

ON NIETZSCHE AND MODERN CHINESE LITERATURE

FROM LU XUN (1881-1936)
TO GAO XINGJIAN (B. 1940)

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BORN IN CHINA in 1940, Gao Xingjian tells in his novel *One Man's Bible* (*Yigeren de shengjing*, 1999)¹ that as a youngster he was aware and fearful of his self being snuffed out by what he was being taught to say and think at school. However, by keeping a diary he continued to articulate his own thoughts and allowed his imagination to wander freely, as he had done since a young child. His creative impulses began to surge at university where he majored in French literature, but this was precisely when Mao Zedong unleashed the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976) in China. In this period the literature of the outside world was banned as well as all past Chinese literature. Literature was considered subversive because its ambiguity challenged the uniformity in thinking demanded of the people in Mao's new society. Writers were persecuted, and their writings held as evidence against them. There were strict guidelines for literature. Poetry had to sing the praises of the new society, and the characters in plays and fiction had to be unambiguously either good or bad. Readers were required to model themselves after the good characters and to report to the authorities any indications of incorrect thinking and behaviour both in others as well as in themselves. In other words, literature was recruited to politics. At the height of the Cultural Revolution Gao Xingjian burned all of his diaries and manuscripts rather than face the consequences of having them found.

It was not until after Mao's death in 1976, and the end of the Cultural Revolution, that Gao Xingjian began to see his writings published for the first time. However, in the 1980s, even while carefully

exercising self-censorship, his works were banned and he was singled out for attack by the authorities. During the campaign to stamp out the spiritual pollution of 'decadent Western literature', 1983-4, his play *Bus Stop* (Chezhan, 1983) was closed down and he was banned from publishing. He fled Beijing for five months in 1983 on learning that he was to be sent to a prison farm, returning only after a change in the top political echelons made it safe for him to do so. Those five months of enforced solitude, living on the fringes of Chinese civilisation, are the substance of a novel that he began writing in 1982 in Beijing: that novel was *Soul Mountain* (Lingshan, 1990). In 1984 his fiction and plays began to reappear in publications, but he again encountered problems with the staging of his plays.

The opportunity for him to travel to Europe arose, and in late 1987 he left Beijing with a few clothes and his manuscript of *Soul Mountain*, and by the end of the year he had taken up residence in Paris. Because of his commitment to literature, he had fled, exiled himself, in order to be able to freely articulate his artistic sensibilities. For him, the expression of his creative self, as described in *One Man's Bible*, was an intense biological drive.

A decade later, 1997, Gao Xingjian became a French citizen, and it was as a French citizen that he was proclaimed Nobel Laureate for Literature. As he read his Nobel Lecture, 'The Case for Literature' (Wenxue de liyou) on 10 December 2000 it was simultaneously available on the web site of the Swedish Academy in Chinese, Swedish, French and English. He was aware that he was addressing a world audience as he spoke on what it meant for him to be a writer living in the modern world and the sort of literature that he was committed to writing. The main points of his lecture are summarised in the following paragraphs.

The writer is an ordinary person who is probably more sensitive and therefore more frail; he does not speak on behalf of others and is not the embodiment of righteousness, but speaks with the frail voice of the individual. Talking to oneself is the starting point of literature and using language to communicate these ideas to another is second. Feelings and thoughts articulated in the written language constitute literature.

While in the writing of a work there is no thought of utility or even publication, there is a perceived compulsion to write because of the consolation and the reward derived from the pleasure of writing. Literature is inherently the affirmation of the writer's self and this is

validated in the process of writing. Literature is born of the writer's need for self-fulfilment and any impact on society comes about after the completion of the work. This is not something determined by the writer. Many great works were not published until after the deaths of their authors. If the authors had not achieved self-fulfilment in writing how could they have continued writing? As in the case of Shakespeare, little is known of the lives of the geniuses who wrote China's great novels *Journey to the West*, *Water Margin*, *Jin Ping Mei* and *Dream of Red Mansions*. In more recent times there is Kafka 'who had pioneered modern fiction' and Pessoa 'the most profound poet of the twentieth century', who wrote regardless of the fact that they were not acknowledged in their lifetimes. Their writing was not to reform the world.

Language is the crystallisation of human civilisation. It penetrates human perceptions and links the perceiver to his own understanding of the world. The written language allows communication between individuals, even from different races and from different times. However, in the case of literature, because of its timeless spiritual value, there is a shared present time in the processes both of the writing and the reading of it: hence temporal boundaries are transcended. Literature also transcends national boundaries. Through translation it transcends languages as well as culturally specific differences 'to make profound revelations about the universality of human nature'. The writer living in present times receives many cultural influences, and to emphasise cultural features is of dubious relevance to literature, unless one is thinking of promoting tourism.

Literature transcends theories or speculations about life. It is an observation on the dilemmas of human existence, and for it 'nothing is taboo'. Restrictions have been imposed on literature by politics, society, ethics and customs. However, literature is 'neither an embellishment for authority or a socially fashionable item'. The only criterion for literature is its aesthetic quality, and this is closely connected to human emotions. Aesthetic judgements will naturally vary from individual to individual, but even subjective aesthetic judgements have recognised standards. The capacity for critical appreciation is nurtured by the reading of literature, and this allows the reader also to experience the poetic feeling and the beauty, the sublime and the ridiculous, the sorrow and the absurdity, and the humour and the irony that permeate a literary work.

Poetic feelings do not simply derive from the expression of the emotions and there are various levels of emotional expression. To reach the higher levels requires cold detachment, because poetry lies in the distanced gaze. If this gaze is used to examine both the characters of the book and the author, as the author's third eye, that strives to be as neutral as possible, then even disasters and the refuse of the human world are worthy of scrutiny. As feelings of pain, hatred and abhorrence are aroused there also comes a concern and love for life. An aesthetics based on human emotions does not become dated despite the changing fashions in literature and art. Literary evaluations that fluctuate like the fashions are based on the notion of whatever is new being good, and the book market is not exempt from this mechanism in general market movements. However, if market movements determine the writer's aesthetic judgement, it signifies the suicide of literature.

In present times there is the need for 'cold literature', or literature that has recovered the innate character of literature. Cold literature exists simply because humankind seeks a purely spiritual activity beyond the gratification of material desires. In the past this sort of literature had mainly to fight against oppressive political and social forces, but writers today have to fight against the subversive commercial values of consumerist society. However, a writer devoted to cold literature is willing to endure loneliness but will find it difficult to make a living. Cao Xueqin and Kafka did not live to see their works published, did not become celebrities in their lifetimes, and lived at the margins of society. They wrote simply for the pleasure they derived from writing.

Literature does not have a duty to serve the masses. 'Once literature is contrived as the hymn of the nation, the flag of the race, the mouth-piece of a political party or the voice of a class or a group, it can be employed as a mighty and all-engulfing tool of propaganda. However, such literature loses what is inherent in literature, ceases to be literature, and becomes a substitute for power and profit'. Literature is not concerned with politics but is purely a matter of the individual. 'It is the gratification of the intellect together with an observation, a review of what has been experienced, reminiscences and feelings or the portrayal of a state of mind. The writer is nothing more than someone speaking or writing and whether he is listened to or read is for others to choose. The writer is not a hero acting on orders from the people nor

is he worthy of worship as an idol and certainly he is not a criminal or enemy of the people. He is at times victimised along with his writings simply because of others' needs. When the authorities need to manufacture a few enemies to divert other people's attention, writers become sacrifices, and worse still writers who have been duped actually think it is a great honour to be sacrificed'.

In his Nobel Lecture, Gao Xingjian prefaces his thoughts on literature with a harsh indictment of Nietzsche: 'A person cannot be God, certainly not replace God, and rule the world as a Superman; he will only succeed in creating more chaos and make a greater mess of the world. In the century after Nietzsche man-made disasters left the blackest records in the history of humankind. Supermen of all types called leader of the people, head of the nation and commander of the race did not balk at resorting to various violent means in perpetrating crimes that in no way resemble the ravings of a very egotistic philosopher'. Without elaborating further, he states that he does not want to waste his talk on literature by talking about politics and history, nevertheless his dislike for Nietzsche is unambiguously stated. Gao has in mind the likes of Hitler and Mao Zedong whose manipulation of the thinking and behaviour of whole populations for their own political objectives he alludes to in *One Man's Bible*.

During the 1980s most of Nietzsche's writings in Chinese translation were published in Hong Kong and surreptitiously, but avidly, read by Chinese intellectuals. Nietzsche's writings extolling the individual were seen as a palliative and a remedy for the individual's self that had virtually atrophied during the Cultural Revolution. Gao Xingjian read all of these translations as soon as they were published. For him parts of Nietzsche's writings were brilliant, but he found the idea of Nietzsche's Superman profoundly disturbing.

The bloating of the self, in Gao's view, deprives the individual of the capacity to critically assess the self and results in the individual losing control of the self. In *One Man's Bible* he deals with this issue on a number of levels. Not taking the standpoint of a victim of the Cultural Revolution, he subjects his own psychology and behaviour to clinical scrutiny. In that period, on several occasions he had succumbed to the perception of himself as hero and, fired by righteous indignation, lost control of his self. Instead, those regarding him as their hero and saviour controlled his actions, and he found himself doing precisely what they expected or hoped he would do. Fear and

terror of being branded the enemy also drove him to a sham existence of deception in order to retain his position within the workplace collective that controlled every aspect of his life, and even whether he was to live or not. His egoism, temerity and glib tongue saw him repeatedly pushed forward as leader and he was manipulated unmercifully by his political masters as well as the collective.

The notion of literature presented by Gao Xingjian in his Nobel Lecture is not at odds with that of the writer Lu Xun (1881-1936). This is implicitly substantiated by Gao Xingjian's comments on Lu Xun in his collection of essays *Without Isms* (Meiyou zhuyi, 1996) and in his novel *Soul Mountain*. Born four years after Lu Xun's death and belonging to another era, Gao Xingjian had a literary aesthetics that was similar to Lu Xun's. Both writers had been nurtured by extensive readings in traditional Chinese literature, then as young adults both had read European authors, intensively and extensively. In their writings they consciously challenged the Chinese language they wrote in and the existing literary forms (Chinese and Western) they knew of, making these serve their quest for creative fulfilment. Lu Xun and Gao Xingjian stand in the forefront of their historical times as bold innovators in their literary creations. However, whereas Gao Xingjian is highly critical of Nietzsche, this was not the case with Lu Xun. Moreover, Lu Xun, dubbed by his contemporaries as 'China's Nietzsche', together with a younger cohort of writers, had played a pivotal role in the founding of China's modern literature at the height of the first Nietzsche fever in China.

Why then was Lu Xun dubbed 'China's Nietzsche'? Why did a Nietzsche fever break out in China at the end of World War I, and how did Nietzsche prepare the soil out of which China's modern literature would grow? The answers will become clear in the following outline of the complex connections between Nietzsche and China that are closely tied to the enigmatic figure of Lu Xun and, on his death, his appropriation by Mao Zedong to the communist cause. As to why Gao Xingjian and Lu Xun view Nietzsche in diametrically different ways was due simply to the accessibility of Nietzsche's writings either in the original or in translation, and what writings were available about Nietzsche. What should be noted, however, is that whereas Gao Xingjian's assessment of Nietzsche is informed by his reading of virtually the whole corpus of Nietzsche's writings, Lu Xun had only read a few chapters of Nietzsche's *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*.

In the West, Nietzsche was blamed for the two World Wars, and Nietzsche studies ground to a halt until recent decades. In any case there was, and still is, little research on the important impact of Nietzsche in China.¹ In China, Nietzsche promoted the idea of the strong individual who was able to challenge the authority of tradition and this was embraced by young Chinese for a short time from about 1915 into the mid-1920s. China's impotence as a nation and Japan's escalating territorial encroachments made idealistic youth realise that political unity and group discipline and action were necessary to 'save the nation'. In 1921 the Chinese Communist Party was established, and for patriotic reasons many individuals unwittingly surrendered their autonomy of thought and action to manipulation by the Chinese Communist Party. Nietzsche abhorred the masses and in the 1930s the ruling Nationalist Government had adopted elements of his writings to support its fascist suppression and extermination of communists. Nietzsche therefore was anathema to the Chinese Communist Party. As Lu Xun had been accorded hero status by Mao Zedong, academic researchers were obliged to respond by dissociating Lu Xun from Nietzsche.

Because of these complications and historical distortions, the topic of Nietzsche and China has not been afforded the attention it deserves. However, the publication of University of Queensland scholar Chiu-yee Cheung's *Lu Xun: The Chinese 'Gentle' Nietzsche* (2001) opens the way for research in many new directions. Cheung's book is based on two decades of sifting through Chinese, Japanese and German archival materials and successfully isolates the historical and textual connections between Lu Xun and Nietzsche, as well as teasing out the reasons underlying the intense debates on the topic. This work, together with Cheung's other publications in the field, provides a rich resource for further investigations on Nietzsche and Chinese literature as well as on many related issues in cross-cultural influences.

From 1915 the names Nietzsche and Zarathustra, and catchwords such as 'God is dead', 're-evaluation of values', 'slave morality', 'master morality', and the 'Superman' came to be very much in vogue in China. Young Chinese intellectuals appropriated the vocabulary of Nietzsche to attack the traditional Confucian-based culture that they blamed for China's failure in the modern industrialized world. Nietzsche was also invoked by Chinese youth to challenge the authority of the older generation that they saw as having failed as national leaders

and, intoxicated with a mere smattering of Nietzsche, they saw themselves cast in the heroic role of saviours of the nation. The publication of translations of the Prologue and some chapters of Nietzsche's *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* followed soon after. Of significance was the immense appeal of *Zarathustra* for Chinese writers, largely because of the resonances found in this work to ancient Daoist texts. Whereas Confucian texts provided guidelines for ethical and moral conduct, Daoist texts with their emphasis on the freedom of the untrammelled self have inspired writers for generations. In past times, Chinese writers would 'recluse' themselves (in remote mountain retreats or monasteries or even in their own homes) away from family, social and political ties, in order to enjoy the freedom of allowing their creative imagination to soar like the great roc in the *Zhuangzi*.

The first wave of Nietzsche fever in China was carried by the founders of China's modern literature, and was inextricably bound to politics. Young writers of the time firmly believed that through their writings they would be able to 'save' China. In other words, literature was to have a political function. This view of literature can only be understood in the context of the times, and the feelings of impotence and frustration experienced by Chinese youth as they saw their nation repeatedly humiliated. The fledgling Republic of China, established in 1912, continued to face the constant threat of territorial encroachments by imperialist capitalism backed by military might. Tensions in Europe leading to the outbreak of World War I saw the retreat of European military forces from China, and the Japanese economic and military presence in China rapidly escalated. China had joined the Allies in a war seen as a struggle for democracy against military might but at the Paris Peace Conference in 1919 China's interests were sidelined. Secret agreements between Great Britain, Italy, France and Japan had already decided that German concessions in China were to be ceded to Japan. In China, this news led to intense outpourings of patriotic anger at this sell-out by the so-called democratic nations of the world, and high school and university students marched through Beijing on 4 May 1919 to demand that the government not sign the Paris Peace Treaty. They were violently disbanded by police with bayonets.'

The student demonstrations continued for some months and nurtured a hard core of activists who subsequently turned to communism to solve China's problems in the context of the modern world.

It was this historical context that gave birth to China's modern literature. Chinese historians later referred to this period of intellectual foment as the May Fourth period, dating it from Japan's infamous 'Twenty-One Demands' on China in 1915 to the establishment of the Chinese Communist Party in 1921. Later designated as May Fourth literature, China's 'new' literature was established at the height of the Nietzsche fever in China. Inspired by Nietzsche's *Zarathustra*, because of resonances in traditional Chinese literature and because it was seen as modern and Western, for roughly a decade China's new literature had an aesthetics characterised by freedom of artistic expression and flights of the imagination. The founders of this new literature were well read in Chinese literature but at the same time were also informed by their readings of European literature and of the writings of Japanese writers and literary critics who served as the interpreters of European literary aesthetics. Although a vast storehouse of Chinese literature spanning many centuries existed, the theorising of literature did not begin to emerge until this period. In China, as in the rest of the world, from ancient times literary masterpieces were created in the absence of patterns or systems of literary theory. Traditionally, Chinese writers would often scatter their comments on literature in their essays and in the prefaces to their own writings or that of others.

In May 1918, a short story called 'Diary of a Madman' (Kuangren riji) by Lu Xun caused a sensation when it was published in the widely read avant-garde magazine *New Youth* (Xin qingnian). This was the first significant work of modern literature in the Chinese language, and Lu Xun overnight became *the* pre-eminent writer of the times and the hero of China's youth.

Lu Xun had a long association with Nietzsche, having arrived in 1902 in Japan where, immediately following Nietzsche's death in 1900, a Nietzsche fever had erupted amongst Japanese intellectuals. At that time, thousands of patriotic Chinese students were in Japan to learn about modern science and technology. There they mixed with Chinese anarchist and socialist revolutionaries who were engaged in offshore activities aimed at overthrowing the Manchu Chinese Government. Rather than for its intrinsic value, Western knowledge was sought for patriotic purposes. In addition to the intensive study of Japanese, Lu Xun took up studying English, then in 1904 when he enrolled at Sendai Medical College he resumed studies

in German that he had begun in China. In his spare time he also began working on various translation projects to extend his understanding of world history and science. These translations are now lost, but his translations of science fiction were published and include Jules Verne's *Journey to the Moon* (Yuejie lüxing, 1903) and *Journey to the Centre of the Earth* (Didi lüxing, 1906).

Lu Xun withdrew from medical studies in 1906. He had decided that saving China required the reform of the national psyche. It was highly likely that he had read 'The Writer as Cultural Critic' (1901) by Takayama Choguu ('Japan's Nietzsche'), for this was how he presented Nietzsche in two essays published in 1908: 'On the Extremities of Culture' (Wenhua pianzhi lun) and 'On the Power of Mara Poetry' (Moluo shili shuo). It should be noted that Japan's Nietzsche fever was not based on translations of Nietzsche's writings, but on Japanese translations of European summaries and interpretations of Nietzsche's writings. Takayama Choguu presented Nietzsche's Superman not as a scholar or intellectual but as an inspired 'poet'. His thesis was that social change depended on writers like Nietzsche, Tolstoy and Ibsen coming forward as cultural critics.'

In 1907, after a failed attempt to establish a literary magazine, Lu Xun enrolled in a German language school in Tokyo but spent most of his time reading Russian and Japanese authors that he had begun purchasing on a massive scale. Before returning to China in 1909, with the help of his younger brother Zhou Zuoren, Lu Xun published a slim volume *Fiction from Foreign Countries* (Yuwai xiaoshuo ji, 1909) containing two stories by Andrejev and one by Garshin. However, on re-entering the reality of China he went into an acute state of denial, and absorbed himself in the study of ancient gravestones and the work of annotating anthologies of ancient poetry and fiction. His research on fiction later resulted in the first Chinese publication on the history of Chinese fiction, *A Brief History of Chinese Fiction* (Zhongguo xiaoshuo shilue; 1924). In other words, Lu Xun was a scholar, an academic, and a few years later for periods he lectured at Peking University and Xiamen University. He also continued to avidly collect and read foreign authors. In later years, his work as a literary translator would outstrip his creative writings. The twenty-volume *Collected Works of Lu Xun* (Lu Xun quanji, 1973) contains ten volumes of translations, mainly of fiction and aesthetics by Russian and Japanese writers.

Lu Xun had trained as a traditional scholar and had inherited a strong sense of responsibility for the welfare of society and nation. Endowed with a powerful intellect, an incisive mind and considerable artistic sensibilities, he wrote classical Chinese in the style of the poets of the Wei and Jin dynasties. Known as the Seven Worthies of the Bamboo Grove, the poets Ji Kang (224-263), Ruan Ji (210-263) and others of the third and fourth centuries were admired for the lucid, sparse, and highly powerful language of their writings. They were also famous for their Daoist leanings, their drinking, and their flamboyant flouting of social convention and political authority. This Wei-Jin style and spirit was to characterise Lu Xun's writings in both the classical and vernacular language. It is worth noting that Daoist resonances in Nietzsche's writings were detected as early as 1902 in Alexandre Ular's 'Lao-Tsé le nietzschéen', published in *La revue blanche*.⁴ Since the 1980s, systematic and rigorous comparative investigations have been carried out on this topic, notably by comparative philosophy scholars such as Roger Ames, David Hall, and Graham Parkes of the University of Hawaii, and Chen Guying of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences in Beijing.

China's impotence in dealing with the modern world also brought the vernacular language movement to a head. The movement had begun around the beginning of the twentieth century, and was closely associated with reform-propaganda writings. However, during the May Fourth period, Chinese youth declared that the classical language was unfit for modern life. Lu Xun, in his late thirties, wrote 'Diary of a Madman' and other short stories in the vernacular language to support this movement. A cohort of younger writers, including Mao Dun (1892-1978), Guo Moruo (1892-1978), Yu Dafu (1896-1945), and Tian Han (1898-1968) also emerged to consolidate the foundations of China's modern literature, through their creative writings and the literary journals they edited and published. These writers, too, were translators of Japanese and European literature and, significantly, also translators of Nietzsche. The mushrooming of a substantial body of modern writings made it possible for the vernacular language to be used as the basis for written Chinese, and from 1921 the vernacular language was progressively brought into the school education system.

Masterly embedded in fiction, 'Diary of a Madman' contained a scathing indictment of China's Confucian-based culture. The mad-

man who suffers from an acute persecution complex, the fear of being eaten by those around him, sees the words 'eat people' between the lines of the Confucian Classics. Lu Xun's people-eating metaphor powerfully endorsed the demands of young intellectuals of the time to overthrow what was deemed a moribund culture that shackled the individual and held Chinese youth hostage to the past. What defined 'Diary of a Madman' as 'modern' was that it was a work created from a broad knowledge of Chinese and foreign writings, it was concerned with contemporary life, and it was written in contemporary vernacular Chinese. Lu Xun went on to publish in rapid succession numerous short stories that were subsequently re-printed in the two collections *Outcry* (Nahan; 15 stories 1922) and *Hesitation* (Panghuang; 11 stories 1926). The success of Lu Xun's powerful fiction lent considerable weight to all of his publications, and significantly to his translation from German of Nietzsche's 'Prologue to *Zarathustra*' (Chalatusitela de xuyan; *New Tide*, 2.5, September 1920) which added fuel to the Nietzsche fever. A dynamic literary publications infrastructure emerged around this time, and writing as a profession (both popular and socially committed literature) was suddenly launched.

The number of Nietzsche publications in Chinese provides an indication of the extent to which Nietzsche was embedded in the Chinese psyche. Publications in Chinese specifically on Nietzsche appeared for the first time in 1904; these were four articles generally believed to have been written by Wang Guowei (1877-1927) who had written extensively on Schopenhauer. Nietzsche was also mentioned in various articles, including the two mentioned above by Lu Xun in 1908. However, in the period 1915-1929 a total of thirty-nine articles on various aspects of Nietzsche and his philosophy were published. Furthermore, in this same period, translations of Nietzsche were also published, but only from the one work *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. In 1919, Mao Dun's translations from the English, 'Of the New Idol' (Xin ouxiang) and 'Of the Flies of the Market Place' (Shichang zhiying) were both published in *Liberation and Reconstruction* (Jiefang yu gaizao). In August 1920 the literary journal *People's Tocsin* (Minduo) ran a special issue on Nietzsche that was reprinted several times, and also contained Zhang Shudan's translation of 'Prologue to *Zarathustra*'. In 1923, Guo Moruo's translation from German of Part 1 to Part 2, Ch. 4 of *Zarathustra* was published in *Creation Weekly* (Chuangzao zhoubao) with the title 'Zarathustra's Lion Roars' (Chalatusiqula zhi

shizi xiao). Lin Yutang's translation from English 'Of Passing By' was published in 1928.⁷

The fiction and poetry that emerged in the period made frequent reference to Nietzsche, and young writers, inspired by Nietzsche's Superman, saw themselves as heroes whose writings would somehow bring about the reform of Chinese society. However, even while the older Lu Xun experienced ecstasy, intoxication, and release through his writings, he began to agonise over his political responsibility as an intellectual. While he knew that he himself would have to abandon literature, he nevertheless continued to support and nurture young writers by reading their works and also editing literary magazines such as *Threads of Talk* (Yüsi, launched 1924) and *Wilderness* (Mangyuan, launched 1925). He also continued to encourage the growth of China's fledgling modern literature through his own translations and also through recruiting the help of his brother Zhou Zuoren. *Collected Translations of Modern Fiction* (Xiandai xiaoshuo yicong, 1922) contained works by Russian writers Andreyev, Chekov and Artyshtbashev as well as writers from Bulgaria and Finland. *Collection of Modern Japanese Fiction* (Xiandai Riben xiaoshuoji, 1923) included short stories by Natsume Soseki (1867-1917), Mori Oogai (1860-1922), Arishima Takeo (1878-1923), Eguchi Kan (1887-1975), Kikuchi Kan (1888-1948) and Akutagawa Ryunosuke (1892-1927). These eminent Japanese writers all had a thorough knowledge of European literature, and were well known to the Chinese literary world. In 1921 Lu Xun also published Artshybashev's *Worker Shevryov*.

The Japanese critic Kuriyagawa Hakuson (1880-1923), a dedicated scholar of European literature and philosophy who published prolifically on literature, art and English poetry, died in the Great Kanto Earthquake of 1923. His almost completed manuscript *Symbols of Suffering* (Kumon no shocho) was published posthumously in the following year, 1924. Lu Xun's translation of the work into Chinese, published later in the same year, was widely read and went through several re-printings. Lu Xun's introduction notes that Kuriyagawa was a writer of individual insights and profound thinking on literature, and he hoped that this great work would rejuvenate the 'withered spirit' of China. *Symbols of Suffering*, a critique of modern life and its inroads on the individual, bore strong similarities to Nietzsche's *Zarathustra*. Kuriyagawa had fused elements of Nietzsche, Freud, Jung, Bergson,

Schopenhauer and other European writers to construct his own theory of literary creation.

Lu Xun's decision to translate this work was an endorsement of Kuriyagawa's thinking on literature, and almost identical metaphors and thoughts are scattered throughout Lu Xun's essays, letters and diaries. For Lu Xun, to translate *Symbols of Suffering* was a convenient way of presenting his own views on literature, life and the creative process. Lu Xun did not write any sustained work on literature but the thrust of Kuriyagawa's *Symbols of Suffering*, which strikingly resembles Nietzsche's *Zarathustra* in spirit, is reflected in the writings not just of Lu Xun, but of other significant writers of the time."

Kuriyagawa argues that life loses its basic meaning if there is no conflict in peoples' lives; it is because of suffering and conflict that there is living. Conflict is not experienced by 'obedient sheep-like followers' who submit to authority and are bound by traditional practice, or by the 'mediocre who are driven by material desire and forget their total existence as human beings'. The basis of human existence is a wildly gushing life-energy. This life-energy, he maintains, is to be found in Bergson's theory of creative evolution, Schopenhauer's theory of the will, Nietzsche's theory of innate potential and theory of the Superman, Carpenter's eternal and indestructible creative cosmic self, and the theory of impulses in Russell's *Principles of Social Reconstruction*. When this life-energy is contained in a particular person and expresses itself through this person, it leaps about as this person's individuality. The expression of one's life-energy is the expression of one's individuality, and the expression of one's individuality is creative life. If one's individuality is denied, abandoned, or suppressed, then people will be 'like clay statues', exact replicas, and if people do not strive to develop their individuality there will be no cultural life. When this life-energy manifests itself as the thinking of the philosopher or as the emotional fervour of the poet, it will arouse feelings and emotions that will deeply move others. This kind of life-energy transcends thought of advantage or disadvantage, judgement of good or evil, and is not constrained by tradition.

However, the struggle for existence has caused people to discard a 'human life' of individuality. People are slaves to law and tradition even before they are turned into machines or weapons of war, or into the guardians of law or tradition. There are young men in banks and companies who are like 'well-dressed calculating machines'. People

are like a horse pulling a cart. The horse may think it is pulling the cart but it is in fact the cart that controls the horse. It is the same with the rickshaw man thinking he is good at his work; he is the same as the horse, but does not realise this. People are numbed by their own slavish lives. When one is moved only by external demands and lives a compromising and submissive life, one forgets the nobility of expressing one's individuality and simply repeats one's past life like an animal. People who do not strive to develop their life-energy but allow tradition to imprison them are duplicating what earlier people have already done and are, in this sense, animals. Kuriyagawa's *Symbols of Suffering* presents an accurate description of the atrophied lives of the characters that populate much of May Fourth fiction. Runtu, Lü Weifu, Xianglin Sao, Kong Yi Ji and of course Ah Q, memorable characters in Lu Xun's short stories, originally possessed that life-energy of which Kuriyagawa speaks. However, they are gradually robbed of this life-energy by the harsh reality of the times and by decaying traditional practices.

In the following year, Lu Xun published his translation of Kuriyagawa's *Out of the Ivory Tower* (Zoge no to o idete, 1925). In translating this work, Lu Xun acknowledged that he had no choice but to leave the ivory tower of literature. His decision to abandon his creative life is documented in a series of twenty-three prose poems written between 15 September 1924 and 10 April 1926. These were first published in various magazines, and then as a collection called *Wild Grass* (Yecao, 1927). These poems, infused with the feel of *Zarathustra* and Kuriyagawa's life-energy, are rich with powerful imagery, dual images and hidden metaphors that are the outpourings of an anguished soul. In form these poems represented a complete break with traditional poetic practice, and Lu Xun named them 'prose-poetry'. These poems pulsate with intense emotions and evoke stark visual images. In isolation, each of the poems palpably resonates with aural and visual beauty and yet conveys a sense of something intangible, like the frozen flames in 'Dead Fire' (Si huo, 23 April 1925). However, examined chronologically, together with the Preface (1927) and in the context of the many essays Lu Xun wrote during that period, it becomes clear that he had written these poems as he agonised over his decision to allow his creative self to suicide. He did not want his 'wild grass', his past creative writings, to be contaminated by the political rhetoric that would direct his future writing. Yet while writ-

ing these poems he successfully concealed that decision from his contemporaries.

Lu Xun had committed his life to his nation long ago, while a student in Japan. 'I offer my blood to the Yellow Emperor' is the last line of the poem 'Inscribing My Own Photograph' (Ziti xiaoxiang, 1903) that he wrote on a portrait-photograph, taken after he had (by cutting off his queue) declared his support for the nationalist revolution. Twenty years later, as the communist revolution approached, Lu Xun knew what this would signify for writers. He wrote several essays on the issue of literature and politics, the most important of which is 'On the Diverging Paths of Literature and Politics' (Wenxue yu zhengzhi de qitu, 1927). In this he described the Russian writers Sobol and Yesenin as having smashed themselves to death on the epitaph of the revolutionary reality that they themselves had promoted.¹⁰

In the poems of *Wild Grass*, Lu Xun uses compelling images to depict the suicide of his creative self. 'Revenge II' (Fuchou II, 20 December 1924) tells of Christ refusing to take myrrh to deaden the pain at the crucifixion, but ends with the comment that those who would kill the son of man reeked more of blood than those who would kill the Son of God. 'The Epitaph' (Mujiewen, 27 June 1925) tells of a corpse that had gouged out its heart to see how it would taste. 'After Dying' (Si hou, 12 July 1925) describes the perceptions of a corpse with its sensory system still intact as it is being interred. After the publication of *Wild Grass*, Lu Xun fell silent about Nietzsche, although he continued to encourage Fancheng (Xu Shiquan; 1909-2000) with his translations of Nietzsche's *Ecce Homo* and *Daybreak* by finding him publishers.¹¹ However, to console himself, he returned to writing classical poetry, a genre he had abandoned in 1909.¹²

Thereafter, Lu Xun's main contribution to literature was through his translations, mainly of Russian literature. When he died of tuberculosis in 1936 at the age of fifty-five, he was pushing himself to complete his translation of Gogol's *Dead Souls* (Si hunling). Mao Zedong promptly appropriated the dead writer to the communist cause by declaring that Lu Xun's work on the cultural front equalled his own work on the military front. A poem in the classical form by Lu Xun, 'Mocking Myself' (Zichao, 1933), contained the lines: 'Eyes resolute I face a thousand pointing fingers/ Head bowed I serve as an ox for the children'. During the Cultural Revolution this couplet adorned educational and cultural institutions to exhort the masses to sacrifice

themselves to the will of the Party, that is, Mao Zedong. It was with the exception of Lu Xun's writings (sacrosanct because Mao had stamped his approval in 1936) that most of China's literary heritage, including May Fourth writings, progressively became forbidden reading. However, before the Cultural Revolution was unleashed, Gao Xingjian was able to continue to read books in French, and he systematically read, a shelf at a time, virtually all the library holdings of the Foreign Languages Institute, and later his workplace. Because of his voracious reading habits since childhood, by the outbreak of the Cultural Revolution he had already added a substantial knowledge of European literature and aesthetics to his very solid grounding in Chinese literature.

Gao Xingjian's compulsive need for literary expression did not abate during the years of the Cultural Revolution. This meant that he had to write in secret and not share his writings with anyone for almost twenty years. He wrote for his own enjoyment and pleasure, and he was his own critic. By writing he was able to remind himself that he was still a human being with his own perceptions, feelings and thoughts. When Mao Zedong reigned supreme and was rigorously creating 'new' people Gao Xingjian had no choice but to burn all of his writings. When he finally began to see his first work published in 1980, he already had twenty years of serious writing practice, although nothing on paper to prove it.

The extent of Gao's unique background and serious commitment to literature projected him to prominence as a leader of the avant-garde in drama and fiction as soon as Mao died and the Cultural Revolution abruptly ended in 1976. Despite the political uncertainties of the time, Gao spoke at conferences on modern writers including Marcel Proust (1871-1922), André Gide (1869-1951), Henri Michaux (1899-1984) and Francis Ponge (1898-1988). In 1980 he published two essays in the first issue of the Wuhan-based *Studies on Foreign Literature*: 'The Agony of Postmodernist French Literature' (Faguo houxiandai wenxue de tongku) and 'Prévert: French Modernist People's Poet' (Faguo xiandai pai renmin shiren Pulieweier). In 1984 his translation of Jacques Prévert's *Paroles* appeared in *Modern Poetry from Abroad* (Waiguo xiandai shi), a special volume published by the People's Publishing House in Beijing; this volume also contained his essays on Beckett, Antonin Artaud, Sartre, Camus, and the two Polish playwrights Jerzy Grotowski and Tadeusz

Kantor. In 1985 the People's Publishing House in Beijing also included his translation of Eugene Ionesco's *La Cantatrice chauve* in *Collection of Absurdist Plays* (Huangdanpai xiju ji).

Gao was aged forty when his first book *A Preliminary Discussion on the Art of Modern Fiction* (Xiandai xiaoshuo jiqiao chutan) was published in 1981 by the Guangzhou-based Huacheng Publishing House. In it he argued that the sensitivities of readers were changed dramatically by the advent of the cinema, and that the techniques of writing fiction had therefore to be adapted to suit the modern age. He also had the temerity to suggest that literature should not be used for preaching. He claimed that model good and bad characters were unlike real people and that what was important in the great works of fiction of the world was the ambivalence in the psychological make-up of the characters. For the established literary authorities, this was a blatant attack on literary conventions established by Mao Zedong in 1942 and rigidly enforced during the Cultural Revolution. However, for intelligent readers, Gao Xingjian's stand was welcome, and there were few academics (of any discipline) and no university students who did not read this work at the time. Nevertheless, when the book was reprinted in the following year, 1982, it was banned for promoting the 'decadent modernism' of Western capitalist literature.

While they belonged to different historical eras and were separated by over half of a century, for both Lu Xun and Gao Xingjian literature meant precisely the same thing. However, whereas Lu Xun's commitment was to nation, Gao's was and is unambiguously and resoundingly to literature.

In China where obedience to the Chinese Communist Party was demanded, Nietzsche's writings were banned because they promoted individualism. In the same period, in the West, Nietzsche's writings were blamed for having inspired the rise of German militarism that had brought about two World Wars, and interest in Nietzsche virtually came to a standstill. It was not until the 1980s that there was a sudden resurgence of Nietzsche studies. Stauth and Turner, for example, noted the continuing relevance and importance of the issues raised by Nietzsche for modern thought and, by examining the writings of Weber, Freud, Adorno and Foucault they attempted 'to restore the presence of Nietzsche in the origins and development of contemporary social theory.'¹ Motivated by different factors and substantively different, this resurgence of academic interest in Nietzsche in the West was paralleled in the 1980s by a second wave

of Nietzsche fever in Chinese publications. In the period 1980-1992, there were 260 publications about Nietzsche and 42 translations of Nietzsche's works into Chinese, after which there was a dramatic decline.¹⁴ In China, as in the May Fourth period, Nietzsche was again used to liberate the individual from the shackles of tradition, but in this case it was the shackles of the more recent tradition that had been imposed by Mao Zedong.

However, Gao Xingjian continued to single out Nietzsche for condemnation. In 'Literature as Testimony: the Search for Truth' (Wenxue de jianzheng: Zhenshi de zuiqiu, 2001) presented at the Nobel Centenary Symposium, he states that during the twentieth century many among the intellectual elite (including those in China) had succumbed to madness. 'It was as if with the death of God, everyone had become the saviour of the world and wanted either to annihilate the obsolete world or establish a brand new utopia'. Gao argued that self-love was inherent in all human beings and that its control depended on one's ability to observe the self. This ability to observe the self depended neither on intelligence nor learning, because tyrants and madmen generally did not have low intelligence quotients. It was the 'unchecked bloating of the self' that was problematical, for it distorted the individual's assessment of the external world. Gao had experienced the intoxicating and distorting effect of heroic sentiments on himself during the Cultural Revolution, when he was inexorably drawn into politics, as described in the pages of his novel *One Man's Bible*. However since leaving China he has had the option of being the frail individual, the writer, taking orders only from himself as dictator over himself.

It was with a sense of the heroic that Lu Xun had made the decision to allow his creative self to suicide. He was certainly aware that many young people regarded him as a hero and a revolutionary and this filled him with anxiety and led him to ask whether he had to allow himself to be 'clapped to death' like the revolutionary martyr Qiu Jin (1875-1907).¹⁵ Under the intoxicating influence of heroic sentiments inspired by Nietzsche's Zarathustra, Lu Xun and other May Fourth writers had wedded China's modern literature to politics. In Gao Xingjian's view it was a tragedy for Chinese literature that 'the writer Lu Xun was crushed to death by the politician Lu Xun'.¹⁶

Notes

- 1 Taipei: Lianjing Publishing House.
- 2 Taipei: Lianjing Publishing House.
- 3 Marian Galik 'Nietzsche in China (1918-1925)', *Nachrichten der gesellschaft für natur- und volkerkunde ostasiens/Hamburg*, Zeitschrift für kultur und geschichte ost- und sudostasiens 110 (1971), was for many years the only work on the topic of Nietzsche and China. Nietzsche studies were taboo in the People's Republic of China until the situation began to change after Yue Dayun's path-breaking 'Nietzsche in China' (Nicaidai Zhongguo) was published in the *Peking University Journal* (Beijing daxue xuebao), 3 (1980), pp. 20-32. Yue's article, trans. Cathy Poon, was published in *The Journal of the Oriental Society of Australia*, 20 & 21 (1988-89), pp. 199-219. Since the 1980s, in the Western world there remain only a small number of research publications in the field. Mabel Lee's 'From Chuang-tzu to Nietzsche: On the Individualism of Lu Hsun', *The Journal of the Oriental Society of Australia*, 17 (1985), pp. 21-38, David Kelly's, 'The Highest Chinadom: Nietzsche and the Chinese Mind, 1907-1989', in Graham Parkes ed., *Nietzsche and Asian Thought* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1991), pp. 151-174, and Raoul David Findeisen, 'The Burden of Culture. Glimpses at the Literary Reception of Nietzsche in China', *Asian and African Studies*, 6 (Bratislava, 1997), pp. 76-91, each investigates specific aspects of Nietzsche's connections with China. Marian Galik's 'Nietzsche's Reception in China (1902-2000)', *Archiv orientální: Quarterly Journal of Asian and African Studies*, 70 (Praha, 2002), pp. 51-64, brilliantly sums up research in the field, including his own continuing research on Nietzsche's influence on May Fourth writers.

University of Queensland scholar Chiu-yeec Cheung has dedicated several decades of study to Lu Xun, Nietzsche, and Nietzsche's connections with China. His publications are too numerous to mention here but are listed in the bibliography of his recent book, *Lu Xun: the Chinese 'Gentle' Nietzsche* (Frankfurt, Berlin, Bern, New York, Oxford, Vienna: Peter Lang, 2001). This book and an earlier book, *Nietzsche in China, 1904-1992: An Annotated Bibliography* (Canberra: The Australian National University, Faculty of Asian Studies Monographs New Series, Number 19, 1992), are definitive studies on Lu Xun and Nietzsche's connections with China.

- 4 Chow Tse-tsung, *The May Fourth Movement: Intellectual Revolution in Modern China* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1960), remains the standard reference work on that movement.
- 5 Cheung (2001), pp. 23. For detailed discussions of Nietzsche and Japan, see Graham Parkes, 'The Early Reception of Nietzsche's Philosophy in Japan', in Parkes ed. (1991); and Chiu-yeec Cheung, 'Tracing the "Gentle Nietzsche" in Early Lu Xun', in Raoul D. Findeisen and Robert H. Gassmann (eds.), *Autumn Floods: Essays in Honour of Marian Galik* (Frankfurt, Berlin, Bern, New York, Oxford, Paris, Vienna: Peter Lang, 1998), pp. 13-34.
- 6 Cheung (1992), p. 131.
- 7 See Cheung (1992).

- 8 In this article, Lu Xun's works (dated in the text) are contained in *Collected Works of Lu Xun* (Lu Xun quan ju; 20 vols, Shanghai: Peoples Literature Publishing House, 1973).
- 9 Kuriyagawa Hakuson's *Symbols of Suffering* and Lu Xun's *Wild Grass* are discussed in detail in Mabel Lee's 'Suicide of the Creative Self: the Case of Lu Hsun', in A. R. Davis and A. D. Stefanowska (eds.) *Austrina. Essays in Commemoration of the 25th Anniversary of the Oriental Society of Australia* (Sydney: Oriental Society of Australia, 1982), pp. 140-167.
- 10 See *ibid*.
- 11 See Cheung (2001), p. 34.
- 12 See Mabel Lee, 'Solace for the Corpse With Its Heart Gouged Out: Lu Xun's Use of the Poetic Form', *Papers on Far Eastern History* (Canberra, 1982), pp. 145-174.
- 13 Georg Stauth and Bryan S. Turner, *Nietzsche's Dance* (Oxford and New York, Basil Blackwell, 1988), p. 209.
- 14 See Cheung (1992)
- 15 See 'Letters', in *Collected Works of Lu Xun*, Vol. 3, p. 433. See also Mabel Lee, 'Gao Xingjian's Dialogue with two Dead Poets from Shaoxing: Xu Wei and Lu Xun', in Raoul D. Findeisen and Robert H. Gassmann (eds.), (1998), pp. 401-414.
- 16 'Jottings from Paris' (Bali suihi, 1990), in Gao Xingjian, *Without Isms* (Meiyou zhuyi; Cosmos Books, Hong Kong, 1996), p. 27