

MAO TSE-TUNG

TALKS AT THE YENAN FORUM ON ART AND LITERATURE



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**FOREIGN ~~LANGUAGE~~ PRESS
PEKING 1956**

First Edition February 1956

PUBLISHER'S NOTE

The present English translation of Mao Tse-tung's *Talks at the Yen-an Forum on Art and Literature* has been made from the first edition of the *Selected Works of Mao Tse-tung*, Volume III, published by the People's Publishing House, Peking, in February 1953.

Printed in the People's Republic of China

a meeting place
for discussion

INTRODUCTION

Or to: Comrades! You have been invited to this forum today to exchange views and ascertain the proper relationship between our work in the artistic and literary fields and our revolutionary work in general, to determine what is the proper path of development of revolutionary art and literature and how they can give better help to other revolutionary activities, so that we can overthrow the enemy of our nation and accomplish the task of national liberation.

✓ In our struggle for the liberation of the Chinese people there are various fronts, of which two may be mentioned: the civilians' front and the soldiers' front, i.e. the cultural front and the military front. In order to defeat the enemy we must rely primarily on an army with guns in its soldiers' hands. But this is not enough; we also need a cultural army which is absolutely indispensable for uniting ourselves and defeating the enemy. Since the May 4 Movement of 1919 this cultural army has taken shape in China and has helped the Chinese revolution in gradually reducing the domain and weakening the influence of China's feudal culture and her comprador culture which is

adapted to imperialist aggression. By now the Chinese reactionaries can only propose what they call "quantity versus quality" as a means of opposing the new culture; in other words, the reactionaries who can afford to blow the expense are straining to turn out an immense quantity of stuff, though they are unable to produce anything good. On the cultural front, art and literature have formed an important and victorious sector since the May 4 Movement. The movement of revolutionary art and literature made much progress during the ten years' civil war. Although this movement and the revolutionary war headed in the same general direction, yet as the two brother armies participating in them were cut off from each other by the reactionaries, they lacked co-ordination in their practical activities. It is a very good thing that since the outbreak of the War of Resistance more and more revolutionary artists and writers have come to Yen-an and other anti-Japanese base areas. But their arrival at these base areas is not the same as their complete merging with the people there. If the revolutionary work is to be pushed forward, a complete merging must be effected. The purpose of our meeting today is precisely to fit art and literature properly into the whole revolutionary machine as one of its component parts, to make them a powerful weapon for uniting and educating the people and for attacking and annihilating the enemy, and to help the people to fight the enemy with one heart and one mind. What are the problems to be solved in order to achieve

this objective? I think they are the problems of the standpoint, the attitude and the audience of the artists and writers and of how they should work and how they should study.

Standpoint: Our standpoint is that of the proletariat and the broad masses of the people. For members of the Communist Party this means that they must adopt the standpoint of the Party and adhere to Party spirit and Party policies. Are there any of our artists and writers who still lack a correct or clear understanding on this point? I think there are. Quite a number of our comrades have often departed from the correct standpoint.

Attitude: Our specific attitudes towards specific things arise from our standpoint. For example: Should we praise or should we expose? This is a question of attitude. Which of these two attitudes should we adopt? I should say both and it all depends on whom you are dealing with. There are three kinds of people: the enemy, the allies in the united front and our own people, namely, the masses and their vanguard. Three different attitudes must be adopted towards these three kinds of people. With regard to our enemies, i.e. the Japanese imperialists and all other enemies of the people, the task of revolutionary artists and writers is to expose their cruelty and chicanery, point out the tendency of their inevitable defeat and encourage the anti-Japanese army and people to fight them with one heart and one mind and overthrow them resolutely. In our attitude towards

our various allies in the united front, we ought to promote unity as well as criticism, and there should be different kinds of unity and different kinds of criticism. We support their resistance to Japan and commend them for their achievements. But we ought to criticise them if they do not put up an active resistance to Japan. We must resolutely combat anyone if he opposes communism and the people and moves farther down the path of reaction with every passing day. As to the masses of the people, their toil and struggle, their army and their party, we should of course praise them. The people also have their shortcomings. Many among the proletariat still retain petty-bourgeois ideas, while both the peasantry and the urban petty bourgeoisie entertain backward ideas—these are the burdens handicapping them in their struggles. We should spend a long time and be patient in educating them and helping them to remove the burdens from their backs and to fight against their own shortcomings and errors so that they can take big strides forward. In the course of their struggles they have remoulded or are remoulding themselves, and our art and literature should depict this process of remoulding. We should not take a one-sided view and mistakenly ridicule them or even be hostile towards them unless they persist in their errors. What we produce should enable them to unite, to advance and to stride forward with one heart and one mind, discarding what is backward and promoting what is revolutionary; it certainly should not do the opposite.

Audience, *i.e.* for whom are the artistic and literary works produced? In the Shensi-Kansu-Ningsia border region and the anti-Japanese base areas in North and Central China, the problem is different from that in the Kuomintang-controlled areas and particularly from that in Shanghai before the War of Resistance. In Shanghai at that time a section of the students, office workers and shop assistants formed the bulk of the audience for revolutionary art and literature. In the Kuomintang-controlled areas since the start of the War of Resistance, the scope has been widened to some extent, but basically these people remain the chief audience because the government there has kept the workers, peasants and soldiers away from revolutionary art and literature. In our base areas the situation is entirely different. Here the audience for art and literature is composed of workers, peasants, soldiers and revolutionary cadres. There are students too, but they are different from the students of the old type in that they are either ex-cadres or would-be cadres. Cadres of all kinds—soldiers in the army, workers in the factories and peasants in the villages—want to read books and newspapers if they are literate, and to see plays and pictures, sing songs and listen to music if they are not; they are the audience for our art and literature. Take the cadres only: they are not, as you imagine, small in number, but are actually much more numerous than the prospective readers of a new book published in the Kuomintang-controlled areas. There one edition

of a book usually runs to only about two thousand copies and three editions total only six thousand, while here in our base areas the cadres who can read number more than ten thousand in Yen-an alone. Moreover, many of them are well-steeled revolutionaries who have come from all parts of the country and will go to different places to work; thus the education of these people is a task of great importance. Our artists and writers should do good work on their behalf.

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X Since the audience for our art and literature is made up of workers, peasants, soldiers and their cadres, the problem arises of how to understand these people and to know them well. A great deal of work has to be done in order to understand them and to know them well, to understand and to know well all kinds of things and people in the Party and government organisations, in the villages and factories and in the Eighth Route and New Fourth Armies. Our artists and writers should work in their own field, which is art and literature, but their duty first and foremost is to understand and know the people well. How did they stand in this regard in the past? I would say that they failed to know the people well and failed to understand them, and were like heroes with no scope for displaying their heroism. What did they fail to know well? They failed to know the people well. They did not know well either what they were describing or their audience; they were even perfect strangers to both. They did not know well the workers,

peasants, soldiers and their cadres. What did they fail to understand? They failed to understand language, i.e. they lacked an adequate knowledge of the rich and lively language of the masses of the people. Many artists and writers, withdrawing themselves from the people into a void, are of course unfamiliar with the people's language, and thus their works are not only written in a language without savour or sap but often contain awkward expressions of their own coinage which are opposed to popular usage. Many comrades love to talk about "transformation along the popular line," but what does that mean? It means that the ideas and feelings of our artists and writers should be fused with those of the broad masses of workers, peasants and soldiers. In order to do so one should conscientiously learn the language of the masses. If one finds much of the language of the masses unintelligible, how can one talk about artistic and literary creation? || When I say heroes with no scope for displaying their heroism, I mean that the masses do not appreciate your high-sounding talk. The more you put on airs as veterans, as "heroes," and the harder you try to sell your wares, the more the people refuse to be impressed. If you want the masses to understand you and want to become one with them, you must be determined to undergo a long and even painful process of remoulding. In this connection I might mention the transformation of my own feelings. I began as a student and acquired at school the habits of a student; in the

presence of a crowd of students who could neither fetch nor carry for themselves, I used to feel it undignified to do any manual labour, such as shouldering my own luggage. At that time it seemed to me that the intellectuals were the only clean persons in the world, and the workers and peasants seemed rather dirty beside them. I could put on the clothes of other intellectuals because I thought they were clean, but I would not put on clothes belonging to a worker or peasant because I felt they were dirty. Having become a revolutionary I found myself in the same ranks as the workers, peasants and soldiers of the revolutionary army, and gradually I became familiar with them and they with me too. It was then and only then that a fundamental change occurred in the bourgeois and petty-bourgeois feelings implanted in me by the bourgeois schools. I came to feel that it was those unremoulded intellectuals who were unclean as compared with the workers and peasants, while the workers and peasants are after all the cleanest persons, cleaner than both the bourgeois and the petty-bourgeois intellectuals, even though their hands are soiled and their feet smeared with cow dung. This is what is meant by having one's feelings transformed, changed from those of one class into those of another. If our artists and writers from the intelligentsia want their works to be welcomed by the masses, they must transform and remould their thoughts and feelings. Without such transformation and remoulding they can

do nothing well and will be ill-adapted to any kind of work.

The last problem is that of study; I mean the study of Marxism-Leninism and of society. One who considers himself a Marxist revolutionary writer, especially a Communist writer, must have a knowledge of Marxism-Leninism. But some comrades still lack a grasp of the basic concepts of Marxism. For example, one of its basic concepts is that existence determines consciousness, *i.e.* the objective reality of the class struggle and national struggle determines our thoughts and feelings. Some of our comrades, however, reverse the proper order of things and maintain that everything ought to start from "love." Now as for "love," in a class society there can be only class love; but these comrades are seeking a love that transcends the classes, love in the abstract as well as freedom in the abstract, truth in the abstract, human nature in the abstract, etc. This shows that these comrades have been deeply influenced by the bourgeoisie. They must thoroughly liquidate this influence and study Marxism-Leninism with an open mind. True, artists and writers should learn to create artistic and literary works, but Marxism-Leninism is the science that all revolutionaries should study, and artists and writers cannot be exceptions. Artists and writers should study society; that is, study the various classes in society, their mutual relations and respective conditions and their physiognomy and psychology. Only when these things are clearly grasped will our

art and literature be rich in content and correct in orientation:

Today I raise these problems by way of preamble and hope you all will give your opinions on these and other related issues.

May 2, 1942

CONCLUSION

Comrades! We have met three times during this month. In the pursuit of truth, heated debates have taken place and scores of Party and non-Party comrades have spoken, laying bare the issues and making them concrete. I think this is very profitable to the whole artistic and literary movement.

In discussing any problem we should start from actual facts and not from definitions. We shall be following the wrong method if we first look up definitions of art and literature in the textbooks and then use them as criteria in determining the direction of the present artistic and literary movement or in judging the views and controversies that arise today. We are Marxists and Marxism teaches that in our approach to a problem we should start not from abstract definitions but from objective facts and, by analysing these facts, determine the way we shall go, our policies and methods. We should do the same in our present discussion of art and literature.

also What are the facts at the present time? The facts are: the War of Resistance that China has been waging for five years; the world-wide anti-fascist war; the vacillation of China's big landlords and big bourgeoisie in waging the War of Resistance as well as their high-handed policy towards the people; the movement of revolutionary art and literature since May 4, 1919—its great contributions to the revolution in the last twenty-three years and its many shortcomings; the anti-Japanese democratic base areas of the Eighth Route and New Fourth Armies, and the alignment there of large numbers of artists and writers with the two armies and with the workers and peasants; the difference in circumstances and tasks between the artists and writers in our base areas and those in the Kuomintang-controlled areas; and the controversies which have arisen over art and literature in Yen-an and other anti-Japanese base areas. These are the undeniable actualities and we have to examine our problems in the light of them.

What then is the crux of our problems? I think our problems are basically those of working for the masses and of how to work for them. If these two problems are not solved, or solved inadequately, our artists and writers will be ill-adapted to their circumstances and unfit for their tasks, and will come up against a series of problems from within and without. My conclusion will centre round these two problems, while touching upon some other problems related to them.

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The first problem is: For whom are our art and literature intended?

This problem has, as a matter of fact, been solved long ago by Marxists, and especially by Lenin. As far back as 1905 Lenin emphatically pointed out that our art and literature should "serve the millions upon millions of working people."² It might seem that this problem has been solved by our comrades working in art and literature in the anti-Japanese base areas and needs no further discussion. But actually this is not

¹ See V. I. Lenin, *The Party's Organization and the Party's Literature*, in which the characteristics of proletarian literature are described as follows: LW

"This will be a free literature, because neither covetousness nor careerism but rather the idea of socialism and feelings for the working people will draw ever fresh forces into its ranks. This will be a free literature because it will serve neither those overfed mesdames nor the 'upper tens of thousands' who are bored with life and suffer from obesity, but it will serve millions and tens of millions of working people who constitute the pick of the nation, its strength and its future. This will be a free literature because it will fructify the highest achievement in the revolutionary thought of mankind with the experience and vigorous work of the socialist proletariat, creating a permanent inter-relationship between the experience of the past (scientific socialism, which completed the development of socialism from its primitive, utopian forms) and the experience of the present (the present day struggle of our worker-comrades)." (V. I. Lenin, *Collected Works*, Russian ed., Vol. X, pp. 30-31, Moscow, 1947.)

the case. Many comrades have by no means arrived at a clear-cut solution of this problem. Consequently their sentiments, their works, their actions and their ideas concerning the guiding principles of art and literature have been more or less at variance with the needs of the masses and the demands of actual struggles. Among the large number of men of culture, of artists, writers and workers in art and literature in general who, together with the Communist Party and the Eighth Route and New Fourth Armies, have participated in the great struggle for liberation, there may of course be some opportunists who will stay only a while, but the greatest majority are energetically working for the common cause. Thanks to the efforts of these comrades, the achievements in our literature, theatre, music and fine arts have been considerable. Many of these artists and writers have begun their work since the Anti-Japanese War, while others took up revolutionary work even long before the war, undergoing numerous hardships and influencing the broad masses of the people by their actions and their works. Why, then, should I say that even some of these comrades have not clearly solved the problem—for whom are art and literature intended? Is it possible that some of them still maintain that revolutionary art and literature are intended not for the broad masses of the people but for the exploiters and oppressors?

Quite true, there exist art and literature intended for the exploiters and oppressors. The art and litera-

ture for the landlord class are feudal art and literature. Such are the art and literature of the ruling classes of China's feudal epoch. Even today such art and literature still retain a considerable influence in China. The art and literature for the bourgeoisie are bourgeois art and literature. People like Liang Shih-ch'iu,¹ whom Lu Hsun severely criticised, may talk about art and literature as transcending the classes, but in fact they all uphold bourgeois art and literature and oppose proletarian art and literature. The art and literature for imperialism, as represented by Chou Tso-jen, Chang Tzu-p'ing² and their like, are called collaborationist art and literature. So far as we are concerned, art and literature are not intended for any of the above-mentioned persons, but for the people. We have said that China's new culture at the present stage is an anti-feudal, anti-imperialist culture of the broad masses of the people under the leadership of the proletariat. Everything that truly belongs to the broad masses of the people must now of necessity be under the leadership of the proletariat. Nothing under the leadership of the bourgeoisie can possibly belong to the broad masses of the people. Naturally the same applies to the new art and literature in the new cul-

¹ A member of the counter-revolutionary National Socialist Party, he has for years propagated the literary theories of the reactionary U.S. bourgeoisie, stubbornly opposed the revolution and denounced revolutionary literature.

² Both capitulated to the Japanese invaders upon their occupation of Peking and Shanghai in 1937.