



A VICIOUS MOTIVE, DESPICABLE TRICKS

**—A Criticism of M. Antonioni's
Anti-China Film *China***

***Renmin Ribao* Commentator**

A VICIOUS MOTIVE, DESPICABLE TRICKS

—A Criticism of M. Antonioni's
Anti-China Film *China*

Renmin Ribao Commentator

FOREIGN LANGUAGES PRESS
PEKING 1974

SINCE the day the five-star red flag was hoisted over Tien An Men Square and the birth of the new China was proclaimed, different political forces in the world have assumed different attitudes towards the earth-shaking social changes in China and the tremendous achievements of her socialist construction. Hundreds of millions of revolutionary people and friends all over the world have voiced admiration and sympathy, while a handful of reactionary forces are filled with great terror and deep hatred. This is what all great revolutions, whether in China or other lands, in ancient times or today, invariably meet. The anti-China film *China* by the Italian director M. Antonioni, which started showing in some Western countries last year, reflects the attitude of the tiny handful of imperialists and social-imperialists in the present-day world who have inveterate hatred for the new China. The appearance of this film is a serious anti-China event and a frenzied provocation against the Chinese people.

Antonioni came to China as our guest in the spring of 1972. With his camera, he visited Peking, Shanghai, Nanking, Soochow and Linhsien County. However, his purpose in making the visit was not to increase his understanding of China, still less promote the friendship between the people of China and Italy. Hostile towards the Chinese people, he took the opportunity of his visit for unspeakable purposes; by underhand and utterly despicable means he hunted specifically for material that could be used to slander and attack China. His three-and-half-hour-long film does not at all reflect the new things, new spirit and new face of our great motherland, but lumps together a large number of viciously distorted scenes and shots to attack Chinese leaders, smear the socialist new China, slander China's Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution and insult the Chinese people. Any Chinese with any national pride cannot but be greatly angered on seeing this film. Tolerating such a film and permitting it to deceive people in various places would be tantamount to legitimizing reactionary propaganda that wilfully insults the Chinese people and capitulating to anti-China provocations by the international reactionaries. In reply to this challenge hurled at the Chinese people by the international reactionaries, we will thoroughly expose and criticize this film's counter-

revolutionary nature. This is a serious struggle on the ideological and political front that merits great attention.

I

The Italian director claims in his narration, "We do not pretend to explain China. We only want to begin to observe this great repertoire of faces, gestures and habits" in China. This is a downright fraud. Every scene in the "documentary" makes its own explanation. These are scurrilous political explanations which use reactionary artistry to slander and smear China; they are outright reckless political attacks on China, on communism and on the revolution.

It seems quite natural that Tien An Men Square is shown as the film begins. In fact, this is designed to serve the reactionary theme of the "documentary." The narrator says: "Peking is the political and revolutionary centre of China," "the People's Republic was proclaimed here," "and here passed the waves of Red Guards marching for the Cultural Revolution." Then, the film leads the spectators away from Tien An Men Square to "observe" China, supposedly to see what the Chinese revolution has brought the Chinese people. A series of reactionary scenes follow, distorting the

new China beyond recognition. This structure and composition of the film is designed solely for the purpose of concentrating its attack on the revolution led by the Communist Party of China. And here lies the nub of this film — reviling the revolution, negating it and opposing it.

This reactionary film completely ignores and totally negates the tremendous achievements China has made on all fronts of socialist construction, trying to make people believe that today's socialist new China is not much different from the semi-feudal, semi-colonial old China of the past.

Antonioni presents Shanghai as “an industrialized city,” only to sling mud at China's socialist industry. Shutting his eyes to the large numbers of big modern enterprises there, the director concentrated on pasting together a medley of scenes of poorly equipped hand-operated enterprises. Everyone can see the shipyards by the Whangpoo River where 10,000-ton vessels are built and the Chinese-made ocean-going ships that berth in Shanghai. However, before Antonioni's camera, all the freighters on the river are from abroad and China has only small junks. Taking an outright imperialist stand, the director asserts that Shanghai's industry “is not born today” and “as a city, Shanghai was literally built by foreign capital in the last century.” “The industries” built

after liberation, he declares, “are often little better than big handicraft canopies built in a hurry.” He says that “the biggest oil refinery in the city is a poor factory practically built with scrap.” Isn't that a brazen boast of the “meritorious service” of imperialist aggression against China in the 19th century and an effort to belittle the great achievements of the Chinese people in developing industry by self-reliance? The director also used very despicable means to take shots that distort the working people. His vicious implication is that if Shanghai, China's major industrial city, is like this, what must other places be like!

Antonioni presents Linhsien County as “China's first socialist mountain,” while he actually aims to sling mud at China's socialist countryside. The Red Flag Canal, known in China and abroad, is shown casually in passing and the film presents neither the magnificence of this “man-made river” nor the prosperity in the county following the transformation of its mountains and rivers. Instead, there is a tiresome succession of laboured shots of small plots, lonely old people, exhausted draught animals and dilapidated houses. . . . With great pains he tries to evoke “the poverty of the peasants” in Linhsien County, describing a mountain village as an “abandoned desolate place” and showing the village school

there in most unfavourable light. Antonioni says maliciously that "we would be naive if we think we have discovered a rural 'paradise'" in present-day China. Is this not sheer slander of the Chinese countryside, more than 20 years after liberation, as a hell on earth?

The film vilifies China's socialist construction in a variety of ways, from municipal construction to the people's life, from culture and education to physical culture and sports, from medicine and health to family planning, sparing not even the kindergartens.

In total disregard of the tremendous changes that have taken place in China's cities, the film depicts Peking as "still an ancient city" with "very simple and poor" housing and urbanization discouraged. It describes Soochow as showing "little difference from what it was at the time of its distant origin," while the changes in Shanghai are presented as limited to the old houses in the concessions built by "Western economic empire" turned into the "office buildings of today."

The film resorts to all possible means to deny the fact that the life of the Chinese people has improved markedly. It says that "the inhabitants of Peking look poor, but not miserable." The director is lenient indeed not to call the Chinese people miserable. But actually he is mocking at their

"poverty." Did he not work hard in cities and countryside to catch shots to describe people as "poorly dressed" and doing "hard labour," in order to spread the false impression that one could meet "poor people" everywhere in China? He did all this in the manner of an imperialist overlord!

Antonioni describes post-liberation China as all dark, and tries to show that nothing is in good order and everything is wrong. His purpose is to make the audience draw the reactionary conclusion that China should not have made revolution. He attacks the people's communes, saying that they have gone through "disillusionment." He spreads the lie that the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution has "thrown the system of production into confusion," and that it has spared "few" of the cultural relics left over from the past. He even goes so far as to make use of a shot of people doing the traditional *tai chi chuan* (shadow boxing) and lies that "the new leaders" of China want to "abolish" such "ancient tradition." In a word, in the eyes of this reactionary Antonioni, China's socialist system is no good, China's revolution is in a mess, and the only way out is to go back and restore the old order. This shows the true counter-revolutionary features of Antonioni who poses as a "Leftist."

II

In the film, Antonioni misrepresents the Chinese people and their mental outlook to an intolerable extent in order to malign the Chinese revolution and attack China's socialist system. He tries to create the false impression that the Chinese revolution has neither changed the status of the Chinese people nor emancipated their minds, and that the Chinese people are not enthusiastic about the socialist system.

The whole world knows that great changes have taken place in the mental outlook of the liberated Chinese people. **“Do the Chinese working people still retain any of their past slavish features? None at all; they have become the masters.”** In our country, **“never before have the masses of the people been so inspired, so militant and so daring as at present.”** However, Antonioni describes the Chinese people as a mass of stupid, ignorant human beings who are isolated from the world, who knit their brows in despair and listlessness, who are dirty and gluttonous, and who muddle along without any aim. In order to defame the Chinese people, he racked his brains to present in a grotesque way various expressions of people sitting in tea-houses and restaurants, pulling carts and ambling in the streets. He did not even stop

at an old woman's bound feet. Moreover, he disgustingly filmed people blowing their noses and going to the latrine. In Linhsien County, he barged into a mountain village and directed his camera at the villagers, who turned away in protest. He slanders them by alleging that they were “frightened” and “often petrified and motionless.” With “European pride,” Antonioni deliberately sullies the Chinese people. This is a great insult to the Chinese people who have stood up!

More spiteful is Antonioni's use of devious language and insinuations to suggest to the audience that the Chinese people are repressed, have no ease of mind and are dissatisfied with their life. In the scene of the tea-house in Shanghai's Chenghuangmiao, he inserts an ill-intentioned narration, “It is a strange atmosphere,” “thinking of the past, but loyal to the present.” He uses the phrase “loyal to the present” but means just the opposite. Actually he is implying that the Chinese people are forced to support the new society but do not do so sincerely or honestly. Does not Antonioni again and again suggest that the Chinese people are not free? He openly ridicules the workers' discussions as “repetitive and monotonous” and “not true discussion.” He slanders Chinese children's singing of “political” songs praising Chairman Mao and the Communist Party as doing

something incompatible with their innocence and attractiveness, and as not expressing their own feelings. He smears the people as being so "prudent and reserved" that "their sentiments and pain are almost invisible." To him, the Chinese people are suffering from the tremendous "pain" of dissatisfaction with the existing order but dare not express it. What nonsense! In our socialist country of the dictatorship of the proletariat, the people are the masters, the political situation is lively and vivid, the masses enjoy real democracy and have boundless ease of mind. Antonioni's attempts to seize opportunities to fan up dissatisfaction among the Chinese people towards the new China and the socialist system are futile. Those who do feel "pain" are the handful of reactionaries who dream of restoring the dictatorship of the landlords and comprador-capitalists in China. Saying the Chinese people "think of the past" is even more slanderous. Who are "thinking of the past"? The Chinese people deeply hate the "past" when demons and monsters swept over them in a swirling dance for hundreds of years. It is only the imperialists and their agents in China who constantly yearn for their lost "paradise" and dream day and night of turning China back to a semi-feudal and semi-colonial state. But the wheel of history cannot be

turned back, and anyone who attempts to do so is bound to be crushed by the wheel of history!

III

The techniques used by Antonioni in making the film are also extremely reactionary and despicable.

With regard to the selection or cutting of scenes, and how to handle them, he took few or none at all of the good, new and progressive ones, or took some of them as a gesture at the time he was shooting but finally cut them out. On the other hand, he grabbed inferior, old and backward scenes and took as many and as detailed shots of them as possible. Not a single new lathe, tractor, decent-looking school, construction site seething with activity, or a rich harvest scene . . . appears in the film. But he took full shots and close-ups of what he considered useful for slandering China and the Chinese people and did not think them tediously long. In photographing the Yangtze River Bridge at Nanking, the camera was intentionally turned on this magnificent modern bridge from very bad angles in order to make it appear crooked and tottering. A shot of trousers hanging on a line to dry below the bridge is inserted as a mockery of the scene. The film gives a still more disgusting

presentation of Tien An Men Square. It does not show the panorama of this grand, magnificent Square and takes shots of Tien An Men Gate, which the Chinese people ardently love, in such a way as to strip it of all grandeur. On the other hand, a lot of film is used to photograph crowds in the Square; there are sometimes long-shots, sometimes close-ups, sometimes from the front and sometimes from behind, at one moment throngs of heads and at another legs and feet moving helter-skelter. These shots are intended to make Tien An Men Square look like a boisterous market-place. Is this not aimed at defaming our great motherland?

In so far as editing is concerned, the film seems to be a jumble of desultory shots pieced together at random, but in fact all are arranged for a vicious purpose. For instance, the director presents the clay sculptures shown in the exhibition hall at the Underground Palace of the Ming Tombs depicting the deep oppression of the working people and how they rose up in resistance during the Ming Dynasty, with narration about the peasants' suffering at that time. This is followed first by a shot of young students with shovels going to the fields to work, and then by a scene in the Sino-Albanian Friendship People's Commune in which a woman commune member is wiping the sweat from her brow, all intended to show that "life in the fields means

daily hard labour" and that China's countryside is no "paradise." The director obviously uses these scenes to suggest that the condition of Chinese peasants today is little better than it was in feudal society several hundred years ago.

The use of light and colour in the film likewise gives a malicious slant. It is shot mainly in grey, dim light and chilling tones. The Whangpoo River appears as if enveloped in smog. Streets in Peking are done in a dreary monotone. Mountain villages in Linhsien County are hidden in dark shadows. In short, many scenes give the audience a forlorn, gloomy, melancholy and sombre impression. Particularly venomous is the use of musical accompaniment to reinforce the aim of vilification. The director did not shoot a single scene of China's model revolutionary theatrical works, but unscrupulously ridiculed arias from these theatrical works. The aria "Raise your head, throw out your chest" sung by Chiang Shui-ying in *Song of the Dragon River*¹ is used in the film to accompany the scene of a pig shaking its head. This was pure concoction because in fact no such music

¹ *Song of the Dragon River* is a modern revolutionary Peking opera which takes its story from China's rural socialist construction. Chiang Shui-ying is the heroine of this opera.

was being played when the scene was shot, the organization concerned has pointed out. This is a deliberate slander against China's model revolutionary theatrical works and an attack on China's revolution in art and literature. It is deadly venom to the core!

Antonioni's hostility to the Chinese people is also obvious in the way he shot his scenes in China. He openly boasts in the film's narration of taking sneak shots of many scenes in the film, like a spy. He brags about how he "secretly filmed" a Chinese warship in the Whangpoo "by evading the restriction" and how he kept the "cine-camera hidden" to "catch unawares the daily reality" in Peking's Wangfuching Street. He complains that "it was difficult to move with a cine-camera" in Chienmen Street. For whom is that difficult? For a thief. He even asked people to fake a fist-fight scene at the Sino-Albanian Friendship People's Commune in Peking so that he could shoot the scene to slander the Chinese people. On another occasion he got people to change clothes to suit his purpose, otherwise he would not take any pictures. His trickery in taking sneak shots, forcibly taking shots against people's wishes and fabricating scenes is in itself grave contempt and disrespect towards the Chinese people.

IV

The appearance of this anti-China film on the international screen is certainly not an accidental, isolated occurrence. It has an international background.

Our situation at home and abroad has improved steadily in recent years. Chairman Mao's revolutionary line in foreign affairs has achieved new and bigger victories. China's international prestige is growing daily. The schemes of imperialism and social-imperialism to isolate and subvert China have gone bankrupt. But our enemies will not accept their defeat in China. Attacking the Chinese revolution and throwing mud at the socialist new China are ways used by them to prepare public opinion for a counter-revolutionary comeback and turning China once again into a colony or semi-colony.

It is clear to all that the Soviet revisionist renegade clique is the spearhead and chief boss behind the scenes in international anti-China activities. From Khrushchov to Brezhnev, they all exert themselves to the utmost to smear and assail the Chinese people. They said that the Chinese people were so poor that they drank watery soup out of a common pot and had no trousers to

wear; that the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution had brought "new destructions" to China's productive forces; that the Chinese people were "worn out" and in "severe trials," "living in barracks," etc. But all these stupid slanders only serve to expose the ugly features of the Soviet revisionist renegades, leaving nothing for them to grab at. The Soviet revisionists' anti-China lies have a poor market in the world today. It is precisely in these circumstances that Antonioni's reactionary film, disguised as "objective" and "truthful," is released to deceive people. And, copying a page from the Soviet revisionist slanders and attacks, it attempts to play a role that cannot be played by Soviet revisionist anti-China propaganda itself. In fact, Antonioni has only parroted the bankrupt anti-China propaganda of the Soviet revisionists.

After this anti-China film came out, the American Broadcasting Company (ABC) bought it for a quarter of a million dollars and put it on show in the United States. Some persons in America chimed in, describing this reactionary film as "fascinating." So it seems the ghost of John Foster Dulles still haunts a bunch of U.S. imperialists, and Antonioni's anti-China film also serves the needs of these reactionaries.

Although an Italian, Antonioni in no way represents the millions of Italians who are friendly

towards the Chinese people. The Italian people will never approve of hostility towards China. By making this anti-China film, Antonioni has obviously gone completely against the wish of the Italian and Chinese peoples to strengthen their friendly relations.

The Chinese people consistently strive to develop friendly contacts and mutual understanding with the people of other countries. In our contacts with others, we never impose our point of view on them. We have repeatedly pointed out that China is still a developing socialist country. Although we have made tremendous achievements in the socialist revolution and construction, we do not try to hide the fact that our country still has shortcomings in its advance and there are still backward and reactionary things; it is necessary to continue the revolution. Chairman Mao frequently reminds us that we must oppose big-power chauvinism. We welcome criticism of our work by friends from other lands. However, we will thoroughly expose anyone who passes himself off as a "friend" but actually engages in shameless anti-China activities to win the approval of imperialism and social-imperialism which are extremely hostile to China, so that he cannot bluff and deceive people. Only by doing so will it be

of benefit to mutual understanding and friendly contacts among the people of different countries.

This anti-China film by Antonioni reminds us that we should remain sober-minded and never forget there are always forces hostile to the Chinese people in the world and that sharp and complicated struggle continues, although the international and domestic situation is excellent. This reality is independent of man's will. Of course, there is nothing terrifying about attacks on China. All the doughty anti-China warriors, whether important people or otherwise, will only be lifting a rock to drop it on their own feet, no matter what weapon or method they use. The Chinese people will steadfastly and courageously advance along the socialist road. As our great leader Chairman Mao said long ago: **“Let the domestic and foreign reactionaries tremble before us! Let them say that we are no good at this and no good at that — we, the Chinese people, will steadily reach our goal by our indomitable efforts.”**

(Renmin Ribao, January 30, 1974)