

**RECOLLECTIONS OF LEADING WORLD FIGURES BY DAISAKU IKEDA**  
**WARRIOR WITH A PEN:**  
**BA JIN, PRESIDENT OF THE CHINESE WRITERS ASSOCIATION**

IT is perhaps only natural that a person persecuted for his or her beliefs may no longer find it possible to trust anyone but the young. My mentor, the second Soka Gakkai president, Josei Toda, often stated rather sharply: "I don't expect anything from the old. I place my hopes on the young." He said this because he never forgot the bitter memory of one comrade after another—all of his own generation—recanting their beliefs after their arrest and imprisonment by the Japanese military authorities during World War II.

The first time I met the Chinese writer Ba Jin, he had similar words. "Youth," he said, "are the hope of humanity." During the decade of China's Cultural Revolution (1966–76), Ba Jin was slandered as "a great poisonous weed" — his writings condemned as harmful and seditious. He was persecuted and tread upon. Through hearing even a small part of the horror he experienced, I could sense the profound weight of his statement about youth.

We first met in April 1980, nearly a year after I retired as president of the Soka Gakkai. Although of course it wasn't nearly on the level of the chaos of the Cultural Revolution, the Soka Gakkai itself was in the midst of a storm of persecution by authoritarian priests within Nichiren Shoshu at that time.

What outrages are perpetrated when fanaticism joins hands with authoritarian power! Is there no limit to the cruelty human beings can inflict upon other human beings? What is it that lowers people to the level of savage beasts?

As attacks on the Soka Gakkai and myself, based on the wildest lies, continued unabated in those days, China's Cultural Revolution was certainly not something I could be indifferent to.

On that first meeting, I welcomed Ba Jin to our Shizuoka Training Center. He was accompanied by his fellow writers Madame Xie Bingxin and Mr. Lin Lin. A group of visiting junior high school girls from Tokyo greeted our Chinese guests by singing "A Hope-filled Twenty-first Century" and "With the Strength of Youth." Their rosy cheeks glowed in the gentle spring sunlight as they filled the verdant garden with song.

Beaming with delight, Ba Jin told the students that watching young people grow gave him inordinate pleasure. He sincerely thanked them and said: "Youth are the hope of all humanity. Our efforts for Sino–Japanese friendship are really for all of you, as well as for the young people of China."

Altogether, Ba Jin and I have met four times. Each time, I sensed behind his aura of gentle humility an inner strength that comes from an ironlike conviction. Ruthless persecution drove many to suicide during the Cultural Revolution. I once asked the Chinese writer if he had ever contemplated death during those bitter days. "No," he said, adamantly, "I never considered it.... I experienced much pain and hardship during that time, but through it all my only thought was 'I have to keep fighting, I have to make it through to the very end.'"

During the Cultural Revolution, Ba Jin was attacked with such labels as "Mafia boss of the literary world" and "reactionary." His house was raided by the Red Guards and his wife beaten with a copper-buckled belt. Condemned as a "monster and demon" — a hated class enemy — he was placed in one of many private prisons known as "barns" and interrogated there for days on end. He was forced to confess to crimes he did not commit. He was insulted and denounced before a large public assembly. He was treated in an utterly inhu-

mane fashion.

He was torn from his friends. His pen — the very life of a writer — was taken from him. His wife, who was his only support, was also persecuted. When she fell ill, she was refused treatment for being the wife of a “poisonous weed.” By the time she was finally admitted to a hospital, it was already too late. Three weeks later, she died.

Even a decade after the Cultural Revolution, Ba Jin spoke of suffering from nightmares and physical pain from the still raw emotional scars of those days.

At first, Ba Jin believed the rhetoric of lofty goals and principles of the Cultural Revolution, but he soon realized that it was all a lie. The Cultural Revolution was little more than a chance for the Gang of Four and other self-declared “true soldiers of the revolution” to advance their own careers by stepping over the corpses of the innocent victims they framed and condemned to death for crimes never committed.

How closely this resembles priests who, while professing true faith, persecuted the very people who were innocent and on the side of truth! Ba Jin has written that the large number of cruel and inhuman acts that marked the Cultural Revolution were engendered by “a religious-like fanaticism cloaked in the robes of the Left.”

Ba Jin was robbed of everything — his beloved wife, his work, even his dignity as a human being. Yet, he kept his eyes open and cried out defiantly in the innermost depths of his heart: “Come what may! I am ready for you. I will survive!”

Then the storm passed. In its aftermath, Ba Jin pledged to write about why the great farce of the Cultural Revolution had occurred and what would be necessary to keep such a tragedy from ever happening again. He would leave a record for future generations. And he resolved not to die until he had accomplished that goal. I will never forget the way his eyes flashed with determination as he shared his thoughts with me. There are things that violence cannot take from us, things that only flame up even more brightly when the authorities attempt to suppress them.

As a warrior of the pen, Ba Jin has inherited the spirit of his teacher, the renowned Chinese writer Lu Xun (1881–1936). Writing of his youthful days studying under Lu Xun, Ba Jin compares his teacher to Danko, a legendary folk hero who appears in a short story by the Russian author Maksim Gorky (1868–1936). Danko tore out his own heart and used it as a torch to light the way for the people. In the same way, says Ba Jin, “Lu Xun illuminated my path with the flames of his burning heart for several decades.” To this day, he says, the memory of his mentor gives him courage to go on living; the lessons he learned from him are something he will always remember.

When Ba Jin was a guest speaker in Kyoto at a *Seikyo Shimbun*-sponsored lecture series, he declared:

I do not write to earn a living or to build a reputation. I write to battle enemies. Who are they? Every outdated traditional notion, all irrational systems that stand in the way of social progress and human development, and all cruelty in the face of love. These are my great enemies.

My pen is alit and my body aflame. Until both burn down to ash, my love and my hate will remain here in the world. (April 11, 1980)

Born in 1904, Ba Jin confesses that age, in addition to illnesses and accidents, has at times made his pen feel as heavy as lead. But he has always kept on writing every day, even

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if only a few lines. He has a fire in his heart that he must express; he has a spiritual debt that he feels must be paid.

Several weeks after our first meeting in Shizuoka, I had another opportunity to meet the Chinese author, this time in Shanghai. He came to the hotel where I was staying, and we shared a discussion on the subject of politics and literature. He said: “Literature cannot be separated from politics. But politics can never take the place of literature, because it is literature that builds the human spirit.”

Some literature intentionally expresses no interest in politics, with the result that its ability to decry authoritarian abuses of power atrophies. In contrast, as long as literature is lovingly connected to the lives of the people, it cannot help but keep a watchful eye on politics.

In this respect, Ba Jin’s view of literature is rooted in the traditional Chinese notion that literature is an important national endeavor and immortal enterprise. For him, literature is not a hobby or a distraction; it requires the awareness that each word, each sentence one writes, could sign one’s death warrant.

“No great work of literature has ever been composed following the dictates of a ruler,” says Ba Jin. “It is always the people who determine literature’s greatness.” Writing, he asserts, is just telling the truth and confronting lies.

“Youth are the hope of humanity”—Ba Jin actually first learned these words in the mid-1920s from the American anarchist Bartolomeo Vanzetti, who was arrested and eventually executed for a crime he didn’t commit. Ba Jin, who was studying in Paris at the time, wrote to him in prison. And Vanzetti’s reply contained those words. In that reply, a spiritual baton was passed from a prisoner, who stood falsely accused and condemned to death because of his political beliefs, to a young student in a foreign land. May the next generation not commit such foolish, ignorant acts. May you build an age of truth—this was Vanzetti’s heartrending cry.

On another occasion, in June 1984, I visited Ba Jin’s home in Shanghai. His library contained many Japanese books, including a comprehensive collection of Japanese literature.

“Our young writers are making such great strides that I almost can’t keep up with them,” he exclaimed. “I’m going to find myself left behind!” Delighting in the growth of the next generation, yet determined to continue progressing himself, Ba Jin’s voice was that of perpetual youth.

Because I was worried about his health, I took my leave early. But Ba Jin rose from his seat, determined to see me off. He took up his walking stick and, supported by his daughter Li Xiaolin, walked with me out of the house and through the garden. Though I repeatedly asked him not to trouble himself any further, he insisted on walking with me, through the gate, down the stone steps, all the way to the street. When I waved from the car window, I saw a scene that remains to this day a treasured memory: Ba Jin and his entire family, including his grandchildren, waving back to me.

Since I myself have walked the thin line between life and death, I sensed a communication between us that transcended words and speech. As I continue to pray for Ba Jin’s health and long life, I, like him, also see in the young the light of hope. And I pray that all my friends will remain forever young at heart.

The eternal warrior Ba Jin once said: “Young people should always fight their own battles and make what they win their own. That is what it means to be a youth!” □

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