

# **Ba Jin as Anarchist Critic of Marxism**

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## Guest Editors' Introduction

*Abstract: This introduction provides background and analysis of Ba Jin's anarchist essays criticizing Marxism and Leninism, with a coda on Ba Jin's value and reputation as a writer.*

This issue of Contemporary Chinese Thought is devoted to the early anti-Marxist writings of Ba Jin (1904–2005: birth name, Li Yaotang; courtesy name, or *hao*, Feigan). Of course, Ba Jin was one of China's most famous modern writers, especially for his novel *Family* (*Jia*),<sup>1</sup> which played a huge role in shaping the political attitudes of Chinese youth during the 1930s.

That he was also a committed member of the worldwide revolutionary anarchist movement from the 1920s to at least the 1940s is fairly well known by many of his readers outside China.<sup>2</sup> In fact, he developed his pen name by combining the Chinese characters for the surnames of the two most famous Western anarchists: Ba, from the Chinese transliteration of Michael Bakunin (*Ba-gu-ning*), and Jin, from the name for Peter Kropotkin (*Ke-lu-pao-te-jin*).<sup>3</sup> That he called himself a follower of Kropotkin and considered the American anarchist Emma Goldman his “spiritual mother” may also be known by those who study his works. What may be less well known, even by readers outside China, is that as part of his commitment to the anarchist cause, Ba Jin became very aware of the long-standing anarchist critique of Marxist communism and participated actively in the anarchist–Marxist debates in China during the 1920s, writing several articles directly critical of the Marxist theory of the dictatorship of the proletariat, Lenin's style of rule, and the repressive policies of the Bolshevik state in general.<sup>4</sup> In fact, as late as the 1930s and 1940s, many of his translations of foreign anarchist writings included letters and essays by Kropotkin, Emma Goldman, and Alexander Berkman (see below) that were critical of the Bolshevik regime

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<sup>1</sup> Originally published serially in Shanghai in the *Shibao* (Eastern Times) under the title *Jiliu* (Torrent), the first installment of *Family* appeared on April 18, 1931. The final installment appeared on May 22, 1932. Retitled *Jia* (Family), the novel was published by the Kaiming shudian (Kaiming Book Company) as a standalone work in May 1933. Many subsequent editions followed. Ba Jin used the novel's original title (*Torrent*) to refer to the “trilogy” of novels including *Family*, *Spring* (Chun, 1938), and *Autumn* (Qiu, 1940).

<sup>2</sup> As detailed by Olga Lang, for example, in *Pa Chin and His Writings: Chinese Youth Between the Two Revolutions* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1967), *passim*, and in Lang, introduction to *Family*, by Pa Chin (New York: Anchor Books, 1972), pp. vii–xxvi. Daniel Burton-Rose's “Ba Jin's Century,” *Perspectives on Anarchism* 11, no. 1 (2007): 15–39, is a useful secondary-source summary of Ba Jin's life and career that includes a discussion of his anarchism and contains a fairly complete bibliography (except for the anti-Marxist essays).

<sup>3</sup> After 1949, Ba Jin himself claimed that he chose the name Ba in memory of a fellow Chinese student in France who had committed suicide (see Lang, *Pa Chin and His Writings*, pp. 269–270), but this retreat may reflect the Communists' harsh condemnation of Bakunin, who was an open rival of Marx, in contrast to their relative tolerance of Kropotkin, who, despite his criticism of the Bolsheviks as we will see below, was honored by Lenin and welcomed back to Soviet Russia after 1917 as a progressive and precursor revolutionary.

<sup>4</sup> For the anarchist–Marxist debates of that period, see Robert A. Scapalino and George T. Yu, *The Chinese Anarchist Movement* (Berkeley, CA: Center for Chinese Studies, 1961), pp. 55–59; Peter Zarrow, *Anarchism and Chinese Political Culture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990), pp. 197–199, 223–229, 231; Arif Dirlik, *Anarchism in the Chinese Revolution* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), pp. 199–230; Edward S. Krebs, “The Chinese Anarchist Critique of Bolshevism During the 1920s,” in *Roads Not Taken: The Struggle of Opposition Parties in Twentieth-Century China*, ed. Roger B. Jeans (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1992), pp. 203–224; Krebs, *Shifu, Soul of Chinese Anarchism* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 1998), pp. 171–190; and John A. Rapp, *Daoism and Anarchism: Critiques of State Autonomy in Ancient and Modern China* (New York and London: Continuum Press, 2012), pp. 112–118.

from a Left-anarchist perspective, and he wrote forewords and/or afterwords to some of these translations in which he expressed his own opinions critical of communism.<sup>5</sup>

These anti-Marxist writings got Ba Jin into trouble during the early years of the Great Leap Forward (1958–1960) and the Cultural Revolution (1966–1976), the two periods of Maoist ascendancy in China, when he was denounced for his past anarchist views (see below). Ironically, Chairman Mao was himself an anarchist in his youth and thus was also very aware of the anarchist critique of Marxism. Indeed, Mao may have tried to answer that critique in his later attacks on the “new class” in the Communist Party during the Cultural Revolution,<sup>6</sup> even as he himself and Party ideologists under him denounced anarchism in the typical Marxist fashion as the ideology of the petite bourgeoisie.<sup>7</sup> Although Ba Jin followed this line in 1959 by renouncing his anarchism and criticized himself for not “having the courage to join the Communist path,” he was nevertheless persecuted again during the Cultural Revolution for his anarchist past, most famously in a public denunciation meeting in Shanghai in 1968 where he was forced to kneel on glass.<sup>8</sup> One could argue that by attacking the one known anarchist within the PRC (People’s Republic of China) cultural elite, the radical Maoists may have tried to protect themselves against the charge of themselves being influenced by what Marxists would call that “petit bourgeois,” potentially counterrevolutionary tradition.<sup>9</sup> In any case, after 1949, even before his full official renunciation of anarchism, Ba Jin removed the anarchist characteristics of his heroes and heroines in his novels, short stories, and biographical works; he also deleted from his works of fiction all allusions to famous anarchists. At one point after 1949, he did mention his translation of Kropotkin’s *Ethics*, but even in that case he denounced his work as “an escape from reality.” He also revised his views of the Soviet Union and was welcomed there on at least three occasions, with many of his works of fiction published in large and small editions.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> See Angel Pino, “Ba Jin traducteur” (Ba Jin, Translator), in *Les belles infidèles dans l’Empire du milieu: problématiques et pratiques de la traduction dans le monde chinois moderne* (The Belles Infidèles in the Middle Kingdom: Issues and Practices of Translation in the Modern Chinese World), ed. Isabelle Rabut (Paris: Yu-feng, 2010), pp. 45–110, rev. English ed., Pino, “Ba Jin as Translator,” in *Modern China and the West: Translation and Cultural Mediation*, ed. Peng Hsiao-yen and Isabelle Rabut (Leiden: Brill, 2014), pp. 28–105. See also Pino, ed., “Ba Jin anarchiste” (Ba Jin, Anarchist), *A Contretemps: Bulletin de critique bibliographique* 45 (March 2013): 1–70, English Kindle edition, *Ba Jin on Anarchism and Terrorism*, trans. Paul Sharkey (London: ChristieBooks, 2013). For Ba Jin’s anarchist essays criticizing Marxism and Bolshevism, see the bibliography at the end of this introduction below, which was greatly aided by the extensive bibliographies in Pino’s works, as well as those of Lang, Dirlik, and others cited in notes 2–4 above.

<sup>6</sup> See Rapp, *Daoism and Anarchism*, chap. 6, “Maoism and Anarchism: An Analysis of Mao Zedong’s Response to the Anarchist Critique of Marxism,” pp. 125–158, who concludes that in the end, Mao failed to answer the anarchist critique and, in fact, demonstrated in his own words and deeds the flaw in the main Marxist theory of the state.

<sup>7</sup> Such denunciations continued after Mao’s death and past the turn of this century. See William A. Joseph, *The Critique of Ultra-Leftism in China, 1958–1981* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1984), and Rapp, *Daoism and Anarchism*, chap. 7, “Denunciations of Anarchism in the PRC,” pp. 159–173.

<sup>8</sup> Ba Jin renounced his anarchism in an essay penned in May 1959 and reprinted as a footnote to the story, “Wode yunian” (My Childhood), pp. 101–112, reprinted in *Ba Jin Wenji* (Collected Works), vol. 10, pp. 120–121, cited in Lang, *Pa Chin and His Writings*, pp. 270–271; she notes the 1968 denunciation meeting in her introduction to that work, p. xxv.

<sup>9</sup> This was a futile attempt in the end, as evidenced by officially sanctioned attacks on the Maoist leaders themselves as anarchists at the end of the Cultural Revolution. See Joseph, *The Critique of Ultra-Leftism in China*, pp. 183–219, and Rapp, *Daoism and Anarchism*, pp. 164–165.

<sup>10</sup> See Lang, *Pa Chin and His Writings*, pp. 268–272. For an examination of how Ba Jin’s fictional works were changed in translation to remove the anarchist references, see Taciana Fisac, “Anything at Variance with It Must Be Revised Accordingly: Rewriting Modern Chinese Literature During the 1950s,” *China Journal* 67 (January 2012): 131–148. For how Ba Jin’s official attitude changed during PRC (People’s Republic of China) years up to the early 1960s

Perhaps as part of that later sanitizing of Ba Jin's anarchist past in the People's Republic, it has proved difficult, but in the end not impossible, to find copies of many of his previous anti-Marxist writings. After an exhaustive search, this issue is devoted to the translation of the most clear and far-reaching denunciations of Marxism and Leninism by Ba Jin that the editors of this volume could find.

Beginning in 1925, writing under his given name Feigan but often dropping the family name Li (as was customary for many anarcho-communists who opposed the "feudal" and "patriarchal" nature of the family),<sup>11</sup> Ba Jin wrote several articles in the popular press denouncing Marxism and Leninism, most especially for its concentration of state power in the hands of a single, dictatorial party, a method that anarchists believed would ultimately betray the ideals of the socialist revolution (see especially the first two essays translated in this issue, "Marx's 'Dictatorship of the Proletariat'" and "On Lenin"). The anarchist critique of Marxism was especially threatening to Marxist-Leninists because the anarchists claimed to be fellow socialist and communist revolutionaries who criticized Marxism not for being too radical or as a threat to private property and the capitalist system, but instead because it was not radical enough and would not, in the end, be truly revolutionary. The third essay by Ba Jin translated in this issue, "Anticommunists and Reactionaries," written under another of his pseudonyms, Hei Lang, and published in the San Francisco Chinese American anarchist journal *Equality* (Pingdeng), though very short, makes this point very clearly. As Ba Jin noted, unlike "reactionaries" who opposed Communists for actually trying to put communism into practice, he opposed Marxist-Leninists for not being communist enough.

Ba Jin based his criticisms of Marxism on what he had learned directly and indirectly from the classic anarchists. From Michael Bakunin he took the idea that Marx's dictatorship of the proletariat would become the worst dictatorship in history because there would be no intervening groups between the socialist state and the people. As Bakunin put it, the workers' state would quickly become the state of the "ex-workers" because power does not just derive from economic class but from the interests of any kind of power elite.<sup>12</sup> As Ba Jin's Sichuan anarchist colleague Jianbo put it: "The inner lining of the dictatorship of the proletariat is the single dictatorship of a single party—the Leninist party. The Soviets have already been captured by bureaucratic

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and how he acquiesced in changes to his earlier work, see Vincent Y. C. Shih, "Enthusiast and Escapist: Writers of the Older Generation," *China Quarterly* 13 (January/March 1963): 93–107. After the Cultural Revolution, especially after the death of his wife in 1973, Ba Jin shifted back and forth in his views, including statements of support for students in Tiananmen (see Ba Jin, statement from his sickbed, in Barmé, Geremie, and Linda Jaivin, eds., *New Ghosts, Old Dreams: Chinese Rebel Voices* [New York: Times Books, 1992], p. 64), and expressing a desire to start a Cultural Revolution museum (see Ba Jin in Geremie Barmé and John Minford, eds., *Seeds of Fire: Chinese Voices of Conscience* [New York: Hill and Wang, 1988], p. 381–384), but then a return to silence after other purges. For selections from his post-Cultural Revolution essays, see Ba Jin, *Random Thoughts*, trans. Geremie Barmé (Hong Kong: Joint Publishing, 1984), and for his shifts back and forth between criticism and acquiescence, see Barmé, "Dissenting from Ba Jin," in *Danwei: Tracking Chinese Media and Internet*, reprinted from the Modern Chinese Culture and Literature Mailing list, October 30, 2005, available at [http://www.danwei.org/breaking\\_news/barme\\_on\\_ba\\_jin.php](http://www.danwei.org/breaking_news/barme_on_ba_jin.php). One could argue that in light of how much he and his family suffered for his mild criticism of the regime during the Hundred Flowers era of 1956 and during the early 1960s, it should be more easily understandable why Ba Jin was so cautious after the Cultural Revolution and how it is much too easy for outsiders to criticize him.

<sup>11</sup> In *Anarchism in the Chinese Revolution*, Dirlik even lists Ba Jin's pen name as Bajin throughout his study, which seems logically consistent with anarchist opposition to family names, but since this style does not seem to have caught on either in Western language usage or in Chinese romanization practice, we use the standard practice in this issue.

<sup>12</sup> Bakunin, "Statism and Anarchy" (1873), in *Bakunin on Anarchy*, ed. Sam Dolgoff (New York: Knopf, 1971), pp. 325–333.

socialists.”<sup>13</sup> After quoting similar statements from his friend Jianbo, Ba Jin, writing as Feigan in another version of the same article, the first selection in this issue mentioned above, “Marx’s ‘Dictatorship of the Proletariat,’” claimed:

If we recognize that one class oppressing another class is not correct and that this is sufficient to harm the happiness of humanity and impede humanity’s progress, then we ought to oppose the dictatorship of the proletariat. The bourgeoisie used their political authority to oppress the proletariat and that was wrong, but should the proletariat rise up and oppress the bourgeoisie and commit the same offense?

... The social revolution of the proletariat is a revolution liberat-ing the proletariat. It’s a revolution that topples control of people by others. Now if in the first step you seize political power, then you become one who controls other people and you put yourself in the position of one who ought to be overthrown.<sup>14</sup>

One could argue that Ba Jin was being unfair to Marx in both versions of this essay and that his argument is a better critique of Lenin than of Marx and Engels, for whom the “Communist League” was arguably not a centralized, disciplined vanguard party and for whom the public ownership of the means of production could have meant or intended democratic control by the majority proletarian class. Nevertheless, following Bakunin’s critique noted above that Marx’s dictatorship of the proletariat would at best lead to a dictatorship of “ex-workers,” and given Marx’s successful expulsion of Bakunin and his followers from the First International by means of taking control of that organization’s executive com-mittee and moving it to New York, anarchists have long seen the precursor of Lenin’s vanguard idea in Marx. In any case, Ba Jin bases his argument in this article clearly on the writings of Bakunin and other anarchists from Marx’s day, as well as on anarchist critiques in later years preceding the Bolshevik revolution.

As Ba Jin lived in the era of Lenin, he learned of the nature of the Bolshevik state from fellow anarchists such as Emma Goldman and Alexander Berkman, who were both deported from the United States to the Soviet Union after the Red Scares following World War I and with whom Ba Jin carried out a lifelong correspondence. His Maoist enemies would later use his relations with such international figures against him in their denunciation campaigns, as can be seen in the last two articles in this issue. Ba Jin also learned of the horrors of Bolshevik rule from other Chinese anarchists, at least one of whom corresponded with Kropotkin’s widow,<sup>15</sup> as well as from Varlaam Cherkov, a Georgian anarchist and associate of Kropotkin whose theoretical critique of Marxism was also highly influential in China.<sup>16</sup> All of these figures lived through the period of “War Communism” in Soviet Russia (1918–1921) and reacted against its harsh, dictatorial nature. Ba Jin translated many works by Goldman and Berkman, including letters Goldman wrote from

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<sup>13</sup> [Lu] Jianbo, “Lun wuchan jieji zhuanzheng” (On the Dictatorship of the Proletariat), *Xuedeng* (Light of Learning) 22–24 (1924): 110, 113, cited in Dirlik, *Anarchism in the Chinese Revolution*, p. 223.

<sup>14</sup> [Li] Feigan, “Zailun wuchanjieji zhuanzheng” (More on the Dictatorship of the Proletariat), *Shishi xinbao shefugan*, *Xuedeng* (Current Trends, Supplement, Light of Learning) 7 (December 17, 1925): 12, paragraph translated by Daniel Youd. This essay is substantially the same as the first essay translated in this issue, (Li) Feigan, “Makeside ‘wuchanjiezhuanzheng’” (Marx’s “Dictatorship of the Proletariat”), in *Makesizhuyi de pochuan* (The Bankruptcy of Marxism) (Shanghai: Freedom Bookshop, 1928), pp. 105–125, except for his references to Jianbo’s essay cited in the previous note, which were removed in Feigan’s later essay.

<sup>15</sup> Dirlik, *Anarchism in the Chinese Revolution*, p. 221.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 224–230.

Russia during and after War Communism that were later included in her book *My Disillusionment in Russia* and Berkman's entire book, *The ABCs of Communist Anarchism*, which contained long sections critical of the Bolshevik state under Lenin.<sup>17</sup> Ba Jin himself wrote at least one article on Cherkesov.<sup>18</sup> As a short representative sample of his translations of foreign anarchist writings critical of Marxism, included as the fourth essay in this issue, is a supposed translation of a letter by Alexander Berkman that Ba Jin also published in the San Francisco journal *Equality*, "On the Tenth Anniversary of the Russian Revolution." In fact, the guest editors of this issue have found this letter to be a more detailed and even more clear-cut criticism of the "failure" of the Bolshevik revolution than the surviving original English edition of Berkman's letter, and that Ba Jin's "translation" may combine portions of other writings by Berkman, as well as Ba Jin's own words (see the first note to the translation of this essay below). That this essay was published in San Francisco and not in China itself may be one reason it survived in American and European library collections. Certainly Ba Jin's Maoist critics (see below) would have been only too happy to use this essay as more fuel for their incendiary denunciations of him had they known about it.

In any event, Ba Jin's view of Lenin and the Bolshevik state was clearly heavily influenced by Goldman, Berkman, and other anarchists. Ba Jin learned from the foreign anarchists about the severe political repression carried out by the Cheka, the Soviet secret police under Lenin during the civil war that became the precursor to the KGB.<sup>19</sup> He also knew from his anarchist colleagues about the Kronstadt uprising, where sailors from units that had helped carry out the original revolution were strongly repressed by Red Army forces under the direction of Leon Trotsky after they had risen up in 1921 to demand real democracy and workers' direct control of the economy. As he noted especially in the aforementioned second essay translated in this issue, "On Lenin," Ba Jin considered Lenin to be "no different at all from Ivan IV (Ivan the Terrible), Nicholas II, and Kaiser Wilhelm II of Germany" for supporting these harsh repressive measures. Indeed, he deemed Lenin a man who, by slandering and murdering the remaining true revolutionaries in Russia, ended up betraying the revolution. For Ba Jin, Lenin's New Economic Policy (NEP) begun in 1921, which replaced the harsh confiscatory measures of War Communism, was not a relaxation of dictatorship but proof of Lenin's betrayal of socialism and retreat back into capitalism. While one might see Ba Jin's criticism of War Communism as a very tragic foreshadowing of what China suffered under the Great Leap Forward, it might be harder for contemporary observers to understand why he would so oppose the relative liberalization of Soviet policies during the NEP period of the 1920s. We should understand, however, that he was an anarcho-communist after all, one who favored Kropotkin's ideal of direct democracy in worker and peasant councils (as opposed to sham collectives controlled by the ruling party) as the real way to prevent dic-

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<sup>17</sup> See the articles translated by [Li] Feigan: Emma Goldman (Gaodeman), "Maliya Sipiliduonuowa de pohai shijian" (The Tragic Affair of the Persecution of Maria Spiridonova), *Minzhong* (The Masses) 1 (January 1, 1925): 10; Goldman, "Bidegele zhi wu yi jie" (The First of May, Petrograd), *Shishi xinbao - Xuedeng* (January 17, 1926); Goldman, "Fang Kelupaotejin" (A Visit to Kropotkin), *Minzhong* (November 16, 1926); and *Cong zibenzhuyi dao annaqizhuyi* (From Capitalism to Anarchism) (Shanghai: Ziyou shudian, shehui kexue congkan, 1930), vol. 1 (translation of Alexander Berkman [Baokeman]).

<sup>18</sup> [Li] Feigan, "Makesi zhuyi pipan Chaierkaisuofu zuo" (Criticism of Marxism in the Works of Cherkesov), *Ziyou yuekan* (Freedom Monthly) 1 (January 30, 1929): 1.

<sup>19</sup> See also Li Feigan, "Qianjia, bu'ersheweikedelidao" (Cheka, the Sharp Knife of the Bolsheviks), in *Su'e geming canshi* (The Tragic History of the Soviet Russian Revolution) (Shanghai: Ziyou shudian [Freedom Book-store], March 1928), vol. 2, pp. 197-205.

tatorship after the revolution and that he therefore opposed the NEP as a return to capitalism within a still-undemocratic one-party state.

Although the anarchist-Marxist debate in China died down by the end of the 1920s as the Communists started to win out over the anarchists as the leading socialist revolutionary group, Ba Jin remained loyal to the anarchist cause up to 1949 and lived to see the development of high Stalinism in the Soviet Union. Although most anarchists, including Ba Jin, started to mute their critique of communism during the 1930s when the Communist-anarchist split took secondary status, first to the split between the Kuomintang (Nationalist Party, hereafter KMT) and the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) and then to the growing Japanese encroachment in China, many nevertheless tried to maintain their independence from Communist control. Ba Jin, for example, refused to join the Communist-controlled League of Left Wing writers, an action for which he was defended by the famous novelist Lu Xun.<sup>20</sup> On the other side of the coin, while more senior anarchists gravitated toward the Nationalist Party regime in hopes of influencing China in the longer run toward libertarian socialist ideals,<sup>21</sup> Ba Jin remained loyal to the concept of an immanent workers' revolution. For political reasons, he may have written less often against the Communists during the period between the Kuomintang's repression of the Communists in 1927 and the Communists' ultimate victory in 1949, but he was far from silent. In the fifth selection in this issue, his "Afterword" to the 1937 edition of his translation of Peter Kropotkin's *Blood of Freedom* (*Ziyou xue*), Ba Jin's critique of the Soviet state seems to resonate not just with the period of War Communism under Lenin but also with the brutal and even genocidal destruction of Stalin's nationalization of all industry and forced collectivization and policies of 1928 through the 1930s. This was, again, a possible allusion not missed by his later Maoist critics, as we will see below. As Ba Jin put it in this essay:

The Russian Communist Party has relied on the organized force of arms to nationalize the factories and land that had been directly confiscated by the workers and peasants. Moreover, they do not permit the workers to control the factories and the peasants to apportion the land. Instead, these apportionments are made by Communist Party government managers—this is what is called the dictatorship of the proletariat. Under the rule of these self-professed representatives, the proletariat still live off wages received for labor. Inequality and lack of freedom still exist. Political struggles, scheming, courts, and prisons have not been eradicated.<sup>22</sup>

Ba Jin contrasted what he saw as the despotic turn in the Russian revolution during the 1930s with the anarchist collectives in the Spanish Civil War from 1936–1939, which he viewed as the real model of democratic, worker-controlled revolution:

The lessons of the Soviet Russian Revolution have undoubtedly impacted the current Spanish Revolution, causing it to be far more progressive: the workers and the peas-

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<sup>20</sup> See Lang, *Pa Chin and His Writings*, p. 163.

<sup>21</sup> See Ming K. Chan and Arif Dirlik, *Schools into Fields and Factories: Anarchists, the Guomindang, and the Labor University in Shanghai, 1927–1932* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1991), passim, and Dirlik, *Anarchism in the Chinese Revolution*, pp. 248–285.

<sup>22</sup> [Li] Feigan, afterword to *Ziyou xue* (*Blood of Freedom*), by Peter Kropotkin (Kelupaotejin), translated by Daniel Youd in the fourth essay in this issue. See also a partial translation of selected paragraphs and phrases from this afterword by Diane Scherer in "Ba Jin's Blood of Freedom: A Chinese Anarchist's Response to Haymarket," in *Haymarket Scrapbook*, ed. Franklin Rosemont and David Roediger (Chicago: Charles H. Kerr, 1986), pp. 236–237.



ants know how to join together in self-government and protect themselves, thereby preventing the rebirth of despotism.<sup>23</sup>

Ultimately, Ba Jin decided to stay in China rather than flee to Taiwan as did some more senior Chinese anarchists such as Wu Zhihui, but even in the 1940s, Ba Jin tried to maintain his independence and reserve his right to criticize Communist methods.

He continued to translate the works of Kropotkin through the 1940s,<sup>24</sup> some of which contained instances of Kropotkin's criticism of the Soviet Union, including criticism of famine in Russia before and after the revolution. Indeed, these writings only added fuel for the fire started by his Maoist critics during the Great Leap Forward and Cultural Revolution, who, as in the final two essays translated in this issue noted below, claimed that by raising the issue of famine in the late 1910s and early 1920s, Ba Jin meant to evoke the later period of famine under Stalin's forced collectivization starting in 1929.

The irony is that Ba Jin remained loyal to the PRC regime and actually muted his criticism after the Communist takeover in 1949. This loyalty included his probably mandatory self-criticism and renunciation of anarchism during the Great Leap Forward, after criticism of his anarchism by the rising Maoist star Yao Wenyuan (see the sixth selection in this issue, "On the Anarchist Ideas in Ba Jin's novel *Destruction*"). Yao's defense of the People's Communes of the Great Leap Forward in this article and his attack on Ba Jin's "petit bourgeois" humanism only adds to the supreme irony, given what we now know about the mass atrocities that were the result of this movement, including brutal beatings and executions, forced starvation, and even cannibalism.<sup>25</sup> At least in this earlier denunciation of Ba Jin's anarchism, Yao refers to him as "Comrade Ba Jin," which would seem to ascribe Ba Jin's errors to "contradictions among the people," even if Yao stated strongly his belief that anarchism was at root a counterrevolutionary ideology that served the interests of the bourgeoisie. In yet another irony (if probably small comfort to Ba Jin), during the late 1970s, as noted above, Yao Wenyuan was later denounced along with his Maoist colleagues in the "Gang of Four" as just such an anarchist himself, one whose "leftist" attitudes only masked a counterrevolutionary attempt to overthrow communism.<sup>26</sup>

Even worse for Ba Jin's later fate in the PRC, his critics in the Cultural Revolution openly denounced him as a class enemy, as can be seen in the seventh and final selection in this volume, "Thoroughly Expose Ba Jin's Counterrevolutionary True Face."

As part of this attack, these Maoist critics claimed that Ba Jin republished Kropotkin's criticism of early Soviet famines under Lenin to criticize not just the later famine under Stalin's (forced) collectivization policies, but Chinese Communist policies under Mao as well. Again, the irony is extreme: although over a third of the Russian people may have starved in the famine Kropotkin described, it paled in comparison to the 20 million or more deaths from the later forced collectivization in the 1930s in the Soviet Union and even more so to the largest man-made famine in

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> See, for example, Ba Jin, trans., Peter Kropotkin (Kelupaotejin), *Mianbao yu Ziyou* (Bread and Freedom) (Chinese title of Kropotkin's *Conquest of Bread*) (Shanghai: Pingming, 1940), and Kropotkin, "Shehui biange yu jingji de gaizao" (Social Change and Economic Transformation), *Shijie yuekan* (World Monthly) 1 (May/June): 9–10.

<sup>25</sup> See, for example, Yang Jisheng, *Tombstone*, with an introduction by Edward Friedman and Roderick MacFarquhar (abridged English translation, New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2013).

<sup>26</sup> See the sources in note 7 above. Among the articles in the PRC press denouncing the Gang of Four as anarchists, see especially, "The Aim of the 'Gang of Four' in Fanning Up Anarchism Is to Usurp Party and State Power," *Guangmingribao* (Enlightenment Daily), March 10, 1977, translated in *Survey of the PRC Press* 6308 (March 28, 1977).

history in China during the Great Leap Forward, when 36 million or more people starved to death. Especially considering Ba Jin's knowledge of at least the economic disaster of the Great Leap Forward and his own suffering and that of others during the Cultural Revolution, when hundreds of thousands more people were persecuted to death, after rereading these old essays one can only guess what Ba Jin's true feelings were about both famine and Communist Party dictatorship in China. One might especially wonder whether the tremendous suffering and human degradation of Mao's Great Leap Forward and Cultural Revolution, and/or the periodic repression of political dissent during the 1980s culminating in the suppression of the Tiananmen student movement of 1989, ever led Ba Jin to recall any of his own writings from his long-ago participation in the anarchist critique of Marxism.

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## **Ba Jin's Reputation and Value as a Writer: Coda to Guest Editors' Introduction**

As a coda to this introduction, a few words are in order about Ba Jin's enduring reputation as one of twentieth-century China's most important writers. Conveniently, there exists in Chinese a six-character, rhyming phrase that establishes a national canon of literary modernity: *Lu, Guo, Mao; Ba, Lao, Cao*. Constructed out of the surnames of six authors, the "Ba" in this slogan refers to Ba Jin (the other authors are Lu Xun, Guo Moruo, Mao Dun, Lao She, and Cao Yu). Indeed, the articles collected and translated here acquire their significance not only because they illustrate an important moment in Chinese intellectual history, but also because Ba Jin—one of these six canonical writers—wrote them.

To gain a sense of Ba Jin's celebrity, one need only look at the commemoration of his career that took place upon the occasion of his death at age 101 in October 2005. At that time, the Chinese media memorialized Ba Jin as both a "literary giant" and "the conscience of the twentieth century," whose passing marked the end of an era.<sup>27</sup> In a forum established by *The People's Daily Online* (Renmin wang), hundreds of netizens expressed their appreciation of the author, as in the following example: "Ba Jin, a name as eternal as the spring! All that has left us is his body, which will soon turn to dust. But what lives on with us is his eternal soul! Thank you for using both your writing and your spirit to give us a pure world!"<sup>28</sup> For the most part, the foreign press echoed these sentiments, although in less florid prose. Thus, the *New York Times* obituary for Ba Jin reported: "Mr. Ba was widely considered a literary giant in China, a novelist who had inspired generations of writers and whose fame many here [in China] said should long ago have earned him the Nobel Prize in Literature."<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> "Dangdai wenxue jujiang Ba Jin 19 shi ling liu fen zai Shanghai shishi" (The great contemporary literary master Ba Jin has passed away today at 7:06 PM in Shanghai), *Renmin wang*, October 17, 2005, available at <http://culture.people.com.cn/GB/22219/3777162.html>. Ba Jin earned the moniker "conscience of the twentieth century" in later life for his advocacy of an honest assessment of the Cultural Revolution. See note 10 above.

<sup>28</sup> "Renmin wang wangyou shenqie diaonian wentan jujiang Ba Jin" (*The People's Daily Online* netizens offer their deeply felt condolences on the passing of the literary master Ba Jin), *Renmin wang*, October 18, 2005, available at <http://culture.people.com.cn/GB/22219/3780549.html>.

<sup>29</sup> David Barboza, "Ba Jin, 100, Noted Novelist of Prerevolutionary China, Is Dead," *New York Times*, October 18, 2005, available at <http://www.nytimes.com/2005/10/18/books/18BA.html?pagewanted=print>.

We should note, however, that there are a number of dissenters from this hagiographic account of Ba Jin's place in modern Chinese literary history. Commenting on the May Fourth generation of writers, the Nobel Peace Prize-winning contemporary author and critic Liu Xiaobo has said that since they were pioneers of a new literary movement, "all they needed to do, no matter what they wrote, was use the vernacular; in so doing, they were able to create a new literary style." Nevertheless, he continues:

Writers such as Ba Jin and Mao Dun, although they are praised as great masters, really don't have any facility with language. From the perspective of language, the literary contributions of these writers are rather minimal. Their books have value only as material for intellectual history and sociological research.<sup>30</sup>

Several decades earlier, C. T. Hsia, doyen of the serious study of modern Chinese literature in the West, reached a similar conclusion. Citing Ba Jin's own discomfort with claiming for himself the title of "artist" (in the sense of craftsman), Hsia asserted that although he was "one of the most popular and voluminous writers of this [the May Fourth] period ... [Ba Jin] is not one of the most important."<sup>31</sup>

How, then, do we account for the immense esteem several generations of Chinese readers have had for Ba Jin's work? First of all, one cannot totally discount the "literary" qualities of his prose. Drawing inspiration from a wide variety of sources — especially nineteenth-century French and Russian literature—Ba Jin, along with many of his peers, helped establish the "new" Chinese novel as a powerful vehicle for intellectual engagement with the political and social issues of Chinese modernity. <sup>32</sup> To be sure, his plots and characters were often little more than one-dimensional clichés, and his prose was at times wooden and repetitive; nevertheless, at his best, Ba Jin succeeded in employing the straightforward immediacy of the vernacular to forge a deep emotional connection with the reading public. Describing the popularity of works such as *Destruction* (Miewang), *Family*, and *Autumn* (Chiu), Olga Lang has written:

... his young readers readily identified with his characters. In his novels they saw the reflection of their own lives, their own sufferings and struggles. They were attracted not only by his ability to grapple with the crucial problems of the times, but also by his warm humanitarianism and his belief in the ultimate victory of his ideals.<sup>32</sup>

In this sense, perhaps, Ba Jin's enthusiastic readers have understood him better than his skeptical critics. As Ba Jin himself wrote, he was not worried that his writing would lose its value after a short period of time.<sup>33</sup> He wrote not for the ages but for the moment. In his own words, he wrote "to enable people to live better."<sup>34</sup> From this perspective, the connection between Ba Jin's

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<sup>30</sup> Wang Shuo and Lao Xia (Liu Xiaobo), <em>Meiren zeng wo menghanyao</em> (A Beautiful Woman Gave Me a Knock-Out Drug) (Wuhan: Changjiang wenyi chubanshe, 2000), p. xx.

<sup>31</sup> C. T. Hsia, *A History of Modern Chinese Fiction, 1917–1957*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1999), p. 237.

<sup>32</sup> Lang, introduction to Pa Chin's *Family*, p. vii.

<sup>33</sup> Ba Jin, "Duanpian de jilu" (Fragmentary Notes), in *Ba Jin quanji* (The Collected Works of Ba Jin) (Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe, 2000), vol. 12, p. 442.

<sup>34</sup> Ba Jin, "Ba Jin lun chuanguo xu" (Ba Jin on the Creative Process: Preface), in *Ba Jin quanji* (The Collected Works of Ba Jin) (Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe, 2000), vol. 17, p. 298.

literary oeuvre and his political writings comes into sharper focus: both were part of a larger project of consciousness-raising and self-discovery, the end goal of which was, for all people, a more honest and equitable way of being in the world.

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