

A Fine Opera Upholding Mao Tse-tung's Thought

— Taking the Bandits' Stronghold

Worker, peasant and soldier audiences have high praise for a new Peking opera production on a modern revolutionary theme. This is *Taking the Bandits' Stronghold*, re-staged in Peking by the Revolutionary Peking Opera Cultural Troupe of Shanghai in the high tide of the great proletarian cultural revolution.

This is indeed a fine opera which, upholding Mao Tse-tung's thought, gives prominence to proletarian politics. It vividly depicts the fighting life and activities of the People's Liberation Army during the 1946-49 War of Liberation. It shows how that army, carrying out Chairman Mao's teachings, mobilized and relied on the masses in mopping up the Kuomintang bandits. Extolling the power of Chairman Mao's thinking on people's war, it gives splendid portrayals of P.L.A. heroes armed with Mao Tse-tung's thought. It shows the noble character of the P.L.A. dedicated heart and soul to the cause of the people.

In the winter of 1946, after hard fighting, the people's army in the northeast has won a brilliant victory. But gangs of Kuomintang bandits, after the *debacle* of defeat, hide themselves deep in the mountain forests, determined on further desperate resistance. Carrying out Chairman Mao's instructions "to arouse the masses, wipe out bandits . . . so as to make our areas secure, co-ordinate with the field armies and smash the Kuomintang attacks," a 36-man detachment of the P.L.A. is sent on an expedition to wipe out the "Hawk," a bandit leader, hiding in the snowbound forests on Tiger Mountain. On their way, reconnaissance platoon leader Yang Tzu-jung and his men meet hunter Chang who to escape the Kuomintang has taken refuge in the forest.

With his help and that of his daughter, Yang's platoon catches a bandit belonging to another gang. On him they find a secret map showing the location of the bandit gangs' liaison centres. Knowing that the "Hawk" wants this map, Yang volunteers to disguise himself as a bandit and, with the map as a bait, introduce himself into the Tiger Mountain lair which, because of its strong fortifications, had best be captured by ingenuity rather than by force alone.

Yang reaches Tiger Mountain with the map and, clever as he is courageous, wins the "Hawk's" confidence. In the meantime, the P.L.A. detachment goes into the very midst of the masses, helping them in their difficulties and, in other such practical ways, winning their support. In the snowy forest, it trains itself and organizes and trains a people's militia for the coming battle. Finally, when the bandits are enjoying a "feast of a hundred chickens," the detachment in skilful co-operation with Yang Tzu-jung, storms their stronghold and rounds up the whole gang.

The new theme and story structure clearly embody Chairman Mao's great strategic teaching that the revolutionary army loves the people, while the people support it and together they wage a people's war. The small detachment has been formed to catch the bandits but it is also a work team which organizes as well as does propaganda among the masses. In this revised version, the masses are no longer shown as waiting passively for liberation, but as masters in the struggle, the invincible support of the people's army.

The red thread of class struggle links the new theme and story structure. Seeing this struggle against

bandits from the viewpoint of class struggle the playwrights have grasped and presented its essential character. They stress the people's intense class hatred against the bandits. The second scene, showing the worker Li Yung-chi's defiance of the bandits, and the newly added third scene, showing the hunter's denunciation of them, both make it plain that the detachment will kindle the flame of class struggle in this isolated mountain area. The playwrights also emphasize that the "Hawk" is a political bandit, a typical example of collaboration between imperialism, the feudal forces and bureaucrat-capitalism. His maniac killing, burning and plundering foreshadow the imminent collapse of reactionary rule and are the last vicious thrusts of a class enemy that is unwilling to step off the stage of history. With a class viewpoint thus used to deepen the significance of the theme and perfect the dramatic structure, the new revision gains greatly in educational significance.

Politics the Commander, the Soul

Chairman Mao has taught us that politics is the commander, the soul. "Ideological education is the key link to be grasped in uniting the whole Party for great political struggles."

Proletarian politics was in command in writing this opera. Shao Chien-po, the detachment's leader is a military commander, but he always views things from a political angle and pays great attention to the ideological education of his detachment and the people. He takes the mission to wipe out the bandits as an important political task and constantly educates the masses and fighters in the Party's policies. When the detachment enters the ancient forest in pursuit of the bandits, he builds up their fighting morale with Chairman Mao's teachings. His advice to Yang, when the latter goes alone into the bandits' lair, is to be bold and prudent and boundlessly loyal to the Party and people.

With proletarian politics in command, the opera has a revolutionary soul and the positive characters

stand out naturally in bold relief. On its march, the detachment never forgets to serve the people wholeheartedly, to do propaganda among them, organize and arm them. A series of incidents—restoring production in the area, training in the snowy forest, pursuing the bandits, with the help of the local people, and so on—displays the high morale, courage and revolutionary optimism of each of its members.

The People Make History

Chairman Mao says: "The people, and the people alone, are the motive force in the making of world history."

The creators of *Taking the Bandits' Stronghold* have given the popular masses their rightful place as masters. The hunter Chang guides Yang and his platoon to snare the bandit and capture the map. The worker Li Yung-chi leads the local people up Tiger Mountain to co-operate with the detachment. Without the help and support of the popular masses, the detachment, no matter how brave and skilful, would have found it hard to operate in this snowy waste. On the other hand, with Chairman Mao's teachings ever in mind, the detachment serves the people wholeheartedly, whether it is chasing after the "Hawk" or Yang Tzu-jung saving the hunter's daughter, or Shao Chien-po organizing the people to restore production or the nurse caring for Aunt Li, all they do is for the people.

One of the notable achievements of this opera is the way it brings out the fact that the invincible strength of our army lies in its essential characteristic as a people's army which relies on and serves the people.

Heroes Armed With Mao Tse-tung's Thought

Chairman Mao has said: "These battalions of ours are wholly dedicated to the liberation of the people and work entirely in the people's interests."

The playwrights have given a successful portrayal of the hero Yang

Tzu-jung. He has shining qualities—he is brave and wise, resourceful, noble-minded, good at making decisions and with a high level of fighting skill. Yet he has nothing in common with the knight-errants of traditional Peking opera. His wisdom comes from his boundless loyalty to the Party, to the people and to the revolutionary cause, from his intense hatred of the reactionary ruling class. Born in a hired farm-labourer's family, the story of his life is a bitter one. When he hears the hunter's own life story of hardship and sorrow, he is roused immediately to burning anger against the bandits. Deep hatred of class oppression and class exploitation spurs him on to the road of revolution. The great thought of Mao Tse-tung is the spiritual source of his wisdom and boundless loyalty. His songs express his revolutionary sentiments:

A Communist responds instantly to the Party's call.

He should always choose the heaviest load.

I am determined to smash to bits the thousand years old iron chain,

And make the happy spring of the people last a thousand generations.

and

The Party gives me wisdom and courage so that hardships and dangers are as nothing.

and

In my heart is a rising sun which will hold at bay the bitter cold and melt the ice and snow.

This rising sun is the great thought of Mao Tse-tung.

Chairman Mao says: "The masses are the real heroes." In the play, Yang Tzu-jung is an outstanding representative of the masses. He carries out many difficult tasks with the help of the masses. When he goes alone into the bandits' lair he says it seems to him that "millions of class brothers are by my side." It is from this close unity with the masses that he draws confidence in being able to

outwit the villains on Tiger Mountain.

Discard the Old, Create the New

Chairman Mao has said: "What we demand is the unity of politics and art, the unity of content and form, the unity of revolutionary political content and the highest possible perfection of artistic form."

Taking the Bandits' Stronghold propagates the mighty idea of people's war and praises heroes armed with the great thought of Mao Tse-tung. The comrades of the Revolutionary Peking Opera Cultural Troupe of Shanghai have spared no effort in order to make the revolutionary content of the opera more explicit through the singing, dialogue, acting, acrobatics and dancing as well as the music and stage decor. To bring out the revolutionary sentiments and noble determination which animate the P.L.A. fighters, the composers have drawn on revolutionary songs and music for their melodies, while assimilating useful elements of traditional Peking opera music. This has introduced new features into the singing. They skilfully interweave the melody of *The East is Red* and the *March of the Chinese People's Liberation Army* to convey the fighters' boundless love for Chairman Mao and Mao Tse-tung's thought and to underline the men's revolutionary heroism. Skilfully based on army life, faithful in dramatic characterization and closely integrated with the plot, the movements of the ski dance and the leaps with widespread legs are finely realistic and majestic. The whirling acrobatics of the fighting in the last scene—the capture of the "Hawk"—has the flavour of traditional Peking opera which is here successfully adapted to show the heroism of the P.L.A. fighters and militiamen.

In a word, the comrades of the Shanghai troupe, holding aloft the great red banner of Mao Tse-tung's thought, have succeeded in both libretto and staging in giving us a fine example of Peking opera on a modern, revolutionary socialist theme.