

A Quotation From Chairman Mao Tsetung

In the world today all culture, all literature and art belong to definite classes and are geared to definite political lines. There is in fact no such thing as art for art's sake, art that stands above classes, art that is detached from or independent of politics.

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Revolutionary Mass Criticism

Comments on Stanislavsky's "System"

by the Shanghai Revolutionary Mass Criticism Writing Group

Stanislavsky was a reactionary bourgeois art "authority" in Russia. Scared to death by the revolution of 1905, he fled to Germany with his repertoire of plays which lauded the tsar and the aristocracy. He was applauded and given an audience by the German emperor Wilhelm II. When the Great October Revolution took place, Stanislavsky admitted that he had again found himself "in an impasse" and that "it was necessary to take a look . . . from a distance." He took his theatrical company to the United States where he was on terms of intimacy with the imperialists. He grieved over the lost "peaceful" days of tsarist times and cursed the revolution for having caused "war, hunger, world catastrophe, mutual misunderstanding and hate."

The period from the failure of the 1905 revolution to the upsurge of the October Revolution was a period of reaction in Russian politics. To quench the flames of the proletarian revolution, the tsarist government mobilized all the forces of reaction and resorted to the counter-revolutionary dual tactics of using political and cultural repression and deception alternately against the revolutionary people. It was precisely during this reactionary historical period that the theory of the theatre which Stanislavsky painstakingly worked out — that is, Stanislavsky's "system" — took shape. This clearly proves that it was a product of the tsarist government's reactionary policy of using culture to narcotize the people.

The core of the "system," in Stanislavsky's own words, is "self." According to him, all the obscurantism which he advocated, such as the "ruling idea" of a play, "through-action," "the germs of all the human vices and virtues" and "living human elements," reposed in the "innermost I."

For a long time, this bourgeois theatrical "system," disguised as socialist theatrical theory, was used by Khrushchov, Liu Shao-chi and company as a tool to counter Marxism-Leninism and restore capitalism. From the Soviet Union to China, this "system" held sway over theatrical and cinema circles. Directors and actors read Stanislavsky as a must, and his "system" was regarded as a virtual "Bible" for art. Chou Yang, Liu Shao-chi's agent in art and literary circles, howled: "Stanislavsky's 'system' is the only system in the world history of the theatre. It must not be discredited, nor can it be discredited."

Is this so? Seen in its true light, the "system" only proves to be a paper tiger.

Should We Proceed From the Workers, Peasants And Soldiers, or From "Self"?

The fundamental difference between the proletarian and the bourgeois concept of literature and art lies in whether to extol the workers, peasants and soldiers or to extol the bourgeoisie.

Stanislavsky said: "No matter what role an actor plays, he should always act out of himself"; "you must get it firmly into your head: The way to art is in yourself and only in yourself"; "play yourself all your life." Be it "himself" or "yourself," it refers to the inner being of the exploiting classes represented by Stanislavsky. His is a downright anti-Marxist concept which praises the bourgeoisie.

In class society, there is no individual in the abstract or above classes. Nor is there literature and art in the abstract or above classes. Let us trace the history

of his "performances" and we will see what "self" Stanislavsky proceeded from and played "all his life."

During the 51 years between 1877 and 1928, he played 106 roles, all of them tsarist generals, aristocrats, bourgeois elements or certain strata of townspeople. During the 57 years between 1881 and 1938, he directed 85 plays, the overwhelming majority of which were bourgeois "classics." Stanislavsky's so-called "acting out of himself" meant proceeding from the political interests and the artistic requirements of the bourgeoisie. His so-called playing "self" meant playing and extolling the bourgeois "self." The stage theory based on this stage practice was bound to be replete with the characteristics of the life, personality and world outlook of the bourgeoisie, which are alien to the revolutionary theatre of the proletariat.

Can we proceed from the "self" of bourgeois intellectuals to portray the workers, peasants and soldiers? No. All the images of the workers, peasants and soldiers in proletarian art, such as Li Yu-ho in the model revolutionary Peking opera *The Red Lantern* and Yang Tzu-jung in the model revolutionary Peking opera *Taking the Bandits' Stronghold*, are those of heroes and outstanding representatives of the proletariat. The excellent qualities they display are "on a higher plane, more intense, more concentrated, more typical, nearer the ideal, and therefore more universal than actual everyday life." The process by which the actors attempt to convey these art images is one in which the actors understand, study and extol these heroic images and remould their own world outlook. Without exception, even actors of worker, peasant or soldier origin must be re-educated. To stress that we should proceed from "self" to portray the workers, peasants and soldiers will only distort the revolutionary struggles of the workers, peasants and soldiers and their heroic mental outlook with the unbridled "self expression" of the bourgeoisie and petty bourgeoisie. Are there works of literature and art which proceed from the "self" of the bourgeoisie to portray the workers, peasants and soldiers? Yes, who has not seen the plays and films produced under the rule of the Soviet revisionist renegade clique? In them the workers, peasants and soldiers are debased to an unbearable extent: some are nothing but cowards, some only think of raising a family, some are mixed up with white bandit officers, and some have still uglier stories... they have none of the qualities of the workers, peasants and soldiers. All are obviously a shameless exposure by the Soviet revisionist renegades of their own "selves"!

Can this theory of proceeding from "self" be used in acting bourgeois parts or other negative roles? It won't do for these either. From the proletarian point of view, villains like the bandit ringleader, Mountain Hawk, in the Peking opera *Taking the Bandits' Stronghold*, and Hatoyama, chief of the Japanese military police, in *The Red Lantern*, can only be acted from the standpoint of the workers, peasants and soldiers, i.e., portrayed with their own class hatred to relentlessly expose and criticize the ugly, cruel, insidious and reac-

tionary class nature of these reactionaries, in order to make the brilliant images of the proletarian heroes stand out in bold relief. If one acts from Stanislavsky's bourgeois "self," then monsters of all kinds, which are to be overthrown and cast away in real life, will be made into major artistic parts, and they will be allowed to exercise arrogant dictatorship over the workers, peasants and soldiers on the stage. Is there any such kind of drama? Yes, there is. The schools of the "art of experience" and "art of representation" of the 19th century and the "avant garde," "modernism," etc., in the imperialist and modern revisionist countries today are such rubbish. In plain language, it means letting monsters and freaks of all descriptions and bandits and rascals play themselves. Many poisonous films appeared in China around 1962 under the domination of Liu Shao-chi's counter-revolutionary revisionist line and with the support and trickery of Peng Chen, Lu Ting-yi, Chou Yang, Hsia Yen, Tien Han and other counter-revolutionaries. In some of these films, counter-revolutionaries, landlords and bourgeois elements were played by real counter-revolutionaries, landlords and bourgeois elements. These bad elements were given many close-ups of an extremely reactionary, ugly and vulgar nature. They were given a free rein to insolently dominate the screen with their reactionary and corrupt "self."

In short, no matter what part revolutionary art workers play, positive roles of workers, peasants and soldiers or negative roles, they must proceed from the revolutionary interests and revolutionary practice of the workers, peasants and soldiers. In the course of integrating themselves with the workers, peasants and soldiers, and of being re-educated by them, the revolutionary art workers must distinguish what in their own minds belongs to bourgeois thinking and feelings from that which reflects the life, thinking and feelings of the workers, peasants and soldiers. They must constantly overcome the bourgeois self-interest and foster proletarian devotion to public interest. Only in this way can they really portray and create revolutionary images in art which can "help the masses to propel history forward."

Stanislavsky's theory of "acting out of himself" is of the same cloth as the notorious theory of "projecting one's self" put forward by Hu Feng, a counter-revolutionary ferreted out from literary and art circles in China over ten years ago. Taking "I" as all embracing and the centre of all and doing whatever "I" like — this is the utterly egoistical purpose of life of the bourgeoisie and all other exploiting classes. Imagination that proceeds from "self" means going in for personal gain and advancing at the expense of others; advocacy of "human love" out of "self" means subjecting the working people in their hundreds of millions for ever to the miserable life of cold and hunger; to "embrace the world" from "self" is a synonym for imperialist fascist acts of aggression. The reactionary literary and art slogan of proceeding from "self" put forward by Stanislavsky epitomized the decadent bourgeois individual-

ism that the landlord class and the bourgeoisie used in literature and art to corrupt the masses so as to try to pump some life into the dying capitalist society. Stanislavsky fanatically tried to change the world by proceeding from "self" in the theatre. Was it not the dark kingdom full of exploitation, plunder and aggression that he sought after and defended?

In 1940, criticizing the comprador "men of letters" of the European-American school represented by Hu Shih, Chairman Mao has taught us: **"The bourgeois die-hards are as hopelessly wrong on the question of culture as on that of political power," "their starting point is bourgeois despotism, which in culture becomes the cultural despotism of the bourgeoisie" and "they do not want the workers and the peasants to hold up their heads politically or culturally."** After the victory of the October Revolution, Stanislavsky went all out to oppose presentation on the stage of the struggle and life of the workers, peasants and soldiers. He slanderously said that the workers, peasants and soldiers were more interested "in seeing how other people live, in seeing a more beautiful life," that is, the rotten life of lords and ladies and their pampered sons and daughters which he presented on stage. The reactionary cultural despotism of the bourgeoisie is intended to make legitimate and eternal on the stage the "beautiful life" of the overthrown bourgeoisie, to prevent the workers, peasants and soldiers from holding up their heads politically and culturally, and to use the stage for a counter-revolutionary political come-back.

Chairman Mao has pointed out: **"All our literature and art are for the masses of the people, and in the first place for the workers, peasants and soldiers; they are created for the workers, peasants and soldiers and are for their use."** Literary and art workers must completely reject the reactionary literary and artistic viewpoint of proceeding from "self." Only by starting from the needs of the workers, peasants and soldiers and by integrating with them, can literary and art workers create works that are really for them and are for their use.

The model revolutionary theatrical works, which shine brilliantly and are created under the guidance of Chairman Mao's proletarian revolutionary line, forcefully present, depict and praise the lofty heroes of the workers, peasants and soldiers. They are a sharp criticism of the reactionary theory of proceeding from "self." The model revolutionary theatrical works are sung everywhere in China, which has a quarter of the world population. Like evergreen pines, the images of the revolutionary heroes have taken deep root among the revolutionary masses in their hundreds of millions and are inspiring their revolutionary fighting will.

Theory of Classes or "Theory of Germs"?

Nothing is more hypocritical than the efforts of the bourgeoisie to attribute their rotten world outlook to "mankind." Stanislavsky's theory of proceeding from "self" is built on this kind of hypocritical theoretical foundation.

Why should he proceed from "self"? He said: Everybody's "soul" originally has "the germs of all the human vices and virtues." Therefore, the actor's "ruling idea" is to find in the character he plays "the germs" which are kindred to his own soul and "to cultivate and develop these germs."

The "theory of germs" is the bourgeois theory of human nature. It sets up a show to rival the Marxist-Leninist theory on classes.

Marxism-Leninism holds that class existence and class struggle are the source for all phenomena in class society. The interests of the proletariat conform to the trend of historical development and to the fundamental interests of the working masses. Therefore, the proletariat is fearless and openly announces that its ideology has a class character and has Party spirit. On the other hand, the interests of the bourgeoisie run counter to the trend of history and are diametrically opposed to the interests of the revolutionary people. Hence they always try to cover up the class essence of their own ideology which they disguise as something transcending classes, something that belongs to "mankind," to the "entire people," so as to deceive the masses and retain their ideological and cultural positions for ever.

Seen in its true light, what "the germs of all the human vices and virtues" means is that all exploiting classes have on the surface the "germs" of humanity, justice and virtue on the one hand, and the inherent "germs" of chasing profits and behaving like thieves and prostitutes on the other hand. They keep both kinds of goods in stock and find a use for each. Aren't actors turned into hypocrites and double-dealers whose words and deeds differ if they "cultivate and develop" these two kinds of "germs" which are to be used alternately and in "organic co-ordination"? A well-known saying of Stanislavsky's that has spread its poison widely and which he energetically publicized runs: "Love art in yourself, and not yourself in art." This is the best characterization of the philosophy of life of such hypocrites. "Love art in yourself" means to love the art that one uses as capital to obtain fame and to become an expert. In essence, it means to "love oneself." "Love not yourself in art" is no more than using "art for art's sake" as a cover-up to gain more capital to become famous and an expert. This is a subtle application to real life of his double-dealing "theory of germs." The bourgeois advocates of the theory of human nature, represented by Stanislavsky, hold that everybody is born with a dual nature of "human vices and virtues"; to say otherwise, they assert, runs counter to "human nature."

The model revolutionary theatrical works which Comrade Chiang Ching led the revolutionary literary and art workers in creating are the most effective criticism, through vivid imagery, of "the theory of human nature" which pretends to transcend classes. The scene "Hatoyama (chief of the Japanese military police) Is Defied" in *The Red Lantern*, a model revolutionary Peking opera, successfully reflects through artistic ima-

gery the struggle between the two world outlooks of the two classes. Hatoyama sings that "the loftiest belief" is "for me," and "each for himself" in a vain effort to tempt Li Yu-ho with the bourgeois "secret of life." But, to Communist Li Yu-ho, who works heart and soul for the public interest and devotes his life to the revolution, that is "too difficult for someone like me to understand." Confronted by the proletarian hero Li Yu-ho, "the loftiest belief" that Hatoyama brings up utterly fails. This also announces the dismal failure of the "ruling idea" on the stage touted by Stanislavsky. The reason for this is very simple: Bourgeois "nature" and "germs" can never be found in the proletariat, and the fine qualities of the proletariat can never be found in the bourgeoisie.

But Stanislavsky did not stop here. On the basis of "the theory of germs," he went further to stress: "Never forget that when acting the villain you must look for those moments of his life when he was good, when his love was unselfish, when a spark of innocence still glimmered in his heart." "When you act a good man, look to see where he is evil, and in an evil man, look to see where he is good," "etc."

Stanislavsky wanted to use "the theory of germs" to obliterate the differentiation between classes as well as the class struggle in real life. But it is precisely his applying it to the portrayal of all characters which exposed the reactionary nature of his "system."

According to this theory, in playing negative characters, the actor should "look to see" where they are "good," "unselfish" and "innocent." The "system" insists on prettifying devils. Isn't this a "system" which speaks on behalf of imperialism and all reactionaries?

According to this theory, the actor playing proletarian heroes must "look to see where he is evil" so as to smear our revolutionary heroes. Isn't this a "system" which gives vent to deep hatred for the proletariat?

The counter-revolutionary advocacy of applying this theory to the portrayal of all characters has been used over and over again by the literary and art hatchetmen of modern revisionism. This happened in the Soviet Union as well as in China. The renegade, hidden traitor and scab Liu Shao-chi was presented as a "saviour" with a "halo" around him. The vanquished generals of the Kuomintang, who were at the end of their rope, were prettified as "heroes" having the manners of "cultured generals." Aren't such things a big exposure of the counter-revolutionary nature of the literary and art hatchetmen of modern revisionism in China?

To Make Propaganda Consciously or "To Create Subconsciously"?

The decadence of bourgeois thinking and culture in the 20th century is expressed not only in the touting of the "theory of human nature," but particularly in the naked publicity given to the anti-rational "subconscious."

According to Stanislavsky, "natural stimulation of creation of an organic nature and its subconsciousness" is "the essence of the whole system."

What is the "subconscious"? It means that human activities are an expression of animal instincts. Did Stanislavsky invent this absurd theory? No, it was copied from the utterly debased and reactionary psycho-analytical school of Freud, and it showed that bourgeois theatrical art had reached the end of the line. The thinking of the bourgeoisie in this era is empty indeed. They cannot come up with anything new theoretically, but can only present themselves as wild beasts and allege that this utterly egoistical "self" of theirs is an animal "urge" that "everybody expresses." This is aimed at justifying their reactionary exploitative, plundering and aggressive class nature. If there is any doubt, here are a few examples.

See Stanislavsky's fantastic method at work:

"Look, your head is whirling. That's good." "Your head is whirling at some unexpected moments, there is a full merging of the life of the character you are depicting with your own life on the stage." This serves to deceive both the actor and the audience. While acting on the stage, if "your head is whirling," won't the dialogue and "the given circumstances" be forgotten?

In fact, the heart of such remarks was to get actors, under the pretext of laying stress on feelings and instincts and under the cover of "the mask," to indulge in displaying the decadent thinking in their inner hearts and unscrupulously show the rotten bourgeois way of life, and the more boldly and shamelessly the better. As Stanislavsky put it: "Under cover of the mask, he reveals intimate and secret instincts and aspects of his character that he dares not even speak of in real life." This theory has been the cause of countless shameless and degenerate acts on stage and behind the scenes, and it has seriously corrupted both the actors and the audience.

"Reason is dry," "in our theatrical art to understand means to feel." This is advocating downright subjective idealism and anti-rationalism, that is, replacing the analysis of objective things with one's subjective imaginary bourgeois feelings, with the aim of distorting objective reality. Its spearhead is directed against the method of class analysis. At the same time, this theory of acting, which denies scientific rationalism and stresses the hysterical subconscious, fully satisfies the needs of the bourgeoisie who lead a parasitic life, are well-fed and loaf around all day long, go in for titillating the senses and use every means to deny and cover up the realities of society and class struggle.

With the spread of Marxism-Leninism-Mao Tsetung Thought throughout the world and with the victories continuously won by the proletariat and the people in their revolutionary struggles, the bourgeoisie has long lost the courage to face reality. Instead of standing for the "rationalism" advocated in the early days of the bourgeois revolution, it has come round to opposing and hating it. Subsequently, bourgeois culture and arts have

moved from so-called realism into the blind alleys of mysticism, impressionism and the "modernist" school of various descriptions. This is equally true for painting, music, the dance, drama and the cinema. Since Stanislavsky was a representative figure of the bourgeoisie in the dramatic arts, he naturally stubbornly tried to give expression to this feature of the bourgeoisie of this period. In fact, the "system" he worked out according to the formula of proceeding from "self" — "cultivating and developing" the "germs" of double-dealers — to "subconscious creative work" is also a sort of "rationalism." But he never said that his stuff was "dry." Instead, he blew his own trumpet: "My system is for all nations." Nevertheless, the "system" adored by the "ruined generation" is, in the eyes of the proletariat and revolutionary people, not only "dry" but utterly exhausted, and is an indication that bourgeois literature and art have become completely exhausted spiritually, ideologically and artistically.

"Human nature cannot be changed" and "don't constrain nature." This reactionary viewpoint categorically denies that the world outlook of actors can be remoulded. It is, furthermore, a flagrant assertion that it is completely unnecessary for actors to remould their world outlook. In the eyes of Stanislavsky and company, it is "everybody for himself, and the devil take the hindmost," and egoism is human nature. This is open opposition to remoulding the world in the image of the proletariat.

However, the whole world will be changed in accordance with the laws of struggle for transforming the world, laws pointed out by Marxism-Leninism-Mao Tsetung Thought. In the case of the intellectuals in general, who are divorced from the working people, we should guide them to integrate with and be re-educated by the workers, peasants and soldiers so that they change their old ideology completely and the great majority of them gradually rid themselves of their bourgeois personality and foster more proletarian thinking and feelings. There are indeed very few diehards who "cannot be remoulded" or refuse to be remoulded. But that does not matter. They also are bound to change, that is, to become sacrificial objects buried along with a dead bourgeois system.

Facts prove that the so-called "subconscious creative work" peddled by Stanislavsky is just trumpetry. Different classes express clear-cut political aims in the spheres of literature and art and always make conscious political propaganda. There has never been such a thing as "subconscious creative work." Whether it is revolutionary literature and art or counter-revolutionary literature and art — each embodies the world outlook of a particular class and serves its politics. In propagating "subconscious creative work," Stanislavsky was consciously aiming at turning creative work completely into a manifestation of "self" for the class instincts of the bourgeoisie, lulling the revolutionary fighting will of the masses of the people, sabotaging the revolutionary movement of the proletariat, and opening the way for capitalism.

Strengthen the Dictatorship of the Proletariat On the Cultural Front

What theory of art and literature is propagated and which line in art and literature is carried out are essentially questions of who exercises dictatorship, the proletariat or the bourgeoisie, and which class will transform the other. If the proletariat does not turn the theatre into a red revolutionary crucible, then the bourgeoisie will change it into a black and stinking dyeing vat, disseminating the ideological poison of the bourgeoisie and contaminating the ideology of the masses. The theatre would thus be turned into an effective weapon for restoring capitalism. The historical process of the "peaceful evolution" of the dictatorship of the proletariat into the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie in the Soviet Union tells us that a bourgeois dictatorship in culture will inevitably lead to an all-round restoration of capitalism, politically and economically. Therefore, after its seizure of political power and even after the completion of the socialist transformation of the ownership of the means of production, if the proletariat does not launch a great cultural revolution, then what will ultimately be lost is not just leadership over culture, but the right of the entire proletariat and working people to live!

After his very timely and profound summing up of the historical experience of the dictatorship of the proletariat in our country and the lessons of "peaceful evolution" in the Soviet Union, our great leader Chairman Mao clearly pointed out: "The proletariat must exercise all-round dictatorship over the bourgeoisie in the realm of the superstructure, including the various spheres of culture." This great revolutionary programme is an important development of the Marxist-Leninist theory on the dictatorship of the proletariat, pointing out the orientation for continuing the revolution under the dictatorship of the proletariat.

Exercising the dictatorship of the proletariat in the sphere of culture is, in the final analysis, using Marxism-Leninism-Mao Tsetung Thought to thoroughly criticize the ideology of all exploiting classes, completely liquidate the cultural capital which the bourgeoisie hopes to use to make a come-back, and remould the world outlook of the intellectuals. At the same time, we must resolutely adhere to the orientation of serving the workers, peasants and soldiers, correctly evaluate the cultural legacy, implement Chairman Mao's principles "make the past serve the present and foreign things serve China" and "weed through the old to bring forth the new," and create a new culture of the proletariat.

Let us always hold high the great red banner of Mao Tsetung Thought and carry through to the end the revolution in the theatre and all other spheres of culture, and guarantee that Chairman Mao's proletarian line in literature and art and the proletarian new revolutionary literature and art, with the model revolutionary theatrical works as their representatives, forever occupy the sphere of culture!

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