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Anarchism, Marxism, and Nationalism in China

Between conflict, cooperation, and continuities

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Marxism and nationalism are both ideological and societal forces that can be easily identified and acknowledged as driving modern Chinese history to this very day. That anarchism was important in shaping China's modern history, too, is less obvious from a present-day perspective. Nevertheless, scholarship on modern Chinese history during the last decades has revealed many facets of anarchism's contributions which have been later covered or dissolved by integration or sublation.¹ On the other side, scholarship on the history of anarchism has started to shift towards taking non-“Western” cases of anarchist movements more seriously,² by careful historical case studies also questioning the long-term prejudice of anarchism's being “anti-modern”.³

For the reconstruction of the historical role of anarchism in China, one needs to take into account its being out of step with later historiography on either side of the Taiwan strait, dominated by Marxism and / or nationalism respectively; and one needs to be aware that legacies may be found under different labels than simply “anarchism” – a label that has been often viewed with suspicion and therefore was later evaded or suppressed. That anarchism is by nature not sitting well with either Marxism or nationalism does, however, not preclude a historically more complex relationship, as ideologies are lived out in historical and often very

¹ Standard references in English are the early treatment by Scalapino/Yu (1961); Zarrow (1990), focusing on the first groups of Chinese anarchists after the turn of the twentieth century; and Dirlik (1991), presenting the movement up to the late 1920s. The latter work is connected to the same author's study on the early reception of Marxism in China (Dirlik 1989) and the (co-authored) book on Shanghai's Labor University (Chan/Dirlik 1991). The more recent and most comprehensive Western study on Chinese anarchism to date in terms of time-span, topics, source materials and languages covered, Müller (2001a) in German, addresses the anarchist movement as a cultural phenomenon in transnational perspective. (For a quick overview of scholarship and more popular presentations of Chinese anarchism in several languages, see *ibid.* pp. 5-9). An English-language in-depth study of one outstanding Chinese anarchist, Shifu, has been provided by Krebs (1998).

² For an assessment of this shift, see Van der Walt / Hirsch (2010). One of the first more general academic works on the history of anarchism also covering non-Western cases, including China, was Marshall (1994). Austrian anarchist Max Nettlau, often called the “Herodot” of anarchism, had already touched upon East Asia, though briefly (and not without racist overtones), in his monumental (but only partly published) German-language *Geschichte der Anarchie* (History of Anarchy) of which five volumes have been (re)printed. (He wrote in the 1920s and 1930s).

³ Cf., e.g., noted historian Hobsbawm's labeling anarchists as “primitive rebels”. Marxist and nationalist critics of anarchism have created this backward image and used it continuously to profile themselves, instead, as “modernizing forces”.

complex realities that render theoretical neat dividing lines problematic in practice. Thus, although confrontations between anarchists and Marxists as well as nationalists were frequent, there were time and again also instances of cooperation and – to some degree – continuities, even if not always openly admitted.

Therefore, this chapter sets out to sketch the ups and downs of the historically complicated relationship between anarchism, Marxism and nationalism and their proponents in China during the first half of the 20th century, mainly based on primary sources, giving due credit to their antagonisms, but also to their occasional solidarities and possibly syntheses.

The early phase (before 1912)

As is well-known, the relationship between anarchism and Marxism, both growing out of 19th century socialism, had become acrimonious after the split in (or in Marxist version: the exclusion of the anarchists of) the First International in 1872, following disputes between the Bakuninists and the Marxists. In China, largely influenced by Japanese sources, the reception of both, Marxism and anarchism, in the early years of the 20th century was intertwined: due to some misunderstanding and misrepresentation, many understood the difference between them as rather one in methods: anarchists used violence, Marxists legal means. A further complicating fact was the problem of terms: emic and etic uses varied considerably: e.g., Marxists claimed “socialism” for themselves only, as they would do with “communism” later. Thus, e.g., Lenin would talk in 1901 about “anarchism and socialism”,⁴ suggesting anarchism was not socialist (which also explains why for him the anarchists should not take part in the Second Socialist International existing since 1889), in fact following up on Plekhanov who had done so even earlier in 1895 in his seminal brochure *Anarchism and Socialism*,⁵ and Stalin soon after in 1906/07 joined in with an unfinished article series “Anarchism or Socialism”, framing the question as an outright either-or.⁶ The anarchists, however, did not want to give up on their socialist identity and claimed the very same labels exclusively for themselves, with Kropotkinian anarcho-communism furthermore arguing they were not only decidedly socialist but also the only true “communists”. Therefore, current-day usage and contemporary usage should be distinguished, as should the different usages among different groups at the time to specify what and who one talks about precisely.

Given these difficulties, it should come as no surprise that the early perception in East Asia was no clear-cut distinction either, and in fact one finds an earnest endeavor to learn about different variants of socialism before choosing one of them, at least during the formative

⁴ See Lenin (1901).

⁵ See Plekhanov (1895).

⁶ See Stalin (1906/07).

period. Apart from the earliest discussions of socialism in the reformist Chinese press,⁷ a concrete outgrowth of this endeavor were the Japanese and Chinese “socialist study circles” in Tokyo around 1906/1907 which discussed socialism fairly broadly, though tending towards anarchism in the end. Notably, it was in Chinese anarchist and nationalist publications that the first translations of Marxist texts appeared:⁸ they focused, above all, on economics and therewith attested to the (qualified) acceptance of Marxist economical expertise (which had already been voiced by Bakunin decades earlier).⁹ However, in terms of revolutionary methods both anarchists and nationalists were more skeptical towards Marxism, being identified at the time with German-style Social Democracy. In fact, as Bernal has argued already many years ago, Marxism in its pre-Leninist form was only attractive to Chinese radicals in (chosen areas of) theory but not in revolutionary practice¹⁰ – something they shared, by the way, with most regions of the world.¹¹

On the other hand, Chinese nationalists and anarchists found much common ground at the time, in spite of anarchists’ professed internationalism. Nationalists were partly drawn towards “anarchism” because of the misunderstanding concerning revolutionary methods that associated anarchism with terrorism.¹² De facto it was above all Chinese nationalists which used the perceived “anarchist” method of assassinations to further their goal of toppling the Manchu court ruling China. On the side of self-declared Chinese anarchists of the time, the “Tokyo group” which had grown out of the socialist study circles and became vocal in Japan in 1907 was critical of the nationalists organized in Sun Yat-sen’s “Revolutionary Alliance” (*tongmenghui*) since 1905. To them, the nationalists’ focus on the nation and Han-Chinese identity vs. the Manchu rulers went against the general principle of equality (*pingdeng*) and “division-lessness” (a concept with evident Buddhist underpinnings, by the way). The so-called “Paris group” active in France at the very same time, however, sustained the nationalist effort by arguing that the nationalist goal of establishing a Chinese republic was the first step toward the long-term goal of anarchy.¹³ Therefore they hailed the nationalists’ assassination attempts and mourned their “martyrs”. Furthermore, they all were members of Sun Yat-sen’s

⁷ Chinese reformer Liang Qichao, for one, had written on different strands of socialism in his widely-read journals published in Japan after 1898, namely in *Qingyi bao / The China Discussion* and *Xinmin congbao* (New Citizen). (Note: East Asian names are given in this chapter in original order, i.e. with the surname preceding the given name).

⁸ The Chinese nationalist journal *Minbao* (The People) (1905-1910) and the anarchist journal *Tianyi* (Natural Justice) (1907-1908), both published in Tokyo, carried some short translations and articles, often inspired by or modeled on Japanese publications. The “Paris group” of Chinese anarchists (see below), in turn, were the first to publish a Marx portrait (as one of 60 “important personalities”) (Jiang/Li 1990: p. 72). For a more detailed discussion of early Japanese and Chinese presentations of anarchism and other socialist strands, see Müller (2001a: pp. 131-270).

⁹ Bakunin acknowledged Marx’ economic expertise several times and even started to translate his *Capital* into Russian. (The translation was probably additionally driven by Bakunin’s financial needs at the time. See the editor’s preface in *Oeuvres complètes de Bakounine* (1973-1982), vol. 3, p. XLVII).

¹⁰ See Bernal (1968).

¹¹ See Van der Walt / Hirsch (2010: p. xxxv).

¹² On this misunderstanding which was not peculiar to the Chinese but reflected a more general trend which tends also to be reified in modern terrorism studies, see Müller (2014).

¹³ Their main forum was the journal *Xin shiji* (New Century), 1907-1910. Most scholars have used the easily accessible partial reprint, Tokyo 1966; however, there is a complete reprint, Shanghai 1947, which had been supervised personally by Li Shizeng, one of the key figures of the group.

nationalist “Revolutionary Alliance” which would evolve into the Nationalist Party (Guomindang) later with the Revolution of 1911. Their de facto circumscribed “internationalism” may be seen in the fact that although the ideologically driving force,¹⁴ biologist Li Shizeng, had many personal contacts with French anarchists and contributed many translations from French sources, their journal had no notable exchange with their European comrades, so that even French anarchists of the time rather associated the group with the Chinese nationalist cause than anarchism!¹⁵

With their “scientist” (Kwok 1962) outlook, the “Paris group” argued for gradual evolution that would finally lead to the crucial point of substantial revolution. Li Shizeng, who was very much impressed by geographer Élisée Reclus, a close friend of Kropotkin, and his brochure *Évolution et révolution*, argued consistently that political revolution was the beginning, social revolution the final aim.¹⁶ Thus, the process would evolve from elimination of the emperor (the aim of the nationalists) to an elimination of all authorities to an elimination of all injustice.¹⁷ In fact, anarchist revolution was not restricted to politics alone but aimed at a new way of living, distancing the “new” from the “old” and thus from Chinese “tradition”. The latter they not only found embodied in Confucianism, but also in popular practices and even in the Chinese language and script which all came under attack in the journal.¹⁸ This “modernist” thrust went well also with the nationalists around Sun Yat-sen.

Other endeavors appear less “modernist” at first glance: one member, in fact a personal link between the “Tokyo group” and the “Paris group”, Zhang Ji, e.g. tried with an anarchist commune in Aiglemont, France, to realize a “new life-style”. However, this kind of experiment would be something again very much en vogue around 1920 (see below) and by then seen as potentially creating a “new” world bottom-up. To reorganize life as a conscious combination of study and work (as Bakunin and Kropotkin had already argued for) was a long-term anarchist project and another area the “Paris group” would engage in, seeing this as furthering revolution. Given the evolutionary concept of “revolution”, the “Paris group” was consequently very much involved in educational endeavors also subsequently and did not view this as an issue of intellectual education only, but rather as the pertinent means to forge a “new” people. They aimed, e.g., at “modernizing” Chinese “bad” habits (something the

¹⁴ A close reading of *Xin shiji* reveals that Li – who was the one most versed in foreign languages and most integrated into French society – was in fact the driving ideological force, whereas Wu Zhihui, who has been seen often as more important because of the simple fact that he was older and a more well-known author, obviously at first was somewhat skeptical and also less knowledgeable in terms of anarchism. His favorite topics were issues concerning China, education and culture, not anarchism per se.

¹⁵ This point has been overlooked in earlier studies on Chinese anarchism that usually only consider the text of the Chinese journals and less the context: notably, although *Xin shiji* used the postal address of the French “sister” journal *Les Temps nouveaux* (New Times) (1895-1914), edited by well-known French anarchist Jean Grave, there is hardly any trace of real exchange with the French journal in either of the two. In fact, Grave remembered the group only as “participants in the Chinese revolution to oust the emperor” and speaks of “Chinese anarchists” only for the 1920s! (Grave 1973: p. 541).

¹⁶ Li Shizeng proposed this reading already in a brochure modeled on the one by Élisée Reclus, and soon after in the journal *Xin shiji* (Li 1907a; Li 1907b).

¹⁷ See Li (1907a).

¹⁸ Main authors in *Xin shiji* were Li Shizeng, Wu Zhihui and Chu Minyi – the latter focusing also on economic implications.

Chinese nationalists as well as the CCP [Chinese Communist Party] would pick up later in various “civilizing” campaigns!) which they hoped to achieve by bringing more Chinese of different walks of life to Europe, namely France, and educate them there.¹⁹ In fact, already in these early years biologist Li Shizeng set up a doufu (bean curd) factory in France and had Chinese workers of his home town come over: besides working they were offered evening courses in Chinese, French and general education. On the other hand they were supposed to give up smoking (opium), alcohol and gambling. For Li Shizeng, apart from the great hopes he had in the multiple possible uses of the soy bean, vegetarianism was also consistent with a “new life-style”, being “hygienic” and “scientific” and going well with anarchist beliefs of refuting the “right of might”.²⁰ This connection to ethics and abstention for purity would remain a Chinese anarchist legacy:²¹ in life and in politics. But the latter was an evident source of possible friction with the nationalists.

Thus, there was not only a honeymoon relation even between the more pro-Sun Yat-sen “Paris anarchists” and nationalists (Marxism being not yet represented by a substantial number of followers in China needs not be addressed here further) even during this early phase: anarchist criticism from both the “Tokyo” and the “Paris” group was directed against the principle of government on the basis of Kropotkin’s thought, *the* guiding theoretician in world anarchism at the time. It therefore seemed dubious to many that a change in government would necessarily further the aim of anarchy or would rather just replace those “above”. And the racialized arguments of the nationalists against the “foreign Manchus” did not go well with anarchism’s principles either. However, apart from ideological aspects, there were also many personal issues involved, namely in the confrontation between the nationalist “Revolutionary Alliance” journal *Minbao* (The People) in Tokyo and the anarchist *Xin shiji* (New Century) in Paris on a host of issues, since the then-chief editor of *Minbao*, Zhang Binglin who had replaced Sun Yat-sen’s followers as editor, and Wu Zhihui of *Xin shiji* were at odds since long (and Zhang and Sun Yat-sen in the nationalist camp rivaled as well so that Sun in fact asked Wu in Paris to help him against Zhang!²²). Only with the last issue of *Minbao*, edited again by one of Sun’s followers, Wang Jingwei, who had close contact with the “Paris group” at the time and who published that very last issue, using their French postal address, were relations eased again. Therefore, even though scholars tend to focus on declared ideological propositions, the historical circumstances and inter-personal relationship also have to be taken into account to give a more balanced picture of historical intersections between nationalists and anarchists during that period.

¹⁹ Apart from articles in *Xin shiji*, these ideas were also spelled out for their later educational endeavors in France, e.g., in *Lü-Ou jiaoyu yundong* (1916).

²⁰ See Müller (2001a: pp. 264-265).

²¹ In this, the Chinese also went well beyond other East Asian anarchists. Shifu (see below) would become the most outstanding living embodiment of this “puritan” tendency which even surprised, e.g., their Japanese comrades.

²² Wu did so without delay. See “Ran” [=Wu Zhihui] (1910).

The revolution and war years

The problems between anarchists and nationalists became especially acute in the years following the successful ouster of the Manchu court in 1911/12 and during the First World War. For most people in China, including the anarchists, the Revolution of 1911 to end two thousand years of imperial rule soon turned into a profound disillusionment: the nationalists had seemingly “won”, but the realities after establishing the Chinese Republic were more than bleak: instead of being a first step toward the hoped-for social revolution, the nationalists had to strike a deal with military strongman Yuan Shikai who – not being a Republican at heart at all and even less a friend of the idea of social revolution – seized the presidency from Sun Yat-sen. Quickly he turned the Republic into a de facto dictatorship, culturally arguing for a re-appreciation of Confucianism. Thus those anarchists who had argued for temporarily supporting the nationalist effort had to face the uncomfortable question: Had it been worthwhile to help the “national revolution”? Outstanding post-revolution anarchist Shifu who had been active during the nationalist revolution and had sustained that effort with assassination attempts earlier, came away from nationalism and to anarchism precisely because of this disillusionment in the wake of the revolution: the latter had been wrong, he argued, and it was only anarchism that provided much higher and worthwhile goals (Krebs 1998).

Although he had come to anarchism via the “Paris group’s” journal *Xin shiji*, Shifu now took his distances from those among the former “Paris group” who did not stick to strict political abstention in the new Republic which they had argued for earlier as a “first step” to anarchy. In fact, only Li Shizeng did not get involved in any political functions at the time: others of the “Paris group” did to various degrees. On the other hand, Shifu’s moral “conscience society” went in parallel with similar societies by the former “Paris group” founded after the Republic’s establishment which aimed at a more holistically “new life-style”: from refraining to frequent brothels and promising equal treatment of sexes and generations in the family, over frugality and incorruptibility, to personal hygiene and civilized “manners” (no spitting etc.).²³ The “Paris group’s” societies asked for political abstention only of those members declaring to subscribe to the “higher” commitment levels, not for the lower levels, but for Shifu political abstention was a sine qua non for any anarchist. His society was considerably more radical,²⁴ even negating the family system altogether, requiring vegetarianism of all members and strictly adhering to anti-militarism on top of it – interestingly a topic not raised by the “Paris group’s” societies but often discussed in world anarchism to which Shifu was closely linked, primarily via Esperanto. In fact, following the example of the “Tokyo group’s” journal *Hengbao* / *The Chinese Anarchist News: Equity* and several short-lived journals after

²³ The “Paris group’s” societies’ statutes of 1912 are reprinted in Li Shizeng (1980: vol. 1, pp. 175-178) for the “Jindehui” (Society for the Advancement of Virtue) which offered different degrees of commitments, and *ibid.* (pp. 178-182) for the “Shehui gailianghui” (Society for the Betterment of Society).

²⁴ For the rules of Shifu’s “Conscience Society” (*xinshe*), published in 1912, see Ge / Jiang / Li (1984: vol. 1, pp. 235-239). See also the discussion by Krebs (1998: pp. 101-107).

1912, his journal *Minsheng* / *La Voûce de la Popolo* (Voice of the People) was explicitly designed for exchange with foreign anarchists. Shifu did so by integrating an Esperanto column with news on China and proudly displayed its international contacts to the readership.

Shifu was also the one to introduce syndicalism as a key component into Chinese anarchism: although the “Paris group” had been involved with workers to some degree,²⁵ and the “Tokyo group” had at least discussed workers’ issues and strikes in their journals, namely in *Hengbao*,²⁶ only Shifu took up the issue with some dedication: first in Guangzhou, later in Shanghai. Given the fact that in general he closely adhered to Kropotkinian anarchism, this made clear that he did not see syndicalism as a “post-Kropotkinian” version of anarchism – as some more schematic Western historiographies of anarchism suggest.²⁷ Commenting on several strikes and on labor issues in his journal *Minsheng*,²⁸ Shifu stressed the necessity to create worker associations and to ameliorate the educational level of workers – the latter going well with the “Paris group’s” endeavors. In good anarchist fashion, Shifu argued that the associations should be formed by workers themselves (and excluding employers, since he saw one of the basic flaws in the “syndicates” of his day in a missing clear distinction between the interest of employers and workers). The basic aims he envisioned for the new labor unions were: 1. revolt against the capitalist system; 2. bottom-up organization by the workers, with anarchists only serving as consultants; 3. revolutionary syndicalism, i.e. abstention from politics, e.g. in forming or cooperating with any labor party.²⁹ Shifu’s suggestions, however, remained only theory, since he fell ill before being able to become active among workers on his own and thus had to leave this to his followers.

Shifu had to confront another challenge in terms of anarchist relationship with nationalism in 1914, now not from the side of the nationalists and their aborted revolution in China but this time from inside the world anarchist movement: when the First World War broke out, the international anarchist community faced a serious split. Their leading figure, Kropotkin, opted for the allies and thus for political involvement.³⁰ This sent a shock-wave through world anarchism at the time and provoked fierce debates. Shifu sided with Kropotkin’s critics

²⁵ As mentioned, Li Shizeng had brought Chinese workers over to France to work in his doufu factory. However, as becomes clear in his discussion with Shifu, he believed that education was the foremost task whereas syndicalism was not yet possible, given the “backward” conditions of Chinese workers. (See “Fulu Zhenmin xiansheng yu Shifu shu” (1914)).

²⁶ *Hengbao* has been recovered in Japan for the issues 1-8 and 10: thanks go to Prof. Hazama Naoki of Kyoto University for having made them accessible.

²⁷ In fact, Kropotkin himself had declared some interest in syndicalism. One may also add that Ôsugi Sakae, the leading Japanese anarchist who had close contacts with other East Asian anarchists, including Shifu, combined Kropotkin and syndicalism, too. (For a more extensive treatment of Ôsugi in English, see Stanley 1982).

²⁸ The *Minsheng* issue with the most pronounced discussions on labor was no. 21 (1914). (The partial *Minsheng* reprint, Hong Kong 1967, used in some earlier studies, has been replaced by the complete reprint, Kyoto 1992, edited by Hazama Naoki.)

²⁹ See Shifu (1915).

³⁰ Kropotkin’s letter to Gustav Steffen of 1914 appeared in the seminal British anarchist journal *Freedom* and was reprinted in almost every important anarchist journal at the time (Kropotkin (1970: pp. 309-316)). Since *Freedom* did not follow its mentor Kropotkin this time, the relationship between both broke down after 28 years of collaboration.

around F. Domela Nieuwenhuis and Errico Malatesta, arguing for strict abstention from politics and holding close to the internationalist ideal.³¹

The earlier “Paris group”, however, sided with Kropotkin, thus bringing the international split also home to China. Their argument stayed in the line of their earlier acceptance of cooperation with the nationalists, now reorganized in the Guomindang (GMD): revolution is only possible when the preconditions have become ripe by evolution, and therefore one needed to side with those furthering “evolution” against those who might block it. On a personal basis, education was again promoted as of crucial importance to further “evolution”, and therefore the “Paris group” continued with their Sino-French educational programs, France being also perceived as an ideal place sanctioned by revolutionary tradition and a strict separation of state and religion in education.³² They therefore set up preparatory schools in China, first in Beijing in 1912 but then also elsewhere, which in turn made a mark in Chinese education also by following the concept of co-education and the principle of combining theoretical (including moral-behavioral!) and practical education, and introduced several batches of Chinese students (basically only male) subsequently to French universities and colleges.³³

Since after the outbreak of the First World War France and Britain were trying to hire workers in China to help with production, substituting the many European workers conscripted into the allies’ armies, the “Paris group” anarchists, namely Li Shizeng, perceived this as a welcome chance to join in. Whereas the first Chinese workers had been recruited for the allies by commercial Chinese enterprises,³⁴ Li and his comrades wanted to counter this by their own program, thus guaranteeing the Chinese workers fair treatment in France, but also educating them according to the “Paris group’s” vision. This way they hoped to bridge the gap between work and study not only “from above” but also “from below”. These workers were offered education by evening courses, similar to Li Shizeng’s early doufu factory precedent. And they designed the first real Chinese workers’ journal, *Huagong zazhi* (Chinese worker), published in France and starting in 1917, using colloquial Chinese and phonetic transcription for those not yet familiar with reading Chinese characters to cater to this audience’s needs.

Finally, the “Paris group” anarchists would set up the “diligent work, frugal study” program – this time again for Chinese students (including some women) who should sustain themselves by working in factories while studying abroad, mainly in France.³⁵ As is well known, several

³¹ See the special war issue of Shifu’s journal *Minsheng*, no. 22 (1914).

³² See, e.g., Li Shizeng’s letter to Wu Zhihui of 1915, reprinted in Li Shizeng (1980: vol. 2, p. 315-319). Li wrote to Wu (who stayed for some time in Britain) that he considered the British system less ideal, since “pro religion, king and gentry”, whereas the French was “free of religion and authority”. Li’s views were shared by the “Paris group” and their close associates.

³³ The women studying in France were mostly family members of male students. A notable exception was Zheng Yuxiu, China’s “first woman lawyer”, who had participated in the Beijing preparatory school’s course and went to France thereafter to study law at Sorbonne. She later became an important figure in the nationalist Guomindang and had long-standing personal connections to Li Shizeng. See Zheng Yuxiu (1943).

³⁴ For this, see Chen Sanjing (1986) and Summerskill (1982).

³⁵ Besides France, there were smaller programs for Britain and Japan. For the relatively few female worker-students, see Barman/Duloust (1987) and Müller (2001b).

leading Chinese Communists of later times went through this anarchist-designed program, e.g. Deng Xiaoping.³⁶ However, since the latter program went into full force only after the war and unhappily coincided with post-war economic depression in France, it soon ran into trouble which, in turn, led to a radicalization of some worker-students. Thus, unintentionally, the anarchists contributed to the shift towards Marxism among several participants in their program who also complained about the lack of help during the crisis from their anarchist peers. That the Versailles peace negotiations which had been held close by ended in a major disappointment for the Chinese,³⁷ leading to a boost in Chinese anti-imperialist nationalism, only added to this radicalizing shift. Problems would peak in 1921 when the “diligent work, frugal study” program was basically stopped on the one hand, but on the other a new elite institution to educate future Chinese professors was established by the “Paris group”: the “Institut Franco-Chinois” at Lyon University. The latter, however, did not easily admit the former (often radicalized and in the meantime rather Marxist-oriented) student-workers but brought over other Chinese students chosen by the financing provinces and selected by entrance examinations.³⁸ By this, the anarchist-inspired educational programs were in hindsight at the same time a case of intersection with Marxism and a source of friction between both.

The crucial phase around 1920

This leads us now to the most varied and complex period in the relationship between anarchism, Marxism and nationalism: whereas the October revolution in Russia was first introduced to the Chinese readership quite tellingly via an anarchist journal (see below), the organizational activities of the newly engendered Marxists – Marxism now appearing not any more linked primarily to economics but also more and more to political and social issues in the wake of the October revolution – led to a more complicated interaction between the three ideological currents and their activists. The so-called May Fourth period (often dated 1919-1923, though in the context of the New Culture Movement comprising developments leading up to 1919) witnessed a host of ideologies proposed and has been interpreted as a crucial

³⁶ The classical study in English on this topic is Levine (1993).

³⁷ As is well-known, in Versailles Japan was allowed to keep the Chinese Shandong peninsula for the time being which spurred the May Fourth protests in China in 1919. (As scholarship has demonstrated in the meantime, things were more complicated so that the Chinese “myth” of US president Wilson’s “betrayal” of China at Versailles is untenable; however, at the time the Chinese students in China and in France mostly perceived it that way.)

³⁸ The specific financial and contractual background of this endeavor and the consequently different selection of the student body are often disregarded in mainland Chinese scholarship on the worker-student movement which tends to view the latter as a part of Marxist-communist beginnings and tries to present the anarchist organizers as “discriminating” against the student-workers. Though this view is at least one-sided and also glosses over the fact that there were also non-Marxists among the worker-students, it is certainly true that the anarchist organizers had little reasons to be particularly obliging towards Marxist-oriented students.

period for Chinese nationalism, namely by its decidedly anti-imperialist thrust in protest of the decisions at the Versailles peace conference detrimental to Chinese national interests, but is also connected to the founding myth of the CCP (officially founded 1921). For Marxist Chinese historiography – sidelining the important liberal and individualist legacies May Fourth also provided (!) – this period is therefore defined as the awakening of Chinese nationalist anti-imperialist consciousness among different “classes” in Chinese society (including the workers), which “naturally” culminated in the founding of the CCP to take the lead in this “patriotic” movement.

However, this period was also the high-time of anarchism in China: never again were there so many groups and publications. Interactions and intersections between nationalists, anarchists and Marxists were most pronounced in these years, but also competition and antagonisms were mounting. One of the crucial areas of competition was syndicalism: already at the time of Shifu anarchists involved themselves in labor issues, and the popularized notion of “general strike” was mainly perceived as anarchist. Anarchists remained very active among workers, comprising also educational activities in the “Paris group” style. (This would be something the later CCP would pick up, too.) In the second decade of the 20th century, the anarchists only had had to compete with the nationalists in the labor organizations, with the most industrialized cities of Shanghai and Guangzhou being the center of activities.³⁹ In the early 1920s the CCP, seeing labor unions as their “natural” field of action, would join in the competition, and would in the end largely succeed in ousting the anarchists who by the mid 1920s had lost most of their foothold in the labor unions. Facing the strong organizations of the GMD and the CCP, the anarchists with their traditional aversion to tight organizations as non-anarchistic had little chance to succeed any longer.

In the beginning, however, things were not that clear-cut. E.g., the Chinese anarchists were at first not sure how to view the bolshevists, since early information on Lenin and the October Revolution was fragmentary. Their first labor journal published in China, *Laodong / La Laboristo* (Labor),⁴⁰ founded in 1918 by Wu Zhihui of the “Paris group” together with followers of Shifu, namely Liang Bingxian and Shifu’s brother Liu Shixin – both experienced in syndicalist work among Chinese in Singapore – and directed at a rather educated readership, at first wrote positively about the developments in Russia. They assumed that the soviets were some form of anarchist-influenced decentralized organizations, lauded the aim of “world revolution” and the perceived social revolution underway in Russia.⁴¹ When it became known that the bolshevists were Marxists and did not treat anarchists in Russia very friendly, *Laodong*’s approval was soon toned down. The journal existed only for several months

³⁹ On the latter in Guangzhou, see the contribution by Marling in this volume.

⁴⁰ The Chinese title means “labor” in English, but the Esperanto co-title of the journal, *La Laboristo* means “laborer”. To not create any confusion with the later mentioned journal *Laodongzhe* (Worker), I translate the Chinese title here. Notably, different from the above-mentioned *Huagong zazhi* in France, this journal clearly intended intellectuals as readership, using classical Chinese. It thus was rather a “labor journal” but not a “laborers’ journal”.

⁴¹ The first two issues of the journal wrote positively about the Soviet Union. The third issue already was mixed in its assessment.

(March to July) in 1918, however, the shift during its existence foreshadowed the increasing tensions between anarchists and Marxists in the following years.

On the other hand, different models for a new society were discussed by the anarchists at the time. Given the difficulties of living out anarchist principles in a militarized and increasingly capitalist environment like the China of the day, the idea of creating a space for oneself gained greater currency. This idea was not new in Chinese anarchism: besides Zhang Ji of the “Paris group” who had lived some months in a French commune (see above), also Shifu had planned to set up one and basically understood his way of living with his comrades as communal. This trend was further boosted by (non-anarchist) models like the Japanese “new village” (*atarashiki mura*) movement (founded 1918) of writer Mushakôji Saneatsu which was introduced to China by noted Chinese writer Zhou Zuoren. Soon, a host of “new village”-style communes sprang up in China to realize a “new life” in a small area: sometimes rural (as in the Japanese model), but in China more often urban.⁴² The idea was also intertwined with the concept of combining work and study, and again several participants in these various projects later became noted CCP activists. Mao Zedong himself was interested in the movement for some time.

The time around 1920 thus was the high-time of communes to try out new forms of living, including new gender relations. Although most of these projects were short-lived (different from the Japanese *atarashiki mura* extant to this very day), they introduced into the revolutionary discourse the component of whole-sale revolution of life. Not only the macro level had to be revolutionized, but also the micro level, and revolution was not just political, but had to address daily habits, interpersonal relations, communication structures etc. – thus taking, in good Kropotkinian fashion, revolution as a wholesale enterprise to oust every authority, wherever encountered. This is why Chinese anarchists – already starting during the formative phase of the 1900s – have always been engaged in issues of gender, life-style, and language. They attacked the traditional marriage system, e.g., much more radically than anyone else,⁴³ even though nationalists as well as the CCP would pick up this issue later, if less radically, only opting for Western-style monogamous and non-arranged marriages. Anarchists, instead, wanted to do away with marriage per se. Similarly, although today’s CCP often drives anti-drugs or anti-prostitution or other “manners” campaigns and the GMD had its own “manner” codes, notably with the New Life Movement of the 1930s, it was the anarchists who wanted early on to “evolutionize” Chinese habits, as mentioned. E.g., the “Paris group” advocated the abolishment of gambling, spitting etc. as “of yesterday”, and the integration of work and study was also a project that should break down class barriers in the future since everybody should work (and have the opportunity to study). This, again, is something the CCP later would take up, reframing it in its own class struggle concept and its

⁴² See Müller (2001c) and Müller (2001a: pp. 351-388).

⁴³ As has been noted, the “Tokyo group” with He Zhen has been decidedly more radical than their Japanese anarchist peers (Zarrow 1988.) However, there are many historical problems around the production and circulation of that group’s publications, namely the journals *Tianyi* (Natural Justice) and *Hengbao*. Nevertheless, even without reference to He Zhen’s anarcho-feminism, the “Paris group” or later Shifu and the subsequent various publications of anarchists around 1920 sustain this point abundantly. For more details on Chinese anarchism and gender issues, see Müller (2005).

Maoist vision of a “new man”. And for language, it was again the anarchists that criticized early on their own (written) language as class-based, since so time-consuming and producing so many illiterates, whereas in international communication the hegemonic role of English was attacked. Therefore, more than anywhere else in the world, in East Asian anarchism Esperanto was held up as a truly international means of communication.⁴⁴ Also these language reform and Esperanto issues would be taken over later (in the 1930s) by the CCP to meet its own ends, providing yet one further example of (unacknowledged) continuities.

On the other hand, the concrete example of the Soviet Union was instrumental not only for the founding of the CCP, but also was the crystallizing agent for anarchist versus Marxist bolshevist identities – since the former soon perceived the Soviet Union as a “lost chance” to change society for the better. However, this, too, took some time. Anarchists around 1920 were mostly in favor of the concept of class conflict and thus had something in common with the Marxists, but they promoted Shifu as the embodiment of anarchist morals against Marxist perceived “dictatorial” trends. And they stressed that only Kropotkinian anarchism was advanced, since really “communist”, whereas the Marxists were only outdated “collectivists” – an argument already proposed by Shifu.⁴⁵ This argument, however, was increasingly difficult to sustain as Marxist bolshevism and the Soviet Union were obviously not “outdated” but very much alive and active. Thus, there was also some search for commonalities: e.g., Huang Lingshuang, a follower of Shifu who had voiced this criticism of Marxism as “outdated collectivism” in 1919 could find also some commonalities with Marxists at the same time. In an article in *Xin qingnian* (New Youth), he criticized Marx’ political theory but acknowledged historical materialism and Marxian economical theses.⁴⁶ Li Dazhao, often apostrophized as China’s “first Marxist”, in turn, had lauded Kropotkinian “mutual aid” in 1919 as the goal which class conflict is only serving to achieve,⁴⁷ and it was he who edited the *Xin qingnian* issue which contained Huang Lingshuang’s contribution. Obviously, there was some dialogue and search for common ground, and Huang Lingshuang, e.g., also participated in the socialist study circle in Beijing organized by Li Dazhao in 1920 in this mood of potential cooperation.

Furthermore, the Soviets were testing the field in China and offered help to various radicals in the beginning: e.g., the anarchists in Fujian in 1919/1920 – then under the rule of “anarchist warlord” and former friend of Shifu’s, Chen Jiongming – found some positive things to say about bolshevism and its concern for the labor question, given the fact that the Soviets tried to build up contacts with Chen.⁴⁸ On the other hand, Chen Jiongming whose long-standing

⁴⁴ For an overview on the relationship between anarchism and Esperanto in China, see Müller/Benton (2006a; 2006b). Cf. also Anderson (2010: xvi) who in his discussion of anarchist internationalism pointed out that the latter was only possible “if linguistic communication was successful”.

⁴⁵ Shifu had stated this in *Minsheng* no. 15. His follower, Huang Lingshuang, picked this up in the first common forum of various Chinese anarchists: the short-lived journal *Jinhua / La Evolucio* (Evolution). See Huang Lingshuang (1919a).

⁴⁶ See [Huang] Lingshuang (1919b).

⁴⁷ See “Shouchang” [= Li Dazhao] (1919).

⁴⁸ Unfortunately, there is not much known about the details of these contacts. However, it is clear that they existed, and that Liang Bingxian’s (under alias “Liangji”) relatively positive assessment of bolshevism in the anarchist journal *Minxing* (Fujian star) no. 3-5 was influenced by this background.

interest in anarchism expressed itself now mainly in his protection of anarchist activities and in favoring a federal system for China, also had close contacts with Sun Yat-sen and the nationalist Guomindang until they split in 1922 over the question of how to best unify China. The Soviets, in turn, also tried with Sun and his Southern government established in Guangdong, so that especially in the South of China the three societal forces, anarchists, nationalists and Marxists, lived through a phase of potential cooperation.

Nevertheless, the anarchist-bolshevist relationship was shaky as exemplified in the development of Chen Duxiu in 1920: Chen, who would become the CCP's first general secretary in 1921, was navigating towards Marxism during that year, whereas his sons were anarchists at the time. Chen was the main editor of the already named seminal journal *Xin qingnian* (New Youth) which would become Marxist in the second half of 1920, financed by then by the Soviets. He organized a "study circle on socialism" in Shanghai with a focus on labor issues, whereas Li Dazhao's Beijing circle (referred to above) was more generally theoretical. In both circles, anarchists participated in the beginning, and when the Comintern sent its representative Voitinsky to sort out possible cooperation, even famous Japanese anarchist Ôsugi Sakae came to Shanghai in 1920 to join the meeting. However, it became quickly obvious to all sides that there were more differences than commonalities, and thus both sides went their own way. This was the beginning of the anarchist-bolshevist split in China which was also paralleled in Japan: they only agreed that the present system had to be overturned, but they disagreed about what kind of new system they envisaged and how to achieve this. Chen Duxiu accused the anarchists of being totally ineffective utopians. Rather, according to him, the Soviet Union demonstrated that it needed organized force to overturn the old system and to hold down the former ruling classes by the dictatorship of the proletariat after the revolution to prevent a restoration of the old order.⁴⁹

Nonetheless, still in the mood of potential cooperation, "anarchist warlord" Chen Jiongmeng invited Chen Duxiu to Guangzhou, then an anarchist stronghold. Taking up Shifu's legacy, anarchists were very active in Guangzhou's labor movement, and thus also the Soviets were interested to build up contacts with anarchists there. The latter published their own journal "The Worker" (*Laodongzhe*) (1920-1921) which – though following up on the earlier (more elitist) Shanghai journal *Laodong* mentioned above – this time was conceived for a workers' readership. Though basically repeating Shifu's anarcho-syndicalist positions, the journal was more pronounced in its anti-imperialist stance, given the often foreign-run factories in which the workers were employed. The Soviets obviously gave some money for the journal, however, a close reading of it does not reveal – as sometimes has been assumed – that the journal was a bolshevist-anarchist cooperation in content. Only Chen Duxiu's arrival in Guangzhou in early 1921 meant a decisive turn. Immediately he started to attack the anarchists, provoking an intensive discussion which was received nation-wide by its publication in the by now completely Marxist *Xin qingnian* (New Youth), edited by Chen.⁵⁰ Main opponent from the anarchist side was the much younger Ou Shengbai who, in fact,

⁴⁹ See Chen Duxiu (1920).

⁵⁰ The debate was also (at times only partially) printed in other, smaller journals.

shortly before had been a student at Beijing University where Chen Duxiu, in turn, had been a professor and dean. Thus, aside from political divergence and the fact, that it was published in Chen's journal, the discussion was also one between an older teacher and a younger student (very notable in the way of writing and often overlooked in the assessment of this high point of anarchist-Marxist debate): given this context, Ou's argumentation was an uphill battle, and in general perception Chen with his rather authoritarian argumentation won the day. He accused the anarchists of ineffectiveness, being outdated dreamers, whereas Marxism's "dictatorship of the proletariat" was without alternatives.⁵¹

One of the last times anarchists and Marxists attempted to cooperate visibly in Guangzhou was during May Day 1921 when they marched through the streets with portraits of Marx and Kropotkin side by side, voicing general slogans like "holiness of labor" or "equality of all classes".⁵² But soon after, many of the most active anarchists left Guangzhou for France to join the "Institut Franco-Chinois" of the old "Paris group" in Lyon.

Thus, France became a second crucial place for Chinese Marxist-anarchist relations. However, here at first the roles were reversed: the still very few Marxists were rather conciliatory in the beginning whereas the anarchists saw not much reason to spare them with attacks. The so-called "socialist youth group" which had been a testing ground for potential cooperation between Marxists and anarchists (similar to the socialist circles in Beijing and Shanghai referred to above), soon failed also in Europe. Mouthpiece of the anarchists was their journal *Gongyu* (literally: after work, but with the Esperanto co-title *La Laboro* = labor) (1922-1924), whereas the Marxists came up with the journal *Shaonian* (Youth) (1922-1923) (both handwritten and mimeographed). Apart from the usual mutual criticism, a notable feature was their discussion about how to assess the Soviet Union. Given the fact that a couple of Chinese anarchists had been in the Soviet Union themselves in the context of early Soviet attempts to "make converts", they sent letters on their first-hand experiences to present the Soviet Union as a failed experiment: people had nothing to eat, felt oppressed and were afraid to voice their opinions. In spite of all nice-sounding rhetoric, this was simply a totalitarian state.⁵³ And the experience of Ukrainian anarchist Nestor Machno, who was briefly introduced in *Gongyu*, was to demonstrate that anarchists had only been welcome to help the bolsheviks against the old system but soon after were discarded. Thus, the anarchists warned against cooperation with the Marxists as the latter would only use them on their way to power.

The Marxist authors of *Shaonian* in France, in turn, who had no personal experiences of the Soviet Union yet to counter the arguments, rather tried to defend themselves by attacking anarchism on a theoretical level. Main spokesmen here were Zhou Enlai, the later prime

⁵¹ The dispute was printed in full in *Xin qingnian* vol. 9, no. 4. Ou Shengbai would voice a last addendum later when already in France (in 1923), not concealing his bitterness.

⁵² See the reminiscences of "anarchist printer" Zheng Peigang in Ge / Jiang / Li (1984: vol. 2, p. 963), and the revived *Minsheng* (no. 32, May 5, 1921, English section p. 3). Cf. also Marling's contribution to this volume.

⁵³ The journal *Gongyu* has been accessible only for some issues in the original and some reprinted articles in collections of anarchist materials. Letters on the Soviet Union were sent by the anarchists Qin Baopu (who would later come out with several extensive critical treatments of the Soviet Union) from Moscow and Huang Lingshuang, the follower of Shifu, who had been there 1921/1922. Another author mainly active in attacking the Soviet Union in this journal was "Sanbo" (a pseudonym to my knowledge not yet reliably identified.)

minister of the PRC, and later Trotskyist Yin Kuan.⁵⁴ That the early editors of the anarchist *Gongyu*, Chen Duxiu's sons, unexpectedly changed sides and went over to the Marxists (i.e. their father's side) in 1922, embittered the relationship between both. The anarchists, however, received support from the Japanese anarchist Ôsugi Sakae who came to France in early 1923 and participated in the May Day celebration which was also used to join the international protests of the verdicts in the US against the Italian anarchists Sacco and Vanzetti,⁵⁵ thus visibly linking up the Chinese and the international anarchist community. Ôsugi told the Chinese anarchists in France about the anarchist-bolshevist split in Japan and thus supported them in their refusal of any further cooperation with the Marxists. After Ôsugi's violent death by the Japanese police after his return to Japan and in the wake of the Great Kantô Earthquake in September 1923, Ôsugi would become a "martyr" and icon also for the Chinese anarchists, together with Shifu, to be held up against the Marxists.

The Marxists, on their part, reoriented themselves, due also to the Comintern strategy of trying to first ally with nationalist movements world-wide to counter Western imperialism and locally set a revolution into motion; thus, they now directed their efforts towards the Guomindang, after they had given up on the anarchists.⁵⁶ Main locality in this endeavor would be once more Guangzhou, where the Guomindang's Southern Government resided. And it was also in Guangzhou where all three groups, the anarchists, the Guomindang and the Marxists, tried to defend their respective foothold in the workers' movement. Given the meanwhile acrimonious relationship between the anarchists and the Marxists, also the anarchists now tended rather toward the Guomindang, if they looked out for allies at all.⁵⁷

The difficult 1920s

When the newly founded CCP and the reorganized GMD decided to cooperate in the first United Front (1924-1927) under the umbrella of a "national revolution", it seemed that the nationalists and Marxists had come to some solidarity whereas the anarchists were left out. In fact, even though Marxism and even bolshevism incorporated some internationalist legacy, the anarchists (together with the equally brushed-aside liberals) were a fairly lonely voice of

⁵⁴ The (not complete) journal *Shaonian* has been reprinted in the PRC.

⁵⁵ For the Sacco-Vanzetti case, see Paul Avrich (1991). As Ôsugi had to remain vague about his voyage to France for legal reasons (he had escaped from Japan), more information can be found by consulting the travel notes of one of his travel mates (as done by Kamata (1997) in his Japanese-language study of Ôsugi).

⁵⁶ One of the last "attempts" from the Marxist side to win over anarchists was the publication of a Chinese translation of the so-called "declaration of Russian anarchists" who voiced support for the Soviet Union in the Marxist *Xin qingnian jikan* (New Youth quarterly) (an extension of *Xin qingnian* and covered in the reprint) no. 2, December 20, 1923, pp. 151-159.

⁵⁷ E.g., the anarchist publication forum *Chunlei* (Spring thunder) of 1923-1924 (partially reprinted in Sakai / Saga (1994) vol. 8) and Jing Meijiu – an early associate of the "Tokyo group" – with his several publications during the 1920s represented this anarchist trend to cautiously draw near the Guomindang.

internationalism in China in the 1920s.⁵⁸ Given the mounting Chinese anti-imperialist nationalism ever since the May Fourth Movement of 1919, further boosted by the May Thirtieth movement of 1925, following the violent death of a worker and subsequent protesters at the hands of foreigners – a movement from which the CCP was able to profit most (leading also to frictions in the United Front with the nationalists), anarchist internationalism found itself with its back to the wall. This, understandably, generated intensive discussions among Chinese anarchists and eventually led to a split into “purists” who wanted to stay clear of any involvement in politics, and “realists” who went for the “lesser evil”, somewhat reminiscent of the problems around the outbreak of the First World War – and also not without parallels in international anarchism of the 1920s.

The argument in the anarchist camp at first mainly crystallized around the figure of Wu Zhihui.⁵⁹ Given the fact that the GMD under Sun Yat-sen decided to reinterpret its tenets somewhat more compatible with Soviet positions in the early 1920s, reframing “nationalism” as “anti-imperialism”, “democracy” as a long-term goal after a phase of political “tutelage”, and “social welfare” as in fact “socialism”, Wu feared that the integration of the CCP into the GMD, as decided in the context of the United Front in 1924, would shift the GMD now from within towards Soviet positions. Thus, he suggested the anarchists should equally enter the GMD to build up a counter-weight *inside* of that party to not “lose” it to the Marxists! Though anarchism remained Wu’s declared long-term goal, it would – he contended – need “3000 years” to achieve this, and he therewith remained in the old *Xin shiji* argumentation line of the “first step into the right direction”, helping the revolution by helping the GMD as the most likely force capable to set the latter into motion.⁶⁰ Consequently, he and other participants of the “Paris group” accepted positions in the GMD and also sustained Chiang Kai-shek’s efforts to finally fulfill Sun Yat-sen’s legacy after the latter’s death in 1925: the Northern Expedition to oust the warlords and unify China.

Other, more “purist” anarchists, however, could not accept an alliance with any political party and thus criticized their fellow anarchists bitterly as traitors. The less emotional voices like Shen Zhongjiu who obviously realized the influence of this decision of the “older” comrades of the “Paris group” on younger anarchists, tried to analyze the reasons for and against such a decision: if one argued the commonality with the GMD was the “same enemy” (i.e. the warlords ruling over most parts of China), one could also argue for a cooperation with the CCP, as the common enemy here would be capitalism. That the GMD was the “first step into the right direction” was problematic to him, as the goals were so different from anarchism: never did the GMD want to abolish the state.⁶¹

⁵⁸ For more on this, see Müller (2006).

⁵⁹ The first round of this argument was between Wu Zhihui and Hua Lin – equally involved with the “Paris group’s” various educational endeavors in France – in 1924 and widely disseminated in Chinese anarchist publications of the time, but similar discussions would be repeated throughout the 1920s in various anarchist publications (Müller 2001a: pp. 513-531).

⁶⁰ Wu Zhihui’s letters to Hua Lin of 1924 are reprinted in *Wu Zhihui yanxinglu* (1929: part 2, pp. 57-72).

⁶¹ See “Xin’ai” [= Shen Zhongjiu] (1924).

Those critical of a cooperation with the GMD struggled to set up their own organization as it became obvious that the anarchists were without chances in the competition if they did not somehow organize: thus they tried to use publications on the one hand as a common forum, suggesting the journal *Minzhong / La Evangelio de la Popolo* (People's Bell)⁶² based near Guangzhou as a theoretical one, whereas the Shanghai *Minzhong* ([different characters:] The Masses) should focus on practical aspects. On the other hand, labor unions still influenced by the anarchists were to serve as a form of cohesion: but here anarcho-syndicalism lost out to the GMD and the CCP more and more. This fact became most pronounced in the “struggle” between all three movements of whom the early syndicalist “martyrs” Pang Renquan and Huang Ai – executed in early 1922 in Hunan by the local warlord because of a strike – should be counted to: de facto both had been mainly labor activists and not very clear about any ideological affiliation, but they were immediately claimed by all three ideological sides. In the end the CCP would get the upper hand and successfully appropriated them.⁶³ Thus, some anarchists “discovered” also the peasants as a possible target of agitation, arguing for cooperatives as a fitting form of rural organization.⁶⁴ Still, compared with the CCP (especially in its later development), Chinese anarchists on balance remained urban in their focus. They tried, however, to set up anarchist organizations that would be “really internationalist” in the sense that they repeatedly linked up with foreign anarchists in China, most notably Koreans and Japanese.⁶⁵ On the other hand, the anarchists continuously attacked the CCP during the 1920s as lackeys of the Soviets and their “red imperialism”. But the two crucial events in the mid 1920s, the anti-imperialist May Thirtieth movement in 1925 and the Northern Expedition (1926-1928) went by without major anarchist involvement, whereas the CCP could profit enormously from both. In fact, some of the anarchist “purists” reconsidered their stance, as, e.g., the more moderate discussion by three leading younger Chinese anarchists in France (Wei Huilin, Ba Jin and Wu Kegang) exemplified: although they were reluctant to advocate a joining of forces with the GMD in 1926/27, they acknowledged that the “national revolution” underway with the Northern Expedition should teach the anarchists the lesson that a by-standing attitude would mean losing all significance of anarchists for directing the future of China.⁶⁶

⁶² My translation again follows the Chinese title. Interestingly, the Esperanto co-title has a Christian-religious ring: “Gospel of the people”, although Chinese anarchists in the 1920s were often involved in the anti-religious (and “anti-imperialist” anti-Christian) movement (Müller 2001a: 473-477).

⁶³ This had to do also with the fact that CCP activists very early on published works on labor activities, and these accounts have often been used later – quite uncritically, given their obvious “vested interest” – as factual descriptions.

⁶⁴ E.g. Li Shaoling, a former anarcho-syndicalist, did so in the tradition also of Kropotkin himself, who had been fairly positive about cooperatives in his last years in the Soviet Union.

⁶⁵ Cf. the chapter of Hwang in this volume.

⁶⁶ The brochure – written by the three young anarchists in France *before* the GMD anti-CCP purges but published at the time of the purges which upset Ba Jin in particular – is reprinted in Ge / Jiang / Li (1984: vol. 2, pp. 826-848). Jean Grave, the French anarchist, had voiced a similar opinion in his letters to the Chinese anarchist journal *Minzhong* (People's Bell). In the background of these discussions was the international inner-anarchist dispute on the “Organizational platform of the General Union of Anarchists” proposed by Ukrainian anarchist Nestor Machno and others, which promoted a stronger organization among anarchists. The three Chinese anarchists in France paid close attention to this issue. See Pino (2013). (Thanks go to an anonymous reviewer for pointing out this reference.)

Again, their theoretical discussions were overrun by the quickly changing historical circumstances: when the United Front between the CCP and the GMD broke up in 1927, the anarchist “realists” in the tradition of the “Paris group” sided with the GMD, having as their most basic point of convergence the intense hatred of the CCP. (Nota bene: it is problematic to use the term “anti-Communist” for the anarchists as they – in the tradition of Kropotkin – claimed “communism” for themselves, i.e. anarcho-communism: this was decidedly different from the GMD which was fundamentally “anti-communist”.) In the eyes of these anarchists, the CCP was dictatorial and neo-imperialist, and the brutal treatment of anarchists in Soviet Russia was well-publicized in China as a warning against the bolsheviks.⁶⁷ Thus, the GMD appeared as a – though admittedly not ideal – ally.

However, with Chiang Kai-shek’s “purges” of the CCP in 1927, anarchists came under additional pressure as a rapprochement with the GMD now meant opting for the GMD right-wing associated with Chiang Kai-shek. Whereas some, like Bi Xiushao and the old “Paris group” who used the newly set-up journal *Geming zhoubao* (Revolution weekly) (1927-1929) as their organ,⁶⁸ saw this as a chance to take over the place the CCP had occupied before in the GMD – and also to build up a counterweight to the “leftist” faction around Wang Jingwei and former CCP member Chen Gongbo within the very heterogeneous GMD, other anarchists warned that this meant joining forces with reactionaries. Thus, the anti-CCP “purges” and end of the United Front between the GMD and the CCP led to a deep split also among the anarchists, dividing the anarchist “rightists” who at times tried to also build an ideological bridge to the GMD (e.g. Li Shizeng, who now referred to Proudhon’s ideas of decentralization rather than to more “system-challenging” Kropotkin or even Bakunin) on one side,⁶⁹ and the more radical anarchist “leftists” on the other.⁷⁰

Although the “purists” (or “anarchist leftists”) – many of them from Sichuan and remarkably interested in gender issues⁷¹ – were decidedly against the CCP (like the GMD-affiliated anarchists), they nevertheless held some ideological tenets intersecting with the Marxists, e.g. in their positive assessment of “leftist” concepts they were familiar with by their earlier studies at “Shanghai University” (a GMD-CCP United Front project), though decrying the CCP’s “dictatorial” ways and subservience towards Moscow. E.g., “leftists” Lu Jianbo and Mao Yibo repeatedly supported the idea of class struggle. They not only attacked the

⁶⁷ One of the authors most active in this field throughout the 1920s was the already mentioned Qin Baopu who frequently published on the Soviet Union in anarchist journals. For a book-length negative portrayal of the Soviet Union, see ([Qin] Baopu 1924). See also his unpublished reminiscences (n.d.). (Thanks to Prof. Yamaguchi Mamoru, Tokyo, for making the latter accessible.)

⁶⁸ The journal has been reprinted in the large Japanese collection of Chinese anarchist materials by Sakai / Saga.

⁶⁹ Li Shizeng’s advocacy of Proudhon’s ideas were published, e.g., in *Geming zhoubao*, although not all anarchists collaborating with this journal agreed to this. As has often been pointed out, Proudhon was the first to use the label “anarchist” in his later years for himself, even if not all histories of anarchism are willing to count him as such. The most authoritative account from the anarchist side in the early 20th century, Kropotkin’s entry on “anarchism” in the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* (Kropotkin 1910), however, counts him as anarchist and thus, in a way, “sanctions” Li Shizeng’s position.

⁷⁰ The split in the Chinese movement has to be seen also in a greater international context. Notably, in Japan Hatta Shūzō’s “pure anarchism” was a parallel not without influence on the Chinese anarchist “leftists” (Crump 1993), though Hatta differed in that he was decidedly against syndicalism and Marxism.

⁷¹ Several of them held close contacts with Emma Goldman.

anarchist “rightists” around *Geming zhoubao* but even had a fall-out with “middle-of-the-roaders” (according to their perception) like “anarchist writer” Ba Jin alias Li Feigan (or “Li Pei-Kan”, as he signed, e.g., his Esperanto articles) who, as mentioned, had reconsidered the “radical purist” stance with his two fellow anarchists while in France (written *before* the start of the GMD purges of the CCP though to his anger published at that very moment to create that “middle-of-the-roader” image).⁷² One concrete outcome of this inner-anarchist split was the suspension of the journal *Minzhong* (People’s Bell), one of the most long-standing anarchist journals in China (1922-1927). The anarchist “left”, in turn, soon resumed publishing its own journal, *Minfeng* (People’s Vanguard), first published in Nanjing 1923 and from 1927 in Shanghai. After the latter’s forced closure in 1928 by the GMD they tried with several short-lived publications. Ba Jin on his part cooperated with the “Pingshe” (Equality Society) group in California which published the journal *Pingdeng* (Equality), founded in the crucial year 1927, to defend his own position critical of the “rightists” and the *Minfeng* “leftists”.⁷³

The “leftists”, in turn, kept trying to build up their own organizations after 1927, also reflecting trends in international anarchism toward “pure” anarchism: a “league of young Chinese anarchists” set against the older “compromising” (i.e. *Geming zhoubao*-style) anarchists, and the “black youth” (*heise qingnian*) were such endeavors, the latter closely following also the Japanese model (*kokushoku seinen*) of 1926, using the same Esperanto name “Nigra Junulo”.⁷⁴ However, different from Japanese and Western anarchism, the issue of organization and the ensuing split between “pure” anarcho-communists and anarcho-syndicalists did not occur this way in China.⁷⁵ Here, the demarcation line between “purists” and the others was rather the “political” issue of the GMD. Thus, Chinese anarchist “purists” like Lu Jianbo understood themselves as anarcho-syndicalists!

The GMD’s unmistakably growing dictatorship since 1927 and its bloody ways of suppressing opposition of any kind (not always sparing anarchist “allies”) increasingly threw into question the reasonability and feasibility of any kind of further anarchist cooperation with the GMD. Whereas there had been some GMD-anarchist collaboration in the realm of education after the end of the GMD-CCP “Shanghai University”, namely with the “Labor University” (1927-1932) equally situated in Shanghai and modeled on the Belgian example of the labor university in Charleroi,⁷⁶ anarchists now tried to build up a more independent (and

⁷² Ba Jin accused Bi Xiushao of *Geming zhoubao* of having done so on purpose, though it seems more likely that the brochure was already in print and the date of publication thus an unhappy coincidence. See Müller (2001a: pp. 538-540; 565-567).

⁷³ Articles from these journals have been reprinted in Ge / Jiang / Li (1984) and in Sakai / Saga (1994).

⁷⁴ In turn, the Japanese journal *Kokushoku seinen* also wrote about the Chinese anarchists’ split, and two contributors, Iwasa Sakutarô and Ishikawa Sanshirô, were involved in the Chinese anarchist movement.

⁷⁵ Interestingly, as Hwang (2010: p. 104) notes, the Korean anarchists living outside of Korea, including those in China, rather followed the Japanese-Western and not the Chinese model; understandably, perhaps, since outside Korea there was not much possibility for anarcho-syndicalist agitation on their part.

⁷⁶ See Chan /Dirlik (1991).

at first militarily backed)⁷⁷ own foothold in Fujian and Guangdong with several educational projects in the late 1920s and early 1930s (with notable help by Japanese and Korean comrades, mainly in Fujian).⁷⁸ Here, the educational ideals of forming “new and holistic personalities” and the realization of a new way of life in the earlier “commune” fashion were integrated (and mirrored to some degree in “anarchist writer” Ba Jin’s seminal fictional renderings).⁷⁹

Given the very repressive policy of the Guomindang ever since 1927, another field of possible action was the cultural sector. Here – again parallel to Japan – leftists of different kinds, above all the Marxists, tried to use literature as a forum for the promotion of their respective interpretations of “revolution”. This was a field also “leftist” anarchists were interested in as was independent, less “radical” “purist” Ba Jin, but also some “rightist” anarchists joined. The discussion revolved around the problem whether literature was class-based or not, how it could be used to further “revolution” and what a “proletarian culture” should look like.⁸⁰ Marxists and anarchists clashed, e.g., on how to evaluate Tolstoy, an issue which was seen by the anarchists – though themselves not all uncritical towards Tolstoy – as a covert attack on anarchism.⁸¹

Another field the anarchists were active in, also somewhat mending the rift between the factions so bitterly opposed since 1927, was the use of publication venues like the “publication cooperative” (*chuban hezuoshe*) of “anarchist printer” and close collaborator of Shifu, Zheng Peigang, which was obviously seen as “neutral” in the inner-anarchist dispute; or the newly established “Freedom press” (*Ziyou shudian*), coming out with works on topics undisputed within all anarchist camps like anti-CCP criticism or translations of Western works on “revolutionary heroes”, from the Russian narodniki of the late 19th century often introduced and translated by Ba Jin to more recent “anarchist” heroes like Sacco and Vanzetti whose trial and final execution in 1927 in the US led to repercussions in the international anarchist movement, including China.⁸²

With the War of Resistance against Japan (1937-1945) (as the Second Sino-Japanese War is called in China) the two anarchist camps finally came closer to each other again, i.e. in the context of national crisis. With a view to the Spanish civil war (1936-1939) which was

⁷⁷ This was influenced by the example of Ukrainian anarchist Nestor Machno on the one hand, and by the GMD “revolutionary” military academies and the CCP Soviet “bases” on the other. The anarchists, however, failed soon in this military regard, not the least because the GMD withdrew its support.

⁷⁸ A precursor of these more anarchist-defined educational projects was Kuang Husheng’s „Lida xueyuan“ (Academy for the perfection [of one’s personality]) in the outskirts of Shanghai, founded in 1925. Like the Labor University, it fell victim to the Japanese attack on Shanghai in early 1932.

⁷⁹ For more information on Chinese anarchism in the 1930s – a time-span hardly addressed by “standard” Western accounts on Chinese anarchism but studied by some Japanese and other East Asian scholars, see Müller (2001a: pp. 600-629). From the viewpoint of interactions with Koreans, see Hwang in this volume and Hwang (2010: pp. 115-123).

⁸⁰ From the “leftist” side, an anarchist version of “proletarian culture” was mainly promoted by Mao Yibo and Lu Jianbo. See, e.g., the handwritten “Organization program of the association for proletarian culture” (*wuchan wenhua xiehui zuzhi dagang*) (Esperanto title: Prokulta Asocio) of 1929, reprinted in Sakai / Saga (1994) vol. 8.

⁸¹ One of the main spokesmen from the anarchist side was – besides Ba Jin – anarchist “leftist” Mao Yibo.

⁸² See Müller (2001a: pp. 584-594).

intensively discussed also in China,⁸³ and with the Second United Front between the GMD and the CCP finally established to stand up against Japanese aggression, historical circumstances suggested that the “common enemy of fascism” was more important than inter-factional splits. Thus, though reluctantly, most anarchists joined in the common struggle to “save the nation”, by this also countering charges that they might undermine and obstruct Chinese resistance, rationalizing their choice with Kropotkin’s definition of anarchism as “against all authorities” and thus necessarily against foreign aggression.

Possible continuities

The relationship between anarchists and Marxists in China had been mostly antagonistic, for sure, whereas parts of the anarchists could live better with nationalists, mainly trying to integrate nationalism as a kind of first step on the way to the final goal of anarchy. Nevertheless, even anarchists and Marxists did at times cooperate, and on an ideological level there were several intersections, namely to vie for a not only political revolution as the nationalists aimed at primarily, but for an economic and social one as well. In this, anarchists and Marxists clearly reflected the broader concerns of socialism to which they both belong, and the basically internationalist outlook they both share (though less pronouncedly in the case of Soviet-style Marxism). Issues of revolutionary practice were the most dividing point. That anarchism lost out as a movement in this competition of the three currents is historical fact, however this does not mean per se that there is no legacy.⁸⁴ As stated in the beginning, anarchist legacy may be found mainly under other “labels”, being integrated or more or less successfully sublated. And many issues later taken up by the nationalists and /or the CCP (from gender or language issues to new life-styles integrating work and study or “civilizing manners” campaigns) have been introduced into revolutionary discourse and practice by anarchists. Thus, the portrayal of an antagonistic relationship of anarchism with nationalism and Marxism which is constitutive, e.g., for PRC historiographies on anarchism, but also to some degree for scholarship in post-1949 GMD Taiwan, reflects only one side of the story. Rather, antagonism was time and again interrupted by points of cooperation (if tactical), and some continuities, though not necessarily acknowledged ones, are unmistakably there. In short, anarchism remains relevant at least as the covert countercurrent to authority-focused perceptions of history that give credit only to the more obvious forces of nationalism and Marxism in the shaping of modern China.

⁸³ Ba Jin, e.g., translated and published extensively on the situation in Spain. While the Marxists tried to use the Spanish case to denounce the anarchists as endangering the anti-fascist front, famous author Lu Xun, an “icon” of the political “left” in China, defended Ba Jin’s contributions even on his deathbed.

⁸⁴ On this, see also recently Dirlik (2012: pp. 137-140) and Wang (2014).

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