

MAO TSE-TUNG
ON
ART AND LITERATURE

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PEKING

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PUBLISHER'S NOTE

This edition of *Mao Tse-tung on Art and Literature* is translated from the Chinese text published in December 1958 by the People's Literature Publishing House, Peking. It is a collection of essays and excerpts dealing with art and literature by Mao Tse-tung.

The materials are chronologically arranged.

Most of the contents can be found in the *Selected Works of Mao Tse-tung*. The rest, such as "On Literary Style", "A Letter About Poetry", and "On 'Letting a Hundred Flowers Blossom', and 'Letting a Hundred Schools of Thought Contend'", are of more recent origin. The titles are mostly taken from the original essays, or their chapter heads or subheads. But the following titles are given by the editor of the Chinese edition: "Myth and Reality", "The Chief Concern of China's Cultural Movement", "What to Praise, What to Condemn", and "On Literary Style",

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CAMPAIGN FOR EDUCATION AND CULTURE

(March 1927)

In China education and culture have always been reserved exclusively for the landlords, and the peasants were denied access to them. But the culture of the landlords is created by the peasants, for its source is the sweat and blood of the peasants. In China 90 per cent of the people have no culture or education, and of these the overwhelming majority are peasants.

With the downfall of the power of the landlords in the rural areas, the peasants' movement for education and culture has begun. The peasants, who hitherto bitterly hated the schools, are now zealously organizing evening classes. The "foreign-style schools" were always unpopular with the peasants. During my home visits in my student days, I used to join in with "foreign-style" students and teachers and stand for the interests of the "foreign-style schools" and always thought the peasants were somehow wrong in opposing such schools. It was during my six months in the countryside in 1925, when I was already a Communist and had adopted the Marxist viewpoint, that I realized I had been wrong and the peasants right. The teaching

materials used in the rural primary schools all dealt with urban matters and were in no way adapted to the needs of the rural areas. Besides, the primary school teachers behaved very badly towards the peasants who, far from finding them helpful, came to dislike them. As a result, the peasants wanted old-style rather than modern schools — “Chinese schools”, as they call them, rather than “foreign schools” — and they preferred the masters of the old-style school to the teachers in the primary schools.

Now the peasants are energetically establishing what they call peasant schools, which are in fact evening classes. Many such schools have been opened and others are being established; on the average there is one school to every township. The peasants are very enthusiastic about establishing such schools, and regard only such schools as their own. The funds for evening classes come from the “public revenue derived from superstitious practices”, the funds of ancestral temples and other kinds of public funds and public property that have been lying idle. The county education boards wanted to use these public funds for establishing primary schools, that is, “foreign-style schools” not adapted to the needs of the peasants, while the peasants wanted to use them for peasant schools; in the end the funds were shared, though in certain places the peasants got them all. With the growth of the peasant movement, the cultural level of the peasants has risen rapidly. Before long tens of thousands of schools will spring up in the rural areas through-

out the whole province — something quite different from the futile clamour of the intelligentsia and so-called “educators” for “popular education”, which remained idle words.

*From Report of an Investigation into
the Peasant Movement in Hunan*

MYTH AND REALITY

(August 1937)

. . . The innumerable transformations in mythology, for instance, K'uafu's racing with the sun in the *Book of Mountains and Seas*,¹ Yi's shooting down of nine suns in *Huai Nan Tze*,² Monkey's seventy-two metamorphoses in the *Pilgrimage to the West*,³ the numerous episodes in the *Strange Tales from the Carefree Studio*⁴ of ghosts and foxes metamorphosed into human

¹ Written during the era of the Warring States (403-221 B.C.). In one of the legends K'uafu is described as a superman who runs a race with the sun. Winning the race, he makes a tour in the sun but finally dies of thirst.

² Yi is one of the legendary heroes of ancient China, famous for his archery. According to a legend in *Huai Nan Tze*, compiled in the second century B.C., there were ten suns in the sky in the days of Emperor Yao. To put an end to the damage to vegetation caused by the scorching sunbeams, Yao ordered Yi to shoot the suns down. In another legend recorded by Wang Yi (second century A.D.), the archer is said to have shot down nine of the ten suns.

³ A novel written in the sixteenth century. Sun Wu-k'ung, hero of the novel, is a brave and resourceful monkey. He has the mysterious power of changing himself at will into seventy-two forms, such as a bird, a tree, a stone, etc.

⁴ A famous collection of 431 tales written by P'u Sung-ling in the seventeenth century.

beings — the transformations of opposites into each other as told in these legends are not actual transformations as manifested in actual contradictions, but are a sort of childish, imaginary, subjectively fancied transformations that are called forth in men's minds by the innumerable transformations of complicated, real contradictions into each other. Marx said: "All mythology masters and dominates and shapes the forces of nature in and through the imagination, hence it disappears as soon as man gains mastery over the forces of nature."¹ Although stories of endless metamorphoses in mythology or nursery tales can delight people because they imaginatively embody man's conquest of the forces of nature and, moreover, the best mythology possesses, as Marx put it, "eternal charm", yet mythology is not based on the specific conditions of actual contradictions and therefore does not scientifically reflect reality. That is to say, in mythology or nursery tales the aspects that constitute contradiction have only a fancied identity, not a real one.

From *On Contradiction*

¹ Marx, *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, Eng. ed., Chicago, 1904, pp. 310-311,

STUDY

(October 1938)

As a general rule, all Communist Party members who have some qualifications for study should study the theory of Marx, Engels, Lenin and Stalin, the history of our nation and the situation and trend of the current movement; and with the help of these comrades, we must organize education for those who are poorly educated. This general rule has special reference to all cadres, above all to members of the Central Committee and senior cadres who should intensify their study of these subjects. It is impossible for a party to lead a great revolutionary movement to victory without knowledge of revolutionary theory and history, and a profound understanding of the current movement.

The theory of Marx, Engels, Lenin and Stalin is universally applicable. We should not regard it as a dogma, but as a guide to action. We should not merely learn Marxist-Leninist terms and phrases but study Marxism-Leninism as the science of revolution. We should not only understand the general laws which Marx, Engels, Lenin and Stalin derived from their extensive study of real life and revolutionary experience,

but also study their standpoint and approach in examining problems and solving them. Our Party has now a better knowledge of Marxism-Leninism than in the past, but this knowledge is still far from being widespread or deep. Our task is to lead a great nation of several hundred million people to carry on a great and unprecedented struggle. Therefore to spread and deepen the study of Marxism-Leninism is for us a big problem which we must solve promptly and by positive endeavour. I hope that, after this plenary session of the Central Committee, a competition in study will be started throughout the Party, and we shall see who really learns something, and who learns more and better. So far as the people shouldering the main responsibilities of leadership are concerned, if we can have in our Party one to two hundred comrades who have acquired a systematic, not fragmentary, a practical, not abstract, knowledge of Marxism-Leninism, the fighting capacity of our Party will be greatly heightened and our work in defeating Japanese imperialism will be accelerated.

Another task for us is to study our historical heritage and sum it up critically with the Marxist method. Our nation has a history of several thousand years with its own characteristics and its own store of treasures. But in these matters we are mere school-boys. The China of today has developed from the China in history; as we are believers in the Marxist approach to history, we must not snap the thread of historical continuity. We must make a summary of the history from Confucius to Sun Yat-sen and possess

ourselves of this valuable heritage. This will give us much help in directing the great movement of today. Communists are internationalist-Marxists, but Marxism must be integrated with the specific characteristics of our country and given a national form before it can be put into practice. The great strength of Marxism-Leninism lies in its integration with the specific revolutionary practice of different countries. In the case of the Chinese Communist Party, it is a matter of learning how to apply the theory of Marxism-Leninism to China's specific circumstances. Chinese Communists are part and parcel of the great Chinese nation, and its very flesh and blood; if they talk about Marxism apart from China's characteristics, it will be only Marxism in the abstract, Marxism void of matter. Hence how to turn Marxism into a living reality in China, to imbue its every manifestation with the requisite Chinese characteristics, that is, to apply it in accordance with China's characteristics, becomes a problem which the whole Party must understand and quickly solve. The foreign "eight-legged essay"¹ must be banned,

¹The prescribed form of essay in competitive examinations in feudal China from the fifteenth to the nineteenth century. It is written to a rigid pattern and a prescribed length; every word in the theme, which consists of a phrase, a sentence or sometimes an entire passage from the *Four Books of the Confucian Canon*, must be dealt with, its meaning expounded and implications teased out with fanciful ingenuity. The result is formalized verbiage without real content. The term "eight-legged essay" has therefore been extended to denote any piece of writing stuffed with clichés, jargon and catchphrases.

empty and abstract talk must be stopped and doctrinairism must be buried to make way for the fresh and lively things of Chinese style and Chinese flavour which the common folk of China love to see and hear. To separate the content of internationalism from the national form is the practice of those who understand nothing of internationalism; we must closely link the two. There are within our ranks serious mistakes in this respect which must be conscientiously corrected.

What are the characteristics of the present movement? What are its laws? How to direct this movement? All these are practical questions. To this day we have not yet fully understood Japanese imperialism or fully understood China. The movement is developing, new things have yet to emerge and are emerging endlessly. To study this movement in its entirety and in its development is a great task claiming our constant attention. Anyone who refuses to study these problems seriously and carefully is no Marxist.

Our enemy in study is self-complacency, which must be eliminated before we can really learn anything. The attitude we should adopt is "to learn without satiety" in regard to ourselves and "to teach without weariness"¹ in regard to others.

From *The Role of the Chinese Communist Party in the National War*

¹ *Confucian Analects*, Bk. VII, ch. 2.

THE MAY 4 MOVEMENT

(May 1939)

The May 4 Movement twenty years ago marked a new stage in China's bourgeois-democratic revolution against imperialism and feudalism. The campaign for cultural reform, into which the Movement grew, was only one of the forms of this revolution. As a result of the growth and development of new social forces in that period, a mighty camp emerged in China's bourgeois-democratic revolution against imperialism and feudalism, i.e. the camp formed by the working class, the students and the newly-arisen national bourgeoisie. But it was the hundreds of thousands of students who marched heroically in the vanguard of the May 4 Movement. This showed that the May 4 Movement had advanced a step further than the Revolution of 1911.

China's bourgeois-democratic revolution has passed through several stages, as will be seen if we trace it back to its formative period: the Opium War, the War of the T'aip'ing Heavenly Kingdom, the Sino-Japanese War of 1894,¹ the Reformist Movement of 1898, the Boxer Movement, the Revolution of 1911, the May 4

¹ This war broke out as a result of Japan's aggression upon Korea and provocation against China's ground and sea forces.

Movement, the Northern Expedition and the War of the Agrarian Revolution. The Anti-Japanese War today marks another new stage of its development, the greatest, the most vigorous, the most dynamic. The bourgeois-democratic revolution can be considered successful only when foreign imperialist forces and domestic feudal forces have been in the main overthrown and an independent democratic state established. The Opium War and the successive revolutionary stages have characteristics peculiar to each. The most important distinction between them is whether they come before or after the emergence of the Communist Party. However, taken as a whole, all these stages have the features of a bourgeois-democratic revolution. This revolution aims at establishing a social system hitherto unknown in Chinese history, a democratic social system; it has as its precursor feudal society, the semi-colonial, semi-feudal society of the last hundred years, and as its successor socialist society. A Communist, if asked why he strives first for a bourgeois-democratic society

The Chinese forces fought heroically, but the unpreparedness and irresolution of the corrupt and incompetent Manchu government brought about the ultimate defeat. A humiliating treaty was concluded at Shimonoseki (Bakan), whereby the Manchu government agreed to cede Taiwan and the Penghu Islands to Japan, to pay an indemnity of 200,000,000 taels of silver (a tael being about 1.33 ounces), to allow the Japanese to establish factories in China, to open Shasi, Chungking, Soochow and Hangchow as treaty ports, and to let Korea become a vassal state of Japan.

and then for a socialist society, will say: "I follow the inevitable course of history."

Certain social forces are required to bring about the democratic revolution in China. They are the working class, the peasantry, the intelligentsia and the progressive section of the bourgeoisie — in other words, the revolutionary workers, peasants, soldiers, intellectuals and businessmen, with the workers and peasants as the main revolutionary forces and the working class as the leader in the revolution. Without these main revolutionary forces, and without the leadership of the working class, it is impossible to carry out the anti-imperialist and anti-feudal democratic revolution. Today the principal enemies of the revolution are the Japanese imperialists and their Chinese collaborators, and the fundamental policy in the revolution is the formation of a National Anti-Japanese United Front composed of all the workers, peasants, soldiers, intellectuals and businessmen who oppose Japanese invasion. The final victory in the Anti-Japanese War will be won when this united front is greatly consolidated and developed.

In the movement of the Chinese democratic revolution, the intellectuals were the first among the people to be politically awakened. Both the Revolution of 1911 and the May 4 Movement clearly demonstrated this point, and at the time of the May 4 Movement the intellectuals were more numerous and more politically conscious than at the time of the Revolution of 1911. But if the intellectuals do not identify themselves with the masses of the workers and peasants,

they will accomplish nothing. In the final analysis, the line of demarcation between revolutionary intellectuals and non-revolutionary and counter-revolutionary intellectuals is whether they are willing to be identified and actually identify themselves with the mass of workers and peasants. This alone is the line of demarcation in the final analysis, and not lip-service to the Three People's Principles or Marxism. A true revolutionary must be one who is willing to be identified and actually identifies himself with the workers and peasants.

It is now twenty years since the May 4 Movement and nearly two years since the outbreak of the Anti-Japanese War. The youth and cultural workers of the nation bear a heavy responsibility in the democratic revolution and the Anti-Japanese War. I hope they understand the nature and the motivating forces of the Chinese revolution and link up their activities with the workers and peasants, go into their midst and carry on propaganda and organizational work among them. The day on which the people of the whole country arise with courage and determination will be the day of victory in the Anti-Japanese War. Let the nation's youth put forth its strength!