



On the Revolutionary Ballet

Red Detachment of Women

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“The orientation is correct, the revolutionisation successful and the artistic quality good.” This is the brilliant comment made by our great leader Chairman Mao on the modern revolutionary ballet *Red Detachment of Women* in 1964.

The proletarian revolution in literature and art is now in full swing. As we recall the journey we have travelled in revolutionising ballet under the guidance of Comrade Chiang Ching, we understand all the more profoundly the significance of our great leader Chairman Mao’s brilliant comment. It is a positive approval and high appraisal of the proletarian revolution in literature and art, a guiding light for the creation and development of the revolutionary literature and art of the proletariat.

Chairman Mao points out in his *Talks at the Yen-an Forum on Literature and Art* that “in the world today all culture, all literature

and art belong to definite classes and are geared to definite political lines.”

In a class society ballet always serves definite classes. In feudal times it was a form of court art used by European nobles and lords to celebrate their rise in rank or their coronations. When capitalism was in its ascendancy during the Renaissance, enlightenment movement and the romantic periods, ballet was known among the bourgeoisie as the “crown of the arts.” Today, as imperialism heads for total collapse, in capitalist and revisionist countries the ballet serves imperialist and social-imperialist policies of aggression and war, helps to consolidate the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie, and propagates by ugly imagery the decadent “American way of life.” In a word, the ballet has been a tool in the service of the exploiting classes right from the start.

Renegade, hidden traitor and scab Liu Shao-chi and his counter-revolutionary revisionist agents in literary and art circles Chou Yang, Lin Mo-han and their gang, in order to safeguard their monopoly over literature and art, made a fuss about ballet, which they used to create public opinion for the restoration of capitalism. They put out the counter-revolutionary slogan that ballet must be “foreign through and through,” and frantically opposed the correct policy set by Chairman Mao of “critically assimilating” the legacies of literature and art. Their objective was to stop the proletarian revolution in the arts.

In 1964, revolutionary literary and art fighters, enlightened by the *Talks*, under the lead of Comrade Chiang Ching started a revolution in ballet. Smashing all the obstacles and sabotage engineered by Liu Shao-chi, Chou Yang and Lin Mo-han, they succeeded in taking over

this branch of the arts and converting it into a weapon which helps to consolidate the dictatorship of the proletariat.

"The principal form of struggle in the Chinese revolution is armed struggle. Indeed, the history of our Party may be called a history of armed struggle." *Red Detachment of Women* describes the birth, growth and maturing of a women's company, a revolutionary armed force under the correct leadership of the Communist Party of China, during the Second Revolutionary Civil War (1927-1937). The ballet reveals in accordance with Mao Tsetung Thought the principal class contradiction in this period and shows how to solve it. It conveys a great truth, namely, that to seize political power, the proletariat must have a revolutionary Party armed with the theory of Marxism-Leninism-Mao Tsetung Thought and a revolutionary working style, and a people's army led exclusively by such a Party; that the Party and the army must arouse the people and rely on them to build and strengthen rural revolutionary bases and carry out a people's war.

Leafing through the pages of the history of world ballet, nowhere can we find one like *Red Detachment of Women* that praises with brimful political enthusiasm the true creators of history, the masses, and their turbulent struggles to break the age-old chains and to win emancipation. Has any other ballet ever unfolded such an extensive panorama of people's war with all its violence and stormy intensity? No, never. The bourgeoisie has always shamelessly proclaimed that "love and death" are the eternal themes for ballet. But this "love" can never disguise sanguinary reality — the cruel exploitation and oppression of the labouring people. Nor can it save them from their doom.

Chairman Mao in his *Talks* teaches us: "revolutionary literature and art should create a variety of characters out of real life and help the masses to propel history forward." The content and theme of an artistic work is primarily expressed through its characters. In different historical periods different classes create their ideal characters accor-

ding to the world outlook and aesthetics of their own classes, and propagate their political aims through these characters.

The proletariat never conceals its political stand, but declares in unequivocal terms that the fundamental task and sacred duty in literature and art is the creation of proletarian heroes. The proletariat, the workers, peasants and soldiers are the masters of the arts and must exercise dictatorship over the bourgeoisie in these fields. This is exactly what our ballet artists do. Through the creation of perfect worker, peasant and soldier heroes, they spread Mao Tsetung Thought and the proletarian revolutionary line represented by Chairman Mao, oppose and criticise feudal, bourgeois and revisionist ideologies, educate the people with revolutionary tradition and the prospect of the revolution, awaken and raise class consciousness of the masses, inspire them with revolutionary enthusiasm, and encourage the people to carry the proletarian revolution through and fight for the complete emancipation of mankind so as to propel history forward.

Red Detachment of Women vividly presents heroic commanders and fighters of the Chinese Workers' and Peasants' Red Army, in particular two dazzling proletarian heroes, Hung Chang-ching and Wu Ching-hua.

Hung is a fine political cadre, a representative of the heroic people's army personally built and led by Chairman Mao, a glorious image of the Communists armed with Mao Tsetung Thought. He closely follows Chairman Mao's teaching that "political power grows out of the barrel of a gun" and conscientiously, faithfully and bravely carries out and defends Chairman Mao's proletarian revolutionary line. That is, with Mao Tsetung Thought he guides the enslaved people's anger and hatred against the landlord class onto the revolutionary road to destroy the old world and emancipate mankind.

On the battlefield he is an intrepid, gallant commander and fighter, who fears neither hardship nor death. On the enemy's execution grounds he is a towering proletarian

hero who says, "What does death matter? The communist creed is the truth." The lofty image of Hung Chang-ching crystallises the fine qualities of the great proletariat, the great people's army and the Communists.

Wu Ching-hua, the heroine, is a typical representative of millions of working people cruelly exploited and oppressed by imperialism, feudalism and bureaucrat-capitalism in the old society. She has a deep hatred for the landlord and capitalist classes and a passionate spirit of revolt. Educated by the Party she quickly matures into a Communist highly conscious of the responsibilities of the vanguard of the proletariat. The road she travels is the correct road for all exploited and oppressed people seeking emancipation.

The production of *Red Detachment of Women*, which now firmly occupies the ballet stage with proletarian heroes, is itself a revolution in which the proletariat overthrows bourgeois control of ballet. It is a starting point in the process of making the ballet serve the workers, peasants and soldiers and help consolidate the dictatorship of the proletariat.

In his *Talks* Chairman Mao teaches us, "Nor do we refuse to utilise the literary and artistic forms of the past, but in our hands these old forms, remoulded and infused with new content, also become something revolutionary in the service of the people." The revolutionary artists proceeded to create the ballet in which Chairman Mao's concepts of people's war were incorporated as the theme and where proletarian heroes were portrayed in accordance with the great leader's directive, "Make the past serve the present and foreign things serve China" and "weed through the old to bring forth the new." Led by Comrade Chiang Ching, they waged a fierce struggle against the sinister counter-revolutionary revisionist line in literature and art. They made a profound remoulding of the forms of the old ballet including dance, music and décor.

The dance is one of the ballet's most important means of character delineation. An accurate, clear-cut

dance vocabulary derives from the organic combination of different dance movements and poses.

Ever since the 18th century, the bourgeoisie has boasted that the ballet is possessed of "great elegance and nobility," that it has "reached a high degree of perfection," that it "leaves nothing to be desired." But in actuality the old form of ballet is pitifully poor. It can at best express despair, sorrow, debauchery and madness, and the neurotic psychology of the exploiting classes. Western bourgeois and Soviet revisionist ballet follow the modernist and abstractionist schools, using vulgar and offensive modes of expression.

Chairman Mao teaches us, "There is no construction without destruction, no flowing without damming and no motion without rest." The portrayal of proletarian heroes on the ballet stage requires of necessity a rich, colourful and representative dance vocabulary capable of conveying proletarian thoughts and feelings. The new era, with its revolutionary political content, demands this, and the ballet artists have discarded the mushy, superficial dance movements that express the ideal characters of the exploiting classes. By smashing the dogmas and conventions of the old ballet they have created a new and beautiful proletarian dance vocabulary.

In order to mould the highest type of proletarian heroes, when creating the characters Hung Chang-ching and Wu Ching-hua, the choreographers made an analysis of their mentality and determined their essential traits, and stressed these in their dances. Hung Chang-ching, Party representative in the women's company, is a prototype of the Party leadership at the grass roots level. He is armed with Mao Tsetung Thought and is an outstanding example of the people's army imbued with a revolutionary spirit of fearing neither hardship nor death. So the dominant notes of his dances are firmness, strength, sweeping vigour and invincibility. Similarly, the dominant notes for Wu Ching-hua, a poor peasant's daughter who has suffered much and been excessively wronged, are fiery revolt, rough-

hewn ardour and revolutionary explosive force.

Having determined these traits, the choreographers created specific dance vocabulary in order to bring the hero and heroine out boldly from among other positive characters and, basing on the requirements of the struggle in various circumstances, express the inner world of the characters in various aspects of its development. Maximum time and space are allotted to them to bring out their proletarian feelings and thoughts.

In the scene in which Hung faces death on the execution grounds, he is in the last moment of his life, seriously wounded and fighting the enemy all by himself. What kind of dance vocabulary is to be designed for him, then, is a matter of principle, a principle of which class's world outlook and what aesthetics should guide the artistic creation. Hung's serious wounds and the execution grounds are but the outward appearances. In essence he is a hero, an indomitable man of steel inspired by an inner strength that can vanquish all enemies. For him the execution grounds are a battlefield to fight the class enemy. His figure dominates the entire stage. Consequently the dance vocabulary must be militant and vigorous.

The counter-revolutionary and revisionist Lin Mo-han clamoured that since Hung is seriously wounded, it is not realistic for him to stand up chest high and head raised. Obviously, what Lin preferred was a display of the ugly cringing of a cowardly renegade. What a vicious slander of the thousands of martyrs who gave their lives for the revolution! This is what the revisionists call "writing about truth." The ballet artists flatly refuted this trash. Adhering to the proletarian Party principles, they designed the dance vocabulary for Hung Chang-ching in accordance with the proletarian world outlook and aesthetics. The hero always stands up head raised and chest high. In the various dance movements — "yen shih tiao," "chien shih pien shen tiao — jeté entrelacé," "ling kung yueh — grand jeté," "kung chuan — tour en l'air," and "ping chuan — chaine" — he is a soaring eagle, moving free-

ly and widely on the stage as he denounces the bandit gang. In this way his dancing gives full expression to the indomitable spirit of the communist, who is "determined to vanquish all enemies and never to yield," no matter what the circumstances.

The series of dances Hung executes are based on the real struggles of the revolution, yet are so artistically refined as to make them "on a higher plane, more intense, more concentrated, more typical, nearer the ideal, and therefore more universal than actual everyday life." They critically assimilate the healthier, more spirited and more flexible techniques and methods of Peking opera, Chinese folk dances and traditional calisthenics and adapt them to create a whole set of new dance vocabulary which retains the characteristics of ballet with due transformation and at the same time is infused with rich Chinese national colour.

Another example is the scene in which Wu Ching-hua, blazing with class hatred, accuses the landlord the Tyrant of the South of savage oppression. At first when the choice of dance vocabulary for her was being decided on, the counter-revolutionary Lin Mo-han launched a desperate struggle to sabotage, ranting that the heroine must look sad and distressed and that for her to lift a fist does not fit in with her character. If this reactionary view were put into practice, the heroine would be distorted into an effete figure at once melancholy and submissive.

The ballet artists determinedly resisted this evil attack. The choreography they worked out is highly expressive of the heroine's rebellious character. By repeatedly improving and polishing they created a set of clear-cut, concise and typical dance movements which bring out to the full the heroine's deep suffering and bitter hatred, her proletarian ability to distinguish between what to love and what to loathe. When Wu is accusing the Tyrant of savage oppression, for instance, the Company Commander hands her a bowl of cocoanut milk and sees weals on her arms. Wu suddenly rises on points, does "tse shen

hsi tui," pulls up her sleeves and reveals long weals. Then with "chan chih tun chuan" and "pei shen kuei pu" she faces the soldiers and civilians, raises the other arm with clenched fist and shows more bloody weals. Anger flares up in her bosom, and her eyes blaze with the fire of class hatred. With the accurate poses of "pang yueh pu — jeté fermé" she turns to "tsu chien ping li — soutenu en tournant" and shows the tortures she went through chained in the Tyrant's dungeon.

Wu's dances in this scene, filled with cadence, counterpoise, ardent passion, sharp contrast, distinctive nuances and clear-cut vocabulary, deeply reveal the heroine's intrinsic class love and hatred, and sharply set off her flaming enmity for the landlord class and her unyielding rebellious character.

To achieve unity in the heroes' inner and outward beauty, the ballet artists pay special attention to the creation of action poses of the heroes to bring forth the beauty of their inner world. Dance poses are an effective means to convey the class character, ideological integrity and spiritual realm of the heroic characters. In the course of dancing a pose cannot last very long, sometimes only for a moment. But in this twinkling of an eye a pose can crystallise the most essential qualities of character, thus leading the audience more deeply into the soul of the hero, and intensifying the impact of the art.

In the ballet a great number of poses were designed for Hung Chang-ching and Wu Ching-hua that reveal their fine qualities and noble mentality. In Scene One, for instance, Hung, disguised, is passing through a cocoanut grove on a scouting mission. The moment he appears we see him brimming over with gallantry, stately and noble of deportment, his eyes darting sharply like daggers at the cannibalistic old world. These series of poses, adapted from Peking opera "liang hsiang," show the traits of a scout of the people's army, emphasising his courage, quick wit, sharp insight and level headedness. Other poses representing his bravery when he is slashing the enemy with his sword show his dexterous handling of the

foe while penetrating by strategy into the manor of the Tyrant of the South, his soaring heroism and indomitable will in face of death on the execution grounds.

For Wu Ching-hua the ballet artists also designed a series of poses such as "tsu chien kung chien pu liang hsiang," and "hsien shen tan hai — attitude basse" to accentuate her hatred and resistance against the class enemy. The various poses of "ying feng chan chih — arabesque" show her extraordinary courage when, after she has matured under the Party's education, she fights the landlord's guards with confidence and supremacy. Practically in every scene all the dances for her, as well as for Hung Chang-ching, unfold from various aspects the communist spiritual world of proletarian heroes.

In the process of revolutionising ballet it has been established that unique, stabilised and refined poses are necessary to express profound ideological content and to portray moving heroic images of the proletariat. This goal cannot be achieved otherwise.

Proceeding from the aesthetics of the proletariat, the dance vocabulary and poses for *Red Detachment of Women* successfully reflect and crystallise the militant life of workers, peasants and soldiers and the beauty of the spiritual world of the proletarian labouring masses — masters of a

new age which flies Mao Tsetung Thought as its banner. The bourgeois ballet can never aspire to such heights, although it also attaches importance to dance vocabulary and poses, most of which are based on dilettantism and formalism. As a matter of fact, no matter what great pains the bourgeoisie takes in their choreography, they can by no means disguise the empty soul of despondency, decadence and reaction of their ideal characters. It is impossible for them to have the revolutionary zeal of the proletariat. All the techniques they have developed are devoid of vitality.

Our practice in the art fully testifies that only the revolutionary artists, boundlessly loyal to Chairman Mao's proletarian line in literature and art, determined to sing of workers, peasants and soldiers, and imbued with intense revolutionary zeal to create heroic characters of the proletariat, can infuse powerful vitality into these new dances and poses.

In ballet, music plays a subordinate part to dance. This is where the relationship between music and dance lies. A subordinate part only serves to set off the principal part, and not otherwise. But it also plays a positive, creative role in its own way. Handled properly, it can assist the dance to bring out the content more effectively, and in the joint efforts discharge its duty of moulding

Chiang Ching applauds cultural troupe.





the proletarian heroic characters.

“Music is the fountain head of ballet,” “Dance is the echo of music,” and so on and so forth — all these are reactionary fallacies on ballet hatched by the bourgeoisie to meet the needs of its own class. It makes music something mystic and unfathomable, and attempts through abstruse scores to disguise the reactionary, decadent, vulgar and indecent political content. For a considerable length of time the fallacy that “music is the absolute determining factor” has been an artistic “criterion” for ballet which could not be offended.

When the scores for *Red Detachment of Women* were being written, Lin Mo-han and his handful of counter-revolutionary revisionist cronies did their utmost to sabotage the work, insisting that it be as “lyrical” as the music in the decadent ballet *Giselle*. Their purpose was to distort and uglify through bourgeois “lyricism” the musical images of proletarian heroes.

Guided by the great banner of Mao Tsetung Thought, the revolutionary artists maintained that the music serve the content, the dance, the creation of proletarian heroes. They stick firmly to the proletarian

line. Breaking away from the foreign conventions and dogmas and smashing all the plots concocted by a handful of revisionists, they set up a proletarian principle for the music of revolutionary ballet.

In ballet music helps to bring out the content and the portrayal of proletarian heroes. To accomplish this task it must first of all create dazzling musical images of the proletarian heroes. In this the theme melody plays an important role. In writing ballet music the composers adhere to two principles: clarity and simplicity. Clarity means that the melody must convey the most typical and noblest characteristics and temperaments of the heroes. Simplicity means that the melody must be easily understood and remembered, and suit the dancing. Based on these principles two theme melodies were designed for Hung Chang-ching and Wu Ching-hua.

For Hung Chang-ching, the theme melody is simple yet passionate, profound yet strong, expressing a heroic revolutionary temperament of the proletariat.



The melody for Wu Ching-hua is also simple but clear-cut, with a compelling sense of motion and power, accentuating her unyielding rebellious character and reflecting the deep hatred of the oppressed for their oppressors.



The theme melodies always appear when the heroes come on stage, presented with variations according to the different environment. In Scene Six, full play is given to the positive functions of the music in emphasising Hung Chang-ching's



sublime revolutionary optimism before he goes to his death. Against the background of broad and majestic theme melodies Hung Chang-ching walks dauntlessly to the execution grounds. With the morning sun in his heart, head high and smiling, he towers at the centre of the stage, accompanied by the theme melodies which are set off by the soft touch of strings and harp. He seems to hear the marching song of the women's company. His blood coursing rapidly and heart overflowing, he clenches his right hand into a fist, which shakes to the powerful rhythm of the march. The bugle echoes in his ears, announcing the victory of the women's detachment over the fleeing enemy, and unfolding before his eyes a splendid sight: "Workers and peasants have risen in their millions to fight as one man," and "Forests blaze red beneath the frosty sky." His firm conviction in the final victory of communism makes his spirit soar and his will strong. To the beating of battle drums, he strides to his death, fighting for communism to the last moment of his life.

The theme melody for Wu Ching-hua in Scene Two in which she tells about her sufferings is also fully



developed. To the quick beat of kettledrums, she begins her accusation of the landlord the Tyrant of the South. Variations of the melody are played on the expressive strings. Turbulent, impetuous and full of power, every note conveys forcefully the heroine's vehement desire to rebel and avenge herself and her firm determination to tear the Tyrant of the South to pieces.

Running throughout the ballet is the *March of the Women's Company*, the theme melody for people's war, the musical image of the women's detachment, a militant revolutionary collective.



To give a deeper portrayal of the heroes' lofty mentality and give the ballet a "fresh, lively Chinese style and spirit which the common people of China love," the musicians broke the restrictions imposed by the make-up of the Western orchestra and smashed the vicious attempts of the counter-revolutionary and revisionist Lin Mo-han and his gang to eliminate from the orchestra for the ballet traditional Chinese instruments which they slandered as something capable of producing only "a wooden sound."

In the course of revolutionising the music the percussion instruments of Peking opera and other traditional folk instruments were successfully incorporated into the orchestra after careful experiments and repeated improvement. The bold combination of the Western orchestra's broad range of sound and volume with lively national colour enriches the music's power of expression and gives it a unique style popular with the workers, peasants and soldiers.

This music, with its distinct class character, its popularity with the masses and its broad contemporaneity, fulfills with success its task of creating musical images of Hung Chang-ching, Wu Ching-hua and other heroic characters. It shatters the so-called "fountain-headism," "echoism" and other reactionary "laws" of bourgeois

dilettantism and formalism, and sweeps away all the sentimentalism, gloominess and decadence of the bourgeois music.

Stage art — including scenery, lighting, costume, make-up and properties — also serves the portrayal of characters. It helps to bring out and set off the characters, their historical background and the circumstances in which they live.

Red Detachment of Women discards completely the naturalistic, formalistic and abstract treatment of bourgeois stage art, and follows instead the principle of putting proletarian heroes and revolutionary political content to the fore. In portraying heroic and positive characters, the stress is on "cleanliness." This helps to bring out effectively the outward beauty of proletarian heroes and the sublime spiritual realm of communism. For example, the first half of Scene Two is given to the celebration by the armymen and civilians of the formation of the women's company. To illustrate the brilliant idea, "Without a people's army the people have nothing," the ballet artists took great pains in working out a décor for the Party representative Hung Chang-ching and the red detachment of women under his lead, rejecting the practice of using noisy colours to create an atmosphere that overshadows the portrayal of the principal hero.

True, much attention is paid to the very prosperous atmosphere in the décor for the revolutionary base area. But when Hung Chang-ching and the fighters of the women's company stride onto the stage, the colours of the scenery, lights and costumes quickly arrange themselves to set off the hero and the army under his lead. The blue sky and white clouds set off the company's bright red battle flag. The peasants' attractive festival clothes set off Hung Chang-ching's and his fighters' plain silver-grey uniforms, the distinct red stars on their army caps, their red collar tabs and red arm-bands — "a red star on our army caps, two red flags of the revolution on our collars," symbols of their loyalty to Chairman Mao's revolutionary line. Again, in Scene Four in which the armymen and

civilians celebrate together, costumes in intermediate colours were designed for the peasants to set off the splendid beauty of Hung Chang-ching, Wu Ching-hua and other heroic people's fighters.

In designing the costumes naturalistic representation of everyday attire is rejected, just as any attempt to deviate from life or actual historical circumstances based on an art-for-art's sake formalism is dismissed. Both tendencies distort the images of the labouring masses. The women's company, for instance, is a revolutionary force composed of the daughters of peasants and workers who have been cruelly exploited and oppressed by landlords and capitalists for generations. The ballet deals with a difficult period when the enemy was superior in strength and numbers. So the silver-grey uniforms they wear are full of patches. But these patches are put on neatly and properly, not in any shabby manner.

By combining revolutionary realism with revolutionary romanticism, the stage art, proceeding from a clear-cut, strong class love and hatred, eulogises heroes and lays bare the ugly features of the negative characters. In Scene Five when Hung Chang-ching passes out after being wounded while covering the retreat of his comrades-in-arms, clouds begin to gather in the background, accentuated by the rumble of distant thunder. Then when the Tyrant of the South and his bandit soldiers move up to Hung Chang-ching, the latter pushes them aside with an indignant sweep of the arms and looks at the Tyrant with cold fury. At this point flashes of lightning and peals of thunder bring to the fore the image of the hero towering over his enemies, at the same time symbolising the power that will destroy the old world, the coming fierce storm of revolution.

The success of the first revolutionary modern ballet in our country is a great victory for Chairman Mao's proletarian revolutionary line in literature and art, an outstanding achievement made under the meticulous care of Comrade Chiang Ching. The *Red Detachment of Women* opens a brand-new road for more and better Chinese ballets. □