

## Bing Xin: First Female Writer of Modern Chinese Children's Literature

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### Abstract

Bing Xin (1900-1999) was among the finest female writers of the early modern Chinese literature, and her poems and essays are full of praising of maternal love, glorification of sea and other natural scenes. They are most welcomed by children. For nearly a century, Bing Xin's works have been avidly read by hundreds of millions of Chinese children and have been a fundamental force, shaping modern Chinese children's literature. This paper examines the development of Bing Xin's "philosophy of love" as a social remedy through analysing her early works.

**Key words:** Bing Xin; Chinese children's literature; Moral education

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### INTRODUCTION

Bing Xin first appeared as a writer of "problem stories" (*wenti xiaoshuo*) at the age of nineteen with her pen name "Bing Xin" [ice heart], later to become so well known that only a few in China would know her real name Xie Wanying. Bing Xin's idealistic treatment of children's literature, advocating her "philosophy of love" at the time when this genre was created as a weapon to save China, inevitably met strong disapproval. Mao Dun (1896-1981),

a Communist Party propagandist in the literary field, claimed that Bing Xin's social remedy of "love" was "misleadingly idealistic", and criticised her "philosophy of love" as nothing but empty talk, likening her poems to talking to the poor about delicacies, deceiving them and making them even hungrier (Mao Dun, 1936, p.198). This paper reassesses Bing Xin's "philosophy of love" through analysing her miniature lyrics and her *Letters to Young Readers*, the first major work in modern Chinese children's literature.

### 1. FAMILY BACKGROUND

Bing Xin was born in 1900 in an extended family of traditional Confucian gentry in what is now known as Fuzhou, with her grandfather as head of the family hierarchy. The authority of Bing Xin's grandfather is best shown in Bing Xin's article "Grandpa and His Light Control System" (Bing Xin, 1982), in which her grandfather is described to have the absolute discretion, every night, on what time the whole compound of residence should turn off the lights. Electricity was new then, and the main was in his room. So, at about nine o'clock every night, he would just switch off the power, often when Bing Xin and her cousins were in the middle of talking, but none of them appeared to mind.

Bing Xin started to learn to read and write from her mother at the age of four. At about the same time, her mother and wet nurse began to tell her folklores, some of which were "The Story of Herd Boy and Weaving Girl" and "The Story of Butterfly Lovers, Liang Shanbo and Zhu Yingtai". At the age of six, she started her traditional Confucian education together with her cousins under the supervision of a private tutor at home. She also began to read classical Chinese novels, the first two being *The Romance of Three Kingdoms* and *Liao Zhai*. Bing Xin's grandfather had two close friends, both having great influence on Bing Xin. The first one was Lin Shu (1852-

1924), an excellent man of linguistic talents. With the aid of his assistants, he translated more than 170 titles, mostly novels from English and French, to the benefit of a whole generation of Chinese readers, including Bing Xin. Because of the friendship with Lin Shu, Bing Xin's grandfather had a very good collection of his works of translation, and Bing Xin had access to this collection, and read Charles Dickens's *David Copperfield* and Alexandre Dumas's *La Dame aux Camelias*.

Another close friend of Bing Xin's grandfather was the famous scholar-translator Yan Fu (1853-1921), who was responsible for introducing many Western thoughts into China, including Darwin's idea of "survival of the fittest by natural selection", and hence influencing a whole generation of reformists and revolutionaries. As the first chancellor of Peking University (1912) in the new Republic, his formative thinking and courageous leadership had a direct impact on the May Fourth New Culture Movement, which challenged both the traditional Confucian ethics and the conventional faith system. Somehow, his prominence in the intellectual history of China has overshadowed another important accomplishment: his role as the pioneer of the modern Chinese navy. Upon completing his studies in the Fujian Arsenal Academy, Yan Fu was sent by the Manchu Qing government to study at Navy Academy in Greenwich, England in 1877. After his return, he was appointed as the chief instructor at Beiyang Navy Officers' School, responsible for organising a modern navy for the Manchu Qing dynasty. It was in this position that he discovered then seventeen-year-old Xie Baozhang, later to become Bing Xin's father, offering the promising young man a place of candidature at Beiyang Navy Officers' School in Tianjin.

Likewise, Bing Xin's father, a loving father, a devoted husband and a dutiful navy officer, influenced her tremendously. She claimed in a 1942 memoir "My Childhood" that she was "mostly a father's child and only occasionally a mother's daughter" (Bing Xin, 1942). She worshiped her father, his colleagues, his career, his professionalism and his heroism. All of these were later embedded into one symbol in her literary creation, the sea:

*O Dad!*

*Come out and sit in the moonlight,*

*I want to hear your story about your sea.* (Bing Xin, 1923, Poem #75)<sup>1</sup>

Xie Baozhang told many stories to his daughter. While he had not studied at any navy academy overseas, but as a high-ranking navy officer, he had been to England, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, and many other countries. A veteran officer, he had taken part in many battles. Moreover, he was a gunner on a Chinese cruiser, the *Laiyuan*, in the battle of Weihaiwei in 1895 during the first Sino-Japanese War (1894-95). When Japanese torpedoes had destroyed his warship, he swam in the ice-cold sea, quite some distance to a nearby island Liugongdao,

all the while feeling the quaking of the vast sea from bombardments and torpedoes:

*The trembling of the boundless sea –*

*From the pitch darkness on the side of the island*

*The moon is emerging.*

*The fount of life,*

*The destination of death!* (Bing Xin, 1923, Poem #3)

Bing Xin dreamed of growing up to be a navy officer, sailing on the sea like her father and all the heroes in his stories. She wore boy's clothes and sometimes even a small navy uniform, following her father to flag platforms, cannon platforms, navy docks and even warships. Around the age of six or seven, she would sit on the beach for hours, watching the sea. "When the tide arrived, the whole world of earth and heaven would float above the waves," she described in one of her memoirs, "and when the tide subsided, the whole coast and myself would seem to be taken into the retreating flood" (Bing Xin, 1942). She loved blue, because it was the colour of the sea, and she loved grey and white, because they were the colours of the warships:

*O Father!*

*How much I love you,*

*As how much as I love your sea.* (Bing Xin, 1923, Poem #113)

Bing Xin often used the possessive case for the sea in her poems, like "your sea" and "his sea". To her, especially during her childhood, the sea was her father's, and indeed, her father was the sea: vast, deep and full of unexpected excitement. A man of few words in public, her father provided her with crucial moral and spiritual guidance, metaphorically speaking, just like a lighthouse; remote but timely, sometimes directing her towards following her dreams, and sometimes bringing her back to reality from her dreams. Her ultimate dream of becoming a navy officer like her father never materialised, but the influence of her father and his sea was nonetheless profound. Furthermore, traces of Bing Xin's following of fatherly figures can be seen later in her admiration of the Indian Nobel laureate Rabindranath Tagore, her respect of the chancellor of Yanjing University, John Leighton Stuart, and her worship of Jesus Christ.

## 2. CHRISTIAN INFLUENCE

Starting from her secondary school years in Bridgman Academy (an American missionary ladies college in Peking), where Bible study was part of the curriculum, Bing Xin was attracted to the idea of "universal love" (Bing Xin, 1984). Deeply concerned with all kinds of problems widely spread in Chinese society, Bing Xin started to write "problem stories" about her perspective on these matters when she was only a nineteen-year-

old university student. However, she was overwhelmed by the complexity of these problems and was aware that her analysis was only superficial. She tried hard to search for a solution to these problems, but felt lost in the process. All this changed, quite accidentally. It was at Yanjing University that Bing Xin came across the painting of *The Lost Sheep* in her Bible teacher's room. Bing Xin felt it "was trying to hint and teach me something, while simultaneously comforting me. It wouldn't allow me to utter anything but made me stand seriously and quietly in front of it" (Wan Pingjin & Wang Wending, 2000, p.50). The painting captured a tender scene of a shepherd retrieving a lost lamb from an environment full of treacherous cliffs and rugged mountains with hungry eagles gliding above. Bing Xin felt she was like the lamb that had been lost in a world surrounded by unpleasant circumstances. Now in front of her appeared her Saviour, the Heavenly Father, giving her guidance. Tears welled up when she read the passage open on the Bible, sitting on her teacher's lap: "The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not be in want." Bing Xin described her emotions then as "surging tides in my chest" and her tears were for gratitude of finding her faith. Ever since then, she wrote, the image of the shepherd and the line of the psalm from the Bible has never left her (Wan Pingjin & Wang Wending, 2000).

While the above scene was by purely coincidental, Bing Xin's embracement of Christianity was not. Unlike many young people at that time, whose views on religion were mainly based on the aforementioned functionality and utility in terms of their socio-political roles, Bing Xin felt frustrated with the vacuum left by the collapse of Confucian ethics and the decline of the conventional faith system during the May Fourth period. So, with these feelings predominating her thoughts, she sought confirmation of her compassionate personality in the tenets of Christianity. She found faith in Christianity for spiritual and moral guidance, as she wrote in a poem "The Dusk" (*Huanghun*):

*O God,  
Endless wisdom  
Fathomless marvels  
Who possesses all the knowledge?  
Is it me, or is it someone else?  
No one,  
Except you, who instructed Jesus Christ through your splendour.  
O God!  
Please instruct me too through your radiance  
As well as innumerable others in the universe, Amen.* (Bing Xin, 1921a)

This is one of the earliest pious references of God and Jesus Christ in her writings. It strongly indicates her longing for moral and spiritual direction. In "The Dusk", Bing Xin expresses the feeling that she desperately needs

guidance, as if she feels that without it, she would be walking "through the valley of the shadow of death" (*Bible*, Psalms 23, Passage 4). Furthermore, the poem also reflects her confidence that as long as she has faith and she repents, the Good Shepherd will search for her and save her, as well as millions of others. This confidence in God is echoed in another verse of hers "The Midnight" (*Banye*):

*O God, it is you who has assembled this quiet night.  
From the glittering of the stars, and from the rustle of the leaves  
I can hear your words.  
Where are you? Where is the universe? And where are the humans?  
God is a loving God,  
The universe is a loving universe.  
What about humans?  
O God! I feel grateful to you,  
Because you have taught and exhorted me, Amen.* (Bing Xin, 1921b)

As Bing Xin tried to establish her new cosmologic framework, through which she could relate herself to God, the universe and to other fellow human beings, she found a specific love for Christianity and in God. In this new spiritual framework, she sensed that God was searching for her and others who had gone astray, and God was teaching her that He and the universe were both full of love. Bing Xin felt extremely grateful for God's love, as she felt that this was something that humans were lacking; and hence, love became an imperative component of her social remedy. God exists everywhere, from the glittering of the stars to the rustle of the leaves, and it was her belief that the whole universe resonates with love. It was then, in about 1920 that Bing Xin became a Christian, but she was never a conventional devoted monotheist Christian, often drawing inspiration for the social remedy in her literary works beyond the scope of Christianity. This reflects her accepting and tolerant nature, as well as her insatiable bewilderment.

### 3. MINIATURE LYRICS

Bing Xin published her 164 miniature lyrics in *The Morning Post* from 1<sup>st</sup> to 26<sup>th</sup> of January 1922. In January 1923, these short poems were published in a volume entitled *Stars (Fanxing)* by Shanghai Commercial Press. Bing Xin introduced magnificent images, such as the roaring sea and the vast starry sky, which were virtually unknown to traditional women's poetry in China. She also addressed a broader range of topics, including the relationships between parents and children, human and nature, ideals and reality and poets and the world. *Stars* is regarded in China as an early anthology of poems for children (Chen Zidian, 1988, p.219). Bing Xin's 164 poems have no titles, but numbered. This is Poem #1:

*A myriad of stars twinkle,  
In the deep blue sky,  
Has anyone heard their conversation?  
In silence,  
Amid pale lights,  
They exchange praises of each other.<sup>2</sup>*

Stars are one of the central images in Bing Xin's poetry, and are closely related to the sea. When Bing Xin was a little girl, her father often took her to the ship's mast at night to watch stars, teaching her how to identify them according to their positions. Time and again he told her that those stars, so small and far away, were crucial in guiding sailors: "when we get lost on the sea, we look at stars as if they were our own family members" (Bing Xin, 1942). Additionally, Bing Xin's poems often reflect her positive attitude towards life, which were often symbolised by sea, stars and flowers, like this one:

*O Sea,  
Which star is not bright?  
Which flower is not fragrant?  
Which thought of mine does not ring  
With the pure sound of your tides? (Bing Xin, 1923, Poem #131)<sup>3</sup>*

In her poems, stars are given anthropomorphic features, capable of having conversations by twinkling in the deep blue sky, praising each other in silence amid the pale lights. In Poem #4, she uses stars as a metaphor for her three brothers:

*O my brothers,  
You are three bright happy stars in my soul.  
Sweet natured,  
You are beyond words.  
O children, you are deep in my soul! (Bing Xin, 1923, Poem #4)*

Bing Xin's constant reference to stars alludes to her need for guidance, as she felt lost in life, as if she were sailing at night. However, the night depicted in Poem #1 is not pitch dark, for the myriad of stars radiate in "pale lights". She attempts to set up a positive undertone of hope in the volume of *Stars* from the very beginning in Poem #1, through words like "myriad", "twinkle", "conversation" and "praises". Still, she was fully aware that some nights could be starless, and so she needed to define "darkness" of her own world, as she did in Poem #5:

*Darkness,  
How do I describe you?  
You are in the deepest spot of our souls,  
At the furthest end of the universe,  
And amid a place where the brilliant light pauses for a rest.  
(Bing Xin, 1923, Poem #5)*

The biggest challenge Bing Xin had then was the knowledge that she would never be able to fully

comprehend the obscurity she perceived around her, potentially existing "in the deepest spot of our souls ... at the furthest end of the universe," or at any location "where the brilliant light pauses for a rest". It is a question of the significance of one's life and one's existence in relation to the universe. Free-verse fragments became the best way to express these delicate, philosophical and spiritual sentiments, often inspired by trivial objects, met at random, sparking her to ponder their metaphysical relation to herself. For example, in Poem #52:

*The flowers and rocks beside the railroad tracks!  
In this instant  
You and I  
Chance to meet among the infinite beings,  
Also bid our last farewell among the infinite beings.  
When I return,  
In the midst of the myriads of our kind,  
Where can I ever find you again? (Bing Xin, 1923, Poem #52)<sup>4</sup>*

What is the meaning of this journey along the endless railroad of one's life? Bing Xin knew that not only could she not find the answer, but the solutions to her problems was beyond any human being, and this bothered her deeply. Hsia (1971) comments that Bing Xin "represents the sentimental tradition in Chinese literature" and "her study of Western culture has only encouraged a didactic tendency" (p.71). Facing "the dilemmas of the younger generation in a period of agonizing transition", Bing Xin's works, according to Hsia, are "profuse with rhapsodic apostrophes to the moon and stars" and "unabashedly sentimental in their ambition to idealize the world" through her celebration of "philosophy of love" (Hsia, 1971, pp.71-72). Farquhar (1999) comments that Bing Xin's love is "feminine and maternal" and "[her] emphasis on 'love' as the moral foundation of her works therefore has a paradoxical function in the text: it both accentuates and mitigates the sense of loss and pathos which pervades her work" (p.117). Bing Xin's portrayal of maternal love is of her emotional shelter:

*Mother!  
When the rainstorm comes from the sky,  
Birds hide themselves in the nest;  
When the rainstorm comes to the heart,  
I can only hide myself in your bosom. (Bing Xin, 1923, Poem #159)*

This was during the period when Chinese intellectuals were trying to understand the special nature of childhood. Bing Xin made her contribution based on her feminine and maternal instinct. Furthermore, she draws upon the golden memories of her own happy childhood, as evidenced in Poem #2 discussed above. She celebrates childhood as a holy symbol:

*Tens of thousands of angels  
Are starting to extol a child:*

*A child!*  
*A tiny body*  
*Holds a huge soul.* (Bing Xin, 1923, Poem #35)

Influence of Christianity is most noticeable in this poem. Bing Xin also idealises the infant as a great muse, the source of her poetic inspiration:

*An infant*  
*Is a great poet.*  
*From his incomplete speech*  
*Come the most complete poetic lines.* (Bing Xin, 1923, Poem #74)

In Poem #14 she claims that “we are all infants of nature, lying in the cradle of the universe” and in Poem #99 she describes all humans as infants on the same boat:

*We are all infants born on a boat in the ocean.*  
*We don't know*  
*Where we came from,*  
*Nor where we are going.* (Bing Xin, 1923, Poem #99)

From this theme, it can be seen that Bing Xin emphasises the commonality and totality of all human beings, drawing from her understanding of Christianity as saving “innumerable others in the universe” through universal love (Bing Xin, 1921a and 1921b). This universal love appears to start with children, who possess the qualities symbolising true love. The broad scope of Bing Xin’s poems, apart from the abovementioned themes, also includes some echoing sentimental traditions, like the following example, which explores the relation between the poet and the world:

*At midnight –*  
*The whole universe is fast asleep!*  
*I am the only one awake.*  
*Am I a character in a dream?*<sup>5</sup>

Although traditional sentimentalism derived from self-pity and self-affection occasionally can be felt in the collection of her miniature lyrics in *Stars*, as revealed in the above example, the book, on a whole, is distinguished by its candid probing of the multiple dimensions of universal love, natural beauty and pursuit of truth as positive moral values. The noted Chinese writer Shen Congwen praises Bing Xin full of “motherly compassion” and “child-like purity ... which forms the moral basis, the desire for peace, in her writings” (Shen Congwen, 1932, as cited in Farquhar, 1999, p.117). Another renowned Chinese writer, Ba Jin, comments: “In the past we were all lonely children. It is from her beautiful and kind works that we come to know how to love stars, to love the sea, and to experience again the maternal love which we have lost forever” (Ba Jin, 1941, as cited in Wang Quangen, 1986, p.97). Yet the revolutionary writer, Jiang Guangci, calls Bing Xin “the representative of

bourgeoisie young ladies” (*zichanjieji xiaojie de daibiao*) and “the representative of aristocratic women (*guizu nuxing daibiao*), who only knew weakness: ‘I miss mum, I miss brothers and I miss home’” (Jiang Guangci, 1925). Jiang further comments that there is not much difference between her and the sentimental young ladies from the Tang and Song dynasties. Bing Xin’s depiction of childhood and her sentimentality were criticized by revolutionaries, who did not share her love of idealism, reflected in her rich use of imagery.

#### 4. LETTERS TO YOUNG READERS

Farquhar (1999) remarks that Bing Xin’s main themes, the “idealization of love and celebration of childhood – are nowhere more obvious than in her *Letters [to Young Readers]*” (p.118). Bing Xin wrote these letters while studying in the United States from 1923 to 1926, which were published in a supplement of a newspaper. According to Hsia (1971), these letters “proved to be a great success with younger audiences” (p.72). Within a year after the publication in book form in 1926, another three editions were published, and in less than a decade, twenty one editions released (Wan Pingjin & Wang Wending, 2000, pp.198-199). Her book is placed by Chinese critics in the category of *ertong sanwen* [essays for children].

*Dear little friends, I am outdated in your innocent team, but I am always proud that I once was, and sometimes still am, a child. I'll try to maintain the innocence of a child, which I sometimes still have. Now I'll go to the other world, but I will always remain your warmest and most faithful friend.* (Bing Xin, 1926, Letter 1)

In her first letter, she claimed that her intention was to “use the language of children, the language of innocence”, and she was “determined not to use the worries of grown-ups to write these letters” (Bing Xin, 1926). Also in this first letter, she revealed that she was already homesick at the thought of leaving home, parents and brothers, and indeed, life alone in a foreign country, away from her comfortable home back in China, intensified her homesickness. Her last letter (Bing Xin, 1926), which chronicled her return, begins in ecstasy and tears of happiness: “I am home!” Thus, her homesickness was an important theme in her *Letters*. For example, in Letter 16 she wrote, “As long as the lake does not dry up and the rock in the lake does not crumble, my feeling of homesickness will not fade, either” (Bing Xin, 1926). In Letter 20, she compared the scenes of Massachusetts like Mystic Lake, Spy Pond, Horn Pond, Revere Beach, Nahant and Egg Rock with that of Peking and she concluded that:

*My hometown does not have the beautiful lake like this, nor does it have the vast ocean or the lush forest or the endless grassland. Peking only has dusty roads,*

*muddy lanes, grey city walls and running sweaty rickshaw pullers. My hometown, Peking, has nothing... Even if Peking has nothing, it still has my love. If it has my love, it has everything! All my most beloved people live inside the grey city walls.* (Bing Xin, 1926, Letter 20)

These feelings became even more exacerbated by her illness, but she said, "I write most easily when I am sick, quiet, and it is raining" (Bing Xin, 1926). So indeed, on a rainy day, sick in a foreign country and feeling particularly lonely, Bing Xin began to ponder about the eternal bond between mother and child:

*Maternal love is unconditional. A mother's love can disregard everything and erase everything yet it envelops me in layers, making me what I am today. I am loved for nothing but myself. My mother's love towards me, yours towards you, his mother's love, her mother's...all are the same. There is never any shortage in width, length, height or depth.... Maternal love is eternal. My mother loves my body as well as my soul. She loves my front, back, left and right. She loves my past, my present, and my future. Her love would not change a bit, even if everything else in the world was destroyed.... I am ill at this very moment, but my mother is not on my side. My little friends, you must feel sorry for me... but I have the memory of her love, which makes every inch of my time of illness honeysweet.* (Bing Xin, 1926, Letter 10)

The "maternal love" passionately penned here is Bing Xin's expression of longing for her mother's protection and caring when she needed them quite desperately. Her social concern and her remedy based upon her notion of "universal love" are extremely idealistic, making her "fare badly whenever judged according to the dictates of social realism" (Bing Xin, 1926). But, Bing Xin's unique style makes her *Letters to Young Readers* distinctively didactic in terms of using maternal love to save the world:

*Her love not only surrounds me, but also surrounds all those who love me. Because she loves me, she also loves all the children in the world, and she loves all the mothers even more. Little friends, let me tell you the truth which is very simple to children, yet very profound to grown-ups: The world has been built in this way!* (Bing Xin, 1926, Letter 10)

In her *Letters To Young Readers* she eulogized the sea, mountains, the moon, stars, morning dews, the sunset, the fragrance of flowers, the sound of waves, the snow and frost in winter, the singing birds in spring and autumn and the cicadas in summer, but maternal love was the centre of her idealism. On the other hand, in nine out of twenty nine letters, Bing Xin mentions God, Jesus Christ, St Paul and other Christian references as her inspiring sources. So her love, originating from mother, is underpinned by her Christian belief, and hence can be seen to become a universal love, which can be extended to siblings,

relatives, friends and eventually all people. Bing Xin's love also extended to all creatures. In Letter 2, Bing Xin recalled how she once shed tears for a cricket, which had lost a leg, and on another occasion, cried for an injured bird. She appeared to believe that love could build a bridge between human and animals.

The basic tone of her *Letters to Young Readers* is compassionate and peace-loving, with the exception of one letter. In Letter 18, Bing Xin describes how she and her fellow Chinese students felt on a stopover in Japan, on their way to the United States. They were visiting a war memorial, honouring the Japanese victory in the first Sino-Japan War, in which Bing Xin's father had almost become a casualty. Bing Xin writes that "the blood of a soldier was boiling angrily on her heart", but then she repents:

*My little friends, I was too weak to control my emotions. I don't believe in any isms, and most importantly I don't believe in nationalism (guojia zhuyi), but I was momentarily carried away... I feel extremely apologetic... My heart does have a lot of a soldier's blood, but I am always fond of the Japanese people, and I never have any room for feelings of humiliation, shame, hatred or revenge. I only have the sense of justice. I cannot put up with human beings oppressing one another.* (Bing Xin, 1926, Letter 18)

It appears that she viewed the conflict between China and Japan as a clash among human beings rather than hostility between the two nations. She also appeared to believe that universal love could wash away apathy, hatred and fighting. There is also a strong tendency of cosmopolitanism in her *Letters to Young Readers*, as she tells about her friendship with people from different ethnic backgrounds, including American, Japanese and Russian. Dorothea Scott (1980) comments that "Dedicated to her mother, whom she loved deeply, *Letters (to Young Readers)* are written in a simple rather ingenuous style, their themes being the love of nature, the love of animals, love in general, and escape from the world" (pp.127-128).

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## CONCLUSION

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To Marxists who believe in class distinctions and class struggle, it can be postulated that Bing Xin's idea that "[her] mother and mothers everywhere in the world are good friends because they share the common love of their children, and children everywhere in the world are good friends too because they share the same love of their mothers" (Bing Xin, 1926) would appear extremely simplistic and naïve. Bing Xin seemed aware of the shallowness of her social remedy, but to idealistic people like her from a privileged and wealthy family, the Marxist option of saving China through armed class struggle and proletarian dictatorship would have been even less appealing. Often she became confused about herself, the world around her, and the future:

*My heart,  
Yesterday you told me  
The world is joyful,  
Yet today you tell me  
The world is disappointing.  
What will  
Your words be tomorrow?  
How can I believe you!* (Bing Xin, 1923, Poem #132)<sup>6</sup>

Bing Xin emerged as the most prominent writer for children in the May Fourth era. From the feminine perspective and influenced by Christianity, she promoted what she called “philosophy of love” through her popular works like *Stars* and *Letters to Young Readers*. The central didactic theme of her poems and letters is her notion of universal love, which is depicted as a bridge for any gap and a remedy for any social problem. Bing Xin’s works are particularly valuable to the contemporary patriotism education in China, especially *Letters to Young Readers*, which can be conveniently used as a pedagogic tool to promote patriotism as a natural and unconditional emotion like children’s love to their mother.

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## NOTES

- Unless otherwise specified, all translations in this paper are my own.
- The English translation is adapted from Yeh, pp.36-37.
  - The English translation is taken from Yeh, p.21.
  - The English translation is taken from Hsu, p.21.
  - The English translation is taken from Yeh, p.21.
  - The English translation is taken from Yeh, p.21.