

1949

Speeches/Documents

Title: The development of literature and art ideological theory (Excerpt)

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Description:

"In 1944 or thereabouts, an ideological trend emerged in Chongqing that emphasized 'vitality,' which was actually an expression of the petty bourgeoisie's inability to bear a long period of darkness and a harsh life. Unable to bear the suffering of real life, the petty bourgeoisie expressed negative and downcast feelings on the one hand, while also showing an impetuous catch-up psychology. Both trends showed up in creative literary and artistic works. Subsequently, a tendency was particularly manifested in literature and art theory that shaped a 'petty bourgeois revolutionary' literature and art theory. Although this literature and art theory severely attacked the former negative and downcast tendency, it could not make a positive contribution to the solution of ideological problems. It could only one-sidedly and abstractly demand a strengthening of 'subjectivism'.

"As a result, problems having to do with literary and artistic 'subjectivism' have become cumulative and festering problems during the past several years in the literary and artistic ideology of areas under Kuomintang rule. A solution must be found.

"The essence of the problem is as follows: Literary and artistic workers naturally are unable to adopt a 'purely objective' attitude to deal with life, but the reason for the various deviations that have taken shape in literature and art stem, in the final analysis, from writers' attitudes being too subjective, or is it because writers too much take the subjective standpoint of the petty bourgeoisie? If the petty bourgeois ideological outlook and sentiment is in fact becoming a fundamental factor that prevents our writers from identifying with the ideology and feelings of the broad masses of people, then solution to the problem must not be to demand 'more' subjectivism from the writers. This is not a matter of strong or weak subjectivism, much less is it an issue of the flagging of subjective zeal or exerting oneself. It is not an issue of whether force of character is great or insignificant, but an issue of writers' standpoint. It is an issue of how thoroughly writers abandon the subjective standpoint of the petty bourgeoisie, and truly link up with the masses of people in ideology and life.

"Is it possible under reactionary Kuomintang rule to raise the standpoint issue? Without doubt, it can be done and must be done. Under such an environment in which progressive writers are linked spiritually in theory and practice, study of the theory of Chinese social and revolutionary policies, and setting one's own creative orientation is possible. Furthermore, it is linked to a certain extent to the real struggle of the popular masses. Learning from the people, the lives and struggles of the people thereby becoming a fountainhead for one's own creative works, is also possible. However, some people suppose that the study of revolutionary theory is enough to make writers 'lie'. They suppose that only by bringing into play writers' 'subjectivism' can art be truly expressed. They suppose that since a writer is revolutionary, he naturally holds a revolutionary standpoint, and if he does not have a revolutionary standpoint to begin with, any effort at studying and remolding is wasted. They suppose that writers will fight' according to the kind of life they live. When writers' freedom was completely taken away under the Kuomintang regime, such a formulation was not entirely unfounded: however, on this account they also ignored the need for writers to be linked to the real struggles of the masses. They emphasized the drawbacks that a feudal system creates for the people, supposing that a struggle against the drawbacks imposed on the people is the primary duty of any writer, while also unconditionally worshipping the spontaneous struggle for individualism. They suppose that this struggle is a manifestation of a healthy primitive vitality. It is not conscious struggle for collectivism but rather this so-called primitive vitality that they regard as the powerhouse of history. They wish to rely on abstract vitality and the spontaneous emergence of individuals to oppose realism; thus, this is actually a petty bourgeois illusion dissociated from the life of the masses.

"Therefore, any further discussion of the issue of 'subjectivism' has to come back to the writer's standpoint, outlook, and attitudes issues that Mao Zedong raised in his 'Talks on Literature and Art'. "If writers cannot truly rid their ideology and their daily life of the petty bourgeois standpoint and adopt the standpoint of workers, peasants and soldiers, and the standpoint of the masses, the problem of producing literature and art of a mass character cannot be completely solved, and the issue of the strength and weakness, and the health or lack of health of writers' subjectivism can certainly not be solved either. Only one conclusion and no other conclusion can be drawn from the struggle over

ideology and theory in literature and art in the areas under Kuomintang control in the same way as in creative practice. ”