

Ba Jin (1904–2005)

Daniel Cairns

2011

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The writer Ba Jin was born Li Yaotang, also named Feigan, to a wealthy family in Sichuan. Nominated for the Nobel Prize in literature twice, he is also considered to be one of the most influential Chinese writers of the twentieth century. His pen name derives from the Chinese transliterations of Bakunin and Kropotkin, both Russian anarchists he admired. At the age of 15 he declared himself an anarchist, shortly thereafter joining the Equality Society, a Chengdu-based revolutionary anarchist group. Through the organ of this group, Ba Jin published his first works, essays on Tolstoy and the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW). In the 1920s Ba Jin became an accomplished anarchist propagandist and translator, responsible for the first Chinese-language editions of many anarchist texts, although his literary accomplishments in fiction are better known. Yet, much of his fiction also addresses social and cultural issues. For example, his renowned novel *The Family* deals with the issue of oppression in the traditional Chinese family structure. Throughout his career, save for the Japanese invasion of China, he was a distinguished anti-militarist, if not necessarily a pacifist.

As an anti-statist, he was openly critical of the Guomindang (Nationalist Party) GMD and the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). However, he was rehabilitated in the People's Republic of China later in his life, involving editing his complete works to suit the CCP. During the Cultural Revolution, Red Guards targeted him for "reeducation;" he was publicly thrashed and his library burned. He was arrested and sent to labor camps until 1976. Reemerging from the ordeal, he distinguished himself as a social commentator until his death.

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The International Encyclopedia of Revolution and Protest, Edited by Immanuel Ness. DOI:
10.1002/9781405198073.wbierp1759

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