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CRITICIZE “WATER MARGIN”

Introduction

The criticism of the novel *Water Margin*, launched by Mao in August 1975, was prompted by increasing pressure coming from the Right to liquidate the class struggle in the name of preparing for war. If China were to survive an attack or invasion, they reasoned, then it must achieve order, and the biggest obstacle to this was the continuing struggle of the masses. It was a race with time to bolster up its economy and defenses, and these movements had to be cooled out, so they claimed.

Necessary compromises with various reactionary powers, especially in the West, were seized upon by the Right in order to foster a conciliatory and ultimately capitulationist attitude toward imperialism, depending on it for economic and military assistance while allowing its cultural influences to penetrate unchecked. This was not a strategy for any sort of defense; it was an invitation to disaster, a recipe for capitulating to an external enemy much stronger in conventional terms. For once you detach yourself from the masses, you wind up attacking them and going over to the camp of the enemy. China's salvation, Mao insisted, lay in mobilizing the masses and pushing revolution forward, exactly what had carried her through the Japanese invasion, the assaults by Chiang Kai-shek, and the American and Soviet threats. Pushing the economy forward and improving weaponry could only be carried out on that basis, but China could never hope to attain parity, much less superiority, in these areas. This, however, was not the cutting edge of whether China would win or lose when war broke out.

The leading figure of the *Water Margin* was a character who symbolized people like Chou En-lai and Teng Hsiao-ping. He was a revolutionary only in name who had sneaked into the ranks of the peasant rebels, equivocating, holding back their struggle, and finally delivering them over to the emperor after having put up a show of resistance. Mao was instructing people to be on their guard for such types and to watch for them to jump out at any minute.