

1951

Speeches/Documents

Title: Pay serious attention to the discussion of the film the life of Wu Hsun

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Source: [Abridged text of an editorial written for the People's Daily.]

Description:

The question raised by The Life of Wu Hsun is fundamental in nature. A fellow like Wu Hsun, [1] living as he did towards the end of the Ching Dynasty in an era of great struggle by the Chinese people against foreign aggressors and domestic reactionary feudal rulers, did not lift a finger against the feudal economic base or its superstructure; on the contrary, he strove fanatically to spread feudal culture and, in order to gain a position for this purpose previously beyond his reach, he fawned in every way on the reactionary feudal rulers -- ought we to praise such disgusting behaviour? How can we tolerate praising it to the masses, especially when such praise flaunts the revolutionary banner of "serving the people" and when the failure of revolutionary peasant struggles is used as a foil to accentuate the praise? To approve or tolerate such praise is to approve or tolerate abuse of the revolutionary struggles of the peasants, abuse of Chinese history, abuse of the Chinese nation, and to regard such reactionary propaganda as justified.

The appearance of the film The Life of Wu Hsun, and particularly the spate of praise lavished on Wu Hsun and the film, show how ideologically confused our country's cultural circles have become!

In the view of many writers, history proceeds not by the new superseding the old, but by preserving the old from extinction through all kinds of exertion, not by waging class struggle to overthrow the reactionary feudal rulers who ought to be overthrown, but by negating the class struggle of the oppressed and submitting to these rulers in the manner of Wu Hsun. Our writers do not bother to study history and learn who were the enemies oppressing the Chinese people and whether there was anything commendable about those who submitted to these enemies and worked for them. Nor do they bother to find out what new economic formations of society, new class forces, new personalities and ideas have emerged in China during the century and more since the Opium War of 1840 in the struggle against the old economic formations and their superstructures (politics, culture, etc.) before they decide what to commend and praise, what not to, and what to oppose.

Certain Communists who have allegedly grasped Marxism merit special attention. They have studied the history of social development -- historical materialism -- but when it comes to specific historical events, specific historical figures (like Wu Hsun) and specific ideas which run counter to the trend of history (as in the film The Life of Wu Hsun and the writings about Wu Hsun), they lose their critical faculties, and some have even capitulated to these reactionary ideas. Isn't it a fact that reactionary bourgeois ideas have found their way into the militant Communist Party? Where on earth is the Marxism which certain Communists claim to have grasped?

For the above reasons, it is imperative to unfold discussion on the film *The Life of Wu Hsun* and on the essays and other writings about Wu Hsun and thereby thoroughly clarify the confused thinking on this question.

NOTES

1. Wu Hsun (1838-96), born in Tangyi, Shantung Province, was originally a vagrant. Using the slogan of "schools through alms", he went about cheating people out of their money, bought land and lent money and eventually became a big landlord and usurer. He ganged up with despotic landlords to set up a few so-called "tuition-free schools", in which he fanatically spread feudal culture and trained lackeys for the exploiting class, thus winning praise from reactionary rulers of successive regimes.