certain that such an understanding of Nietzsche as socio-political author (Mao Dun’s article has a section “Nietzsche as a Sociologist”) traces back to the sources Mao Dun consulted, first of all Anthony Ludovici, then “the hard core of Nietzschean writers in England”,11 and his book Nietzsche, His Life and His Work of 1910.

Although from the 1920s on Mao Dun began his thorough inquiries in literary criticism and theory, Nietzsche did not completely disappear from his view. In 1922, using his pen-name Xi Zhen [19] he translated an article discussing Nietzsche’s philosophy and its impact on the German dramatist Hauptmann,12 precisely the author Mao Dun had previously called an important representative of socialist ideals.

2. Guo Moruo

One verse of Guo Moruo’s early poem “Hymn to Bandits”, written at the end of 1919 and to enter his famous collection “Goddesses” (Nüshen [20] 1921), reads as follows:

“Nietzsche, ye madman and propagator of the philosophy of overman, you have smashed idols and destroyed saints.

[...]

Live long! live long! live long!”13

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10 Quoted from Thus Spoke Zarathustra, tr. by R. J. Hollingdale (Harmondsworth/England: Penguin, 1961), 77-78.

11 D. Thatcher, Nietzsche in England, 239.

12 “Huopudeman yu Nicai zhexue” [83], Xiaoshuo yuebao [84] 13, 6 (Jun 10, 1922), 20-26; trans. from Poet Lore no 24 (Sep 1913), 341-347.

13 “Feitu song” [85], Xuedeng [86] [Shishi xinbao fukan [87]] Jan 23, 1920; repr. in Guo Moruo quanjii. Wenzhu bian [88] (Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe, 1982), 1: 111-117. – Probably the only complete translation into a Western language is by A. Buatti as “Inno ai banditi”, in Guo Moruo, Le dee (Pesaro: Flaminia, 1987), 104-106.
This poem, healing as “bandits” Cromwell, Washington, José Rizal, Marx, Engels, Lenin, Rousseau, Pestalozzi and Tagore among others by enumerating their respective merits, is explicitly declaring its debt to reading of Carlyle’s On Heroes, Hero-Worship and the Heroic in History (1841) and probably the most unmediated expression of Guo Moruo’s Romantic heroicism that would eventually make him assimilate also Walt Whitman’s concept of the “hero-poet” – an author who has once been called the “democrat counterpart of Nietzsche”.

Furthermore, the poem is some practical work of “transvaluation”, since Chinese students actively opposing Japanese politics of imperial expansion had been labelled “student bandits” by the Taishô (1913-25) government in Japan. An additional “transvaluation”, taken from the Chinese literary tradition is imbedded in the poem since Guo Moruo, as a sort of prologue, quotes extensively from the “Quqie” [21] chapter in Zhuang Zi [22]. Here the bandit Zhi [23] declares, as for the cardinal values of Confucianism, that the bandits’ notion of “sage” (sheng [24]), “courageous” (yong [25]), “righteous” (yi [26]), “intelligent” (zhi [27]) and “benevolent” (ren [28]) is the real morality (“acting accordance withdao [29]”). Hence, according to Guo Moruo’s view, the true heroes are those who transvaluate Confucian values, i.e. iconoclasts as those mostly Western ones he lists in his poem.

Guo Moruo’s most weighty contribution to Nietzsche’s reception in China, however, is his translation of the first part and of portions of the second part of Also sprach Zarathustra, published irregularly in 24 installments in the first 39 issues of Chuangzao zhoubao [30], i.e. over more than half the total publication period of this important Creation Society magazine. In addition to this fairly prominent position accorded to Nietzsche in the Creation Society’s activities, another of its publications carried a bilingual Chinese-German quotation from Zarathustra as an epitaph, thus almost elevating the author to an intellectual point of reference. It reads:

“Go apart and be alone with your love and your creating, my brother; and justice will be slow to limp after you.”

The partial Zarathustra translation by Guo Moruo carries the title “Zarathustra’s Lion-Roaring”, alluding to the chapter “Of the Three Metamorphoses” in which Nietzsche stresses unlimited creativity as the only force capable to destroy and reconstruct values. In this chapter the antagonist of the lion is the dragon – a metaphor more appropriate to represent traditional Chinese values than Nietzsche ever could have had in mind.

In late 1923 Guo Moruo writes an article exclusively devoted to Nietzsche’s philosophy intended as an answer to the “numerous letters” asking for expla-
nations. Guo Moruo declares himself not competent for any interpretation, not without adding that his translation was, in fact, an interpretation of Nietzsche’s text. He suggests a two-fold method to understand the text, with a critical and an interpretative approach:

“To him who waits until he has progressed in his own experiences the text will finally reveal itself [chuxian [31]] thoroughly. [...] He who has progressed in his understanding, may not stay indifferent, but needs a critical view, as well as the ability to negate [fouding [32]] the work as well as he can. Only then the work’s life turns to one’s own life, and the author’s heart’s blood transforms into the blood of one’s own heart.”

This represents an interpretative method in three steps: (1) contemplation leading to (2) an intuitive understanding based upon individual experience which finally results in (3) the revelation and identification directed by “critical view” and “negation”. Frequently misunderstood or consciously distorted as “refutation”, these three steps in fact do quite precisely correspond to basic elements of Wang Yangming’s [33] (1472-1529) epistemology beginning with “contemplation” and characterized as “paradialectical method”. It also reminds the sort of “close reading” suggested by Zhu Xi [34] (1130-1200) in a saying transmitted in his Zhu Zi yulei [35] (1270):

“(1) read little but become intimately familiar with what you read; (2) don’t scrutinize the text, developing your own farfetched views of it, but rather personally experience it over and over again; and (3) concentrate fully, without thought of gain.”

Guo Moruo could even refer to Zarathustra as a witness since there is greatness equated with the ability to refute.

Thus Guo Moruo’s image of Nietzsche evidently concentrates on the rebelling individual in search for perfection, once again emphasized in a “Letter on Chinese and German Culture” [19] addressed to his Creation Society colleague, the expert on aesthetics Zong Baihua [36] (1897-1986), then studying philosophy in Germany, in which he parallels Nietzsche and Lao Zi [37]:

“Both were rebelling against religious ideas of theism and the established morality obstructing the individual’s personality. Both had their basis in individuality and strived for a positive development of themselves.”

3. Yu Dafu

The story “Chenlun” [38] which made Yu Dafu known as baihua story-writer bears direct reference to Nietzsche. Yu Dafu illustrates the megalomania (expression used within the Chinese text) of his protagonist by saying:

18 Quoted from CHU HSI, Learning to Be a Sage: Selections from the Conversations of Master Chu, Arranged Topically, tr. by D. GARDNER (Berkeley & Los Angeles/CA: University of California Press, 1990), 132 (#4.21).

19 “Lun Zhong-De wenhua shu” [92], May 20, 1923, Chuangzao zhoubao no 5 (Jun 6, 1923); repr. Guo Moruo quanji, 15: 148-158.
“Sometimes, when he ran into a peasant in the mountain, he would imagine himself Zaratustra and would repeat Zaratustra’s sayings before the peasant.”

The nameless protagonist is one of the most Wertherian characters in early modern Chinese fiction. His alienation becomes manifest as an abandon towards his own emotions, while knowing about the possibility of rational self-control, but uncapable to exert it. He strives for action but cannot act, is periodically exposed to his own emotional excesses, subsequently conflicting with traditional patterns of values, and over and again painfully thrown into his existential experience of alienation from them. The protagonist seeks deliverance, both in the contemplation of nature and self-abandon of carnal pleasures, but cannot escape his sense of alienation.

When Yu Dafu wrote “Chenlun” he had at least read Also sprach Zarathustra by Nietzsche and probably knew the Birth of Tragedy (Die Geburt der Tragödie) as well, also for the fact that his close friend Tian Han [39] (1898-1968), also from the Creation Society, in 1919 had translated an article on this work of Nietzsche.

The Japanese literary genre of shishôsetsu [40] (“Ich-Erzählung”), then quite popular in the country where Yu Dafu lived, and published and discussed mainly in periodicals, had been one of the sources of inspiration for Yu Dafu’s “Chenlun”. The shishôsetsu shares, as a matter of fact, a number of common traits with the ancient Greek tragedy as speculatively seen by Nietzsche in his Birth of Tragedy: Life means suffering. The “action on stage”, i.e. the aesthetic sublimation of action that has become impossible, is one possible way to escape. As for the Greek tragedy, the aesthetic sublimation has as its core technique creation of the “Apollonian illusion”. This is close to the Buddhist concept of mâyâ also evoked by Nietzsche who had, by the way, developed his own concept in close contact to the Buddhist mâyâ such as he had become acquainted with it by reading Schopenhauer. On the other hand, the shishôsetsu has highly refined formalized devices of self-description in which emphasis lies on the means of creating authenticity, rather than on the subjective experience itself. At the time, Japanese Buddhists had made attempts to merge Nietzschean thought with their own religion; and Yu Dafu, in his youth strongly under the influence of Buddhism, probably knew them.

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21 “Shuo Nicai zaoqi de “Beiju de fasheng”” [96], Shaonian Zhongguo [97] 1,3 (Sep 15, 1919), 39-41. This text is probably by IKUTA ŌGAI [98] and was originally a review of Nietzsche’s Philosophie (1904) by Arthur DREWS, published in Shin shôsetsu [99] 15.9 (Sep 1910).
23 “Beiju de chusheng. Zizhuan zhi yi” [100], Renjian shi [101] 2,17 (Dec 5, 1934), 11-14; repr. in Yu Dafu wenji, 3: 352-357.
So the frequently expressed assumption, referring to his own invocation of Anatole France’s famous credo, Yu Dafu’s work was merely autobiographical is easily resolved in a rather precise concept of tragedy. It is bearing this aesthetic concept in mind that Yu Dafu titles the first section of his autobiography “The Birth of Tragedy”. Even though declared as an autobiographical text it cannot be a compilation of data that could be empirically reliable since the “mask” is an outcome of the unescapable mâyâ essential to Yu Dafu’s aesthetics. This goes as well for his series of diaries written during the same period in the mid-1930s and later compiled as Dafu riji ji [41] (1935).

This kind of polyvalent self-expression, temporarily striving for a political application and as such a crucial pattern of approach for the Creation Society, is also closely linked to Nietzsche when Yu Dafu gives, ten years earlier, a brief introduction to the ideas of Max Stirner (1806-56) whom he calls “a master of the ideology of overman [chaorenzhuyi [42]]” – although Stirner had developed his philosophy of the Ego some half-century before Nietzschean “overman” came into living. This connection, however, was frequently insinuated not only in China, but has evidence only in a vague genealogy of intellectual history. Yu Dafu points out both Stirner’s and Nietzsche’s radical iconoclasm and their strive for individual freedom, as he does immediately afterwards in his article “Art and the State”, Here Art is representing the Truth of self-expression, whereas the State as its antagonist is the place where alienation takes place, in brief: the source of all evils of modern civilization, and therefore has to be destroyed – statements fairly similar to the aesthetic anarchism expressed by Nietzsche in the Zarathustra chapter “Of the New Idol” translated by Mao Dun.

According to Yu Dafu, it is in this context that the genius, the capable individual, i.e. the artist, takes an important role as the one who gives expression to Truth and acts as a leader of the masses until they jointly destroy the State and its falseness.

Among the sources of Yu Dafu was undoubtedly the English poet John Davidson (1857-1909) who was not only belonging to the circle of The Yellow Book on which Yu Dafu had written an article but also a co-founder of the Journal of Egoistic Philosophy devoted to the propagation of Stirner’s, Nietzsche’s, Emerson’s and Thoreau’s thought. Yu Dafu calls Davidson “a student of Nietzsche” and believes his works should be propagated all over China. The focus of Yu Dafu’s interest, however, soon shifted back from political practice to the individual’s and namely the artist’s role and position in society, and here

24 “Max Stirner de shengya ji qi zhexue” [102], Chuangzao zhoubao no 6 (Jun 16, 1923), 6-12; repr. in Yu Dafu wenji, 5: 141-148.
more precisely to biographical writing as an exemplification of “tragedy”. How complex Yu Dafu’s concept of identity is and how obviously embedded in his aesthetics clearly comes out when he gives the title “An Aspect of Overman” to his own translation of some letters by Nietzsche.27 Yu Dafu compares these letters to a woman Nietzsche admired and probably was in love with to the fu [43] written by Song Guangping [44] (Song Yu [45], 3rd/2nd cent. BCE) and was certainly also attracted by the erotic tension and the sense of “tragedy” both authors express.28 There is still additional evidence for Yu Dafu’s lasting interest in Nietzsche’s life and in 1932 he even planned to write a biographical novel on the thinker:

“This time [I have] taken with me several books on the German philosopher Nietzsche. In his genial and unhappy life there are many episodes I really admire. I would like to study them more thoroughly in order to write a story with him as the protagonist.”29

The plan was not executed but postponed, in favour of the translation of Rousseau’s Les rêveries d’un promeneur solitaire (1782). Although Nietzsche for Yu Dafu is by far not as important Ernest Dowson (1867-1900), the leading poet of the The Yellow Book group, or Turgen’ev with his creation of the character of the “superfluous man”, or the Japanese shishôsetsu authors with their aesthetically tempered models of self-expression. Yet Yu Dafu still frequently refers to Nietzsche as an individualist and at the same time a “great individual” who not only developed a theory of tragedy but lived it.

4. Lu Xun

Academic philosophy has for long considered Nietzsche not a really serious thinker, reproaching him with being not systematic, classifying him as a mere culture critic. The appropriation of a Nietzsche distorted towards Aryan racism by German Nazi ideologists later on did also a great deal to contribute to this ambiguous position of Nietzsche’s. It is only when in the 1960s the not less ambiguous philosophy of Heidegger was discussed in France that Nietzsche became established in philosophical discourse.

So the Nietzsche whom Lu Xun read during his stay in Japan basically was the cultural critic: An adherent of Darwin’s evolutionary thought as most of his contemporaries, and originally a believer in the progressive potential of natural sciences whose faith gradually became shaken, Lu Xun in his early essays extensively discussed the possible implications of a China modernized according to Western models. He believed that matter and mind are antithetic and that industrialization would inevitably result in serious conflicts. That is why he calls for an “ethical

27 “Chaoren de yi mian. Nicai gei Madame O. Louise [sic, i.e. Louise OTT] de qi feng xin” [105], Beixin banyuekan [106] 4,1/2 (Jan 16, 1930); in Yu Dafu wenji, 12: 103-110.
evolution” (*lunli jinhua* [46]) in order to form a counter-weight to a purely material civilization. In his “Shortcomings of the Culture” written in 1907, he declares that such an ethical evolution should start from the individual and gives an overview of the history of Western individualism, starting with Luther and mentioning Nietzsche among many other representatives. To Lu Xun, Nietzsche’s ideal of the “overman” appears the paramount of such an ethical evolution: “Only when the overman appears, there will be peace on earth.” (*wei chu chaoren, shi nai taiping* [47]). Lu Xun drafts the emergence of a future *élite* of “independent and autonomous humans” (*liren* [48]), of “genuine men” (*zhen ren* [49]) who are capable to define moral ideals and to contribute thereby to the awakening of common people, the masses, characterized as passive and subordinating because of the burden of tradition.

In “On the Power of Marâ Poetry” Lu Xun further elaborates his ideas, mainly based upon the Promethean revolt in romantic poetry, in particular the so-called “satanic poetry” of Shelley. Lu Xun argues that revolutionary changes also imply destruction, i.e. destruction of old values and old beliefs. (What he had in mind was, of course, the whole set of *lijiao* [50] values.) This is the meaning of his “satanism”. By connection the rebellion to poetry and to poets as prototypes of “genuine men”, he clearly expresses his conviction that any “ethical evolution” leading to the “overman” should start from an *élite* of *litterati*, from men of letters, i.e. in Lu Xun’s own words: from “fighters in the spiritual world”.

At the same time Lu Xun seems quite aware of the dangers of such a destructive work. Iconoclasm can lead to despair, to a world-view in which no relevant ethical values are left. He therefore vividly defends the human experience and ideals (*shensi* [51]) as embodied in mythology and in other forms of the literary tradition, at that time – and even more so during May Fourth – frequently attacked as a whole for being superstitious and an obstacle to scientific progress.

On the other hand, Lu Xun is everything but uncritical towards natural sciences, and warns they may also result in irrationalism if not properly guided by ideals:

“Nietzsche […] adopted Darwin’s theories of evolution to attack Christianity and created an entirely different philosophy, that of the Übermensch or overman. The proposals of […] Nietzsche, albeit based on science, were still tainted by distinctly religious and fantastic elements, and thus implied an alteration in, not the elimination of faith.”

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31 *Lu Xun quanji*, 1: 52.
32 “Moluo shi li shuo” [113], *He’nan* nos 2 & 3 (Jan & Feb 1908); repr. in *Fen*; in *Lu Xun quanji*, 1: 63-115.
Hence it is quite early that Lu Xun had assimilated the Nietzsche's ideal of “overman”, as a concept meeting the requirements of an evolutionary Weltanschauung, but understood it as a call for ethical ideals. In his “Random Thoughts” (suiganlu [52]), regularly published between 1918 and 1920, Lu Xun repeatedly refers to Nietzsche. Because of these articles, some critics labelled him a “Chinese Nietzsche”. Among his many translations made during this period, there are also some from the “Prologue” of Nietzsche’s Also sprach Zarathustra, one translated into classical Chinese, the other into written vernacular.35

However and more important, it is not exaggerated to say that Nietzsche had stood at the cradle of modern Chinese literature. Many obvious borrowings from Nietzsche’s writings are made in Lu Xun’s famous story “Diary of a Madman” (“Kuangren riji” [53]) of 1918 in which many motives are taken from the Prologue of Zarathustra – striking to the extent that the Japanese sinologist Niiijima Atsuyochi [54] called Lu Xun’s “Diary of a Madman” a mere “translation variant” (fanyi bianzhong [55]) of Nietzsche’s text.36 Lu Xun himself, in retrospect, admitted that, when writing his story, the most important sources were the novel of the same name by Nikolaj Gogol’ and Nietzsche’s Zarathustra from which, by the way, he produced his vernacular translation of the prologue parallely.37

Above of all, it is noteworthy that traditional Chinese literature had already connected “madness” to a critical or even rebellious attitude towards the established dominant ideology, usually ljjiao.38 In Western tradition, madness of a persona in literature traces back to Gogol’s work where madness forms the framework of a generally critical perspective. But it is only Maksim Gorkij who introduced a type of “clinical literature” in which madness is not simply a literary technique but becomes precisely the symptom of specific social conditions. Nietzsche uses the concept in very a similar context when writing, under the heading of “In the Neighbourhood of Madness”, yet adding an implicit draft of his theory of decadence:

34 Lu Xun quanji, 8: 28-29; quoted from the translation by J. KOWALLIS, Renditions no 26 (Hong Kong, autumn 1986), 113-114.

35 The version in wenyan [114] (“Chaladuosidelu xuyan” [115], parts 1-3), probably translated between 1904 and 1906, thus chronologically preceding his series of early essays, was never published during Lu Xun’s lifetime, but only in Lu Xun yiwen ji [116] (Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe, 1958), 773-778; the baihua translation as “Chalatusitela de xuyan” [117] under the pseudonym of Tang Si [118], in Xin chao [119] 2,5 (Jun 1, 1920), [repr.] 954-973, followed by some brief notes and repr. in Lu Xun yiwen ji, 10: 439-458. – I disagree with the editors of Lu Xun yiwen ji in dating the wenyan translation to 1918, also for the remark by Lu Xun’s brother Zhou Zuoren [120] who considers “the brush-style might indicate it [i.e. the translation] dates back to Sendai”; see ZHOU XIASHOU [121] [i.e. ZUOREN], Lu Xun de gujia [122] [Lu Xun’s Home, 1953] (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 1981), 207.

36 Quoted from KAWAKAMI TETSUMASA [123], “Lu Xun Nicai chutan” [124] [A Preliminary Inquiry on Lu Xun and Nietzsche], tr. by GAO PENG [125], in Lu Xun yanjiu [126] vol. 10 (Beijing: Zhongguo shehuike xue chubanshe, 1987), 310. 

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“The sum of sensations, items of knowledge, experiences, the whole burden of culture, that is to say, has become so great than an over-excitation of the nervous and thinking power is no a universal danger.”

In Zarathustra, Nietzsche takes up the motif again:

“Not only the reason of millennia the madness of millennia too breaks out in us. It is dangerous to be an heir.”

There is no question that Lu Xun had in mind such a kind of “madness of aeons” when he wrote his story, creating a madman who, by the very means of his madness, unveils dominant lijiào values as “cannibalistic morals”. In Nietzsche it is also a madman who comes to the market place and makes the well-known declaration: “God is dead. God remains dead. And we have killed him.”

In one of his “Random Thoughts”, published during the same year as his “Diary of a Madman”, Lu Xun declares that geniuses can perfectly well be labelled as “mad”. Should be noticed observed that Lu Xun, in his aforementioned early essays, had used the expression “genius” (tiancai) as a synonym for the “genuine man” (zhēn rén) and for the “independently acting man” (liren) who were, as he expected, those to realize “overman”.

There are much more parallels between the Prologue of Zarathustra and “The Diary of a Madman”: Both pieces have about the same length. The writers use their respective protagonists to propagate an utopia, Zarathustra calls for the “overman”, whereas Lu Xun’s madman expresses his hope for the “true man” (zhēn de rén). Nietzsche’s polemics are directed towards Christianity,

37 “Zhongguo xin wenxue daxi’ xiaoshuo er ji xu” [Preface to the “Anthology of New Chinese Literature”: Fiction, Part 2; 1935], in Lu Xun quanji, 6: 238-239. Studies on Lu Xun’s debt to these authors, not least for his own testimony, are of course numerous. I just mention two, i.e. J. D. CHINNER Y, “Influence of Western Literature on Lu Xun’s “Diary of Madman”, Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies 23 (1960), 309-22; and WANG RUNHUA [128], “Xiyang wenxue dui Zhongguo di yì pián duānpían bāihuà xiǎoshuò de yìnxīng” [The Impact of Western Literature on China’s First Vernacular Story], in Zhong-xi wenxue guānxi yánjiū (Taipei: Dadong shùguǎn, 1978), 207-26, & passim; revised English version in WONG YOON WAH [i.e. Wang Runhua], Essays on Chinese Literature (Singapore: Singapore University Press, 1988).


40 Quoted from Thus Spoke Zarathustra, 102.


42 “Suiganlu 38”, in Lu Xun quanji, 1: 311. The dichotomy of “genius” and "madman" can be traced back to Genio e follia (1864) by Carlo LOMBROSO. Cf. MIN KANGSHENG [131], “Kuang-gren riji’ zhòng Nicai de shengyin” [Nietzsche’s Voice in the “Diary of Madman”; 1986], Lu Xun yanjiu vol. 12 (Beijing: Zhongguo shēhuìxué chǔbānshè, 1988), 299-315.
whereas Lu Xun’s target are the *lijiao* values and its “cannibalism”. Both protagonists are loners and marginalized. They are exposed to the indifference and the mocking of their environment, and in both cases the source of their isolation appears as the result of a highly developed sensitivity and insight.

Another very prominent place in Lu Xun’s work that bear a number of imprints of its indebtedness to Nietzsche’s motifs are the prose poems in “Wild Grass” (*Yecao* [58], 1927) in which a number of characters make their appearance that are overtly taken from *Zarathustra*, namely the allegory of nihilism such as it becomes imminent when iconoclasm – as propagated during May Fourth – succeeds, i.e. the Last Man (*letzter Mensch, moren* [59]). This allegorical character did not fail to exert a lasting fascination with traces up to present concerns of Chinese intellectuals.43 Yet in this context I shall not discuss the complex presence of Nietzschean ideas in *Yecao* since it has been done comprehensively, in a recent monograph that was preceded by a number of detailed individual studies.44

5. Conclusions

Yan Fu’s [60] (1854-1921) introduction of Western thought not only prepared the ground for the key demands of May Fourth intellectuals, but can also hardly be overestimated as far as Nietzsche’s reception is concerned. Darwin’s concept of biological perfectibility, together with traditional ideas of “self-cultivation” (*ziyang* [61], *zixiu* [62]) were the soil on which Nietzsche’s ideal of the “overman” fell. Lu Xun very generally emphasized the concept of human moral progress, whereas Mao Dun considered the “overman” rather as a scientific concept with a vague idea of sociological application. The creative individual, as opposed to the traditional social order, or to any existing order, however, is more important for Guo Moruo’s and Yu Dafu’s reception of Nietzsche.

All authors I discussed were attracted by Nietzsche’s spirit of iconoclasm and easily adopted his quest for a transvaluation which they wanted to see applied to values of the Chinese tradition. Their Darwinian predisposition, typical for their generation, merged with the Romanticist cult of the genius when referring to the “overman”. But none among them showed such a life-long appreciation for Nietzsche as Lu Xun who, during his last year, even took care of the proof-reading for translations from Nietzsche.45

43 See LIU ZAIFU [133], “Lun moren” [134] [On the Last Man], in his *Renlun ershiwu zhong* [135] (Hong Kong: Oxford University Press, 1992), 53-60.
44 MIN KANGSHENG, *Lu Xun de chuangzuo yu Nicai de zhenyan* [136] [Lu Xun’s Literary Creation and Nietzsche’s Aphorisms] (Xi’an: Shaanxi renmin jiaoyu chubanshe, 1996).
45 They were made by XU FANCHENG [137] (1909-) and included in *Ecce homo* (published as *Nicai zizhuan* [138] [Nietzsche’s Autobiography], Shanghai: Liangyou tushu gongsi, 1935) and *Also sprach Zarathustra* (*Suluzhi yulu* [139], 2 vols., Shanghai: Shenghuo shuju, 1935-36). After several reprints under various translator’s names hiding Xu Fancheng’s identity, the *Zarathustra* translation closely supervised by Lu Xun is republished again (Beijing: Shangwu yinshuguan, 1994, 2nd printing 1995). – See also Lu Xun’s letters to Zhao Jiabi [140] (1908-) of Dec 12, 1934, and to Xu Shiquan [141] [i.e. Xu Fancheng] of Aug 17, 1935, and his diary entry of Nov 14, 1935, in *Lu Xun quanji*, 12: 597-598, 13: 190-191, 15: 254, & passim.
The obvious eclecticism dominant in all four authors enjoys, without any important exception, a very positive judgement by Chinese critics and is even honoured by attributes like wei wo suo yong [63] or qu qi suo xu [64]. Nietzsche's writings with their essayistic mood were much more influential in literary than in academic circles that were anyway only in emergence as an independent realm at the time, and it is not by mere chance that the eclecticism focused on Nietzsche's work Zarathustra which in certain respect bears resemblance with the dialogical or even homiletic patterns of discourse in which traditional Chinese philosophical writing is transmitted, with its flavour of argumentum ad hominem and the strong relationship between teacher-master and student-disciple.

In a striking analogy to Western criticism of Nietzsche that often showed high esteem for his language but rejected his ideas as immoral and nihilist, Confucian orthodoxy had always appreciated Zhuang Zi’s and Lao Zi’s style, but not accepted their individualist and anarchist mood. In this respect there are two controversial opinions on the reasons for the fascination by Nietzsche with Chinese intellectuals: one saying only ideas already pre-shaped in Chinese tradition could be received so vigorously, the other saying Nietzsche was only interesting because China previously had not known similar concepts of individualism. Such models, whether applied to Nietzsche or to any other set of ideas and ideology, are certainly too simplistic since in the exchange of ideas any new idea always meets an existing intellectual environment, transforming it and in turn being transformed by it at the same time.

Among the concepts creating favourable conditions for Nietzsche’s impact in China was of course the traditional idea of the litteratus and scholar-official, closely linked to an overwhelming esteem of literature, as well as to a strong sense of social responsibility. It is within this frame that we might discern two pairs among the four authors: Lu Xun and Mao Dun mainly interested in the ideological content of (Western) literature, with the former attracted by the “overman’s” individualistic morality and the latter by the inherent concept of progress. On the other hand we find Guo Moruo and Yu Dafu who had an Romanticist obsession with the artist’s role within the likewise unquestioned need for social changes, with Yu Dafu stressing the archetypical tragic experience he saw embodied in the “overman” as well as in Nietzsche’s biography. After all, however, Lu Xun’s affinity to Nietzsche was the strongest. His discussion and use of Nietzsche, covering three decades, is even more comprehensive and goes deeper than with many later academic philosophers.

After the pioneering studies by Marián Gálík in the West and by Yue Daiyun in China, and after a number of scattered hints to previously unnoticed intercultural exchanges as early as in the 1930s and 1940s, quite a great number of articles on various aspects of Nietzsche’s reception in China have been pub-

lished, usually focusing on his importance for modern literature and with a first ideological breakthrough in the year of the centenary of Lu Xun’s birth, in 1981. The first book-length historical survey, however, is “Nietzsche in China” by Cheng Fang [65].47 One year before, Cheung Chiu-yee (Zhang Zhaoyi [66]) had published his bibliographical manual aiming at tracing any Chinese text published on Nietzsche up to the early 1990s and presents an extremely useful instrument for further research.48 Moreover, publication business in the PRC has known a true craze in matters of Nietzsche recently, resulting in, apart of wide range of selections, two competing three-volume editions of his selected works49 that even gave way to a public controversy not on Nietzsche’s work, but on copyright issues that ended with a lawsuit50 and almost equals the style of conflict-management in which the pre-war Nietzsche archives in Weimar excelled.51

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51 For details and documents see D. M. Hoffmann, Zur Geschichte des Nietzsche-Archivs (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1991).