



Ba Jin: From Rebellion to Endurance

Ba Jin¹, one of the main figures of twentieth century Chinese literature, died in Shanghai on the 17th of October 2005. He was also a survivor of the Chinese anarchist movement which disappeared with the victory of the Communists. While he was required to ‘repent’, and purged and humiliated during the Cultural Revolution, he never embraced any other ideal.

Ba Jin was born in 1904 in Chengdu, Sichuan province, into a wealthy family. Economically comfortable but personally stifling, he described his patriarchal family home as a despotic kingdom. His first escape came in 1919 when, under the influence of Kropotkin’s *Appeal to the Young* and the writings of Emma Goldman, he joined the local anarchist group, the Equality Society. ‘He became the group’s most active member, taking part in the students’ demonstrations against the local war lords, distributing revolutionary leaflets, and organizing a reading room on the premises of the local anarchist journal, to which he began to contribute articles.’² He was also inspired by the stories of nineteenth-century Russian radicals who went ‘to the people’ as recounted by writers like Turgenev, whose works he would later translate.

His second escape came in 1923 when he was finally able to leave Chengdu to study, moving to Nanking and then Shanghai. There he continued his anarchist activism and writing, producing a pamphlet on the Chicago Haymarket Affair of 1886-7.³ From 1927 to 1928 Ba Jin lived in France, meeting many anarchists including Alexander Berkman, whose *Now and After: an ABC of Communist Anarchism* (AKA *What is Anarchism?*) he later translated and adapted as *From Capitalism to Anarchism*. In France he also wrote to Bartolomeo Vanzetti awaiting execution in Massachusetts. He was deeply affected by the case and later wrote a pamphlet, *On the Scaffold*, about it.

In France Ba Jin completed *Destruction*, the first of his novels based on the struggles of young Chinese



revolutionaries. In 1931 he wrote *Family*, recognised as his greatest work, and from this point he was established as a writer. In 1931 came the first Japanese invasion of China which preceded the full-scale war of 1937-45. Ba Jin wrote extensively for the anti-Japanese resistance, though without abandoning anarchism.

After the Communist victory in 1949, Ba Jin was forced to rewrite his works. ‘In the first editions the protagonists acted with anarchist ideas and in a clearly anarchist ambience, and they often quoted the well-known

texts of anarchism... In the “revised” edition... Emma Goldman is not only no longer his spiritual mother; she doesn’t exist.’⁴ From this point on, he abandoned fiction, and only wrote a small amount of reportage. In 1958 he renounced Anarchism and in 1961 stated ‘I am not satisfied either by the quantity or quality of my works.’

However, whenever the regime allowed it, Ba Jin was prepared to speak out. ‘In 1962, when the party seemed to tolerate and even promote a more creative and spontaneous style in literature, [Ba Jin] came out with a speech under the title “Courage and Sense of Responsibility of Writers.” It was a strong protest against the literary bureaucrats and an admonition to writers to be fighters, to uphold the truth and their own vision of reality.’⁵

Payback came during the Cultural Revolution (1966-76). Mao unleashed the Red Guards on his ‘bureaucrat’ enemies. They also persecuted writers, including Ba Jin – making a great deal of his anarchist past. ‘To the people’, instead of being an optimistic plan to spark social change as it had been for the nineteenth-century Russian *narodniks* became a punishment for independent thinking or ‘disloyalty.’

‘Finally, on June 20, 1968, [Ba Jin] was dragged to the People’s Stadium of Shanghai. [continues over...]

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Those present and those who watched the scene on television saw him kneeling on broken glass and heard the shouts accusing him of being a traitor and enemy of Mao. They also heard him break his silence at the end and shout at the top of his voice, 'You have your thoughts and I have mine. This is the fact and you can't change it even if you kill me.'"⁶

Worse came in 1972 when his wife Xian Shan died of cancer, after being denied adequate medical care. During these years Ba Jin gave himself strength by reading Dante's *Inferno*. In 1977 Ba Jin was rehabilitated and returned to his position as a respected writer of an earlier generation. Soon after his return, he produced a series of essays entitled *Random Thoughts* dealing largely with the Cultural Revolution.

Unlike the rest of his anarchist comrades we're able to sketch out the life of Ba Jin: in many ways he was protected by his fame as a writer. Facing a totalitarian regime, he could have surrendered and endorsed every new slogan demanded by the powers that be, but didn't. Beyond that it is difficult to discuss the exact political attitudes he held, since censorship and self-censorship take us into a foggy world of codes and meaningful silences.

But his words show that the spirit of freedom endured:

'When Ba Jin was a guest speaker at a lecture series in Kyoto in 1980, he declared: "I do not write to earn a living or to build a reputation. I write to battle enemies.

"Who are they? Every outdated traditional notion, every irrational system that stands in the way of social progress and human development, and every instance of cruelty in the face of love. These are my great enemies.

"My pen is alight and my body aflame. Until both burn down to ash, my love and my hate will remain here in the world."⁷

1, a note on names: Born Li Yaotang and later named Li Feigan (Li Pei Kan) by his family, Ba Jin (previously transliterated as Pa Chin or Pa Kin) took this pen name (which he used only for his fiction) from the first syllable of Bakunin and the last of Kropotkin to show his anarchist politics.

2, from the introduction by Olga Lang to *Family*, Anchor Books edition: 1972 posted at <http://plawiuk.blogspot.com/>

3, *The Chicago Tragedy* (published 1926). See 'Ba Jin's *Blood of Freedom*' by Diane Scherer in *Haymarket Scrapbook*, edited by Dave Roediger and Franklin Rosemont (Charles H. Kerr, 1986).

4, Giuseppe Galzerano, 'The Anarchist writer Pa Kin', *Le Monde Libertaire*, N° 470, January 13, 1983. Trans. Paul Sharkey.

5, Olga Lang, introduction to *Family*.

6, Olga Lang, introduction to *Family*.

7, 'Warrior of the Pen – Ba Jin' by Daisaku Ikeda (President, Soka Gakkai International). Posted at <http://plawiuk.blogspot.com/>

Front cover image of *Ba Jin* by Clifford Harper (from *Cienfuegos Press Anarchist Review* #4, 1978).

Letter from Ba Jin to the CRIA [International Anarchist Liaison Commission, Paris], 18 March 1949

Dear comrade

Received your letter, for which I thank you. Apologies for the belated reply, but I have been very busy of late. Anyway, eight days ago I sent off my editions of the artwork of Sim and Castelao on the Spanish Revolution. The publications that you sent me from Paris have yet to arrive. I am delighted that you have sent me them.

I get the Japanese newspaper regularly and know of the proposal for a Far Eastern Congress. But I don't reckon a congress is feasible, given current circumstances in Asia. For a start, there is no way of travelling abroad from here without the permission of the government and correspondence destined for Japan is subject to censorship here and over there.

I regret that I am not in a position to bring you news of the anarchist movement in China since, to be honest, there is no such movement in China. I am quite alone here, working and making propaganda as just one writer. I am in charge of the editing of Kropotkin's *Illustrated Complete Works* in Chinese, four volumes of which have already appeared. I am also the publisher of the project. There was another comrade who translated *Paroles* ... and who is translating *Modern Science* ... for me, but he was a pro-Kuomintang anarchist.

Lu Chien-Ho is isolated in Chengdu, but there is his brother who is not a comrade but a sympathiser and who knows French. He is an indefatigable worker. However he publishes his newspaper, *Thought*, as a supplement to the Kuomintang's daily in Chengdu (the editor being a personal friend of his), so it is not widely read. In Fukien, and only there, there is a libertarian movement. It is not huge but it is real. There is a school there founded by our comrades and a small publishing house that has published ten or so pamphlets including Malatesta's article on anarchy, as translated by Lu, and part one of my *Bakunin*.

I shall write again on other matters.

With best wishes and a fraternal handshake.

Li Pei Kan

(from the CIRA archives in Lausanne, Switzerland)

Chinese anarchists in the 1920's USA – the Equality Society

Includes a report from 'The Equality Society'

In the period before the Chinese revolution Chinese anarchists were also active in the USA - in particular the 'Equality society'. This article includes complete transcriptions, including original errors, of two articles from that time on The Equality Society

In America, Chinese anarchists were few ("not more than 100") but they were active in the struggle. Some were workers, toiling in restaurants and garment shops. Others were students.

I am unaware of there being much written, in English at least, about Chinese-American anarchists.

Below you will find complete transcriptions, including original errors, of two articles which I have on file on The Equality Society. Both appeared in the American English-language monthly newspaper "The Road to Freedom".

In her autobiography, *Bread Upon the Waters*", Rose Pesotta briefly mentions a "group of Chinese students" in San Francisco who were known by, presumably an anarchist "friend" in New York in the mid-1930s. (p.71)

When Pesotta was on a union organization visit to San Francisco she met with of these "students". In the tenement apartment, Pesotta writes, she saw copies of Chinese "pamphlets with portraits of... Kropotkin, Proudhon... and others.

Even though Pesotta was a known anarchist at the time she wrote this book (1944) she also served as a Vice President of the AFL International Ladies Garment Workers Union (ILGWU) and never wrote about anarchism or anarchists in her autobiography. So we can only infer that the initial people she met, Chih Ling and Yung Lee, were either active anarchists or sympathetic to anarchism.

From a read of the below article by Joseph Spivak, and Pesotta's description of her physical surroundings, it appears that both Pesotta and Spivak were talking about the same people.

We do know there existed an anarchist organization named The Equality Society. Mention of them appears in the English language anarchist paper "The Road to Freedom".

Writing in his column, "Our Organized Movement: A Coast to Coast Observation, Joseph Spivak, glowing reported that :

"The most encouraging group in San Francisco is the Chinese group, not because they do much work – they are very few in number – but on account of their enthusiasm. The members of the Chinese group have the same enthusiasm as the early revolutionists in Russia.

"I went up to see Comrade Red Jones the secretary of the group. He lives on a second floor of a very old fashioned building in the Chinese section of San Francisco. He, as well as most of the Chinese there, is very poor. He occupies a small room and according to the number of beds in this room is occupied by three. Yet when I entered the room I felt I was in an atmosphere of Ideal! The room was actually filled with literature, every inch of space is made use of for this purpose. Comrade Jones immediately began to show me one book after another in the Chinese language which were received from China and which he spreads among the Chinese population. I could not read the books, but from the pictures of the authors, I could see they were translations from Kropotkin, Bakunin, Berkman, Malatesta and almost every other anarchist writer. They also issue in China two monthly publications which this group spreads in San Francisco. In China, Comrade Jones told me, our comrades carry on a fight against the Nationalist party [of Chaing ki-Shek, the KMT] who are only a bunch of politicians: we do not want to make the same mistake as the Anarchists made in Russia [Apparently a reference to some anarchists alliances with the bolsheviks and being soft on the bolshevikization of the revolution early on]

"This little group also issues their own publication in Chinese language, "Equality", which they distribute free of charge. They also have a class in Chinese every Sunday for those who are interested."

[Sorry, the page with the date when this article was written, does not appear in my files. I am presuming it was in 1927 as there appears references to the execution of Sacco-Vanzetti which took place in August 1927.]

The Equality Society issued a report to the October 1928 Anarchist Conference (held at the International Center, 149 E 23rd St., NYC). The comrades reported:

"1. The Chinese in America:

Except for a few well to do class, most of the Chinese in America are sweat earners. On account of their ignorance, even they feel their own sufferings under the present economic order, they do not have class consciousness and revolutionary spirit. However they are not to be blamed, for they do not have any education at all. Even they do have, they have only the education under the capitalistic regime. Naturally, they object to all radical changes of the present order. Under this situation, the Chinese comrades have a very hard task to convert these poor Chinese workers to be revolutionists. However, they begin to realize the solidarity of the labor class. "As for the well to do class, they can never give up their selfishness. What

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they do care is to build up a bourgeois government in China to protect their interest.

“2. Chinese in America toward Anarchism:

“The Chinese in America who really believe anarchism are not more than one hundred. The reason for that is they are followers of nationalism and have confidence in politics and government. [My note: Of the then ruling KMT in China].

“3. A short history of the Equality Society:

“The Chinese in America who are interested anarchism in America are less than one hundred. We realize that the organization and propaganda are very important, so we had this society organized in 1925. In the course of this short history, there were several troubles with those well to do class, as they tried to make this organization a failure but in vain. A few months ago, the imperialistic government of America threatened to destroy this society by arresting comrade Jones and confiscating all our literatures. However, this only made us more militant than ever before.

“4. Some of the work of the Equality Society:

“In spite of the fact that we do not have many comrades, we have made an effort to publish a monthly in Chinese called “The Equality”. Just a few days ago, the Chinese government notified the Chinese post office not to circulate the same in China and send them abroad. This what they are doing now and afraid of. besides, we have published and send free all sorts of pamphlets to all who understand Chinese from time to time. We also distribute literatures concerning anarchism in both English and Chinese. Now, we are going to hold regular meetings even we have little time to do so, as we are all long hour, poor working conditions and low pay workers.

“5. The Anarchist movement in China:

“Comrades in China are very faithful to their work for anarchism. They do it either by large combination or small organizations. The ones which are worth to mention are ‘the Young Anarchists Federation in China’ and the ‘South China Anarchists Federation.

“Every organization has its publication. There is a bookstore in Shanghai named the Freedom Bookstore, has made a great contribution in handling our anarchist literatures.

“Suggestions to the Conference:

“We suggest that:

1. The anarchists should pay more attention to the current situation of all countries in the present day.
2. Anarchists should have a well organized organization to facilitate our work.
3. All local organizations, if possible, should hold regular meetings. If possible, some kind of social gatherings should be held occasionally for comrades of all nationalities in big cities.

4. All organizations better send their news in English to ROAD TO FREEDOM.

5. the ROAD TO FREEDOM better expands materials and pages. If possible, cheap paper may be sued for achieving these purposes.

The Equality Society
per MING HSI”

New KSL pamphlet

Konstantinos Speras: The Life and Activities of a Greek Anarcho-Syndicalist

by Leonardos Kottis

Translation by James Sotros, edited by Paul Pomonis
‘Konstantinos Speras was one of the pioneers of the working class trade-union movement in Greece. He spent the biggest part of his life in prison and in exile. He fought with all his might for the emancipation of the working class, for an autonomous trade-union movement, for a society without slaves and bosses. He represented revolutionary syndicalism and as a consequence he incurred the wrath of the State and the Communist Party. He was slandered, his work and actions were distorted and eventually he was murdered, along with dozens of other working class militants, in the name of the one and only “orthodox” way to socialism.’

ISBN 1-873605-14-5 £3 (£2 to subscribers)

Anarchy's Einstein: Carl

by Pat Murtagh

A biography of Carl/ Karl Einstein, nephew of Albert, art critic and writer, and *miliciano* with the Durruti Column during the Spanish Revolution appears in: *Any Time Now* “A newsletter of social anarchism” number 23, winter 2005. The writer hopes to reproduce Einstein’s oration given at the funeral of Durruti (22 November 1936), so keep your eyes peeled.

Bulletin #40 reviewed

“To the casual reader the KSL Bulletin can err on the esoteric side, but this issue is more light-reading than usual. Good stuff... They’ve got some great pamphlets looking at forgotten episodes of anarchist history.”

in *Headwound*, Leeds “DIY Punk Zine”

c/o 145-149 Cardigan Road, Leeds, LS6 1LJ

Esoteric? Us?

Credit

This edition of the KSL: Bulletin of the Kate Sharpley Library produced in Jan-Feb 2006 by the KSL collective. Thanks to everyone who helped with this issue and are helping with projects...

Special thanks for **donations**, to Mitch for providing the ‘Equality Society’ article and to our reviewers.

At the Café: Conversations on Anarchism

by Errico Malatesta, edited translated and introduced by Paul Nursey-Bray

A great new title from Freedom Press by the celebrated Italian veteran, published here for the first time in an English translation.

This small and stylishly produced volume is composed of a series of short dialogues between Giorgio, a young anarchist, and Cesare, a shopkeeper, Ambrogio, a magistrate, and Prospero, a wealthy businessman. Malatesta is rightly famed for his clear and easily-understood explanations of basic anarchist theory and this attractive little book is a perfect example of his accessible style.

Within the café conversations Malatesta explains the fundamentals of anarchist-communism, describing how a future free society might function and very convincingly countering the most common objections to the libertarian ideal. Anarchists will of course be familiar with these arguments and counter-arguments, but Malatesta writes so lucidly that this book could certainly serve as a useful introduction to anarchist doctrine for beginners.

The actual publishing history of these dialogues is equally fascinating. Begun in 1897 whilst hiding from the police in Ancona, they were interrupted by his eventual arrest, release, house arrest and exile from Italy. The first ten dialogues (of seventeen) were themselves published as a separate pamphlet. It was not until 1913 that Malatesta resumed work on the dialogues whilst working on the new anarchist journal *Volontà*, which was also based in Ancona. Here he wrote four new dialogues and also introduced some new characters into the café discussions.

However, following ‘Red Week’ in 1914 in which he was an enthusiastic participant, Malatesta was to become a political refugee in London and did not return to Italy until 1920.

The final three dialogues were written whilst editing *Umanità Nova* in Milan, most probably at the prompting of his close comrade Luigi Fabbri. The manuscript of the set of dialogues were miraculously overlooked during a police raid on Malatesta’s apartment in October 1920 and they were to be finally published by as a complete set in 1922 with an introduction by Luigi Fabbri. Overall then, an engaging and accessible read that explains the anarchist position on a range of social and political issues, making it as relevant today as when it was originally written.

Freedom Press, 2005. ISBN 1-904491-06-5 £7.50

Freedom, 84b Whitechapel High Street, London, E1 7QX

Chomsky on Anarchism ed. Barry Pateman

AK Press, 2005, 241pp. ISBN : 1-904859-20-8.

I can hear readers sighing and saying “another general book about anarchism” so I will use this review to point out what is specific about Noam Chomsky. But first a few points about the man himself and the contents of the volume in question.

Chomsky has spent much of his working life on linguistics and while there is a tradition of writers using their studies as a subject – Kropotkin for example – It is only tangentially covered in the book, For our purposes, his directly political writings are the subject but note that he does link the two subjects in a reading on Language and Freedom.

The bulk of the book is reprints of interviews from the last 35 years with only a few literature extracts. One of these is a revised version of his useful Introduction to Daniel Guerin’s classical *Anarchism from Theory to Practice*. Another is Objectivity and Liberal Scholarship, one of the first of a continuous series of comment and analysis with which he has plagued the academic establishment, and governments and grandees of US capitalism ; in this case over the Spanish revolution and the Vietnam War

The interviews are perhaps more specific and responsive, and one emerging theme is that he thinks for himself and his views are sometimes quite challenging to anarchist assumptions. As Barry Pateman points out, he claims that the state can be used to move towards a more equitable anarchist society, contrary to those anarchists who are “pursing doctrine in a rigid fashion without being concerned about the human consequences”.

In another slightly heretical section, he defends both Marx, for his early liberationary theory, and praises lavishly the “left marxists” like council communists, who broke with Lenin in 1920 but were first called Left Communists. His promotion of Anton Pannekoek has led George Woodcock to claim that Chomsky is not really an anarchist, but readers can make up their own mind.

As well as proposing State orientated action, and supporting Marxist influenced groups like council communists, now Workers Socialists, Chomsky says that he has a “flexible view of voting”. Like some other anarchists he does vote on local matters and would vote in national elections in a key vote. In this he is only following the practice, if not the policy, of the Spanish CNT from 1930 to ’36.

It is worth noting that whatever his reservations about theory, he repeatedly avoids answering questions about anarchist practice, tactics and such issues. Still this is a very thought provoking. publication by a writer who would perhaps want to be defined as a “libertarian socialist”. Alan Woodward

Alexander Berkman *The Blast* introduced by Barry Pateman.

My first thought was ‘hell, it’s huge’ because it stands eleven inches high, but that’s what you get when you do a real-size facsimile of a newspaper.

The introduction is very good, detailed and tightly focused on Berkman’s *Blast* years – for a general introduction to Berkman’s life and significance you’ll have to look elsewhere. But the real beauty is in the text. The cover cartoons, some by Robert Minor (before he gave it up to play ‘follow-my-leader’ in the Communist Party) still have the sharp edge of satire undulled.

As one of the most important journals in the history of anarchism it’s packed with articles showing history in the making. So much so that it was a relief that this book is widely and cheaply available, so that we don’t have to type them out for the bulletin. Is there any higher praise? Get it.

AK, 2005 ISBN 1904859089 £15 / \$21.95

Iron Column

2006 sees the 70th anniversary of the Spanish Revolution. To mark this we plan to publish *The Iron Column: Militant Anarchism in the Spanish Civil War*. The Iron Column – comprised of anarchists and ex-prisoners – was one of the most famous militia units of the Spanish Civil War, holding out for the revolutionary gains of 1936 longer than almost anyone. This is the story of a group of revolutionaries willing to take the fight to fascism: and unwilling to tolerate dictatorship behind them, either. Paz (himself a veteran of the anarchist Durruti Column) recounts the Iron Column’s story, illuminating the rise and fall of the Spanish Revolution which raged alongside the Spanish Civil War.

We need money to do this of course, but also need help to get it noticed, into newspapers, bookshops and libraries. If you can help us do that, drop us a line.

More publishing news

Daniel Guerin’s *No Gods No Masters: An Anthology of Anarchism* has been reprinted in one volume, ISBN 1904859291, £16.95/\$24.95 We will get copies of this once we shift the last of the 2 volume set.

AK are also publishing Paul Avrich’s *Anarchist Voices: an oral history of anarchism in America; The Modern School Movement* and *The Russian Anarchists* as well as *Dreams of Freedom: A Ricardo Flores Magon reader; Anarchy will be! Selected writings of Luigi Galleani*, plus Abel Paz’s *Durruti in the Spanish Revolution* and Clifford Harper’s rewritten and redrawn *Anarchy: a Graphic Guide*. Watch this space!

Read & Noir: new crime fiction from Christiebooks

We have copies of *The Man Who Killed Durruti* by Pedro de Paz, a prize-winning detective novella built round one of the mysteries of the Spanish Civil War (with biographical afterword by Stuart Christie – £8)

Also just out: Pino Cacucci’s *Without a Glimmer of Remorse* (illustrated by Flavio Costantini) a dramatic, bitter and wonderful novel of Jules Bonnot and the ‘Bonnot Gang’ (£10)

Projectile 2006

“There is still time to make submissions of films or ideas for the **2nd Projectile: International Festival Of Anarchist Film & Culture**. The will be in Newcastle upon Tyne, UK, date t.b.c.

So far we have: An epic drama about anarchist militiawomen in the Spanish Civil War – *Libertarias*; An Angry Brigade docudrama; *Nosotros Somos Asi* – the CNT’s restored 1936 musical comedy in which children confront authority and organise in a political assembly; *Anarchists Against the Wall* from Israel; Classic 1988 sci-fi *They Live* (the rich really are an alien species); *The Story of the East Van Porn Collective* – consensus has never been so sexy; The rarely seen *Rebellion in Patagonia* which portrays the revolt (and massacre) of anarchist workers in Argentina in the 1920s; and more gems. But We Need More!

For more details contact info@projectile.org.uk or paleto33@yahoo.co.uk – www.projectile.org.uk”

Libertarian Chronicles

The Libertarian Historical Archive (Eleftheriako Historiko Archeio) have recently begun publishing “Libertarian Chronicles” (*Eleftheriaka Chronika*) Contents of issue No 1 (in Greek): **James Sotros**, “Plotyno Rhodokanaty: A Greek Anarchist in Mexico of 19th century” (p. 3-29), **Pedro Siler**, “The Socialist newspaper *El Hijo del Trabajo* (1876-1884)” (p. 30-41) and **Plotyno Rhodokanaty**, “Cartilla Socialista” (p.42-62). Editorial by **Linos Kottis** for the Libertarian Historical Archive (Eleftheriako Historiko Archeio)

The magazine will be published twice a year.

Comrades Linos Kottis, Dimitris Troaditis & Spyros Fragos are collectively responsible for it.

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