

## TEXT 23

### CRITICISM OF “WATER MARGIN”

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Is *Water Margin* a novel “eulogizing the peasants’ revolutionary struggle”? No. It is a novel advocating capitulationism.

Is it a “revolutionary textbook”? No. It is teaching material by negative example.

Chairman Mao has pointed out: **“The merit of the book *Water Margin* lies precisely in the portrayal of capitulation. It serves as teaching material by negative example to help all the people recognize capitulationists.”** Poisonous weeds can be turned into fertilizer. The revolutionary people can extract experience and draw lessons from this teaching material by negative example.

#### A Capitulationist Line

*Water Margin* is a classical novel depicting a peasant uprising at the end of the Northern Sung Dynasty (960-1127). Chairman Mao has pointed out: **“The ruthless economic exploitation and political oppression of the peasants by the landlord class forced them into numerous uprisings against its rule.”** (*The Chinese Revolution and the Chinese Communist Party.*) By the end of that dynasty, class contradictions and national contradictions had sharpened to breaking point. Peasant uprisings which erupted one after another dealt heavy blows to the rule of the landlord class. How does *Water Margin*, once praised as “an epic of peasant revolution,” describe the peasant uprisings at that time?

The novel is against corrupt officials only, but not against the emperor.

Running through it is the theme that corrupt officials are bad and the emperor is good. The novel says that “Emperor Hui Tsung who ruled during the years 1101-25 was a sage and was most intelligent but unfortunately power was in the hands of evil officials,” with the result that the country was in upheaval. Whenever officers sent by the court were captured, Sung Chiang, head of the insurgent forces on the Liangshan Mountain (in present-day Liangshan County in Shantung Province), would say: “How dare I, Sung Chiang, turn against the court.” “I was only driven to this pass by corrupt officials.” The main targets of attack of the Liangshan peasant insurgents led by Sung Chiang were the

local corrupt officials.

In feudal society, the emperor was the chief representative of the landlord class and the mainstay of all feudal officials. The rule of the landlord class could not be overthrown if attacks were directed at corrupt officials only but not the emperor. The Yellow Turbans Uprising in the Eastern Han Dynasty (25-220) and the uprising led by Fang La in the Northern Sung Dynasty all had their spearheads directed at the emperors.

Sung Chiang and his cohorts were loyal to the emperor. That was why they feared Li Kuei who was against the emperor. Whenever Li Kuei declared that he wanted to fight all the way to the capital and seize the throne, Sung Chiang threatened to cut his head off. Even when he was dying, Sung Chiang did not forget that Li Kuei was a menace to the emperor and so he managed to poison Li Kuei. Sung Chiang decked himself out as one "carrying out the right way on behalf of Heaven." In his terminology, "Heaven" was the reigning emperor, and the "right way" was the rule of the feudal landlord class. In short, "carrying out the right way on behalf of Heaven" meant placing himself in the service of rulers of the Sung Dynasty.

In the novel, fighting against corrupt officials and being loyal to the emperor were identical. In fighting against corrupt officials, Sung Chiang and his followers were merely showing their loyalty to the emperor. In their attempt to eliminate corrupt officials, they were actually trying to mend the state machinery and consolidate the dictatorship of the feudal landlord class. Just as Chairman Mao has pointed out: "**Sung Chiang's struggle against Kao Chiu is a struggle waged by one faction against another within the landlord class.**" The two had identical basic political interests: safeguarding feudal rule and opposing the peasant revolution. The only difference between them was in the method employed: one used the tactics of armed suppression, while the other caused the peasant revolution to disintegrate from within.

Regimes of the landlord class always resorted to dual counter-revolutionary tactics in dealing with peasant uprisings: suppression as well as offering amnesty and enlistment. If they could destroy the peasant forces, they resorted to suppression; otherwise, they offered amnesty and enlistment. The imperial court in *Water Margin* used these two tactics alternately in dealing with the Liangshan peasant insurgents and finally offered amnesty and enlistment to them.

To meet the needs of the court, Sung Chiang pushed a capitulationist line and made acceptance of the offer of amnesty and enlistment the aim of the uprising. What the novel praises is just this specimen of "revolt in order to accept the offer of amnesty and enlistment."

The two-line struggle within the peasant insurgent forces of

Liangshan focused on accepting or rejecting the offer of amnesty and enlistment. Sung Chiang and Lu Chun-yi were capitulationists while Li Kuei, Wu Yung and the three Juan brothers were good characters and were not willing to surrender. In the novel, however, Sung Chiang's capitulationist line dominated while the anti-capitulationist line of Li Keui and others was in an inferior position. It ridiculed the anti-capitulationist line and described it as sheer stupidity to make it serve as a foil to the "correctness" of Sung Chiang's capitulationist line. So acceptance of the offer of amnesty and enlistment was good, capitulation was excellent! That was the theme of the novel *Water Margin*.

When Sung Chiang was still a "bandit," "carrying out the right way on behalf of Heaven" meant opposing corrupt officials. What did he and his cohorts do after they had been offered an amnesty and enlisted as "imperial troops"? On their own initiative they petitioned for and obtained an "imperial decree" to fight Fang La (?-1121), the famous leader of another peasant uprising towards the end of the Northern Sung Dynasty. For a period, his troops occupied 25 counties in eight prefectures in present-day Anhwei and Chekiang Provinces in southeast China. He not only gave his reign a title, but dared to proclaim himself a king. His troops were a peasant revolutionary force determined to overthrow the Sung Dynasty.

When Sung Chiang was face to face with Fang La's troops, he was no longer the obsequious man he was previously in front of the "imperial troops." Spitting out threats, Sung Chiang blustered: "We troops of Heaven have arrived!" "We will never turn back until we have killed you all!" He was most ruthless towards the captured leaders of Fang La's army, "disembowelled them and had their hearts gouged out." How clear his counter-revolutionary stand was and how vicious were the features of this butcher in suppressing the peasant uprising! The reactionary nature of "carrying out the right way on behalf of Heaven" by Sung Chiang and his band was completely bared there and then.

That Sung Chiang had turned to fight against Fang La was an out-and-out counter-revolutionary action. Yet the novel *Water Margin* lauds it to the skies. But this only helps the revolutionary people see more clearly the counter-revolutionary stand of this novel.

Opposing corrupt officials but not the emperor, accepting the offer of amnesty and enlistment, and suppressing the peasant uprisings—this is the trilogy in praise of the capitulationist line in *Water Margin*.

The view that Sung Chiang's surrender stemmed from the "limitations of the peasantry" was once prevalent. This viewpoint negated the principled difference between the two opposing classes—the peasantry and the landlord class—and between the two diametrically opposed lines—the line which upholds peasant uprisings and the line of capitula-

tion. Thus this viewpoint actually amounted to an apology for the capitulationists. In Chinese history, peasant uprisings which broke out one after another with unremitting and fierce attacks on the rule of the landlord class demonstrated the undaunted revolutionary spirit of the Chinese peasants. It was only because at that time there were no new productive forces, no new relations of production, no new class forces and no advanced political party to lead them that those uprisings ended in failure.

But defeat must not be equated with surrender. Traitors and lackeys capitulated to the feudal ruling classes; this must not be mentioned in the same breath with "limitations of the peasantry." There was nothing in common between defeat after undaunted struggle and surrender for the purpose of getting high official posts and personal gain! The peasantry might have "limitations" of one kind or another, but not the "limitation" which would lead them to surrender to the feudal ruling classes.

### Typical Image of a Capitulationist

In a literary work, its main character is a representative of a certain class and trend. *Water Margin*, which eulogizes capitulationism, laid it on thick in its subtle portrayal and praise of Sung Chiang, a typical capitulationist.

In *Water Margin* Sung Chiang was a member of the landlord class. "Having studied the Confucian canon since boyhood," Sung Chiang whose mind was saturated with this trash was a dyed-in-the-wool follower of Confucius and Mencius. A peasant uprising was in his eyes "lese-majesty" and taking part in it meant "disloyalty to the emperor and unfilial behaviour to one's parents." That was why he refused several times to join the Liangshan peasant insurgents. He eventually joined them because he had no other choice. But his feelings were: "Though I am here by the Liangshan marshes, my heart is still with the court." And he often declared: "I Sung Chiang and the rest of us never really meant to revolt in the first place." He pledged that he, "with unmatched loyalty," "will work faithfully to serve the country until death."

Later, having accepted the emperor's offer of amnesty and enlistment, he became more devoted than ever to serving the feudal ruling class and volunteered to suppress other peasant insurgent forces. Even when he was dying, he still muttered: "I'd rather let the court deal unfairly with me. But I will remain loyal and never turn against the court."

The highest tenet abided by Sung Chiang throughout his life was "loyalty to the emperor"; he was in no way "an outstanding leader of the peasant insurgents," as some people said, but a filial son of the landlord class and a faithful lackey of the emperor of the Sung Dynasty.

Because of his “loyalty to the emperor,” Sung Chiang had all the time set his mind on getting amnesty and enlistment from the emperor. Even before he went to Liangshan, he had counselled some captains of the peasant insurgents to surrender. Sung Chiang would never have joined the peasant uprising if he could climb up the official ladder. It was only after he had failed to “achieve fame and get an official post” and when his very life was in danger—first he was sentenced to imprisonment for having killed his kept woman after a quarrel and later given the sentence of death for his impromptu poems written in inebriety—that he decided to “make Liangshan his temporary refuge” until the emperor offered amnesty and enlistment.

Chao Kai was the founder of the peasant army of Liangshan. He adhered to the line of uniting all the captains of the insurgent force in their struggle against the emperor. He called the assembly hall where he and his men met to discuss matters the Chu Yi Hall (*chu yi* meaning to unite and rise in revolt). In order to accept the offer of amnesty and enlistment in the future Sung Chiang schemed in a thousand and one ways to replace Chao Kai as leader of the insurgents. Using double-dealing tactics and bestowing petty favours, he finally succeeded in winning people over to his side and usurping the leadership over the insurgents. After Chao Kai's death, Sung Chiang lost no time in changing Chu Yi Hall into Chung Yi Hall (*chung yi* meaning loyal to the emperor), thereby tampering with the revolutionary line of the Liangshan peasant insurgents.

In the hope of securing amnesty and enlistment from the emperor, Sung Chiang refrained from “taking cities and prefectures” and expanding the territory held by the peasant insurgent force, but went out of his way to release captured generals and troops sent by the imperial court on “punitive” expeditions. All these were designed to facilitate his surrender to the court at a later date.

To secure this amnesty and enlistment, Sung Chiang also resorted to both coercion and persuasion in his dealings with the revolutionaries in the insurgent force, removing them from power and suppressing them as he saw fit. At the same time, he recruited hereditary aristocrats, generals of the imperial army, landlords and prominent members of the gentry and appointed them to important posts, thereby building up a backbone force to push his capitulationist line.

To secure amnesty and enlistment, Sung Chiang announced at a gathering of the 108 leading members of the insurgent force his programme for a surrender, declaring: “It is my ardent wish that the court would before long give us blessings and absolve us from our heinous crimes.” Later he wrote a poem expressing what he had in mind:

I wish the Son of Heaven would soon issue an edict  
for our enlistment,

Only then will I rest content.

To secure amnesty and enlistment, Sung Chiang went in person to Li Shih-shih, the emperor's favourite courtesan, asking her to put in a word for him and get the emperor's permission for him to surrender. He also sent his men to bribe the Secretary of the Imperial Court for Military Affairs Su Yuan-ching to talk to the emperor on his behalf. When the Liangshan insurgents captured their deadly enemy Kao Chiu, Sung Chiang acted so obsequiously as "to prostrate himself [before the captive], saying he had committed a 'capital offence,' " and begging for "mercy and forgiveness." How nauseating and despicable his conduct was!

The novel excluded Chao Kai from the 108 insurgent leaders and, as the story developed, had him shot to death by an enemy arrow not long after Sung Chiang came to Liangshan. This was a calculated move to place the capitulationist Sung Chiang in the spotlight and also to make way for him to secure amnesty and enlistment. Chao Kai, founder of the Liangshan peasant revolutionary cause who was determined to "fight the emperor of the Great Sung Dynasty" to the finish, adhered to the revolutionary line of the peasant uprising. Sung Chiang, having wormed his way into the ranks of the peasant insurgent force, engaged in counter-revolutionary activities in the guise of a revolutionary and, revising Chao Kai's revolutionary line and replacing it with his capitulationist line, practised revisionism. This was how the once raging peasant uprising of Liangshan fizzled out, a tragedy for which Sung Chiang and his capitulationist cohorts must be held responsible.

Sung Chiang was hardly a "fellow-traveller" of revolution, still less the leader of a peasant revolution. He was a traitor who led the peasant uprising to destruction. He had not made any "contribution" to the peasant uprising; in fact, he was the arch traitor who had betrayed a peasant revolution.

### **Philosophy of Capitulationism**

In propagating the capitulationist line and singing the praises of the capitulationists Sung Chiang and company, *Water Margin* peddled the decadent doctrines of Confucius and Mencius and advocated in a comprehensive way the philosophy of capitulationism.

"The mandate of heaven." This is an ideological weapon used by the exploiting classes to safeguard their reactionary rule and poison the

minds of the working people. All peasant uprisings in Chinese history, in their resistance to the rule of the landlord class, without exception directed the spearhead of their criticism at this reactionary spiritual shackle.

But *Water Margin*, in its very first chapter, said by way of an introduction that peace or disorder on earth and good fortune or bad are all "decided by heaven." The emperors of the Sung Dynasty, as the novel had it, were all deities deputized by the King of Heaven to rule on earth, while the 108 persons of Liangshan were "demons" loosed upon mankind to create troubles. Thus the relationship between the landlord class and the peasantry ceased to be one of two antagonistic classes since both had come to the world by "the mandate of heaven." It was on this cornerstone that the novel *Water Margin* rested.

Then there was the "Goddess of the Ninth Heaven" who appeared twice at the crucial moments of the story. This was an attempt to impress the readers with the omnipotence of the "mandate of heaven." For instance, when Sung Chiang had just joined the Liangshan insurgents, the "Goddess of the Ninth Heaven" passed on to him a "holy decree" which said: "You are to carry out the right way on behalf of Heaven. As the chief, see to it that loyalty and righteousness prevail. As a government official, your duty is to serve the state and pacify the people. So break away from the evil and return to the saintly way."

Thus, it "conforms to the will of heaven" if the peasant insurgent force should surrender to the landlord class; and to "carry out the right way on behalf of Heaven" required that one be loyal to the emperor and fight in defence of the state of the landlord class. This was how *Water Margin* put an aura of holiness about the despicable conduct of capitulation and made the theory of the "mandate of heaven" the theoretical basis for spreading capitulationist ideas.

"Loyalty and righteousness." They constituted the core of the feudal-patriarchal ideology. *Water Margin* did its utmost to laud the capitulationists represented by Sung Chiang, describing them as men with "the twin virtues of loyalty and righteousness." In this novel, capitulation and "loyalty and righteousness" were synonyms, and to uphold "loyalty and righteousness," one must capitulate. Some members of the landlord class were well aware of the subtle role played by *Water Margin* in propagating "loyalty and righteousness," around which contradictions in the story were unfolded, the plot built and the characters delineated.

The authors of the novel wrote: "As far as benevolence, righteousness, propriety, wisdom, sincerity, acting in accordance with the code of conduct, loyalty and kindness are concerned," Kao Chiu "is a complete stranger"; as for Sung Chiang, "all his life, he believes only in two words: 'loyalty and righteousness.'" With regard to Sung

Chiang's joining the "rebellion," the novel described him as a "loyalist" driven to take up arms by the "treacherous ministers," not as one joining a popular revolt caused by despotic rule. This being the case, Sung Chiang made Liangshan his temporary abode, waiting for an offer of amnesty and enlistment by the emperor and a chance to serve the imperial court—this was "loyalty to the emperor" in a round-about way, so to say. On the question of peasant uprising, *Water Margin* provided the landlord class with ideas and tactics far more vicious than suppression by brute force; it recommended using the rope of "loyalty and righteousness" to drag the peasant insurgent force towards capitulation.

The philosophy of life of all exploiting classes is that one should do his best to move to the top of the official ladder and get rich; position, fame, high emoluments and other material gains are baits used by all reactionary ruling classes in enlisting lackeys. *Water Margin* propagated this reactionary and decadent philosophy of life by giving an account of the life of Sung Chiang. "Though loyal to the emperor, he failed to make much headway" at the start. He joined the Liangshan insurgents against his will and later accepted an offer of amnesty and enlistment, went to fight Fang La and wound up with fame and success in his official career. To Sung Chiang, a man should live to seek promotion in officialdom, get rich, win honour and distinction for his family and "make a name in history."

Sung Chiang died like a dog, and most of the captains under him got killed in the fight against Fang La. But the authors of *Water Margin* considered that they all deserved to be extolled. So Sung Chiang, as the novel said, was conferred posthumously the title of marquis by the emperor who built a temple for him on Liangshan Mountain and wrote a dedicatory inscription as a tribute to Sung Chiang. All this, according to the landlord class, was indeed a feather in the cap.

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At all times—past, present and future—it is inevitable that there are capitulationists in a revolutionary camp. Sung Chiang was a capitulationist of bygone days. Liu Shao-chi, Lin Piao and their like, who pushed a revisionist line, were modern capitulationists. Internally, they practised class capitulationism and, externally, national capitulationism. In the historical period of socialism, it is necessary for us to learn to identify the capitulationists and fight them in order to combat and prevent revisionism and persevere in continued revolution under the dictatorship of the proletariat.

At present, the Chinese people are unfolding a criticism and dis-

cussion of the novel *Water Margin* by using the Marxist viewpoint and adhering to the method of class analysis. They are making good use of this teaching material by negative example as they criticize *Water Margin* for propagating the capitulationist line, expose the true colours of Sung Chiang who practised revisionism and capitulationism, criticize the theory of reconciliation in class struggle in the study of the novel and draw a line of principle between the two classes and the two roads. This is of great and profound significance not only to the study of classical literature, to literary criticism and the work of literature and art as a whole but also to the Chinese people in upholding Marxism, combating revisionism and adhering to Chairman Mao's revolutionary line.