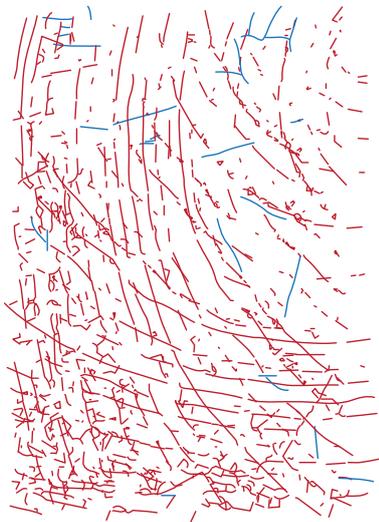


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About the author:

Iwo Amelung is the speaker of CRC 1095 *Resource Regimes and Discourses of Weakness* and a professor of Chinese Studies at Goethe University, Frankfurt am Main. His research focuses on late Imperial and Republican Chinese history with a special focus on Sino-Western interactions and history of science.

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Goethe-Universität Frankfurt am Main

Sonderforschungsbereich 1095 *Schwächediskurse und Ressourcenregime*

Postadresse: Postfach Juridicum 104 | 60054 Frankfurt

Besucheradresse: Gräpfstraße 78 | 60486 Frankfurt

Tel.: + 49 (0) 69 798 33952

www.sfb1095.net

info@sfb1095.net

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Translating Darwin into Chinese

Iwo Amelung (Frankfurt am Main)

Introduction

The first complete translation of *The Origin of Species* appeared in China in 1920 only, this is more than sixty years after its first publication in Britain (Darwin 1920).¹ This comparatively late publication and the all in all rather reserved reaction to it stands in a marked contrast to the excitement of the reception of the translation of Huxley's *Evolution and Ethics* as *Tianyanlun* 天演論 in 1898, which greatly contributed to the popularisation of the concept of evolution and more importantly ideas related to Darwin in China. This is amply demonstrated but becomes clearest from a famous passage of the autobiography of Hu Shi 胡適 (1891-1962), one of the foremost intellectuals of 20th century China:

Within a few years of its publication *Evolution and Ethics* gained widespread popularity throughout the country, and even became reading matter for middle-school students. Very few who read the book could understand [the significance of] Huxley's contribution to scientific and intellectual history. What they did understand was the significance of such phrases as “the strong are victorious and the weak perish” as they applied to international politics. After China had lost several wars and after the shameful signing of the Boxer-protocol in 1901, the formula of “The survival of the fittest”, indeed constituted a knock against the heads and provided a stimulation for a large number of people. Within a few years these ideas spread like a prairie fire, sitting ablaze the hearts and blood of many young people. Technical terms like “evolution” (*tianyan* 天演), and “natural selection” (*tianze* 天擇) became common in journalistic prose, and slogans on the lips of patriotic young heroes. There even was a large number of people, who used these terms as name for themselves or for their sons. Wasn't Chen Jiongmings 陳炯明 style name Jingcun 競存 “struggle for existence”? One of my classmates called himself Sun Jingcun 孫競存 also “struggle for existence” and another one was called Yang Tianze 楊天澤 “Natural Selection”. My own name also is a souvenir of this fad. One day I asked my second brother to select a style for me. My brother, who was just washing his face said: From the phrase “The survival of the fittest in the natural selection in the struggle for existence” just take the term “fittest” (*shì*), what do you think about this? I was very happy and used the two terms *Shizhi*—the name of my second brother being Shaozhi, and the one of my third brother being Zhenzhi” (Hu Shi 1998: pp. 68-9).

¹Parts of Ma Junwu's translation, had been published earlier, however.

This quotation clearly demonstrates a social-Darwinist reading of evolution, which at first seems surprising, given the fact, that it was based on a translation of Huxley's. It makes clear, however, to what extent Social Darwinist aspects dominated the diffusion and appropriation of Darwinian ideas. As we just have seen, this quite often – and with some justification – is related to the translation of Huxley by Yan Fu 嚴復 (1853-1921), the famous translator and popularizer. Of similar—if not even larger—importance, however was the contribution of Liang Qichao 梁啟超 (1873-1929), the towering intellectual figure of late Imperial and early Republican China. In this brief paper, I will attempt to go beyond the fixation on Yan Fu's Huxley translation and try to position the emergence of Social Darwinist thought in China within the greater context of the reception and appropriation of Western science and thought in late Imperial China. While there is no doubt, that social Darwinism and evolutionary thought was a widespread and very powerful discourse during the time in question, I intentionally entitled my contribution “translating”, since such an approach will allow me to focus on the two main protagonists Liang Qichao and Yan Fu, whose work to quite some extent would shape the discourse and whose appropriation of social Darwinism and evolution exerts a very powerful influence—up to the present day.

I.

In his book on China and Charles Darwin James Pusey has quite fittingly called Yan Fu's translation of Huxley's *Evolution and Ethics* “A good book for bad times” (Pusey 1983: p. 155). This serves as a timely reminder on the contingency of the reception and appropriation of Darwinist thought in late Imperial China and the need to contextualize it. Before we look into the question of the “bad times”, however, it is necessary to briefly recapitulate the question of how Western knowledge was diffused and appropriated in late Imperial China.

It is well known, that the defeat in the first Opium War and the successive “opening” of China, ushered China into a new phase of confrontation with Western Knowledge. This phase of dealing with Western knowledge was highly selective. Chinese reformers —or proto-reformers—who demanded the application of Western knowledge in order to strengthen China by no means were of the opinion that the whole range of knowledge should be appropriated in China. There was a widespread consensus, that China mainly needed applied knowledge, but that the core —the Chinese cultural, ideological and legal system—should remain untouched. This meant that the first phase of reception of Western knowledge mainly focussed on the natural sciences, technology and military knowledge. A further constraint was that for a considerable time protestant missionaries were one of the major avenues of information, since the number of Chinese travelling or sojourning abroad remained very limited until the last years of the 19th century, when a larger number of students went to study to Japan. Equally limited was the number of Chinese being able to read and speak English. Translation thus was a cumbersome process, mainly carried out by Westerners many of them missionaries and former missionaries. Already this situation made the diffusion of new knowledge complicated to say the least. In addition it needs to be noted, that there only

was a very limited number of journals and newspapers, which could help to popularize the new knowledge. Institutions in which new knowledge could be taught were almost not existing—there was a very limited number of schools, which were not considered attractive by the Chinese elites since they would not prepare for the civil examination system, which was considered as being the only avenue to status and wealth. We finally need to look briefly into the probably greatest problem, the complete lack of a technical terminology, needed to translate the complex notions employed in modern Western writing. Given this situation it is not particularly surprising that Darwin and his ideas only rarely show up in Chinese writing, one of the first instances being a Chinese translation of Lyell's *Elements of Geology* (Lyell 1873). Except for this there was a very limited number of articles at least briefly discussing Darwin and some of his ideas (Yang Haiyan 2013: p. 251). There were however, no academic institutions discussing the question, and the impact of Darwinian thought on the commercial book-market was minimal prior to 1895. Given these structural obstacles, it is all the more surprising, that Darwinist thought was able to rapidly catch the imagination of Chinese scholars and politicians since 1895. There have been different attempts to explain the situation. More recently this was done with the help of the “critical diffusionist” approach, applied by Lightman in his *Global Spencerism* (Lightman 2015), already earlier there have been researchers suggesting that during the 1880s and the 1890s Chinese scholars adhering to the rediscovered so-called “New-Text school” proposed a number of ideas, which can be interpreted as indigenous predecessors of evolutionary thought in China, which stood in a marked contrast to orthodox Chinese ideas and a cyclic worldview, which located the Chinese utopia in early Zhou 周 times. While this indeed may have informed some of the Chinese reformers of 1898 (Kwong 2001), I think however, in order to properly highlight local agency, it is necessary to take a closer look into the crucial personality of Yan Fu, the influential translator and propagandist of Darwinian thought, mentioned above. Yan Fu's father died early and his family was poor. For this reason he was not able to prepare for the civil examination system in early age. He instead attended one of China's first naval schools, where he learned English and later on from 1877 to 1879 studied at the Royal Navy College in Greenwich. Yan Fu thus was one of a limited number of Chinese scholars able to read English and actually started to read Darwin's book in the 1870s already. A little bit later he began to acquaint himself with Spencerian ideas as well (Schwartz 1964, Huang Kewu 2010, Hutters 2005: p. 48). Yan Fu himself, however relates, to what extent the success of his rendition of *Evolution and Ethics* as well as the strong impact of Darwinian thought in general was linked to the special conditions of his times. It actually was not the translation of Huxley but the publication of four political essays, which propelled Yan Fu and these new ideas to national prominence for the first time. Yan Fu himself describes his motivation the following way: “Toward the end of the *Jiawu* 甲午 [1894]year, just when affairs in the east were tottering, I suddenly felt that a number of things came to mind to which I simply had to give voice. At that point, the set of four essays that included “Yuan Qiang” 原強 (On the origins of Strength” and “Jiuwang luelun” 救亡略論 (On our salvation) were published in the newspaper *Zhibao* 直報. But my talents were so straitened and my spirits so weary that I

could not measure up to my original intention and the [four essays] that resulted are thus far from being adequate to the task at hand.²

This is a clear-cut statement. Although it certainly is possible, that the series of defeats (and the loss of territory), which China had suffered from the First Opium War on, to many Chinese scholars was traumatic, these defeats at least to some extent could be explained away by the complete newness of the situation: These adversaries had been unknown before and they used means and techniques unprecedented in Chinese history. This completely changed in 1894/95, when the war against Japan took place. Japan, traditionally was considered as the “smaller brother”, who had learnt everything from China. The second aspect, which was as important, was that China’s “tottering” made clear, that the attempt of modernization – to strengthen oneself (*zìqiáng* 自強) – as it was called at that time, had disastrously failed and this was all the more hurting because Japan’s modernization actually had started later than the one attempted in China. All of Yan Fu’s four essays are iconoclastic or even revolutionary. Although only one of the essays explicitly mentions Darwin, the impact of Darwin and Darwinian thought can be observed throughout all of the essays. Already the title of the first of these essays bespeaks of a highly dynamical worldview entering China together with evolutionary thought: Titled “On the urgency of Change in the World” (*Lun shibian zhi ji* 論世變之亟), Yan Fu here introduces a perspective of historical progress, which he postulates as being fundamentally different from traditional Chinese thought:

It has been said that of things in the West and China that are most unlike and, in fact, cannot be harmonized, nothing is more different from the Chinese love of the past and neglect of the present than Westerners’ determination to have the present overcome the past. The Chinese consider the change from order to disorder and from prosperity to decadence as the normal course of nature and human affairs. In contrast to this, the Westerners are of the opinion that the progress in the world is indefinite. [According to them] it is the highest rule of science and politics of moral, that prosperity cannot fall back to a status of decadence and that order cannot fall back to a status of chaos (Yan Fu 1896: pp. 1-4).³

Yan Fu is quick to remind his readers, that such ideas had an inescapable consequence: “In fact, the resources available in the universe are limited, but the desire of the people is insatiable. The growth of the population is faster than the growth of the products, which in consequence become insufficient. And this insufficiency will lead to war”. Yan Fu already here, thus adopted one of the grimmest inspirations of Darwin, namely Malthusian ideas, which were applied to the natural world, and which Yan Fu here re-applied to the human realm.

In order to highlight the importance of evolution and progress, Yan Fu even goes one step further and in a very powerful manner posits the idea of evolution and progress against the agency, which in Chinese

² Adopted from Hutters 2005; p. 48.

³ There still is no English translation of Yan’s essays, for a French translation cf. Yen Fou 1977, there are partial translations in a number of works such as especially Pusey 1983.

traditional thought is related to the sages. This historical determinism here is called “destiny” (*yunhui* 運會) by Yan:

Once the [process of] destiny had been fulfilled, the sages could not force it from its course, for after all, the sages were themselves a factor within the course of destiny. It is unreasonable to assert that they could change the course of destiny. The sages were men who knew the direction of the process and were able to anticipate its ultimate course [. . .] They were then able to regulate it, complete it, to cooperate with it, and thus lead the world (*tianxia* 天下) to a state of peace. Later men observing their success, came to believe that the sages were actually able to change the course of destiny. (Yan Fu 1986, p. 1)

Yan Fu here clearly highlights the impersonal forces of evolution, which cannot be influenced even by the highest authority of traditional Chinese culture, the sages of antiquity. The situation was not completely hopeless, however, since agency, denied to the sages by Yan Fu could be found in fitting and adapting the countries/societies/groups to the circumstances. Before we look into this question in a more systematic way, it seems useful to make clear, that the idea of historical progress, which accompanied evolution, had a far-reaching impact on Chinese thought. It basically can be claimed that it made weakness, decadence and downfall appear extremely threatening, since the normal cyclic model, especially the downfall and resurgence of dynasties seemed to not apply any longer (Kwong 2001).

It is not entirely clear since when the dichotomy between weak and strength became dominant in the Chinese discourse. It is certainly possible, however, to state that the strife for “wealth and power” (*fuqiang* 富強) became increasingly clearly pronounced since the 1860s. Since the defeat against Japan in 1894/95 it became deeply engrained in the Chinese public consciousness – if one can speak of such a thing – and later resulted in something of a cult of weakness, which found its best manifestation in the assumption of national humiliation, which became dominant during the 20th century, and is of importance even today. (Cohen 2002, Callahan 2009)

It is of significance that Yan Fu’s second essay was titled “On the origins of strength” and that it communicated a rather clear cut discourse of weakness. Yan Fu, however, starts by praising Darwin as a great scientist and attesting to the validity and influence of his theories.

Darwin was an English scholar, specialized in zoology and botany [...] After several dozen years of intensive research and deep reflection he published a book, which was entitled “The origin of species by the way of natural selection”. Since the publication of this book, vast changes have occurred in Western learning, government, and philosophy. Those who assert that the teachings of Darwin have done more to renew the eyes and ears and to change men's thoughts than Newton's discovery of physical laws are perhaps not indulging in empty words (Yan Fu 1986b: p.5).

Given the fact, that hardly any Western social scientists were known in China at that time, and that even less was known about the value and the validity of their work, these sentences established Darwin—and in

extension that, which was derived from his teachings, as an unassailable scientific authority—saving the reader from the whole of the controversies surrounding Darwin’s theories in Europe and the US. Quite programmatically Yan Fu then singles out the two chapters of the *Origin of Species*, which he considers as most important, namely “The struggle of the living species” and “Natural selection”. He finds the core of Darwin’s observations in the following.

Living things struggle among themselves in order to survive. Nature (*tian* lit., 'heaven') selects [among them] and preserves the superior species. It is his view that humans and living things are born within a given space and together feed on the environment (heaven and earth) and on the benefits of nature. They come into conflict with each other. Peoples and living things struggle for survival. At first, species struggle with species; then as [men] gradually progress, there is a struggle between one social group and another. The weak invariably become the prey of the strong (*qiangrou* 強肉), the stupid invariably become subservient to the clever. In the end, those who survive and have descendants are perforce the hard and the tough, the outstanding, the able, the skilful, the intelligent – those who at that moment are most fit for their time, their place, and their human situation (Yan Fu 1986b: p.5).

Yan Fu quite soon makes clear, that Darwin might have been one of his inspirations, but that his real hero is Spencer, whom he describes as following:

Spencer is also a native of England, and a contemporary of Darwin. His books actually appeared before the *Origin of Species*. He based himself on the theory of evolution to explain the origins of human relations and of civilization. I call this science the science of social groups [sociology], for, as Xunzi states, man's superiority over the beast lies in his ability to form social groups (Yan Fu 1986b: p.6).

There is no doubt, that Yan Fu’s essay, as well as his later writings are logical inconsistent in many ways. In his exposition China’s sage are – as we just have seen – powerless against the way of nature, on the other hand, it is them, whom he blames for China’s woes – since they were timid given the Malthusian challenge and were unable to understand, that it was possible to overcome these limitations by engaging in that, what made strength attainable namely struggle. Yan Fu states:

Our Chinese Sages were not unaware that the universe is an inexhaustible storehouse [of infinite possibilities] and that if the subtle powers of the human mind are given free vent, human ingenuity and intellectual capacity can attain unfathomable results. However, we simply turned aside [from the pursuit] and did not concern ourselves with it. In our philosophy (*dao* 道) of sustaining the people we aimed only at harmony and mutual sustenance. [...] Alas, such was the consummate skill of the sages in constraining the world, in preventing struggles and putting an end to disorder, they were unable to foresee that people's knowledge would decline steadily and their energy would steadily deteriorate! (Yan Fu 1986a: p.1).

Yan Fu would greatly elaborate these ideas in later works, especially in his rendering of *Evolution and Ethics*. It is not necessary here, however, to go into further detail, since already here we can clearly see, where the

attraction of Yan Fu's understanding of evolutionism lies for his Chinese readers: Yan Fu was able to provide a convincing explanation of the moving principles of the world. At the same time Yan Fu was able to explain, why China was suffering from these developments and failed to compete. He finally provided a recipe of how to deal with the problem: The Chinese needed to take up the challenge and fight.

Equally important was, that he even found a way, how this fight was to be organized. In contrast to Spencer's individualism, Yan Fu focussed on the group (*qun* 群), which also had the advantage to correspond to traditional Chinese thought, since Xunzi of course had claimed, that what men distinguishes from beast is his ability to "group" (*qun* 群). Here Yan Fu was able to completely endorse Huxley, who had claimed, that the "gradual strengthening of the social bond, though it arrests the struggle for existence inside society, up to a certain point improves the chances of society, as a corporate whole, in the cosmic struggle". If we look into Yan Fu's dealing with this assertion, we can observe, how evolutionary thought was turned into a resource itself, Yan says "The reason those who seek a cohesive group suppress competition within that group is order to withstand the natural forces without." We here could draw a clear connection to Sun Yat-sen (Sun Yixian 孫逸仙 1866-1925) much later saying, that China was so weak, exactly because it lacked cohesion and thus was not more than a "sheet of loose sand" (*songsan shazi* 松散砂子)(Zarrow 2005: 214).

II.

While it took a considerable time until the modern term for race *zhongzu* 種族 became stabilised in China, it is clear that thinking in racial terms began to enter China since the 1840s. Blumenbach's five race theory came to China latest during the 1850s (Sun Jiang 2012). While the earliest introductions of race are limited to physical differences, during the 1870s first texts appeared which also dealt with other capacities. Most important was a translation from *Chamber's educational course*, which was published in the *Gezhi huibian* 格致匯編 (*The Chinese Scientific Magazine*) in Shanghai and which establishes something like a racial hierarchy 1. Caucasian, 2. Mongolian (including Chinese), 3. Malay Race, 4. Black race, 5. "Red Barbarian race." Although there is no direct link to Darwin, we find the following interesting passage: "The Caucasian race is keen on studying scientific things and pursuing various knowledge. Each generation makes more progress than the previous one. The other four races have not pursued knowledge or studied science for a long time. Therefore they have made little progress (*jinyi* 進益)." ("Gezhi luelun" 1876: p. 275)

In his early writings Yan Fu still had the task to argue against an imagined interlocutor who claimed, that history proves that China had survived all former attacks from the outside. Even if China was

conquered by “men dressed in felt and furs, who smelt of mutton and milk”, the “tribulations of China never lasted longer than a hundred years”. “It has been known since antiquity: The changes of dynasty only make the disappearance and birth of a ruling family, but the people remain the same people, civilisation remains always.” (Yan Fu 1986b: p. 9)

Yan Fu’s answer to this is, that his interlocutor might be well acquainted with the past but that he does not know anything about the present. Here Yan Fu brings the very interesting argument, that the foreign barbarians, which in the past had conquered China actually were no foreigners at all: “There are four large races, yellow, white, brown and black.” While Yan Fu sees differences, his main point still is, that the white race managed to develop into a much more sophisticated and superior entity because of the constant struggle among the different nations of Europe. Now it is the time of the greatest danger and Yan Fu demands that it is now necessary to “protect the race”, with which, he of course means the Yellow Race, but which he considers as a universal truth. Yan Fu argued that “the strength of a race determines the standing of its group [in the world].” He made the connection between biology and sociology explicit: “A country is like an organism. The size and strength of a group depends on its ability to work together. If everyone only fights for his own interests, the group’s coherence will be lax. If such a group meets with a people that love their country and protect their race, it will be at best humiliated and at worst obliterated.” (Yan Fu 1986b, p. 5)

Yan Fu’s argument on race thus is a twofold one: he clearly distinguishes—as Blumenbach does and other Chinese have done before him—between physical features like the colour of the skin. There are, however, other features which are equally important—namely the ability to adopt to a challenging situation. This up to that time had been done best by the White race, but Yan Fu quite clearly and absolutely understandable sees the potential to develop this way in the Yellow Race as well. We easily can observe the mobilising function of such statements. On the other hand, and this is probably more important, we also can see, how Yan Fu here constructs dichotomies between the achievements of the white and the yellow race (it is clear, that the other races are of no great importance for him) and that his assertion to “protect the race” (*baozhong* 保種) became a very powerful trope, which had a tremendous impact on the subsequent historical development. It should be noted here as well, that the fact that one term, which Yan Fu used for “race” was *xhong* 種 and thus similar to the Chinese word for species, served to firmly integrate the category of race in the socio-biological discourse.

Yan Fu, however, was not intensively interested into the issue of race, and so it remained—as almost always—to Liang Qichao, to pull together different strands of racial and proto-racial thinking—among them and foremost Darwinian thought—to create a new understanding of race for late Imperial and early Republican China.⁴

If anything, Liang Qichao had an even stronger Darwinian outlook than Yan Fu, and steadfastly applied it for its analysis of the international situation:

⁴ On Liang Qichao’s racial thought, see Zarrow 2006.

The extinction of countries is the universal rule of evolution. In all cases, in which people are on the world, they must compete with each other for existence. In competing for existence there are those who are good and those who are bad. If there are those who are good and bad, then there are those who win and those who are defeated. The rights and privileges of those who are bad and are defeated are swallowed by those who are good and win. This is the principle of the vanishing countries. Since there has been a human species on earth, this natural law has been followed. [Countries] fight each other and bite each other, they substitute/replace each other. Today there are only some hundred countries left on the whole globe (Liang Qichao 1999g).

The real background for this struggle for existence, however, was the competition between different races. Liang Qichao here makes a rather programmatic statement, which runs as follows:

Since there have been living beings on earth, all the time up to the present day for ten-thousands of years there has been mutual struggle and contention, mutual pouncing on and mutual biting, alternating between strong and weak and alternating between rise and elimination. This can be described with one word: ‘racial strife’. In the beginning animals struggled with animals, then men struggled with animals, and finally men struggled with men. First savages struggled with savages, then the civilized struggled with savages, and finally the civilized struggled with the civilized, in endless struggle stretching back through all time. Alas, this is the law of the struggle for survival. Not even a Sage can do anything about it. Seen from this perspective, when the differences between the races on the world are great, the struggle is particular intense and the progress of civilisation is very difficult. When the differences between the races are less, then the struggle is a little bit less intense and the progress of civilisation is faster. The whole world is like this. [...] According to the law of the survival of the fittest, members of an inferior race must be devoured by a superior one. Day by day, month by month, they will slowly be eaten away until there are no more of them left, and their race no longer lives upon the earth.

Liang thus claimed, that even though the world was marked by “racial competition”, this somehow led to a tendency of races to merge. Intense struggle will lead to less struggle and finally there were only the “large”—“superior” races left, which would contend with each other.

This is an interesting idea, which actually is rather close to ideas of interbreeding, which were quite common in the public discourse of that time. For many of the participants interbreeding finally would result in a new race, which, however would be white—since of course all the less successful traces would be wiped out by the natural process of adaption. Persons like Kang Youwei 康有為 (1858-1927) or Wu Tingfang 伍廷芳 (1842-1922) and others supported such a solution (and actually even made elaborate plans how to bring this about), but of course as Chinese they tried to make sure, that there were to be Chinese traces in it (Chung 2014).

This was an utopian vision, of course, and for the time being it was important to make sure, that the “Yellow Race” as Liang called it, actually would be among those who finally would contribute to become

“white”. Liang dealt with this question time again, starting as early as 1897 in an article called “On China’s imminent rise” (*Lun Zhongguo zhi jiang qiang* 論中國之將強), by using a biological argument:

The reason for India’s decline is due to its race. People of the black, red, and brown races cannot compare to the white people because of the kind of microorganisms that exist in their blood and the angle of their crania. Only the yellows and whites are not so far apart. Thus whatever the white people can do can also be accomplished by the yellow people. Japan’s imitation of western ways is a case in point. Since the Japanese race originated in our country, it would be illogical to say that we cannot accomplish what they can (Quoted from Tsu Jing 2005: p. 51).

In another article aptly titled “On the future of the Chinese race”, and published in 1899 Liang says, that the survival and extinction of a country is entirely depended on the “citizens” or probably better “people” of the country in question. If a country does not have the “nature” (*xingzhi* 性質) to exist, it would vanish, even if there was nobody extinguishing it. Or, the other way round, if a country has the “nature” it will continue to exist, even if it is threatened from the outside.

Today China’s situation is such that it is violated by outside forces, she is in a deadly peril, not differently from Turkey, India and Africa in the past, or maybe even worse. The nature of the Chinese however, and their position is definitely different from those of the Turks, the Indians and the Africans. If the Europeans want to apply the frame, they in the past had applied to these countries, it will be not easy for them. Moreover: It not only is this. In the days of the future in the 20th century the Chinese must be the most powerful race on earth, this certainly can be claimed (Liang Qichao 1999b).

Liang, however went beyond this statement and attempted to give some reasons, why this would be so. It goes without saying, that the reasons he provided are less “racial” features but rather social, institutional and culture reasons, or to use a word, which was quite fashionable then – reasons related to the “National character”.

But who then actual constituted this “Chinese race” postulated by Liang? As we have seen, Liang basically had a very dynamic idea of race, so that the definition of whom could belong to it could change over time, the key for Liang Qichao quite clearly was, that “sub-ethnic” groups merged or unified in order to create that, what then could be called the Chinese race. If groups would not do this, they would face extinction. Liang here makes the very smart argument, that of all the groups and barbarian people known from the past—this is from the Chinese written tradition—none survived.

This is the inferior races are defeated and up to the present day they are gradually extinguished. And today it is like this that the Miao, the Tong and the Yao live interlocked with the superior races, but their dying breath will not be far away. Why is that? If they do not merge, they must fight, when they fight, they must be defeated, and from the number of defeats and victories one can distinguish between superiority and inferiority. So, today, the Manchu and the Han, which is the better race and which is the inferior race? One does not need to be an expert in order to know that (Liang Qichao 1999b).

As we have seen, Liang does not mean to extinguish the Manchus, he rather wants to say, that the Manchus have proven inferior in the struggle for existence, and that it would be of advantage not only for the Manchus but for the Han as well, if they would “merge”, quite clearly in order to stand up against a common enemy. Seen from the pure point of argument, this is a very interesting idea, since Liang Qichao basically employs a Darwinian argument in order to subvert Western phantasies of racial dominance, equally based on Darwinian premises. In fact, however, Liang Qichao did something else: By distinguishing between different races within China and establishing a racial hierarchy, Liang was—even if it was unwittingly—opening Pandora’s box and establishing a very powerful discourse, which finally would lead to toppling the Manchu government in 1911. It is somehow ironic, that it was Liang Qichao, who refused to work together with the revolutionaries, who with the help of Social Darwinian arguments at least indirectly provided them with the ultimate weapon to attain their goals and even ennobled these actions, by giving them an at least a pseudo-scientific backing. Although it would be foolish to blame Liang Qichao for it, we should keep in mind, that the Revolution of 1911 not only toppled China’s dynastic government but also in many places resulted in anti-Manchu violence, which at certain places amounted to ethnic cleansing.⁵

III.

Until the Chinese defeat in the Sino-Japanese war of 1894/95 the West had been China’s most important source of new knowledge. Now the situation changed in two decisive ways: First, the scope of knowledge introduced to and appropriated in China was greatly expanded, increasingly extended to knowledge related to the social realm. The introduction of evolution and Darwinian thought actually is quite a good example, all the more since it graced itself with the attribute of being “scientific”, although Yan Fu and others made quickly clear, that they considered the ideas they appropriated as important for the necessary transformation of society. The second aspect was the source of knowledge: Here Japan played an increasingly important role. More and more articles and books were translated from the Japanese, at the same time Japanese gained in importance as intermediary language—this is books originally written in other languages and translated into Japanese were translated into Chinese. The most conspicuous manifestation here is the strong Japanese impact on the Chinese terminology. Although, as we have seen, Hu Shi and many of his contemporaries were deeply impressed by Yan Fu’s rendering and the terms devised by him, in the long run the larger part of terminology related to Darwin and Darwinism was adapted from Japan. This tendency began in 1896 already, when Liang Qichao started to publish his *Shinwubao* 時務報—interestingly in English subtitled *The Chinese Progress*. The by far largest part of the terminology related to evolution, Darwinism and social Darwinism, came to China from Japan. Some of it uneasily co-existed with terms first used by Yan Fu, but in due time was replaced by the terms originally

⁵ This was true especially for Xi’an, where at least 10.000 Manchu – including women and children – were killed. Not surprisingly this aspect of the revolution is not regularly addressed in Chinese accounts of the 1911 revolution, cf. Rhoads 2000: pp. 173 ff.

used in Japan. This is true for such basic terms as “evolution” *jinbua* 進化 instead of *tianyan*, “struggle for existence” *shengcun jingzheng* 生存競爭 instead of *wujing* 物競 used by Yan Fu, “natural selection” *ziran taotai* 自然淘汰 instead of *tianze* 天擇, “artificial selection” *renwei taotai* 人為淘汰 instead of *renze* 人擇 and “survival of the fittest” *yousheng liebai* 優勝劣敗 instead of *shizhe shengcun* 適者生存. The main reason for this was a wave of works on evolution and social Darwinism, which were translated from the Japanese to the Chinese. Ma Junwu 馬君武 (1881-1940) for example, translated his *Origins of Species* from a Japanese version, employing large parts of the terminology used in that book. More important for us, however, are the translations of social Darwinist tainted works. Between 1899 and 1911 at least ten monographs on Social Darwinism were translated into Chinese from Japanese sources (Wang Zhongjiang 1999). The most prominent Japanese author to be translated into Chinese was Kato Hiroyuki 加藤弘之 (1836-1916). As a young man, directly after the Meiji reform, Kato had been an ardent propagator of liberalism and democratic ideas and their application in Japan. Quite soon, however, he completely changed his stance and began to attack liberal ideas and democracy by emphasizing Social Darwinist ideas, which in his opinion proved that equality was impossible, so that democracy wasn’t an option either (Hiroshi 1999). The Chinese translation of his book *The Fight for the right of the stronger and its development*, which he published in German as well (Kato Hiroyuki 1894), has been considered as one of the hundred most important translations in modern China (Zou Zhenhuan 1996: pp. 148-152). It was, however, as the title of the book *Wujing* shows, inspired by Yan Fu, since the translator—a Chinese student studying in Japan—had become interested in Darwinist thought because he had read Yan Fu’s texts.

While *Wujing* certainly was important, we here again need to turn to Liang Qichao, since it was him, who was profoundly influenced by Kato’s version of social Darwinism (Price 2004), which was international Darwinism in its grimmest form. Kato wrote:

The citizenry of superior knowledge will exterminate the citizenry of inferior knowledge; or it will conquer and enslave it, thus civilizing it gradually. The enlightened citizenry of today will definitely not grow out of useless humaneness and benevolence. Harming others, then is a necessary condition of the biological world. It should be understood that this is nothing but the law of nature (Huang 1972: p. 56).“

It is necessary to stress here, that such a view fundamentally contradicted all traditional Chinese ideas about living together in a peaceful way. Still Liang in an article called “Rights of the Strongest” more or less echoed Kato, stating:

The only thing that matters in this world is power. The strong may bully the weak, but it is the fundamental law of nature. Those who want to have freedom and assert their rights have no alternative ways of achieving those objectives other than strengthening themselves and increasing their power. For

an individual who wants freedom, he must begin with strengthening his body. For a country that wants to achieve independence it must strengthen itself (Liang Qichao 1999d: p. 353).

In Kato Liang Qichao seemed to have found somebody, who presented a modern version of Hobbes, a thinker with whom Liang Qichao first became acquainted in Japan, and on whom he wrote:

That what Hobbes spoke about was that people fought each other, that they pursued their own profit and that they did not care about harm brought to others. This is what Darwin later called the struggle for existence. The survival of the fittest is a commonality among the animals and the human species is not excluded (Liang Qichao 1999a: p. 499).

The biggest appeal to Liang Qichao certainly was, that it seemed to offer a way to the strength of a country, a topic, Liang Qichao was obsessed with since 1894/95. Liang Qichao to quite an extent endorsed Kato's ideas, when he published his "Rights of the Strong", which actually constituted an annotated translation of Kato's thoughts. These ideas Liang Qichao would develop into something like a concept of imperialism. Interestingly and quite consequently, Liang Qichao here distinguishes between struggle between States and struggle between the individual citizens of a state. The first one was represented by rulers such as Alexander, Qin Shihuang, Dschingis Khan and Napoleon, the other, however, was much more powerful (Liang Qichao 1999c: p. 309) and it was this kind of conflict, which had developed into what Liang Qichao calls "national imperialism". In his "On the new citizen", Liang actually postulates that "this, by what Europe has developed and by which the world has progressed" is all brought about by nationalism. National imperialism (in English in the original text) is, when the "power of the citizens has developed so fully within that it needs to spread outward". And now this not only happens by means of the military, but as well by means of commerce, industry and even the church (Liang Qichao 1999h: p. 656).

Liang Qichao is of the opinion, that exactly this is lacking in China. The development of the Nation State with its immense power as demonstrated by Western societies, such becomes and indispensable part of the evolutionary process. And in order to being able to compete in present times and not being extinguished in this struggle, the Chinese people needed to understand that they belonged to a "nation" and needed to do away with the old understanding that China was "all under heaven". Liang Qichao would not be Liang Qichao, if he did not have a number of very sophisticated ideas, of how to bring that about. This, however, would go beyond the scope of this paper. The point, which should interest us here, is how Social Darwinist ideas again function as an analysis of the situation of the world, and at the same time as a discourse of weakness with the explicit aim of mobilising the Chinese in order to adapt to this new world. It is nobody else than Liang Qichao himself, who in a very interesting article, which he titled "The Influence of Learning on the World around it" ("Lun xueshu zhi shili zuoyou shijie" 論學術之勢力左右世界) and in which he discusses among others Copernicus, Bacon and Adam Smith, rather explicitly makes this point:

All phenomena, which can be observed by humans can be understood by relating them to the Great Principle of evolution. The changes of the political system: this is evolution. The development of religious moral: this is evolution. The changes in human customs: this is evolution. The history of several thousand years is a history of evolution. The world, which extends over several ten-thousand miles, is a world of evolution. This meant, as soon as the theory of evolution had appeared, all the superstitious ideas of religious sects of the past lost their basis. For this reason the people in the religious congregations hate Mr. Darwin so much. They say that there was a demon in his mind, and this is not without reason. Once the meaning of this [the evolution] is clear, there is nobody who will not strive to become strong and fit in order to be able to survive in this world, which is governed by natural selection. Regardless one is a person or one is a state everybody progresses in direction of this target. And this is which has given rise to the National Imperialism of the Modern World (Liang Qichao 1999e: p. 559).

Some tentative conclusions

The Chinese intellectual world in 1902 looked definitely different from the one only ten years earlier. In this preliminary paper I have tried to show, how the reception and appropriation of evolutionist thinking and Darwinian thought by Yan Fu and Liang Qichao contributed to or even brought about a conceptual shift whose impact hardly can be underestimated. A comprehensive history of Social-Darwinist discourse in early 20th century up to now is missing. There is little doubt, however, that Social Darwinist thought—very much as envisioned in the quotation of Liang Qichao given above—did not fail to influence many aspects of political, economic and probably also social life in modern China.

The reason for the considerable impact of Darwinism in its Social Darwinism mode and with its strong relationship to thinking in racial terms, to me can be gleaned from a close look into the work of Yan Fu and Liang Qichao.

Darwinism was attractive to Chinese scholars and intellectuals for a number of reasons. Important certainly was the fact that it constituted “scientific knowledge”, which in the eyes of many Chinese scholars at the turn of the century was the only field of learning of universal nature, which would be able to replace traditional Chinese thought with Confucianism at its core, which seemed to be discredited beyond repair.

The second reason for the attractiveness of Darwinism to more openminded Chinese scholars certainly has to be seen in the fact, that it seemed to provide a convincing analysis of the complicated situation of the world and the laws of movement governing it. It could be used to explain the situation in which China was at the end of the 19th century and how it had gotten into it.

The third, and probably most important reason, however, was that Darwinism not only provided the analytical tools necessary, but at the same time seemed to offer a solution for the Chinese predicament: China needed to fight, as other nations did. The Yellow Race—something, which to a large extent came into being in the process of the appropriation of Darwinism as well—had the inherent qualities to do that

(although this argument to a great deal rested on wishful thinking and comparison with red, brown or black ‘others’, who seemed to fare even worse). In this way, then, the dominant Chinese version of Social Darwinism at the turn of the century, was a typical discourse of weakness, with a mobilising function. The ubiquitous histories of “national decline” and “national extinction” popular at that time served to strengthen this function. It seems, however—and this would deserve much more research—that social Darwinism in its Chinese version also offered a number of hints, which resources needed to be developed—just think about the possibilities ascribed to “grouping” (*qun*) in order to enable China to compete—as a nation, to be sure and not as an Empire – in a bewildering new world.

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