

The Nannao Brigade Rejects Apriorism

by Li Suo-shou*

This article describes how members of the Nannao Brigade of the Tachai People's Commune in Shansi Province study Chairman Mao's philosophical works in the course of criticizing revisionism and rectifying the style of work and how, through their own experience, they rejected apriorism and the "theory of geniuses" advocated by Liu Shao-chi and other political swindlers. This has helped to emancipate their minds and brought about a vigorous development in both revolution and production. — Ed.

PERCHED on a high mountain ridge 1,100 metres above sea level, Nannao was notorious for its poor, barren soil before liberation. Led by the Party after the liberation, we former poor and lower-middle peasants took our destiny into our own hands. Production went up and our livelihood improved. Since the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution began, in particular, great changes have come to our village.

Our per-mu grain yield rose from 180 jin to 933 jin in the five years from 1966 to 1971. Though we have only some 300 people in the 60-odd families, the grain delivered and sold to the state in 1971 amounted to nearly 1,000 jin per person. Our brigade has 120,000 jin of grain reserves, enough for everyone to eat for a whole year. Though there was a bad drought in 1972, we overcame its effects and had another fairly good harvest.

These last few years, we have cut many terraced fields on the hills, completed a number of water conservancy works, built a road that winds up the mountain, put up high-tension transmission lines and laid tap water pipes. As production soared, life has improved steadily. We now have enough and some to spare — 90 per cent of the households have money in the bank.

How did all this happen? Was it because some "geniuses" suddenly showed up in our village? Of course not. It is because we Nannao poor and lower-middle peasants, guided by Chairman Mao's revolutionary line, are now writing our own history. Studying Chairman Mao's philosophical works to criticize the apriorism and "theory of geniuses" advertised by Liu Shao-chi and other political swindlers has helped liberate our minds and thus gave a big fillip to Nannao's revolution and production.

Intelligence and Ability Come From Practice

To usurp Party leadership and seize state power and restore capitalism, Liu Shao-chi and other political

swindlers spread idealist apriorism, asserting that some people were born "geniuses" and should dictate to the world, while others were born "simpletons" who could only be beasts of burden.

Chairman Mao has taught us: "They [correct ideas] come from social practice, and from it alone; they come from three kinds of social practice, the struggle for production, the class struggle and scientific experiment." "Whoever wants to know a thing has no way of doing so except by coming into contact with it, that is, by living (practising) in its environment."

The changes which have taken place in our village in the last few years fully show that practice helps people increase their ability and intelligence, whereas without practice, the result will be just the opposite.

Take building the road up the mountain. Communications in Nannao were so poor that it did not even have a road wide enough for a horse cart to pass through. For generations, delivering manure to the fields or getting the grain home depended on men or mules. In 1967, we decided to build a road to facilitate work. The class enemies sneered: "There has never been such a road in Nannao, and there never will be!"

The brigade's Party branch organized its members and the masses to study over and over again Chairman Mao's *On Practice, Where Do Correct Ideas Come From?* and other philosophical works and started a revolutionary criticism campaign. The commune members declared: "What we can't do we'll learn by doing; we'll train blacksmiths and masons through work."

We did the survey work for a road and organized a road-building team of 20. Party member Wang Hutou volunteered to learn smithy work. Overcoming many difficulties, he eventually learnt to repair picks, hoes and chisels. Later, when transmission lines were put up and new dwellings dug, he learnt masonry and carpentry along with some knowledge of electricity. Inspired by his example and under his coaching, over a dozen other commune members learnt the skills of the blacksmith, mason and carpenter. When someone called him a "clever man," Wang said: "I'm not. I learnt only because there is Mao Tsetung Thought to guide me, the masses to support me and by learning on the job." His experience shows that so long as one is adept at learning through practice, he will be able to do what he could not do.

"Cleverness" is also relative. Man's intelligence will develop continuously through practice. Take road-

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Cadres and members of the Nannao Brigade terracing a field.

building and blasting, for instance. At first, we would drill a vertical hole in the rocks and put in gunpowder to blast them. After doing this many times, we improved, and drilled horizontally into the cracks in the rocks and changed to using TNT. This not only saved labour and powder but was safer and more effective. Carrying out the principle of **“practice, knowledge, again practice, and again knowledge,”** we became quite “clever” and our ability to subdue nature increased. After some 20 days of hard work, we cut a 2.5-kilometre road on the mountain-sides. Now even trucks can drive straight into the village.

This incident is itself a repudiation of the apriorism advocated by Liu Shao-chi and other political swindlers, a blow to the class enemies and an education and inspiration to the cadres and masses.

The Masses Are the Real Heroes

Chairman Mao has said: **“The people, and the people alone, are the motive force in the making of world history.”** Liu Shao-chi and other political swindlers, on the other hand, claimed that a few “heroes,” and not the people, are the makers of history. This is nothing but historical idealism.

We Nannao peasants have our answer to this question. It is the people here who till the fields and build the roads and houses and put up the transmission lines. Without the masses, there would be no Nannao today.

Fighting drought is another case in point. The worst drought in a century hit us last year; there was not one good rain from the skies the year through. What should we have done? We reviewed Chairman Mao’s injunction to **“be prepared against war, be pre-**

pared against natural disasters, and do everything for the people.” Under the leadership of the Party branch, all of us worked hard, relying on our own efforts. In less than three months, we completed an irrigation station and two water-detention basins, sank wells and cut a labyrinth of ditches and channels to bring mountain water to the parched fields.

The people working and fighting in the forefront of revolution and production have the richest experience. Just as Chairman Mao has said, **“In a sense, the fighters with the most practical experience are the wisest and the most capable.”**

Before, we had to carry drinking water from 2.5 kilometres away. In 1970, our village started getting running water from the 2,000 metres of pipelines we laid. Even so, they were no match for the extra big drought last year. The water table dropped so low that little water could be drawn up from the river and the taps gave only a trickle. We cadres talked it over and decided to dig a pond and lead what water there was in the river into it to be pumped up from there. After a day of work, 19-year-old Li Tsun-yin, the electrician in charge of the pumps, came up with an idea. He said: “What’s the use of a pond if the whole river dries up? Moreover, the river water is not good for drinking. I think we should dig a deep well, and that’ll give us clean water from underground.” Both cadres and masses voted for this idea. Everybody worked with enthusiasm, and it was ready in four days. This incident provided us cadres with much food for thought.

“The Other Half”

Criticism of idealist apriorism was also a big help to emancipating the minds of the women, “the other half,” so to speak. Through it, they got rid of their inferiority complex and began to chuck out old traditions and customs. They started thinking and doing things they would not have dared to before, and challenged the men in every kind of work. Some learnt to plough and sow, others who used to get scared whenever they saw the men getting ready to blast the rocks, are now not only expert dynamiters themselves but even make the dynamite.

One episode illustrates the extent of the emancipation of their minds. A rocky hill used to bar our way out of the village, but nobody ever thought it could be

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removed. After criticizing idealist apriorism last year, the cadres and members reasoned that since "slaves are the makers of history," surely we peasants of today can remove that hill. It was the women who first volunteered. All winter 40 of them drilled the rocks, blasted them out, carried the debris away and brought in fresh earth. By spring, they had levelled the hilltop into 18 *mu* of fertile cropland.

Cadres Change Working Style

Revolutionary mass criticism, which swept away traces of the "theory of geniuses" in the minds of the brigade's cadres, brought changes in their work style.

As Nannao constantly changed for the better, some cadres, including myself, found ourselves getting rather smug. We began to think how smart we were and took all the credit for improvements in the village. We took less part in collective productive labour, devoted less time to our work, and did not follow the mass line as much as before.

While criticizing apriorism, we studied Chairman Mao's teachings to be modest and prudent and mobilized all Party members and poor and lower-middle peasants to help us overcome our complacency. The result was that the idea that the masses are the real heroes took root, and we seriously followed the mass line, which helped to bring about closer cadre-masses relations and made us take part in labour with greater readiness.

Through our practice, we came to realize that whether rural cadres at the grass roots actively take part in collective productive labour or not is not merely a question of the amount of work one does; more important, it is a question of sticking to a materialist line or taking up an idealist one. Once a cadre becomes divorced from labour, he will become divorced from reality and the masses and go against Chairman Mao's revolutionary line. He will do things which the masses do not want and, in production work, is prone to issue orders that are wide of the mark. On the other hand, regular participation in labour enables him to keep in constant touch with the masses and keep his fingers on the pulse of things; only thus can he truly become one with the masses.

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