

TEXT 12

A DECADE OF REVOLUTION IN PEKING OPERA

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Led by the Party Central Committee headed by Chairman Mao and guided by Chairman Mao's proletarian line in literature and art, the revolution in Peking opera has traversed a militant course over the last ten years. Though a decade is not a long time, there have been tremendous and fundamental changes on China's literary and art front.

Ten years ago the revisionist line in literature and art pushed by Liu Shao-chi, Chou Yang and their gang put us under their dictatorship. Under their control, the whole literary and art field was in a miasma of laying more stress on the past than on the present, worshipping what was foreign and negating what was Chinese, and praising the dead and having contempt for the living. The literary and art arena was occupied by emperors, kings, generals, ministers, scholars and beauties as well as all sorts of ghosts and monsters. Practically everything was feudal, bourgeois or revisionist trash. It was quite an abnormal phenomenon: the landlord and capitalist classes which had been politically overthrown were still swaggering in our literature and art, while the workers, peasants and soldiers who are masters of the country as yet had no place in this field. This seriously undermined the socialist economic base and endangered the fundamental interests of the proletariat and other revolutionary people.

A decade later, this situation has been fundamentally changed today. With the revolution in Peking opera as its start and with the model revolutionary theatrical works as its landmark, the proletarian revolution in literature and art has won great victories after ten years of hard struggle. There are now 17 model revolutionary theatrical works created and cultivated by the proletariat. Like spring thunder, the birth of the first group of eight model revolutionary theatrical works in the early years of the Peking opera revolution announced that the revolutionary line in literature and art formulated by Chairman Mao in his *Talks at the Yen'an Forum on Literature and Art* had obtained brilliant results through practice, the new era of socialist literature and art in China had come, the domination on the stage by lords and ladies and their pampered sons and daughters for so many centuries had come to an end, and the era had arrived in which the worker-peasant-soldier

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heroes lift their heads and occupy the centre of the stage. This was a change of great significance in the history of Chinese literature and art.

Following the creation of the eight model revolutionary theatrical works*, many new ones have been brought forth in the last few years. They are the piano music *The Red Lantern* with Peking opera singing, the piano concerto *The Yellow River*, the revolutionary modern Peking operas *Song of the Dragon River*, *Red Detachment of Women*, *Fighting on the Plains* and *Azalea Mountain*, the revolutionary modern dance-dramas *Ode to Yimeng* and *Children of the Grassland* and the revolutionary symphonic music *Taking Tiger Mountain by Strategy*. Their birth has consolidated and expanded the fruits of this great revolution and further promoted the vigorous development of the movement to create socialist literary and art works throughout the nation. Whether in literature, drama, the cinema, music, fine arts, photography, dancing or *quyi* (ballad singing, story telling and cross-talk), a large number of good or relatively good works have appeared and more and better ones will be created. The tendency in the development of the past ten years has proved that our socialist literature and art are becoming increasingly thriving year after year.

Revolution in Peking Opera—Strategic Measure to Consolidate the Dictatorship of the Proletariat

The tremendous changes in the last decade are by no means accidental. The revolution in Peking opera in China is determined by the fact that there are still classes, class contradictions and class struggle in the historical period of socialism. This revolution is also an inevitable result of the struggle between Marxism-Leninism and revisionism and a proletarian strategic measure, under the guidance of the Party's basic line, for preventing capitalist restoration and consolidating the dictatorship of the proletariat.

Class struggle at home and abroad tells us that when the proletarian revolution enters the socialist stage, the overthrown classes which are unreconciled to defeat always use their influence in the ideological sphere, formed over a long period, to corrupt and sabotage the socialist economic base and attack the proletariat. The literary and art sphere, in particular, is used by them as a bridgehead for propagating the reactionary world outlook and restoring capitalism. In the course of its all-round restoration of capitalism, the Soviet revisionist renegade clique

*The eight model revolutionary theatrical works are the revolutionary modern Peking operas *Taking Tiger Mountain by Strategy*, *The Red Lantern*, *Shachiapang*, *On the Docks* and *Raid on the White Tiger Regiment*, the revolutionary modern dance-dramas *Red Detachment of Women* and *The White-Haired Girl* and the revolutionary symphonic music *Shachiapang*.

has made literature and art an important sector for creating counter-revolutionary public opinion. For the same purpose, representatives of the landlord and capitalist classes in China such as Liu Shao-chi, Lin Piao and their like spared no effort to lay hands on ideology and on literature and art.

These facts show that with socialist revolution on the economic front alone but without a thoroughgoing socialist revolution on the political and ideological fronts, including literature and art, the socialist system is still not consolidated and the dream of the bourgeoisie for a restoration may become a reality. To carry the socialist revolution through to the end and shatter the class enemy's plot for restoration, the proletariat must battle the class enemy tit for tat, firmly occupy the positions of literature and art, attach importance to the class struggle in the ideological sphere and exercise all-round dictatorship over the bourgeoisie in the realm of the superstructure including all cultural spheres.

Chairman Mao has always attached great importance to the socialist revolution in the ideological field and has personally initiated and led all the past major struggles on the literary and art front. At the working conference of the Central Committee at Peitaiho in August 1962 and at the Tenth Plenary Session of the Eighth Central Committee of the Party in September of the same year, Chairman Mao summed up in a profound way the historical experience of the Chinese revolution and the international communist movement, more comprehensively put forward the Party's basic line for the historical period of socialism and called on us never to forget classes and class struggle. In 1963 the international open polemics between Marxist-Leninists and modern revisionists and the socialist education movement which was unfolded on a wide scale in China pushed to a new stage the proletariat's struggle to oppose and prevent revisionism. With the intensified class struggle and the two-line struggle at home and abroad, the struggle between restoration and counter-restoration in the literary and art field become sharper than before.

Against such a historical background and focusing on the existing problems in our drama and other art sectors under the control of the revisionist line in literature and art, Chairman Mao clearly pointed out: **"The social and economic base has changed, but the arts as part of the superstructure, which serve this base, still remain a serious problem. Hence we should proceed with investigation and study and attend to this matter in earnest."** This set the task for the proletarian revolution in literature and art and pointed out its orientation.

At the call of Chairman Mao, the proletariat first launched a revolution in the fields of Peking opera, the ballet and symphonic music. In

July 1964, Comrade Chiang Ching delivered her talk "On the Revolution in Peking Opera" at a forum attended by participants in the Festival of Peking Opera on Contemporary Themes. This important speech is full of the Marxist spirit of going against the tide and has become a declaration of war on the revisionist line in literature and art. For a decade it has always inspired the revolutionary literary and art fighters to march forward victoriously in their struggle to consolidate the dictatorship of the proletariat.

The old Peking opera was a stubborn stronghold of the landlord and capitalist classes in the ideological field. The main content of its repertory may be summarized as feverish propagation of the doctrines of Confucius and Mencius*. Reactionary ideas such as the "Three Cardinal Guides and Five Constant Virtues**," the "Three Obediences and Four Virtues***," "loyalty, filial piety, chastity and righteousness" and "loyalty, forbearance, benevolence and love" were all made into images to be praised on the old Peking opera stage. This was the reason why the reactionary rulers of the Ching Dynasty and the

*The doctrines of Confucius and Mencius refer to the reactionary political line and idealist system of thought of the Confucian school represented by Confucius (551-479 B.C.) and Mencius (c. 390-305 B.C.). Stubbornly defending and trying to save the slave system, both opposed social change and advocated returning to ancient times and retrogression. Modified and elaborated by successive rulers from the Han Dynasty onward, the doctrines of Confucius and Mencius had become an ideological weapon for maintaining reactionary rule and the spiritual bondage of the working people for more than 2,000 years in China's feudal society and semi-colonial and semi-feudal society. Even up to the present these doctrines are still used by reactionaries in China and abroad and by chiefs-tains of the opportunist lines in the Party.

**The "Three Cardinal Guides" meant that "the sovereign guides the subjects, the father guides the son and the husband guides the wife." That is to say, the sovereign, father and husband had absolute authority to rule, while the subjects, sons and wives could only obey unconditionally. This was said to be the will of Heaven. The three "guides" were, in other words, the political, clan, religious and masculine authorities, the four thickest ropes binding the Chinese people, especially the peasants, for more than 2,000 years.

The "Five Constant Virtues" meant the five so-called eternal principles—"benevolence, righteousness, propriety, wisdom and sincerity." They were the reactionary moral concepts used by the Confucianists to support and regulate the "Three Cardinal Guides."

***The "Three Obediences" meant female "obedience to the father and elder brothers when young, obedience to the husband when married, and obedience to the sons when widowed." Women were thus placed under rule by men from cradle to grave.

The "Four Virtues" meant women's virtue, speech, appearance and chores. Specifically, women's virtue meant a woman must know her place and behave and act in every way in compliance with the feudal ethical code. Women's speech demanded that a woman must not talk too much and not be a bore. Women's appearance meant that a woman must pay attention to adorning herself with a view to pleasing the opposite sex. The meaning of women's chores was that a woman must willingly do all the household work.

later northern warlords and Kuomintang reactionaries all extolled the old Peking opera as “national essence” and “national opera,” and the imperialist robbers invading China also praised it to the skies. Though they all said they honoured this opera, it would be more appropriate to say that they made use of it. They used the doctrines of Confucius and Mencius spread by the old Peking opera to corrupt and poison the minds of the Chinese people and enslave them.

Taking the reactionary class stand, Liu Shao-chi, Peng Chen, Chou Yang and their gang turned the Peking opera world into an impenetrable and watertight “independent kingdom.” They continued to poison the masses with the doctrines of Confucius and Mencius on the stage and at the same time used the Peking opera form to manufacture one anti-Party and anti-socialist poisonous arrow after another. Could such absurd and strange things be allowed to go on? Certainly not. If they were tolerated, it would have meant permitting them to undermine the foundation of socialism and letting China return to the dark semi-colonial and semi-feudal society. That is what the Chinese people will never tolerate.

The selection of Peking opera as the place to make a breakthrough by the proletarian revolution in literature and art is itself a major struggle to criticize the doctrines of Confucius and Mencius; it aims at dismantling the spiritual props on which the reactionary classes have relied for centuries to create a hell on earth. Capturing the stubborn fortress of the old Peking opera makes it possible for us to accumulate experience in struggle and promote the revolution in other fields of literature and art and the superstructure as a whole, so that it will conform to the socialist economic base and help consolidate and develop this base.

Laying the Foundation for Developing Proletarian Literature and Art

The tremendous changes in the last decade have not been easily won. The revolution in Peking opera is the first great campaign of the socialist revolution on all fronts in the realm of the superstructure over the last ten years. The difficulties and obstacles it met and the efforts it exerted were exceptionally large. This is a thoroughgoing revolution to firmly eliminate exploiting-class literature and art and energetically foster proletarian literature and art, the first of its kind in history. How to overcome the old Peking opera and its influence in people’s minds, how to create an entirely new revolutionary Peking opera and how to make the heroic figures of the workers, peasants and soldiers firmly occupy the stage—the solution of a series of such questions had no precedents to follow. It should be noted that after painstakingly fostering Peking opera on the stage for 100 or 200 years, the landlord and

capitalist classes had turned the old Peking opera into a dramatic art with the highest technical and artistic skills in China. Therefore, it was certainly no easy job for the proletariat to remould it, surpass it and overwhelm it in the shortest possible time.

Whether the proletariat can firmly occupy the positions of literature and art or not depends on the creation of model theatrical works with **“the unity of revolutionary political content and the highest possible perfection of artistic form.”** Only with such model theatrical works can we convince people and firmly occupy the positions. From the very beginning, therefore, the struggle between the occupation and anti-occupation in the revolution in Peking opera raged around the model revolutionary theatrical works. In the face of this revolution, Liu Shao-chi, Peng Chen, Chou Yuang and their gang who represented the interests of the bourgeoisie considered it a big calamity for themselves and vented their anger against it. Making use of that part of the power they had usurped, they spared no effort to sabotage, openly or secretly, the revolution by every vicious means. Every step forward by the revolution at the time was made through struggle; the process of creating every model revolutionary theatrical work was a history of soul-stirring struggles. But new-born things are unconquerable. The proletariat triumphing over the bourgeoisie in the literary and art field is an irresistible law of history.

Shouldering the historical mission, Marxists leading a group of revolutionary literary and art fighters boldly pressed forward and blazed the trail, waging extremely arduous struggles, politically and artistically. In every model theatrical work, from script writing to stage production, from every rhythm in the music and singing to every dance movement, every detail was repeatedly revised and improved and carefully polished. The proletariat persevered in setting high standards and strict demands on the model revolutionary theatrical works because the latter would lay the foundation for developing socialist literature and art. The strength of models is unlimited, and the strength of the model revolutionary theatrical works will always inspire us to triumphantly march forward along Chairman Mao's revolutionary line in literature and art.

The central issue in creating model revolutionary theatrical works lies in wholeheartedly portraying typical proletarian heroes in the best possible way. Historically, which class' heroic images should be created and which class' representatives should be the masters of the stage reflect in a concentrated way the political struggle in literature and art and constitute the main indication showing which class' political line they serve. The revolution in Peking opera calls for emphasis on portraying the artistic images of the proletarian heroes, making the

workers, peasants and soldiers the masters of the stage, reversing the history which had been reversed by the landlord and capitalist classes for many centuries, and thus restoring the truth of history. The proletariat has clearly put forward portraying typical proletarian heroes as the fundamental task of socialist literature and art. This draws a basic line of demarcation between our literary and art movement and that of all exploiting classes in the past.

The revolution in Peking opera has proved in practice the following: Only by portraying typical proletarian heroes well can we use Marxism-Leninism-Mao Tsetung Thought to criticize the doctrines of Confucius and Mencius in literature and art and transform the world in the image of the proletariat. Only by portraying typical proletarian heroes well can we present on the stage the revolutionary struggle of the Chinese people under the leadership of the Chinese Communist Party, sing the praises of the great victories won by Chairman Mao's revolutionary line in the different revolutionary periods and on various fronts, and inspire the masses to push forward the advance of history. Only by portraying typical proletarian heroes well can we exercise proletarian dictatorship over the bourgeoisie in literature and art. Adhering to this basic task means adhering to the orientation that literature and art should serve the workers, peasants and soldiers. This is a question of principle on which we must never waver.

The question of how to work out a good solution in inheriting the artistic form of Peking opera and introducing changes in it is a major issue closely related to portraying typical proletarian heroes. The Peking opera had always been used to depict old times and characters of the past. It can easily be used to depict negative characters, but there are numerous difficulties when it is used to portray the new era and new characters. The revolution in the ideological content of Peking opera inevitably necessitates basic reforms in its artistic form. A good solution to this question will ensure firm occupation of the Peking opera stage by the images of worker-peasant-soldier heroes, while an unsuccessful solution will bring about the reappearance of emperors, kings, generals and ministers and scholars and beauties.

It is obviously going against revolution to adopt the reformist method of putting "new wine in old bottles" with regard to old Peking opera's artistic form. If the worker-peasant-soldier heroes of our time were made to sing the old tunes and melodies suited to the ancient people and imitate the behaviour and movements of the dead, it would inevitably distort the new life and discredit the new characters. On the other hand, it would also be going up a blind alley by completely throwing overboard the special artistic features of Peking opera and adopting a nihilist attitude. To put the Peking opera's artistry in singing, acting,

dialogue and acrobatics in the service of portraying proletarian heroic images, it is necessary to proceed from life, do away with the old tunes and melodies and critically assimilate and remould whatever is useful.

The revolution in Peking opera over the past decade has adhered to the principles of **“making the past serve the present and foreign things serve China”** and **“weeding through the old to bring forth the new,”** and has correctly solved the question of critically inheriting the Peking opera’s artistic form and creating a new one. The past and the present, foreign and Chinese, and weeding through the old and bringing forth the new are examples of the unity of opposites. They manifest the relationship that puts destruction first, and in the process there is construction. **“There is no construction without destruction. Destruction means criticism and repudiation; it means revolution.”** The musical and dance images of proletarian heroes in the model revolutionary theatrical works all result from critically inheriting and remoulding the useful elements of the art of the old Peking opera and creating something new. In composing the arias for every heroic character, we have revolutionized the traditional melodies and singing and succeeded in bringing forth the powerful spirit of our era while carrying forward the special artistic features of the Peking opera’s melodies.

Today the masses—men and women, old and young, professionals and amateurs—all like learning and singing melodies from the model revolutionary theatrical works; the powerful and inspiring tunes sung by our heroic characters have now spread to all parts of our motherland. Could the so-called “most excellent” singing portions of the old Peking opera spread as far and wide as those of our model revolutionary theatrical works? Facts have convincingly proved that our model revolutionary theatrical works have triumphed artistically over the old Peking opera, overwhelmed it and opened for the proletariat the revolutionary road of critically inheriting and remoulding classical artistic forms.

Through sharp class struggle and arduous artistic practice in the last decade, the revolution in Peking opera has gradually trained a contingent of proletarian literary and art workers. They fight together with the revolutionary literary and art workers on the musical and dance fronts and, together with spare-time worker-peasant-soldier literary and art workers, constitute the main force of the proletarian revolution in literature and art. Contingents of proletarian literary and art workers are formed through revolutionary and artistic practice. The contingent trained in the course of the revolution in Peking opera far excels that trained by the old art colleges and schools in the past both in political and ideological level and in artistic standard. This shows that **“learning warfare through warfare”** should be our main road and method for

training contingents of literary and art workers. From now on, we should continue persevering in forming, uniting and expanding our contingents in the course of struggle. As long as we pay close attention to building up our contingents ideologically and organizationally in the course of struggle, seriously remould their world outlook and conception of literature and art, and attach importance to ideas guiding creation, we can surely develop and expand the ranks of proletarian literary and art workers.

China's proletariat now has its own model theatrical works, experience in creating them and contingents of literary and art workers. This has laid a firm foundation and opened a broad road for proletarian literature and art. In the literary and art movement under the leadership of the Party, the last decade may be said to have been the pioneering period of proletarian literature and art. Reviewing the history of mankind's literature and art, we see how many years it took the exploiting classes to create their own literature and art. The feudal class took thousands of years and the bourgeoisie hundreds of years, yet only a limited number of representative works have been handed down. By the time capitalism reached the stage of imperialism, there was complete decadence and decline. The literary and art field is filled with such degenerate rubbish as the modernist school, fauvism and strip-tease. The essence of this numerous and varied junk is to poison and numb the minds of the people. Besides continuing to develop this vicious garbage, the Soviet revisionist renegade clique has in recent years shouted loudly about writing on the "theme of military patriotism" to promote militarism so as to serve its expansionism and aggression against the territories of other countries and create public opinion for its struggle for world hegemony.

Like their social and ideological systems, the literature and art of imperialism and social-imperialism resemble a dying person who is sinking fast, or like the sun setting beyond the western hills. They can no longer produce works worth anything. Contrasting our last decade with the thousands of years or hundreds of years of the landlord and capitalist classes, we find that **"the landscape here is beyond compare."**

Carrying the Revolution in Literature and Art Through to the End

While victory has been won through struggle, there will still be struggle after victory. Although the proletariat has smashed the interference and sabotage by Liu Shao-chi, Lin Piao and their like, occupied the positions in Peking opera and won great victories, the struggle between occupation and counter-occupation in the field of literature and art has not ended. Amid the present reactionary trend of thought trying to

negate the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution, there are a handful of people who are pointing the spearhead of their attack against the Peking opera revolution.

Some say that “ ‘The fundamental task’ is not proper.” To make portraying typical proletarian heroes the fundamental task of socialist literature and art is the inevitable demand of the workers, peasants and soldiers in this field after they have become masters of the country and meets the needs of consolidating the proletarian dictatorship. But some people have gone so far as to consider it “improper” and describe it as “mixing the means with the goal of literature and art.” This is an absurd argument! Throughout the ages, every class has used literature and art to portray the images of its own heroes and propagate its own world outlook so as to remould the world in its own image. When the stage is dominated by the images of heroes of a certain class, it means that class exercises dictatorship in literature and art. When some people disparage portraying typical proletarian heroes as one of the “literary and art means” and even make the slander that current literary and art creation “suffers from the ‘fundamental task,’ ” they simply are trying to negate the occupation of the stage by workers, peasants and soldiers and making a wild counter-attack against the proletarian line in literature and art.

We should like to ask: When the emperors, kings, generals, ministers, scholars and beauties ruled the old stage for several centuries, did these people ever say this was “improper”? When, under the rule of the revisionist line in literature and art in the past, poisonous plays dominated the stage and ghosts and monsters danced on it, why didn’t they say anything about “improper”? Now, soon after the heroic images of the workers, peasants and soldiers have mounted the stage, they shout that things are “improper.” This contrast reveals that what they consider “proper” is to put back on the stage the representatives of the landlord and capitalist classes, who were driven from it, and restore their domination.

There are others who say that “the standards of the model theatrical works are too high and they drive the others off the stage.” Are “the standards too high”? Every class has its own political and artistic standards. They want us to give up the proletarian political standards. Doesn’t this mean preserving the legitimate positions for feudal, bourgeois and revisionist literature and art? They want us to lower proletarian artistic standards. Doesn’t this mean encouraging the production of rough and slipshod works and providing chances for the bourgeoisie to counter-attack. The so-called “standards are too high” is only a pretext to attack the model revolutionary theatrical works. Since these works came to the stage, they have indeed driven feudal, bourgeois and revi-

sionist literature and art off the stage. This is fine. Otherwise, the situation would have been serious. Had they not been driven off, how could we have brought forth the thriving scene of socialist literature and art? The purpose of lamenting what has been “driven off the stage” by the model theatrical works is nothing but to reinstate feudal, bourgeois and revisionist literature and art and “drive off” the model theatrical works instead. Now that the model revolutionary theatrical works have occupied the stage, we will never permit the reappearance of feudal, bourgeois and revisionist literature and art on it.

There also is the talk about “breaking down the stereotypes of the model theatrical works.” This is a variety of the theory of “discarding the classics and rebelling against orthodoxy” under the new circumstances. Isn’t it clear which class’ language it is to slander everything—the orientation, road, principles and methods of creation followed by the model revolutionary theatrical works and the experience accumulated in practice—as “stereotypes” and to clamour for “breaking down the stereotypes”? It is precisely Chairman Mao’s revolutionary line in literature and art that they want to “break down.” Literature and art in the world today either serves the proletariat or the bourgeoisie. Where would they go after “breaking down”? It is evident that they want to go back to the counter-revolutionary revisionist line in literature and art. “Breaking down the stereotypes” means, in essence, carrying out “restraining oneself and returning to the rites” in the field of literature and art and dragging history back!

It is not at all strange for the class enemies to slander and attack the revolution in Peking opera. This is an inevitable reflection of class struggle. Their reactionary hullabaloo shows by their negative example that our revolution in Peking opera has been correct and fine, and has hit them where it hurts. The more violent the enemies curse us, the more we should persist in struggle, make further efforts to popularize and develop the model revolutionary theatrical works, consolidate and expand the achievements of the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution and carry our revolution in literature and art through to the end.