The Tasks of Worker, Peasant and Soldier Writers

by CHOU YANG

Following are excerpts of a speech made by Chou Yang at the All-China Conference of Young Activists in Spare-Time Creative Writing held in Peking towards the end of 1965. Chou Yang is a Deputy Director of the Propaganda Department of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China. An English translation of the full text of this 23,000-word speech, originally entitled "Raise High the Red Banner of Mao Tse-tung's Thinking, Be Fighters on the Literary Front Who Can Labour as Well as Write," appears in the monthly magazine CHINESE LITERATURE, No. 3, 1966. — Ed.

THIS literary conference differs from all previous ones in that the participants are a new contingent on our literary front. You come from the masses of workers, peasants and soldiers. You can work as well as write; when you take up guns you are fighters, and when you take up pens you are fighters too. You are a production force, a combat force, and also a creative force. The appearance of such a force on our literary front is an event of unprecedented importance in the history of our literature.

You are new people who have grown up in the age of socialism, educated by the Party and the thinking of Mao Tse-tung, steeled in the class struggles and production struggles of the masses. The aim of your writing is clear: You write for the workers, peasants and soldiers, for the revolution. With strong class feeling you describe in your writing the new life, new struggles and new men and women of the working class, the peasantry and the army. To you, writing is a kind of battle, a battle to win ideological positions.

Some of your works, both as regards ideological content and artistic form, have reached a fairly high standard achieved by few of our writers in the past. Of course, your achievement is not confined to your writings. What is even more important is that by conducting spare-time cultural activities on a large scale among the masses in factories, villages and army units, by telling revolutionary stories, singing new songs, putting on new plays, and fighting the backward old culture to serve contemporary politics and production, you have really popularized socialist art and literature among the workers, peasants and soldiers, and occupied strategic positions among them. In this way you have really turned our art and literature into a strong fighting front with workers, peasants and soldiers participating in it. You have infused fresh blood and revolutionary spirit into our writing and into the cultural life of China's millions. This is a fresh victory on the literary and art front, a victory for the socialist cultural revolution, a victory for Mao Tse-tung's line on art and literature.

There are various kinds of art and literature in the world today, progressive and reactionary. The art and literature which serve imperialism and capitalism are reactionary, decadent and moribund, a poison to corrupt men's minds. Modern revisionist art and literature have degenerated to the point where they ape the bourgeois art and literature of the West. While still posing as socialist, in fact they oppose socialism and the people, and are a turncoat art and literature. They slander the revolution, revolutionary wars and proletarian dictatorship, preach bourgeois humanism, pacifism, fear of nuclear weapons and the philosophy of "survival at any price," along with all kinds of decadent bourgeois ideas and the shameless bourgeois way of life. Art and literature of this sort have become instruments for the imperialists to engage in ideological subversion in the socialist countries, to prepare the way for the restoration of capitalism.

Our art and literature are diametrically opposed to those of imperialism and revisionism. They inspire our people to go forward all the time, to carry on the revolution continuously. They arm the people with socialist and communist ideas, with ideas of the class struggle and the people's war, and with proletarian internationalism. As Comrade Mao Tse-tung once said, they are "powerful weapons for uniting and educating the people and for attacking and destroying the enemy."

The current domestic and international situation is very favourable. Our workers in art and literature should raise even higher the red banner of Mao Tsetung's thinking and take an active part in the three great revolutionary movements of class struggle, the struggle for production and scientific experiment. They should strive to integrate themselves with the workers, peasants and soldiers, to become both revolutionaries and workers, using the weapon of art and literature to oppose resolutely imperialism and revisionism, propagate socialism and oppose capitalism. Let our art and literature serve still better the workers, peasants and soldiers, the socialist revolution and socialist construction, and the revolutionary struggle of the peoples of the world.

The Struggle on the Literary and Art Front, And the New Situation in the Cultural Revolution

The fundamental way for us to ensure that our art and literature fulfil their task well is by firmly implementing the line on art and literature laid down by the Central Committee of the Party and Comrade Mao Tse-tung.

Should art and literature serve the workers, peasants and soldiers, or the bourgeoisie and other exploiting classes? Should they serve socialism or capitalism? Should they be guided by Marxism-Leninism and Mao Tse-tung's thinking or by modern revisionist ideas? This is the struggle on the literary and art front between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie, between the road of socialism and the road of capitalism.

As early as 1940, in On New Democracy, Comrade Mao Tse-tung said that our culture "should serve the toiling masses of workers and peasants who make up more than 90 per cent of the nation's population, and should gradually become their very own." In 1942, in his Talks at the Yenan Forum on Literature and Art, he further pointed out that art and literature should serve the workers, peasants and soldiers, and that the key to the solving of this problem lay in writers and artists integrating themselves with the workers, peasants and soldiers. Comrade Mao Tse-tung applied Marxism-Leninism to the reality of the revolutionary cultural movement in China, giving for the first time in the history of the proletarian revolution the most comprehensive, thoroughgoing and correct programme for the proletarian cultural revolution and the line for proletarian revolutionary art and literature. After the liberation, Comrade Mao Tse-tung put forward the directives, "Let a hundred flowers blossom; weed through the old to let the new emerge;" "Let a hundred flowers blossom, a hundred schools of thought contend," and proposed the creative method of combining revolutionary realism with revolutionary romanticism. In On the Correct Handling of Contradictions Among the People and Speech at the National Conference on Propaganda Work of the Chinese Communist Party he gave detailed and penetrating expositions of the directive "Let a hundred flowers blossom, a hundred schools of thought contend" in the light of the new situation and tasks in the period of socialism.

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Many years of experience have proved that when we fully and correctly carry out Mao Tse-tung's line on art and literature, our work is successful. When we go against this line, our work suffers setbacks.

If the policy of letting a hundred flowers blossom and a hundred schools of thought contend is divorced from serving the workers, peasants and soldiers and from serving socialism, our art and literature will take the road of revisionism and bourgeois liberalism. On the other hand, if we try to serve the workers, peasants and soldiers and the cause of socialism without adopting this directive and the democratic method of the mass line, our art and literature will head towards dogmatism and mental stagnancy. Mao Tse-tung's line on art and literature is against both revisionism and dogmatism.

Comrade Mao Tse-tung's thinking on art and literature is extremely rich in content. The core of it is: Art and literature must serve the workers, peasants and soldiers; writers and artists must integrate themselves with the masses.

On the literary and art front, the difference between the working class and the bourgeoisie, the difference between socialism and capitalism and the difference between Marxism-Leninism and revisionism centre on this issue: Whether or not to serve the workers, peasants and soldiers and to merge with them.

Mao Tse-tung's line on art and literature was born in the midst of struggles and opened a path for itself amidst struggles.

The Talks at the Yenan Forum on Literature and Art was the product of a great debate. At the same time it summed up the struggle against various current trends to oppose the workers, peasants and soldiers and to split away from them. It also gave a scientific summary of the basic experiences of the literary and art movement since the May Fourth Movement of 1919.

After the establishment of the People's Republic of China, literary and art workers in our country have had five great debates and criticisms in connection with whether we should carry out the proletarian line or bourgeois line in literature and art.

There are two main reasons for the frequency and fierceness of these struggles on the literary and art front. In the first place, they are an objective reflection of the domestic and international class struggle, which is inevitable. Art and literature are extremely sensitive organs of the class struggle. It is bound to find reflection in them, and indeed is often first reflected here. Art and literature are like antennae which instantly sense each movement by any class. Every time the situation in the class struggle changes, every time the working class meets with difficulties, every time the working class carries out self-criticism, the bourgeoisie will seize the chance to attack. And often the attack is first launched in the literary and art field, since this is the most sensitive field and the weakest link. In the second place, the bourgeoisie still

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possesses certain advantages in the literary and art field; so they believe that they are still powerful enough to challenge the working class there. The great majority of intellectuals, including intellectuals who are Party members, have had a bourgeois education. They retain a good deal of what belongs to the bourgeoisie in their world outlook and literary and art outlook. When people do literary and art work, they can easily be contaminated by bourgeois ideas, by bourgeois concepts of fame and profit, especially if they cut themselves off from the workers, peasants and soldiers, from manual labour, from the actual struggle. Then it is even easier for them to be influenced by bourgeois ideas, to become enslaved by these ideas or act as their spokesmen.

It is evident then that the struggle on the literary and art front is inevitable. Unless we wage this struggle, our art and literature, our artists and writers, are liable to degenerate politically. Our economic base is socialist, our political system is proletarian dictatorship. If art and literature, which are part of the ideological superstructure, propagate bourgeois or revisionist ideas instead of working-class, socialist ideas, far from helping to consolidate the socialist economic base and proletarian dictatorship they will help to undermine them, paving the way and preparing men's minds for the restoration of capitalism.

By waging the struggle continuously on the literary and art front, not only can we avert or minimize the danger of revisionism in our art and literature, we can also greatly speed up the development of socialist art and literature. Our proletarian art and literature advance in the course of struggle. Criticism and struggle clear the way for their development.

The Yenan Forum on Literature and Art ushered in a completely new era in our revolutionary art and literature. The recent reappraisal and struggle on the literary and art front may be considered as another large-scale rectification of art and literature since the Yenan Forum, a continuation of the rectification in Yenan under new historical conditions. A new high tide in our socialist cultural revolution has appeared. It has brought about and will continue to bring about great changes in all branches of art and literature, and we are now in the process of these changes.

First, art and literature are becoming transformed. This change has appeared primarily in the theatre, a front-line position. In 1961 and 1962 the feudal and bourgeois forces began their attack in the literary and art field by storming the theatre. The working class also began its counter-attack on the forces of feudalism and capitalism, to carry forward and deepen the socialist cultural revolution, by occupying the theatre. The production on a large scale of many revolutionary Peking operas on contemporary themes opened a new chapter in the cultural revolution. Operas like *The Red Lantern* and *Shachiapang*¹ have received a warm welcome from very large audiences. The drama festivals in all parts of the country have also produced a conproves that so long as we persist in the direction of serving the workers, peasants and soldiers, and the cause of socialism, so long as we have the courage to make bold innovations, the patience to carry out repeated experiments, the daring and ability to use new revolutionary content to change the old forms, we shall produce new forms as well as new content. This applies equally to traditional Chinese forms and to foreign forms. Thus we have put on The Red Detachment of Women² as a ballet; The East Is Red,³ a pageant of the Chinese revolution in song and dance, a bold experiment which has proved successful; and a symphonic orchestra playing the music of Shachiapang. Similarly, Szechuan sculptors and folk artists, co-operating with the masses, have made, with deep class feeling, the extremely moving sculptured figures in Compound Where Rent Was Collected.⁴ These varied achievements prove that Comrade Mao Tsetung's line-weed through the old to let the new emerge; make the old serve the new, and foreign things serve China - is the most correct way to develop our new national socialist art and literature. We have already amassed very useful experience in this respect. All art forms loved by the people were created by our forbears with their heart's-blood. We must analyse them with discrimination, use and develop them creatively; they are certainly not to be cast lightly aside. Revolutionary ideas and a new content will bring about a change in different art forms, whether on the stage, in music and dancing, sculpture or literature. Is not our literature also undergoing changes? We have many innovations in those new folk-tales and short stories which describe the new people, new ideas and new morals in our country's socialist revolution and socialist construction. Both as regards ideological content and artistic technique, these have made striking improvements over previous works of the same genre and show distinctive new features.

siderable number of fine local operas. Experience

Next comes the change in the cultural life of China's hundreds of millions of workers and peasants. The new upsurge in industry and agriculture, the development of the movement for socialist education in our cities and countryside, and the deepening of the cultural revolution have given fresh impetus to the spare-time cultural activities of the workers and peasants, especially the latter. The main emphasis in all our cultural and educational work now is being directed to the villages. The centre of spare-time cultural activities in the countryside is the village club or cultural centre. Many of you at this conference are activists in those clubs. You have won cultural positions for socialism in villages, factories and mining districts all over the country. If not for these positions you took, our socialist cultural revolution could not have become imbued with a genuinely mass character. It is you who spread the new revolutionary culture, who propagate Mao Tse-tung's thinking, who serve as the undaunted vanguard in the socialist cultural revolution.

Another change is in the ranks of our literary and art workers. On the one hand, a new literary and art contingent has emerged from among the workers, peasants and soldiers, the new contingent of spare-time writers whom you represent. On the other hand, professional writers and artists are enthusiastically responding to the Party's call, eagerly going down in great numbers to live with the workers, peasants and soldiers in order to remould themselves. While joining in manual labour and the current struggles, they are taking revolutionary culture to our villages, factories and army units. A great change has taken place in their minds. Spare-time and professional writers and artists are striking deep roots among the workers and peasants, they are studying Comrade Mao Tse-tung's works and creatively applying his teachings. This means that a sound contingent of writers and artists who are genuine revolutionaries and manual workers at the same time is growing up.

Write First and Foremost About Socialism, Write First and Foremost About Heroic Characters

The reappraisals and struggles on the literary and art front have been concerned mainly with solving the problem of whether or not art and literature should serve the workers, peasants and soldiers and the cause of socialism. Once our direction is determined, the task of developing creative work should become one of primary importance.

In creative writing the problem is mainly what to write about and how to write. Our literature today should: first, write first and foremost about socialism; secondly, write first and foremost about heroic characters.

The transition from the democratic to the socialist revolution involves two historical stages, two different eras. During these two stages our revolutionary, proletarian art and literature have had certain common features but certain differences too. One common feature is that the art and literature in both periods were created to serve the workers, peasants and soldiers and revolutionary politics, guided by proletarian and communist ideology. The difference is that in the stage of the democratic revolution the main task of our art and literature was to propagate the national democratic revolution and oppose imperialism, feudalism and bureaucrat capitalism; while in the stage of the socialist revolution their main task is to propagate the socialist revolution and socialist construction, oppose capitalism, and at the same time together with the revolutionary people of the world to oppose imperialism and revisionism. Because the economic basis of our society and the world situation have changed, there must necessarily be changes in the tasks and content of our art and literature too. In the stage of democratic revolution, our aim was to establish the politics, economy and culture of new democracy; and although these contained socialist elements, which were the decisive ones, the politics, economy and culture as a whole belonged to new democracy and not to socialism. After 1949 the

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situation changed. The proletariat won political power over the whole country. After the three great socialist transformations⁵ our whole economic base became socialist, which meant that our entire culture must also become socialist to correspond to the economic base. This is a fundamental change. Since the completion of the democratic revolution, the main contradiction within the country has become that between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie, between the road of socialism and the road of capitalism. The main task of socialist art and literature is to oppose capitalism. True, they must also oppose imperialism and feudalism, and from the world viewpoint opposing imperialism is still a most important task, yet at home our main task is to oppose capitalism. For quite a long time a number of our writers and artists lacked a clear understanding of the change in our art and literature during these two different historical stages. Today, to propagate socialism and oppose capitalism, to uphold proletarian ideology and eradicate bourgeois ideology are the foremost tasks of our entire ideological, literary and art front.

Comrades, most of your writings deal with socialism, and your merit is that you are relatively familiar with it. To write about socialism is our glorious task. In this age of ours is there anything in the world more worth describing and praising than socialism? To write about socialism is our duty and our good fortune too.

According to the Marxist-Leninist viewpoint, the class struggle will persist throughout the entire socialist historical period until we finally reach communism. Comrade Mao Tse-tung has summed up new historical experience and profoundly developed this idea, pointing out that contradictions remain in socialist society after the basic completion of the socialist transformation of the ownership of the means of production; there are contradictions between the people and the people's enemies, contradictions among the people, as well as classes and class struggle. He has pointed out that the struggle between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie, the struggle between the socialist and capitalist roads, runs through this entire historical period until communism is achieved. This is a vitally important creative development of Marxism-Leninism.

Comrade Mao Tse-tung's concept that classes and class struggle exist in socialist society shows us the fundamental direction for writing about socialism. In the last few years more works about socialism have begun to appear, and their viewpoint is getting clearer. Since they describe the new men and new deeds in our socialist age, as well as the class struggle and struggle between the two roads in our socialist society, they are exercising a greater influence.

We should be daring enough to write about all sorts of contradictions and struggles in socialist society: the contradictions among the people, the class struggle, and the struggle between the two roads. If we do not write about these, we shall be going counter to the realities of our age, to Comrade Mao Tse-tung's view on the class

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struggle and the struggle between the two roads, and as a result we shall reach the dead-end of "theory of no conflict."

Our stress on writing about socialism does not mean that we oppose writing on historical themes. But works on today's socialism should have priority and be produced in the largest number. Of course, the democratic revolution and the people's struggles in the past are indispensable themes in our literature. There are still many subjects in the period of democratic revolution which can and should be written up. For instance, the great history of the people's wars in our country in the various stages of the revolution, the history of the struggles of our working class.

Whether or not we write about the progressive, heroic characters among our workers, peasants and soldiers affects the question of whether or not our literature is truly revolutionary and socialist, and whether or not our writers take a genuine proletarian stand. Whether or not we can create typical heroes of the working class and labouring people shows whether or not our socialist literature is mature. The literature of each class praises the ideal characters of that class. Even when we reach communism and classes no longer exist, we shall have to write about heroic characters. The literature of that time will undoubtedly continue to present progressive characters, to help people to continue impelling history forward.

The problem of writing about heroic characters today is an urgent practical problem. Who are our heroic characters today? They are men like Lei Feng and Wang Chieh, armed with Mao Tse-tung's thinking, completely loyal to the revolution, who fear neither hardships nor death; people like those of the Taching Oilfield and Tachai Brigade who struggle to transform the world in the spirit of the "Foolish Old Man Who Removed Mountains." Today such heroes are legion.

We should describe the deeds of advanced young people on different fronts and create splendid images of various types among them today as examples for other young people. As a whole our young people are undoubtedly the keenest, most dynamic section of the population; and today the main trend in our youth is even more progressive and revolutionary. They have a buoyant, vigorous spirit and are bubbling over with eagerness to serve the people. They have the enterprise to carry on the revolution continuously and the determination to struggle to the end against all enemies and all difficulties. A new communist generation is growing up. Our literature should truthfully depict this buoyant, vigorous spirit of our youth.

Of course, our literature must not write only about heroic characters, nor can we describe them in isolation; we should show them in the midst of conflicts and struggles. Heroes grow to their full stature in the midst of struggle, and only so can their noble qualities be revealed.

The main content of our literature is socialism and heroic characters. But the forms and styles of different works should vary. If we aim at achieving variety but deviate from the direction of serving the workers, peasants and soldiers and the cause of socialism, we will backslide and take the wrong, bourgeois path. Provided that we stick firmly to writing for the workers, peasants and soldiers, for socialism, the more variety there is in form and style the better. We should allow and encourage competition between different styles in the way of expression. This is what we mean by letting a hundred flowers bloom in socialist art and literature. Our writers should try to explore and create artistic forms, whether in oral or written literature, which the people like, and provided the people like them we must advocate and propagate them. The new revolutionary content demands new forms and new styles. When we have the correct political content and an attractive artistic form, our literature will be better able to educate and influence millions of people.

For a swift, sound development of our socialist literature, we must adopt the method of co-operation between the leadership, the writers and the masses. The leadership should point out the direction and assign tasks for the writers, giving them ideological help and advice in the course of their work. In this way politics is in command of literature, and the wisdom of the individual is combined with that of the collective, so that writing ceases to be simply the work of an individual and becomes a genuine part of the work of the Party, of the revolutionary work of the people. To carry out this method of co-operation between the leadership, the writer and the masses means having Party leadership and the mass line in writing.

Bringing Up a New Generation of Writers For Socialist Literature

Comrade Mao Tse-tung has repeatedly pointed out that our Party must pay great attention to bringing up and training worthy heirs to our proletarian revolutionary cause. He speaks of this as a long-term plan for our proletarian revolution, a plan for a century, ten centuries or a hundred centuries. The cause of proletarian art and literature also requires us to train and bring up those who will carry it on.

Special importance attaches to the problem of bringing up a new generation of workers in socialist art and literature. This is because:

First, these new artists and writers will succeed the older generation, but they will not take entirely the same road and may even have to take a fundamentally different road. We should inherit the revolutionary spirit of our many predecessors in revolutionary art and literature from the May Fourth Movement onwards. We should also respect and learn from the rich experience of the older generation of writers. But we cannot take it over wholesale; we must study and analyse it critically. You are living in a different age; you are living, working and fighting in the basic units of factories, rural communes and the army as new workers, peasants and soldiers of the socialist age; you have experience in productive labour and fighting. You have been brought up and educated from the very start by the Party and Mao Tse-tung's thinking. The great majority of you will never leave your work on the production front or in the basic units, but will continue to write and work at the same time, and this is fundamentally different from the older writers. So you will take a new road, one which makes you genuine revolutionaries and labourers, which will gradually lessen the difference between mental and manual labour and lead eventually to communism.

Secondly, this problem is important because the intellectuals, including those in the field of literature, art and science, are one of the chief targets of the imperialists and bourgeoisie, who are trying to win them away from the working class. In addition to attempting to overthrow the proletarian dictatorship by force, the class enemy is plotting hard to bring about a "peaceful evolution." This dastardly plot has already achieved results in the Soviet Union under the rule of the Khrushchov revisionist clique. Since the imperialists and the bourgeoisie have few illusions about our revolutionaries of the older generation, they have put their hope in our younger generation, especially in our young intellectuals. They hope you will change colour, hope that once you have knowledge you will despise the labouring people, cut yourselves off from them and learn bourgeois ways.

On the question of bringing up those who will carry on our proletarian revolutionary cause, there are two diametrically opposite lines: one is the Marxist-Leninist line which insists that writers and artists should become revolutionaries and manual labourers at the same time, so that our younger generation are able both to write and take part in productive labour, to gradually lessen the difference between manual and mental labour until finally it is eliminated and the way is prepared for the entry into communism. This method involves having politics in command, ideology in command. Another line is the modern revisionist one which makes writers and artists cut themselves off from the revolution and the masses and lead a soft life as a privileged élite, until finally they become hostile to the revolution and the people and the way is prepared for the restoration of capitalism. The method is the use of material incentives with fame and profit in command. This revisionist line can only result in changing many intellectuals, writers and artists into new bourgeois intellectuals, an élite who become a part of the social basis of revisionism. When the cart in front overturns, the cart behind should beware. We must guard against this danger.

We are living in an environment of sharp and complex class struggles at home and abroad; the struggle for victory on the ideological front between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie will not be settled for a very long time, not for several decades or even several centuries. So each of us must arm ourselves with Marxism-Leninism and Mao Tse-tung's thinking, take

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a firm proletarian stand, and always remain on the side of the workers, peasants and soldiers, struggling and advancing incessantly. We must be mentally prepared for a long-term struggle, be prepared to stand up to tests in the tempest of struggle.

Comrade Mao Tse-tung has listed five requisites for the new generation of proletarian revolutionaries. First, each must be a "true Marxist-Leninist," "a revolutionary working wholeheartedly for the great majority of people in China and in the world." He must also be able to unite with the great majority of people so that they will work with him, must have a democratic working style, be modest and able to criticize himself, etc. No matter what your occupation, you must first of all regard yourself as a revolutionary. In our case, we are literary and art workers but first of all revolutionaries. The relation between the two must never be reversed.

The fundamental way to ensure that our literary and art workers do not degenerate politically lies in not cutting ourselves off from the workers, peasants and soldiers, not cutting ourselves off from labour -- not just for the time being but for all time. The aim of our socialist cultural revolution is to make intellectuals who are at the same time labouring people, and workers and peasants who are at the same time intellectuals, to create the conditions for the gradual lessening of the difference between manual and mental labour until finally it is done away with altogether. Only then can we successfully build socialism and go on towards communism. We must therefore continue to carry out the system of cadres' participation in manual labour, and experiment further with the educational system of "part-work, part-study" and "part-farming, part-study." This is basic in constructing our country. Only in this way can we guarantee that our state will not change colour. Our young writers must always retain their revolutionary spirit, they must not lose their revolutionary colour. The most important way of ensuring this is by not cutting ourselves off from labour or from the workers, peasants and soldiers.

¹Two new Peking operas based on revolutionary struggles during the War of Resistance Against Japan. The original title for Shachiapang was Sparks Amid the Reeds. See P.R., No. 24, 1964.

² Based on a film of the same title. The story is about a women's detachment led by the Chinese Communist Party which fought against the despotic rule of a landlord. This ballet is a successful experiment in adapting a foreign art form to portray Chinese revolutionary struggles. See P.R., No. 6, 1965.

³ An epic portrayal of the modern revolutionary history of China. See *P.R.*, No. 41, 1964.

⁴See P.R., No. 49, 1965.

⁵ The socialist transformations of agriculture, handicraft, and capitalist industry and commerce, which were accomplished in 1956.

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