

Esperanto and Chinese anarchism in the 1920s and 1930s

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Esperanto in China and among the Chinese diaspora was for long periods closely linked with anarchism. This article looks at the history of the Chinese Esperanto movement after the repatriation of anarchism to China in the 1910s. It examines Esperanto's political connections in the Chinese setting and the arguments used by its supporters to promote the language. In exploring the role played by Esperanto in interwar Chinese culture and politics, it helps to throw light on the complex relationship between language and politics in China in the first half of the twentieth century.

Keywords: Esperanto, anarchism, communism, China, language politics, language reform

Introduction

Socialists and anarchists saw at around the turn of the twentieth century saw the international language Esperanto as a perfect vehicle for the world revolution to which they aspired. It also won strong support among internationally minded Chinese. Leading Chinese radicals outside China – primarily anarchists in France and Japan – embraced the Esperanto cause and strove to establish the language in China. In later years, Esperanto also won a following among Chinese communists and other radicals.

Esperanto is a planned universalist language developed in the late nineteenth century by L. L. Zamenhof for use as a global second language. It was intended by its author as a remedy for problems of miscommunication and social conflict. In the structure of Esperanto, Zamenhof strove towards maximum simplicity. In the late nineteenth century, Esperanto started to take off as a cultural and political movement. Today, it has supporters throughout the world, more than 100,000 speakers, and more than one hundred periodicals.

As we explained in an earlier article (Müller & Benton 2006), in early twentieth century, the history of Esperanto was strongly linked with Chinese anarchism in Tokyo and Paris. Throughout the early period, the Chinese Esperanto movement retained a robust connection with anarchism, both in Chinese political communities overseas and in China itself. This relationship was less developed in the West, where few anarchists were as interested in language issues as their East Asian counterparts. This contrast points up important differences in cultural sensibilities. It must also be seen in the context of the historical setting in which anarchism was introduced to China – who developed an interest in it and why.

Chinese anarchists in Tokyo and Paris frequently published material in Esperanto as part of their campaign for world citizenship. Around 1915, reform-minded scholars in China itself started to assert a new role for themselves as critics of Confucianism and champions of new-style values, including science and democracy. They attacked the Chinese writing system and the use of classical Chinese and called for a literary revolution and the promotion of the vernacular, known as *baihua*. The educational debate and experiments in new styles of learning and living associated with this movement, known as the New Culture Movement, made anarchism more acceptable in China, and helped it spread and diversify. As a result of the sudden popularity of anarchism in China itself, the anarchist interest in Esperanto was quickly imported into the New Culture Movement and became a topic of intense debate in *Xin qingnian* (New youth), the movement's most influential forum. However, the Esperanto debate in *Xin qingnian* ended in February 1919, when Chinese disappointment at the detrimental outcome of the Versailles peace treaty for China's national interest led to a cooling of internationalist sentiment and a rising tide of political rev-

olution. Now, the discussion about language reform gave way to broader social, political, and philosophical issues. Even so, interest in the language revived in the early 1920s, when anarchist organisations began to form in several of the main Chinese cities.

***Xuehui* and Erošenko**

Numerous anarchist groups developed in China after 1919. The most important centres of anarchist activity were Beijing, Shanghai, and Guangzhou.¹ Central to these developments was the journalist Jing Meijiu, who had earlier been affiliated to the *Tianyi* group formed by Liu Shipai in Tokyo, and named after Liu's journal *Tianyi* (Natural justice). Jing Meijiu was the sole personal link between the early and later anarchist organisations. In Beijing, starting in the autumn of 1922, Jing created a broader audience for anarchist thought by publishing *Xuehui* (Collected learning), a supplement to the daily newspaper *Guofeng ribao* (National customs). *Xuehui* was not purely anarchist, but it carried numerous translations and articles by anarchist authors.² Many were taken from other publications, so *Xuehui* was more a transmitter than an innovator. Its non-Chinese authors included Kropotkin, Ōsugi, and Tolstoy, and it also published Eltzbacher's outline of anarchism. But though many of the translations were not new, they now reached a far wider circle. The supplement tended to look to China's own anarchist traditions, a concept elastic enough to include Laozi and Zhuangzi.³ Several authors argued that China was cut out for anarchism, and writers like Zheng Taipu and Jing Meijiu specifically recommended sinicising it. Some suggested a New Village strategy, an idea borrowed from Japan, where anarchists and others started experimenting in the late 1910s with communal forms of rural living. Mixing with the rural population like the Narodniks and building organisations from the bottom up was thought to embody an essentially Chinese style.⁴ Indeed, such ideas were carried out in some places.⁵ Others argued for a more radical line and exhorted readers not to ignore soldiers as targets of anarchist propaganda, since the ruling classes would not give up without a fight;⁶ or they argued for the need to recruit women.⁷

Xuehui also talked about the role of Esperanto. Jing Meijiu had learned some Esperanto from Ōsugi in Japan and was interested in language issues. In Shanghai, where Jing lived until 1922, Esperanto had spread quickly, just as it was now spreading in Beijing. Earlier, Cai Yuanpei, Dean of Beijing University, had appointed Sun Guozhang, a veteran of the Chinese Esperanto movement, to introduce Esperanto to the curriculum.⁸ Although the first big Esperanto debate (in *Xin qingnian*) had subsided in 1919, Sun Guozhang continued to offer courses at the university and had no difficulty in attracting students.⁹ He had always stressed the practical advantages of Es-

¹ Lu Zhe 1990 reviews anarchism studies (pp. 250–261). See also Xu Shanguang and Liu Jianping 1989:142–153.

² It appeared more than 500 times. See Li-Pei-Kan 1926:26.

³ Wuxu, “Zhongguo gudai wuzhengfuzhuyi chao zhi yipie” (A brief look at anarchist currents in old China), *Xuehui* 138–139 (March 14 and 15, 1923).

⁴ Xuantian, “Wang xiangcun qu” (Go to the villages), *Xuehui* nos. 74–75 (December 25 and 26, 1922). Partly reprinted in Ge Maochun, Jiang Jun, and Li Xingzhi, eds, 1991 [1984], vol. 2, pp. 641–647.

⁵ *Xuehui* nos. 413–424.

⁶ Sanbo, “Wo de shehui geming de yijian” (My views on social revolution), *Xuehui* nos. 62–63 (December 13 and 14, 1922). (Also in Ge Maochun, Jiang Jun, and Li Xingzhi, eds., 1991 [1984], vol. 2, pp. 637–641.)

⁷ [Lu] Jianbo, “Zenyang xuanchuan zhuyi” (How to propagate [our] principles?), *Xuehui* 194 (May 13, 1923):4–6.

⁸ Hou Zhiping 1985:121–124; or, in the Esperanto version, Hou Zhiping 1982.

⁹ The university daily, *Beijing daxue rikan*, regularly reported on internal Esperanto activities.

peranto. The language received an added boost when Cai invited the blind poet and Esperantist Vasilij Erošenko to join the faculty.

Erošenko, who came from Ukraine, then part of the Soviet Union, had ties to East Asia and the international socialist movement.¹⁰ Born in 1890, he had gone blind at the age of four. He was a talented linguist and musician. He learned Esperanto and enrolled through Esperantist contacts at a blind school in London in 1912, to study music. He was expelled for “improper behaviour,” but not before learning English and seeking out Kropotkin and the British anarchists. In 1914, he left Ukraine for a second time, after hearing that in Japan blind people could learn to become doctors. Also through Esperantist contacts, he enrolled at a college in Tokyo and linked up with Ōsugi and other radical intellectuals, including the “proletarian” dramatist and Esperantist Akita Ujaku. Erošenko began to write and publish. After travelling through South and Southeast Asia between 1916 and 1919, he was expelled by the British colonial authorities as a “dangerous Russian.” Back in Japan, he was placed under police supervision.

In June 1921, the Japanese government expelled Erošenko on the suspicion of “Bolshevism.” However, he was unable to prove himself as a Bolshevik to the Soviet authorities, who refused him entry. Erošenko preferred anyway to go to China, where he arrived in October 1921.

In Shanghai, the writer Lu Xun (1881–1936) had already begun to publish translations of Erošenko’s work (from Japanese).¹¹ Hu Yuzhi, the publisher of *Dongfang zazhi* and himself a prominent Esperantist, had also written about him (see below). Reports had already appeared in *Juewu*, the supplement to the Guomindang newspaper *Minguo ribao* (in which Jing Meijiu was involved) about Erošenko’s activities in Japan and his treatment by the Japanese authorities.¹² After his arrival in Shanghai, the reports and translations multiplied. Erošenko had his biggest impact at Beijing University, where he was appointed in February 1922 to teach Esperanto. During this period, he lived in the home of Lu Xun and Lu’s brother Zhou Zuoren.

Esperanto, which Sun Guozhang had previously taught as a mere language, received a big boost at Beijing University after Erošenko’s arrival. Erošenko argued in his lectures – usually in English – that Esperanto had much to offer, including its own literature, and that it could not be identified with any given ideology. Esperantists were in principle humanists and pacifists.¹³ He spoke freely about his own ideals. He criticised the Bolsheviks for their many errors, but he accepted that they were inspired by love for the people and could be expected to succeed. He spoke positively about the nineteenth-century Narodniks and proposed them as a model for Chinese youth. Besides criticising Japanese imperialism, which went down well with his audience, he remarked that some Chinese intellectuals were prepared only to sacrifice others and not themselves.¹⁴ As a result, many started boycotting his lectures. He also won enemies among pro-Bolshevik students, who disliked his criticisms of the Soviet Union, and among the anarchists, for arguing against the use of violence. As an Esperantist, he supported the humanist wing, which Zamenhof had founded. Erošenko always retained a certain affinity for anarchism and preferred the company of anarchists, but he never joined an explicitly anarchist organisation.

¹⁰ Fujii 1989 reports on Erošenko’s activities in Tokyo, Shanghai and Beijing.

¹¹ *Xin qingnian* 9/4, August 1921. (Lu Xun’s translations are republished as *Lu Xun yiwenji* [Collection of Lu Xun’s translations], 10 vols., Beijing 1958. See vol. 2.)

¹² Fujii 1989:70–72.

¹³ After Erošenko’s departure, his lectures were published in *Ailuo xianke* 1923 (reprinted in Sakai and Saga, eds., 1994, vol. 12).

¹⁴ “Zhishi jieji de shiming” (The mission of the intelligentsia), reprinted in *Chenbao fujian*, March 7, 1922, p. 1.

He was a socialist only in a very general sense, moved more by the longing for a pure, peaceful world than by dogma.

While Erošenko's star at Beijing University was sinking, he set about founding his own Esperanto school in Beijing with the help of Wu Zhihui, Li Shizeng, Cai Yuanpei, and other members of the old *Xin shiji* group, and with the support of Lu Xun and Zhou Zuoren (Fujii 1989:125–127). As a representative of the Chinese Esperanto Association, Erošenko attended the Esperantists' world congress in Helsinki in the summer of 1922. This time, he was allowed to cross the Soviet Union, and the Japanese gave him a permit to cross Manchuria. On the way, Erošenko met the Japanese socialist Katayama Sen, who helped him gain entrance to the congress (Fujii 1989:154–158): the Esperantists were in the middle of a split and at first distrusted him.

On his way back to China, Erošenko was able to gain an impression of conditions in the Soviet Union. The experience did not fill him with enthusiasm. However, he held back in his criticism. Perhaps he realised that he would sooner or later return to Ukraine, particularly since he did not feel at home in Beijing. He may also have feared making further enemies in China.¹⁵ Erošenko left China in the spring of 1923. In the Soviet Union, he worked for a while as a Russian teacher and as a translator at the University for the Toilers of the East, but he was sacked in 1927 as “ideologically unreliable.” He later worked in blind education and died in his home village in 1952.¹⁵

In Beijing, the new Esperanto school started to take off. At the end of 1922, while Erošenko was still in China, the Esperantists' Association held a conference to mark Zamenhof's birthday. Several prominent people expressed their support. Cai Yuanpei argued that Esperanto would allow Chinese to present China in a better light in the West. Cai requested the Chinese diplomat Wellington Koo (Gu Weijun) to send a message to the meeting in Esperanto.¹⁶

As a result of the conference, Esperanto was much in the news at the end of 1922. Translations of Erošenko's works by Lu Xun, Zhou Zuoren, and Hu Yuzhi played a big part in its restoration to visibility. As publisher of *Dongfang zazhi*, Hu Yuzhi promoted the language in various ways, including a special section on it.¹⁷ He said that international languages were not a substitute for national languages but a means of communication between peoples. In itself, language was neutral. Even so, international languages promoted internationalism and would end nationalism and racism. Since lack of communication led to conflicts, an international language would lead to peace and social progress worldwide. Which language would best serve this role? From the point of view of number of speakers, Chinese was an obvious choice, but Chinese was hard for foreigners to learn. Moreover, national languages were tied to nations, which lessened their efficacy as vehicles of internationalism. The best choice would be an artificial language, regularly constructed and therefore easy to learn. Esperanto was the most widely accepted such language, since it was linguistically superior and ideologically neutral. Zamenhof's humanism should not be viewed as a binding philosophy. It was supported only by some Esperantists and was no more

¹⁵ V. Rogov, “V. Erošenko,” *El Popola Ĉinio*, June 1958, pp. 195–197, at p. 197.

¹⁶ *Beijing daxue rikan*, December 22, 1922, pp. 2–3, and *Chenbao fujian*, December 22, 1922, pp. 1–3.

¹⁷ Fukang, “Shijieyu de guoji diweiguan” (On the international position of Esperanto), *Dongfang zazhi* 19/9 (May 10, 1922):71–74.

than an expression of universal love. Thus Hu Yuzhi presented Esperanto as the solution to the problem of international communication and Chinese isolation.¹⁸

Another contribution to the special section was by Ou Shengbai and Huang Zunsheng, anarchists who had studied together in Lyons and run Esperanto courses at the Institut Franco-Chinois (designed chiefly by the Paris group of Chinese anarchists). The pair had attended a conference in Geneva in April 1922, called to discuss how to implement a proposal debated at the League of Nations the previous year to adopt Esperanto in schools. The conference accepted Huang's suggestion to found a translation committee, so countries could translate their newest and most important discoveries into Esperanto and make them internationally accessible.¹⁹

Huang, who lived in France until 1926, represented China at several Esperanto congresses in Europe, including a conference in Venice in 1923 on the need for a common trade language, where he represented the Chambers of Commerce of Beijing and Tianjin. In 1924, he accompanied Cai Yuanpei to the Esperantists' world congress in Vienna. In 1925, he represented the Chinese Ministry of Education at a conference in Paris on the use of Esperanto in the pure and applied sciences and again at the Esperantists' world congress in Geneva. In 1924, he was elected to the Language Committee and the Central Committee of the Esperanto movement, in which capacity he attended congresses in Spain, Bulgaria, Romania, and Yugoslavia.²⁰ He was the first Chinese to play a prominent role in the international Esperanto movement.

In China itself, Zhou Zuoren returned in the magazine *Dongfang zazhi* to the discussion about Esperanto and the reform of Chinese that had occupied intellectuals in the 1910s. Like Qian Xuantong, Zhou and Lu Xun had been pupils of Zhang Binglin. At Beijing University, Zhou had followed the Esperanto discussion in *Xin qingnian*. As a translator of foreign literature and a writer, he had an interest in the controversy about national languages and the pro and cons of the vernacular. He was close to Erošenko and a patron of the Esperanto school. Nevertheless, he remained lukewarm about Esperanto. He said in *Dongfang zazhi* that the time had come to sum up the language debate. The extreme demand, to abolish Chinese and replace it with Esperanto, was not just illusory but undesirable. Esperanto could act as a second language, but it was also necessary to improve Chinese. Zhou offered only limited support for the proposal, put forward by Hu Shi, that the new Chinese should draw on the vernacular-based novels of the Ming and Qing periods, since they lacked the rigorous logic China needed. On the other hand, it would be wrong to reject traditional writing out of hand, just as it would be wrong to reject regional expressions. The new Chinese must integrate foreign words to express modern themes and align itself with Western grammar. It was not his aim to Westernise by force, but he thought – after all, he was no linguist – that grammars could be artificially adjusted, at least within limits. The new national language needed a grammar and dictionaries that could be made compulsory in the schools and presses.

Zhou's main criterion was practical. He still believed in the struggle for One World and thus in Esperanto, but not at the expense of national languages. On the other hand, the construction of a national language should not be at the expense of dialects. Just as everyone will learn a new

¹⁸ “Guojiyu de lixiang yu xianshi” (The ideal and the realisation of an international language), *Dongfang zazhi* 19/15 (1922):77–82. For similar arguments, see Hu Yuzhi, writing in the organ of the Shanghai Esperanto Association, *Hina Esperantisto* 1 (January 1921):9–10.

¹⁹ *Dongfang zazhi* 19/15:93–96.

²⁰ Hoŭ Ĝiping 1987. Huang used Wong Kenn as the latinised form of his name, following its Cantonese pronunciation. Many overseas Cantonese followed this practice.

high language alongside his or her native dialect, so he or she can also learn a foreign language or Esperanto. In a word, Zhou was calling for linguistic unity in diversity.²¹

This relegation of the Esperanto question to an ever more pragmatic level helped secure the language greater acceptance. However, the anarchists continued to try to harness Esperanto to their schemes. The new Beijing school became a meeting point for anarchists and helped Chinese anarchists abroad distribute their publications. Jing Meijiu was not at first directly involved, but he published reports about the school in *Xuehui*. There were numerous contacts between Jing and young anarchists at the school. In late 1922, Yamaga visited Beijing on behalf of Ōsugi and met Erošenko, who introduced him to Jing by way of a Korean anarchist and Esperantist. Jing, who knew Ōsugi from Japan, had developed close ties with Sun Yat-sen, despite his own anarchist beliefs. Yamaga noted that Jing practised a style of anarchism all his own. Apart from his political promiscuity, he led a free and easy life and took opium. Yamaga, who was more familiar with the strait-laced anarchists of the Shifu group, was greatly surprised (Mukai 1974:85–88, Sakai 1983:38–39). Jing Meijiu was nevertheless a central figure in the Beijing anarchist scene, since he was an influential personality and had *Xuehui* as a forum for those interested in anarchism and Esperanto. Most young anarchists therefore flocked to his standard – and to the Esperanto school.

One young anarchist, Feng Shengsan, a student at Beijing University and occasional secretary to Erošenko, compiled an Esperanto reader for which Zhou Zuoren wrote a preface. Lu Xun protected Feng after his expulsion from the university for agitating against the raising of print-fees on student publications, and Qian Xuantong wrote an obituary on the occasion of his death in 1924. Although not themselves anarchists, the three professors were sympathetic to anarchism, whereas they kept their distance from Bolshevik students. In 1924, Jing Meijiu was appointed Director of the Esperanto school and published an Esperanto supplement to his *Guofeng ribao* (probably a sequel to the *Xuehui* supplement). Some Russians – like Erošenko, no Bolsheviks – also taught at the school, so Esperanto continued at the time to be seen either as anarchist or as a neutral language, but never as Bolshevik.

Anarchism and Esperanto in the late 1920s

Chinese communism had roots in anarcho-communism, but by the mid-1920s the two traditions no longer saw themselves as linked, by either past ties or a shared agenda. The split, says Peter Zarrow (1990:223), was “deep and bitter.” The differences, in China as elsewhere, concerned attitudes towards the state and the Soviet Union. Chinese anarchists were at first sympathetic to the Bolsheviks but by the mid-1920s they saw the regime in Moscow as oppressive. They polemicised against the CCP’s statist goals and promotion of “proletarian dictatorship” and “iron discipline.”

During the Revolution of 1925–1927, the CCP worked on Comintern instructions in a united front with the Guomindang, an authoritarian party populist in rhetoric but tied in practice to defending the interests of China’s business groups and rural elites. The terms of the alliance required the CCP’s subordination to the Nationalist leaders and the submersion of its membership.

²¹ Zhou Zuoren, “Guoyu gaizao de yijian” (Views on the reform of the national language), *Dongfang zazhi* 19/17 (1922):7–15.

The Chinese anarchists were divided on whether to join the united front. Wu Zhihui wanted to, but others favoured building their own constituency, independent of both parties. In 1925–1926, anarchists were reduced to passive observers both of developments in the labour movement, which came under communist control, and of the Northern Expedition launched by the Guomindang to reunify China. In 1927, when Chiang Kai-shek started a bloody purge against his communist “allies”, the anarchists faced a test. Some opposed Chiang, others supported him out of a deep-seated antagonism towards the communists. Still others favoured a third way. On the pro-Guomindang wing were veteran leaders like Wu Zhihui, Li Shizeng, Cai Yuanpei, and Zhang Jingjiang. At more or less the same time as the purge of the communists, its supporters launched three initiatives, the magazine *Geming zhoubao* (Revolutionary weekly), the Workers’ University, and Ziyou shudian (Freedom bookshop).²²

For a while, *Geming zhoubao* concentrated on anticommunist polemics and abstract theorising. In time, however, it reverted to a more overtly anarchist direction. Topics such as the relationship between revolution and morality resumed their traditional prominence. Esperanto also made a come-back, as the “third revolution” after anarchism and communism: while anarchism stood for political and communism for economic revolution, Esperantism stood for “spiritual” revolution. The aims of Esperantism were listed in fourteen points: for an anarcho-communist society, for a culture and science based on philanthropy, for an education in the same spirit, for human liberation, for permanent peace, for a morality based on philanthropy rather than on law, for the free association of peoples, for individual freedom, for an aesthetic life, for free love, against nationalism and militarism, against the need to struggle for existence, against every form of dictatorship, and against class dictatorship.²³

Anarchism and Esperanto in China in the 1930s

The tensions that arose in the anarchist camp in 1927 affected the entire movement.

After 1928, the Guomindang began to deal more harshly with the anarchists. Those who had previously ingratiated themselves with it now saw little hope for themselves. The Workers’ University and *Geming zhoubao* were forced to close down. Anarchists who had applauded the smashing of the communist-led labour movement now saw their own unions banned and had to retreat into “harmless” literary and educational activities. Even then, the authorities continued to interfere (Müller 2001a:600).

In Shanghai, the anarchist left around Lu Jianbo and his League of Young Chinese Anarchists and Anarcho-Communists were among those forced to retreat. By promoting Esperanto and his own brand of “proletarian culture,” Lu tried to preserve a base for anarchism, but his efforts were thwarted by frequent bans. He opposed the call for armed struggle, which he associated with “heroes from foreign novels,” and said anarchists should play the role of humble and patient servant.²⁴

These “foreign-style heroes” were probably a reference to the novels of Ba Jin, who had made foreign revolutionary heroes popular in China. Ba Jin’s “romanticism” was criticised by literary

²² Müller 2001a, pt 2, ch. 11.

²³ Xianmin, “Shijieyu zhuyi de yuanli” (The principles of Esperantism), *Geming zhoubao* 14 (July 31, 1927):111–113.

²⁴ Daji [Lu Jianbo], “Gongzuo de taidu,” *Jingzhe* 3/1, reprinted in Ge Maochun, Jiang Jun, and Li Xingzhi, eds., 1991 [1984], 2:884–889.

critics and anarchists alike. But although he and Lu had fallen out in 1927, they later became reconciled (Ba Jin nianpu 1989:2.1163). So Ba Jin, who had in the meantime gained fame as a writer, added his weight to Lu's magazine *Jingzhe*, to which he contributed an article about the Spanish anarchist Buenaventura Durruti and argued for a coalition of socialists, communists, anarchists, and anti-fascists (Ge Maochun, Jiang Jun & Li Xingzhi 1991:2.1021).

Whereas Lu Jianbo stood for China's fast-disappearing anarchist movement, Ba Jin represented its cultural influence, which remained strong in the 1930s. He continued to identify with the anarchists but no longer propagandised for them, and he maintained his commitment to Esperanto. After returning to China from France, he acted as publisher in Shanghai of *La Verda Lumo/Lüguang* (Green light), the magazine of the Esperanto Association, and of Eroŝenko's fables, particularly since he lived for a while on the Association's premises. However, he had to move after the Japanese attack on Shanghai in January 1932, when the premises were destroyed. After that, he only rarely translated from Esperanto.²⁵

Ba Jin first wrote about Esperanto in the magazine *Banyue* (Half-monthly) in Chengdu in 1921, when he quoted *Xin qingnian* and praised the language as a means of spreading anarchism.²⁶ In 1924, he applied to join the Tutmonda Ligo de Esperantistaj Senŝtatanoj (World league of the Esperantist stateless), an anarchist organisation that split from the Sennacieca Asocio Tutmonda (World society of the stateless) (Forster 1982:195). His last publication in *La Verda Lumo/Lüguang* was in 1933.²⁷ Ba Jin's interest in Esperanto was perhaps reinforced by his close ties in France with Hu Yuzhi, a prominent Esperantist (Shimada 1983:10).

Ba Jin distanced himself from the Esperanto movement after 1932, at the same time as the link between it and anarchism began to fray. Previously, Esperanto in China had been associated mainly with anarchism. Now, Chinese communists began for the first time to take an interest.²⁸ Developments in the Soviet Union led to the founding in China of the procommunist League of Proletarian Esperantists.²⁹ Leading Shanghai Esperantists, including Hu Yuzhi, turned away from anarchism and towards the CCP.³⁰ Under the motto "With Esperanto for the liberation of China," large parts of the movement abandoned all pretence of neutrality and joined the CCP's anti-Japanese campaign. Only Lu Jianbo clung to a recognisably anarchist line.

In the 1930s, Chinese Esperantists became more active in general language issues, particularly the latinisation movement, which received support from Soviet Esperantists. The Chinese Esperantists proposed the adoption in China of the system of romanisation (Latinxua Sin Wenz) created by the Soviets for their own Chinese minority, and thus paved the way for Hanyu Pinyin, developed in China in the 1950s (see Riedlinger 1989, Martin 1982:83ff., DeFrancis 1950 ch. 5, Ye Laishi 1983:125–129).

Because of Esperanto's internationalist character, its procommunist supporters in China hoped by publishing propaganda in the language to harness foreign support to the anti-Japanese cause.

²⁵ Müller 2001a, pt 2, ch. 13.

²⁶ The article is reprinted in Xu Shanshu, ed., Beijing 1995.

²⁷ Bakin [Ba Jin], "Mia Frateto" (My little brother), *La Verda Lumo* 1 (June 1933) 6–7 (reprinted in Xu Shanshu, ed., 1995:48–51).

²⁸ Some communists had already learned Esperanto. They included Zheng Chaolin, a founder in 1931 of the Chinese Trotskyist party (Benton 1997:56).

²⁹ Zhongguo puluo shijieyuzhe lianmeng.

³⁰ On the League of Proletarian Esperantists, see Cén 1978.

The Guomindang opposed the campaign, not just politically but from the point of view of language policy, since it opposed romanising the Chinese script.

An outstanding example of a non-Chinese Esperantist who contributed to the anti-Japanese resistance was the Japanese woman writer Hasegawa Teru (1912–1947), who accompanied her Chinese husband to China in 1937. In Japan, Teru had been a member of the Klara Circle, named after Klara Zamenhof, the wife of the author of Esperanto, and the German communist Clara Zetkin, which worked to promote proletarian-Esperantist literature among women. From her new home in China, writing under her Esperanto name Verda Majo, she addressed an open letter to Japan’s Esperantists asking them to support the Chinese resistance and another to the Esperantists of the world urging them to boycott Japan.³¹

Conclusions

“Anarchism,” wrote Krebs in his study on Shifu, “set the agenda for [China’s] dialogue on New Culture” in the 1910s. The topics raised in New Culture discourse – Esperanto, female equality, the dignity of labour, the importance of science, internationalism, and China’s role in the world revolution – had all been promoted, and often pioneered, by the anarchists. Their support for Esperanto was an expression of their “consistent advocacy of internationalism.” Their internationalism was at the same time a form of patriotism, for they saw worldwide revolution as the only way to destroy imperialism’s global underpinnings (Krebs 1998:161–164).

The course of China’s pre-1949 Esperanto debate, starting with Wu Zhihui’s utopian expectations and ending with the mobilisation of Esperantists in the romanisation campaign of the 1930s, was marked by a progressive shedding of social and political relevance. Shorn of its ideological pretensions, the Esperanto movement spread into wider areas of Chinese society. Since the founding of the People’s Republic of China in 1949 through until the late 1980s, China’s Esperanto Association was a stronghold of the World Association and Esperanto again prospered. Bookshops all over China put Esperanto titles on display and school children had easy access to Esperanto comic strips. However, this high tide was due largely to government backing, for which the price was submission to political control (Chan 1989 ch. 6). The welfare of Chinese Esperantism was always tied to political factors, whether the Esperantists wanted it or not. (Not surprisingly, it got nowhere in Taiwan under the Guomindang.)

What did China’s Esperantists hope to achieve? For most, Esperanto was a badge of internationalist commitment and belief. For some, it was a general key to the “West” that would spare China the need to engage separately with each Western culture and language. However, the First World War proved to radical Chinese of the May Fourth era that the West was far from homogeneous and even further from the One World ideal. Moreover, Esperanto failed to achieve the universal breakthrough its supporters dreamed of and banked on.

³¹ Müller 2001b. For Hasegawa Teru’s autobiography, see Hasegawa 1982. For a biography, see Tone 1980 [1969]. On the movement for a proletarian-Esperantist literature, see Ōshima and Miyamoto 1974, chs 6 and 7. On Japanese Esperantism in general, see Hatsushiba 1998. For the open letter to Japanese Esperantists, see “Venko de Ĉinio estas ŝlosilo al morgaŭo de la tuta Azio” (China’s victory is the key to tomorrow for all Asia), in *Flustr’el uragano* (Whisper from the storm), Chongqing 1941, reprinted in Hasegawa 1982:374–376. For the open letter to the Esperantists of the world, see “Al tutmonda Esperantistaro” (To the Esperantists of the world), written on December 15, 1938 (on Zamenhof’s birthday), reprinted in Hasegawa 1982:387–394.

Many Chinese Esperantists emphasised the language's international and neutral character. A lingua franca needs interlocutors, so the hopes of the Chinese movement were tied to its fate abroad. Esperanto had the advantage of being nationless. But nationlessness was also a disadvantage, for it deprived Esperanto of a noisy lobby and the material resources associated with state power. Esperanto was a vacuum filled with ever-changing ideals – but this further weakened its progress, for it came to be identified with sectarianism and quixotry.

When the communists came to power, the role previously played by Esperantists in language reform was recognised and rewarded. Hu Yuzhi and Ye Laishi were appointed vice-presidents of the script reform committee. In the event, however, reform was confined to the simplification of Chinese characters. In the early 1950s, China's Esperanto movement was suppressed, following the Soviet example, but in the late 1960s it was allowed to revive. During the Cultural Revolution, Chinese Esperantists – like everyone in China with foreign contacts – tended to suffer discrimination and persecution as individuals, but official ties to the international Esperantist movement persisted. Books and magazines continued to be published (but their contents were naturally restricted to official propaganda).

The collapse of communism in Russia and Eastern Europe robbed Esperanto of its main sources of political and financial support, and changes in China in the 1990s weakened it even further. With English more than ever rampant, the practical arguments of Wu Zhihui and others are less valid than they once seemed.³³ Esperanto is back where it started, dependent on the idealism of individuals. It remains to be seen whether nativism, anti-Americanism, language purism, or some other form of ideologically motivated reaction will rebound on English³⁴ and bring Esperanto back into the debate in China. Such a development cannot be entirely ruled out, especially in the computer age, when the idea of artificial languages acquires a new significance.

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Glossary

1908-nian chuangshi Shanghai shijieyu xuehui fushe shijieyu hanshou xuexiao guicheng 1908

XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX

1932 shijieyu niankan XXXXXXXXXXXX

Ailuo-xianke 爱罗先客
Aishiyu 爱诗语
“Aishiyu shiming” 爱诗语诗名
aisibunandu 爱诗布南都
Akita Ujaku 秋田 宇作
Ba Jin 巴金
Ba Jin nianpu 巴金年谱
Banyue Banyue
Beijing daxue rikan 北京大学日刊 “Bianzao Zhongguo xinyu fanli” 编造中国信语反例
Bingxian (= Liang Bingxian) 冰仙
“Bo Zhongguo yong wanguo xinyu shuo” 驳中国用万国信语说
“Bujiu Zhongguo wenzi zhi fangfa ruo he?” 不究中国文字之方法若何?
Cai Yuanpei 蔡元培
Chenbao fujian 陈报福建
Chen Duxiu 陈独秀
Chu Minyi Chu Minyi
Daji 大抵
datong 大同
Dongfang zazhi 东方杂志
“Esperanto cili tongshi zongxu” Esperanto Esperanto Esperanto
“Esperanto shiming” ESPERANTO
“Feichu hanwen yi” 非出汉文意
Feng Shengsan 冯胜三
Fujii Shōzō 藤井 正三
Fukang 福康
Ge Maochun / Jiang Jun / Li Xingzhi 葛 茂春 / 江 军 / 李 兴志
Geming zhoubao 革命周报
“Gongzuo de taidu” 工作之态度
Gu Weijun 顾维钧
“Gui Xin shij” 归心集
Guocui xuebao 国粹学报 Guofeng ribao 国风日报
“Guojiyu de lixiang yu xianshi” 国际语之理想与现实
“Guoyu gaizao de yijian” 国语改造之一见
Hanyu Pinyin 汉语拼音
“Hanzi tongyihui zhi huanglou” 汉字同义会之黄楼
hao 好
Hasegawa Teru 长谷川 武
Hatsushiba Takemi 服部 武
Hazama Naoki 荒巻 宗基
He Zhen 何 震
Heimin shinbun 平民新报
Hengbao 恒报 Hou Zhiping 侯 志平
Hu Shi 胡 适
Hu Yuzhi 胡 愈

Hua Nangui 胡南贵
 Huang Lingshuang 黄灵双
 Huang Zunsheng 黄遵生
 Huaxing 胡兴
 Huiming lu 胡鸣路
 “Ji wanguo xinyu hui” 暨万国新语会
 Jiang Kanghu 江康胡 Jing Meijiu 荆梅九
 Jingzhe 荆哲
 Juewu 居武
 Katayama Sen 加塔山 善
 Laodong 劳东
 Latinxua Sin Wenz (Ladinghua xin wenzi) 拉丁学新文 (拉丁化新文字)
 Li Shizeng 李时增
 Liang Bingxian 梁炳先
 Lingshuang s. Huang Lingshuang
 Liu Shenshu xiansheng yishu 刘慎书先生遗书 Liu Shipai 刘时培
 Lu Jianbo 卢健波
 Lu Shikai 卢世凯
 Lu Xun 鲁迅
 Lu Xun yiwenzhi 鲁迅遗文集
 Lüguang 吕光
 “Lun Esperanto” 论 Esperanto
 “Lun Zhongtu wenzi you yi yu shijie” 论中国文字与一语世界
 Min 闵
 Minbao 闵保
 Ming 明 Minguo ribao 民国日报
 Minsheng 民生
 Minshengshe jishilu 民生社日记
 Miyamoto Masao 宫本 正藏
 Mo Jipeng 莫季鹏 Mukai Kō 向井 康
 Ōshima Yoshio / Miyamoto Masao 大岛 好生 / 宫本 正藏
 Ōsugi Sakae 大杉 节
 Ou Shengbai 欧圣白
 “Pi miu” 皮米
 pingmin 平民
 Pingmin zhi sheng 平民之声 Qian Xuantong 钱玄同
 Qianxing 钱兴
 Ran 冉
 Ranliao 冉僚
 Rendao zhoubao 人道周报 Sakai Hirobumi 坂井 广文
 Sanbo 三波 Shanghai Mujun 上海 穆君
 Shehuizhuyi jiangxihui 社会主义讲习会
 Sheng Guocheng 圣国成
 Shifu 师夫
 Shijie 时界

Shijieyu 世界语
 “Shijieyu de guoji diweiguan” 世界语的国际组织
 “Shijieyu wenti” 世界语问题 “Shijieyu zhuyi de yuanli” 世界语的主旨原则
 Shimada Kyōko 志田京子
 “Shu ‘Bo Zhongguo yong wanguo xinyu shuo hou’” 舒博《万国通用世界语》
Shuowen jiezi 说文解字
 Sugelanjun 苏格兰君 Sun Guozhang 孙国璋
 Taiyan (= Zhang Binglin) 台彦 (= 章炳麟)
 Tao Menghe 陶梦鹤
 “Taosidaojun zhi jingjiaoshi shu” 陶斯道君之精家史书
Tasogare nikki 夕暮日记
 Tianyi 天逸
 Tone Kōichi 音儿
 “Wang xiangcun qu” 王向群曲
wanguo xinyu 万国新语
 “Wanguo xinyu” 万国新语 “Wo de shehui geming de yijian” 我的社会革命的意见
 Wu Jingheng (= Wu Zhihui) 吴景衡 Wu Zhihui 吴志会
 Wuxu 吴序
 Wuzhengfu gongchan zhuyi she 吴正甫工产主义社 “Xiandai xiju yishu zai Zhongguo de jianzhi” 现代戏剧艺术在中国的建设
 Xianmin 鲜民
Xin qingnian 新青年
Xin she 新舍 *Xin shiji* 新世纪
 “Xinyu wenti zhi zada” 新语问题之跋
 Xing 邢
 Xiwangzhe 席望哲 Xuantian 璇天
Xuehui 雪会 Xu Anzhen 徐安贞
 “Xu ‘Haogu zhi chengjian’” 徐《浩古之成建》
 Xu Lunbo 徐伦波
 “Xu Lunbo xiansheng” 徐伦波先生
 “Xu ‘Pi miu’” 徐《皮米》
 Xu Shanguang / Liu Jianping 徐尚光 / 刘建平
 Xu Shanshu 徐善书
 “Xu wanguo xinyu zhi jinbu” 徐万国新语之进步
 “Xu xinyu wenti zhi zada” 徐新语问题之跋 Yamaga Taiji 山田泰次
 Ye Laishi 叶来士
 Yuan Shikai 袁世凯 “Zenyang xuanchuan zhuyi” 怎样宣传主义
 Zhang Binglin 章炳麟
 Zhang Jiang (= Zhang Binglin) 张江 (= 章炳麟) Zhang Jingjiang 张静江
 Zhang Qicheng 张启程
 Zheng Bi’an 郑碧安 Zheng Chaolin 郑超林
 Zheng Peigang 郑佩刚 Zheng Taipu 郑太浦
 “Zhishi jieji de shiming” 智识阶级的命名
 “Zhongguo gudai wuzhengfuzhuyi chao zhi yipie” 中国古代无政府主义潮流之一瞥
 Zhongguo puluo shijieyuzhe lianmeng 中国普罗世界语者联盟 Zhongguo wuzhengfuzhuyi he Zhongguo shehuidang 中国无政府主义和中国社会党

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