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Expose Comrade Yang Hsien-chen's Substitution of the
Metaphysical Mechanical Theory for Dialectical
Materialism

by

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The philosophy classes taught by Comrade Yang Hsien-chen have been characterized by his basic thought of setting aside revolutionary dialectics, revolutionary class struggle, men's subjective initiative, people's revolutionary practice, and the reform of the objective world in practical struggle, thus basically negating the partisan character of Marxist-Leninist philosophy.

When he lectured on dialectics, he [Yang] stressed the "inseparable relationship" between two opposite sides, "the indivisible nature of things," and asserted that the sole mission of our study of unity of opposites was the search for "common demands," and "looking for similarities and tolerating dissimilarities." Thus he basically negated the materialistic dialectics of Marxism-Leninism.

Comrade Yang's lectures on materialism were the same as those on dialectics. He was never tired of lecturing on the first importance of existence, the second importance of thinking, the "recombination of concept" and the "recombination of feeling," both as the processes from spirit to matter, and idealism as the result of discrepancies between the subjective and the objective. In these lectures, there was no trace of active and revolutionary theory of reflection, no men's subjective initiative, no reform of the world as the main purpose for our understanding of the objective world, thus basically negating the dialectic materialism of Marxism-Leninism.

Now, let us see how Comrade Yang has twisted dialectic materialism.

(I)

In his "Introduction of Philosophy" delivered at the 1959 class of the Higher Party School in November 1961, he said the following:

"What is materialism? It is [the process] from matter to idea. In it existence comes first and thinking second. Idea is the reflection of existence. What is idealism? It is [the process] from idea to matter. In it idea comes first and matter later. Berkley and Mach considered matter as a recombination of concept as well as recombination of feeling."

Comrade Yang's materialism is one hundred per cent old materialism. It is entirely wrong. In the philosophy of Marxism-Leninism, materialism and dialectics are inseparable. Any lecture on materialism must be dialectical materialism. If we follow Comrade Yang's lectures, we will find that dialectics and materialism are completely separated so that there is no dialectics in materialism, and no contradiction and struggle in dialectics, and no transformation of things. It is evidently a serious twisting of the dialectic materialism of Marxism-Leninism.

Existence comes first and thinking second. Thinking depends on existence and consciousness depends on matter. Men's thinking and consciousness come from transformations of existence and matter. The above are naturally the basic prerequisites any materialist will recognize. However, merely insisting on those prerequisites does not make one hundred per cent materialists. In addition to recognizing the above basic prerequisites, a thorough dialectic materialist must recognize that the reform of existence also depends on consciousness and consciousness can transform into existence. In other words, matter can be transformed into spirit and spirit to matter. Comrade Mao says: "Men's social existence decides men's thinking. Once the correct thinking of the progressive class is mastered by the masses, it will become a material force for the reform of society and the world." (Where Did Men's Correct Thinking Come From?) On the other hand, Comrade Yang's lecture on materialism covers only the following: "Men's social existence decides men's thinking. In other words, existence comes first and thinking second." He completely ignores the thought that once the correct thinking of the progressive class is mastered by the masses, it will play the great role of reforming society and the world. He insists on Lenin's statement in "Materialism and Empirico-Criticism" that "without those who are being reflected, there will be no reflection, but the former depend on the reflections for their existence." Thus he cries aloud: "From idea to matter, or the transformation of correct idea into matter is idealism and the 'recombination concept' of Berkley and Mach." It is very stupid for Comrade Yang to use Lenin's above statement in refuting the dialectic materialism of Marxism-Leninism. He means to convince people that Lenin's materialism includes nothing but the theory that existence comes first, ideas come second, and thinking is the reflection of existence. This is a great insult to Lenin. As we all know, Lenin pointed out clearly in his "Philosophical Notes": "Men's consciousness not only reflects the objective world but also creates it," and "the world cannot satisfy men and men have decided to reform the world with their own action." (Collected Works of Lenin, Vol. 318, pp. 228-229) Lenin also pointed out that dialectics is Marx's theory of knowledge. One of the basic weaknesses of the old school of materialism was its failure to apply dialectics to the theory of reflection. Marxism has completely corrected this weakness and for the first time in human history of knowledge solved the problem of relationship between thinking and existence. Therefore, it is outrageous and a lie for Comrade Yang to say that Lenin distinguished between materialism and idealism but failed to distinguish between dialectic materialism and metaphysical materialism.

The Marxist-Leninist theory of reflection is an active and revolutionary theory of reflection, which is not a pessimistic or passive theory of reflection. One of the characteristics of thinking and consciousness is that they are not simply a mirror passively reflecting objective things but on the basis of such reflection suggest in advance a certain objective and plan for man's action in order to guide men's practical struggles and to reform society and the world. This positive function as well as active and revolutionary function of thinking and consciousness can be fulfilled only through the practices of reforming nature and society.

The Marxist-Leninist theory of reflection has become an active and revolutionary theory of reflection mainly because of its recognition of the important reform function of thinking on existence. For example, the revolutionary theories which came from practice also offered important guidance and promotive function to practice. Lenin said: "Without revolutionary theory, there will be no revolutionary action." Marx said: "Once theory dominates the masses, it immediately becomes a material force." The above statements show clearly that revolutionary theories could be transformed into revolutionary practice of the masses in their changes and reforms of the world. Of course, revolutionary theories are products of experiences gained in revolutionary struggles, which correctly reflect the objective laws of social development and the actual demands of the masses. The existence of these theories will become a great power mobilizing and organizing the masses. With them, the masses will be able to promote the development of revolutionary movement and to guide revolution to victory. Thus, the success or failure of a revolutionary movement depends on the existence of revolutionary theory. A revolutionary theory is the major and decisive factor of revolutionary development.

Under the prerequisite of recognizing the priority of matter over thinking, Marxist-Leninist dialectic materialism has affirmed the active function of consciousness, which will not prove the correctness of idealism, will thoroughly reject the idealism which reverses the correct relationship of matter and consciousness, and will thoroughly uphold dialectic materialism. Ideas, under a certain condition, can be transformed into matter. Is this contrary to the materialistic principle which advocates the priority of matter over consciousness? No, because the ideas we talk here are produced on the basis of recognizing and reflecting objective laws, and based upon the evaluation of accumulated experiences, Comrade Yang's definition of idealism as the precedence of idea over matter is directly related to his negation of dialectics and his metaphysical view rejecting the transformation of things. Comrade Mao says: "Marxian philosophy considers the law of unity of opposites a basic law of the universe, which exists universally in nature, society and man's thinking." In accordance with this law, "the result of struggles between opposites of a contradiction is that they are always transformed into each other under certain conditions." (On the Correct Handling of Contradictions Among the People) In the relationship between politics and economics and in the relationship between ideas and production, they are transformed in the forms of cause and effect under certain conditions. Of course, economics should have precedence over politics but when politics and ideology exist as results of economic development, they will be reversed to form causes of further economic development. In his article: "Where Did Man's Correct Thinking Come From?" Comrade Mao says: "Many people cannot understand the daily happenings of matter being transformed into spirit and spirit being transformed into matter." From Comrade Yang's metaphysical point of view, it is no wonder that he cannot understand these daily crossing-over happenings. In his opinion, there has been no transformation or leaping across between politics and economics or between ideology and production. Since politics comes from economics, it is the result of economic development and remains as the reflection of economics and only a passive reflection. Politics can never be transformed into cause for the reform and development of economics. Superficially, this view of Comrade Yang is a metaphysical mechanical theory used in refuting dialectical materialism, but actually the content of his theory reflects that he is a hundred per cent subjective idealist.

(II)

Since Comrade Yang denies the active and revolutionary theory of reflection, the effects of the subjective on the objective and the transformation of spirit into matter, he very seldom speaks about in his lectures the subjective initiative and the great effect of revolutionary spirit. Nor does he touch on the importance of class struggle practices and production struggle practice. In short, he only lectures on the passive theory of reflection, not on the revolutionary theory of practice. He lectures on passive understanding of the world, but not active reform of the world. On January 14, 1964, in his lecture to the special course on Party history and Party construction at the Higher Party Cadres School he said: "How can we develop the function of subjective initiative? Only through our recognition and understanding of necessity can we fully and correctly develop the function of our subjective initiative.

Revolutionary spirit alone without proper understanding of the necessary nature of objective things will not help us to develop subjective initiative.... Is revolutionary spirit alone freedom? Revolutionary spirit alone cannot help us to be free. In addition to having revolutionary spirit, we must also understand the necessity of things" and "To unite the subjective and the objective and to make our ideas conform to laws of objective environment, although revolutionary spirit is necessary, it alone is not enough, because we shall not know the underground situation (meaning the Ta-ch'ing Oilfield)."

According to Comrade Yang's theory, the understanding of objective necessity is indispensable to the development of our subjective initiative. Then, how can we understand objective necessity? In terms of his passive theory of reflection, it means the correct reflection of objective world. How should we reflect the objective world? Through what do we reflect it? Since Comrade Yang has denied the effect on the objective by the subjective, the correct reflection of the objective world can be only "the God" or "our crazy subjective imaginations" at home. Does it not prove he is a subjective idealist?

According to Comrade Yang's theory our Comrades of Ta-ching Oilfield understood the underground situation, united the subjective and the objective, and made their ideas conform to the laws of objective environment, not because they succeeded in developing the revolutionary spirit of masses for hard work and industrious experimentations. It sounds as if the success of our comrades at Ta-ching had come from the sky. Here Comrade Yang again exposed his subjective idealism.

May I ask how, without people's revolutionary spirit and without studies in experiments, can the subjective and the objective be united? Without the practice of struggles by the masses, how can their ideas conform to the laws of their objective environment? Where did men acquire correct thinking which conforms to their objective environment? Just like what Comrade Mao says: "Where did men's correct thinking come from? From the sky? No! Did it come from his own brain? No! Only from social practice as well as from the three practices of production struggle of the society, class struggle, and scientific experiment." (Where Did Man's Correct Ideas Come From?) It is clear that revolutionary practice and revolutionary spirit are indispensable to the unity of the subjective and the objective and to the conformity of ideas to objective environment. If our understanding and our control of objective laws were separated from our practice of struggle and our revolutionary spirit, would our control of objective laws become "water without source" and "wood without roots"? What Comrade Yang talks about is this type of philosophy -- philosophy without source and roots. He intentionally sets apart the development of revolutionary spirit and understanding of the masses from the control of objective laws in order to show the former and the latter are not related.

Why did Comrade Yang try so hard to eliminate the function of revolutionary spirit, practice, and struggle? He means to squeeze revolutionary spirit out of dialectic materialism, thus making the latter a dogma for the restraining of ideas and serving the capitalistic idealism and metaphysics. His intention is both evil and tricky because we know very well the central problem of dialectic materialism is the problem of revolutionary practice, of the development of men's subjective initiative, and of guiding men's correct action.

We are learning the theory of dialectic materialism because we want to understand the dialectical relationship between thinking and existence so that we can not only understand and interpret the world but also change and reform the world. Of course, material world can only be reformed by material forces, in other words, through the development of men's revolutionary spirit and practice of struggle. Therefore, the full development of men's subjective initiative in order to reform the world is the nucleus of dialectical materialism and the idea of revolutionary practice is the basic idea of dialectical materialism. No matter whether we want to understand or to reform the world, men's revolutionary spirit and practice of struggles are indispensable. Consequently, a thorough materialist must have revolutionary spirit and join revolutionary practice.

The Marxist-Leninist dialectical materialism is a powerful weapon for the liberation of human ideas because it has given us the basis for courageous practice as well as the basis for engaging in struggles, for conquering difficulties, and for reforming the objective world. Comrade Yang talks about materialism but omits the great functions of subjective initiative and revolutionary spirit and the significance of practice in struggles. He means to eliminate the soul of materialism and his technique is really a fraud. Why was he so enthusiastic in downgrading revolutionary spirit and practice of struggles? Because he himself is not a revolutionist and he does not want others to become revolutionists. Anyone who is opposed to other's revolution is an anti-revolutionist.

(III)

Since Comrade Yang is opposed to the active theory of reflection, to the great role of the revolutionary spirit, and to practice serving as a standard of truth, he logically refuses to apply dialectics to the process of knowledge. For a number of times he has advocated the theory that whenever the subjective and the objective do not conform, it is idealism. He also claims that any mistake in practical work is subjectivism. In his lecture on "Introduction of Philosophy" to the 1959 class of the Higher Party School in 1961, he said: "How did our mistakes in work happen? It was because of our departure from materialism, because of the existence of idealism in our work, which is also subjectivism." In his lecture on "rectification movement" in the course in Party history and Party reconstruction at the Higher Party School in January 1961, he said: "Many of our comrades made mistakes in their work. Actually, their mistakes were due to idealism."

Comrade Yang's above theory is entirely wrong in theory and extremely harmful in practice. Of course, many political mistakes in political and Party policies as well as some mistakes on matters of principle were related to metaphysical idealism. They may be considered as subjectivism and idealism. However, to classify all mistakes in our practical work as idealism without proper analysis is entirely contrary to the dialectics of knowledge and practice and absolutely outrageous.

First of all, men's initial knowledge of the objective world usually covers the phenomena, the different aspects, and the external relationship of things. This sensory knowledge is a necessary process of knowledge. However, in nature or society, men's knowledge usually improves from a low level to a high level, from the simple to the profound, and from one side to many sides. Only through accumulation of data in the process of knowing the objective world just as what Comrade Mao said of "the processing work of getting rid of the crude and retaining the useful, eliminating the false and retaining the true, learning from one another, and reading the inside from the outside" can we control nature and the laws of things. When some comrades have not mastered the laws of a certain thing because of his own subjective feelings about that thing, naturally he does not have a profound and correct knowledge of it. When he searches it and experiments on it, he must have weaknesses and must make many mistakes. If we follow Comrade Yang's logic all these mistakes and weaknesses would be subjectivism and idealism. Then, the burning of fingers by a child who does not know what fire can do, the breaking of a glass jar in a physics laboratory, and the chopping down of one sprout by a young farmer should all be considered as subjectivism and idealism. Is it not outrageous? When a technician of Shanghai Machinery Factory, Hsia Chen-te, made 263 experiments in making a part for an automatic plasmatic cutting machine (等离子切割机), he would be criticized as an idealist. Then how could he be successful in making this machine? This kind of viewpoint is entirely the viewpoint of nobles and the lords, blocking people from courageous practice and from learning in class struggle, production struggle, and scientific experiment. It is contrary to dialectic process of knowledge. No exposure of nature of things is possible without practice because the inner nature of things was often hidden and twisted by its outside appearance. Man's process of knowledge is a process of exposing the nature of things, in which mistakes are bound to be made. We cannot under any circumstance call them idealism or subjectivism.

Next, after man's knowledge has advanced from sensory to rational knowledge, is the process of knowledge concluded then? No more mistake would be made? We cannot say that either, because correct knowledge gained through practice must be checked again in practice. Your rational knowledge might be almost correct. However, due to the incomplete exposure of the nature of the objective process, due to the limitations in scientific techniques, your knowledge might not have reflected the entire nature of objective things. Then you need to return to practice for checking, supplementing and revising. Only by doing these can man's knowledge conform to the laws of the objective process.

However, it is not easy to know the laws of the objective process. It is necessary to go through many times from matter to spirit and then from spirit to matter, and from practice to knowledge and then from knowledge to practice. If we follow Comrade Yang's theory that original idea, theory, and plan would be changed during the process of "from matter to spirit and from spirit to matter, then this idea, theory, and plan would become subjectivism and idealism. This kind of philosophy is a mystical capitalistic philosophy blocking the struggle for truth of our revolutionary masses.

Comrade Yang's theory that any mistake and weakness in practical work is idealism is meant to block the masses from courageous practice and to accuse the mass movement, as well as to discourage them. The great Lenin once gave a merciless scolding to those capitalists who accused the Bolsheviks of having committed too many mistakes. He said: "Capitalists and their lackeys (including Mensheviks and right socialists) shouted that we have made mistakes. Behind 100 mistakes, there were 100 great and heroic actions which were common, inconspicuous, and hidden in the daily lives of a factory or a village. These actions were done by those who were not accustomed to showing off their achievements, thus making them greater and more heroic. Even if all things turned out entirely wrong (although we know it can't be) and 100 correct actions turned out to be 100 mistakes, our revolution will still be the greatest in world history and unconquerable because instead of the minority, the rich and the cultured, this is the first time that the masses and the vast number of toilers have tried to build up a new life with their experiences in solving the most difficult problems on the organization of socialism. (Complete Works of Lenin, Vol. 28, p. 53)

When millions of people are participating in a socialist revolutionary movement, it is impossible to create mistakes in practical work. How can we call such mistakes idealism? Comrade Yang actually puts himself into the disagreeable position of those whom Lenin scolded.

Comrade Yang's metaphysical "theory of complete understanding at once" is entirely wrong and absolutely outrageous. In his lectures on materialism within the last decade, he never touched the dialectic theory of knowledge, how sensory knowledge actively leaped into rational knowledge and how rational knowledge actively leaped into revolutionary practice. He acts like a mouse scared of the sun when he tried to avoid the theory of knowledge of dialectical materialism which preaches practice -- understanding -- again practice -- again understanding. This actually exposes Comrade Yang's secret intention -- the intentional opposition of revolutionary dialectics and genuine materialism, and his intention to use capitalistic world outlook in reforming and negating the world outlook of Marxism-Leninism.