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Method of Marxist Study

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This is a speech I made in May 1941 at the meeting of Yen-an cadres. I have now set the sketch of the report in order and have had it published so that comrades might discuss it.

I maintain that the method and system of study in the whole Party should be changed, because of the following reasons:

One—The period of twenty years in the life of the Chinese Communist Party is one of a combination between the universal truth of Marxism-Leninism and the concrete practice of the Chinese Revolution. If we reflect for a moment we shall find how shallow and poor was our knowledge of Marxism-Leninism and the Chinese Revolution then, at the infancy period of our Party, and how deep and rich is our knowledge now. For a whole century the catastrophe-ridden Chinese people have been groping for the truth while struggling for national salvation. Many of the best of China's sons have joined the struggle and sacrificed themselves, advancing by moving over the dead bodies of their fallen comrades. This is worthy of commemoration in tears and lyrics.

It was only after the first world war and the October Revolution in Russia that we found Marxism-Leninism, the best weapon for our national liberation. The Chinese Communist Party is the proposer, propagandist and organiser in the use of this weapon. The marriage between the universal truth of Marxism-Leninism and the concrete practice of the Chinese Revolution has changed the features of the latter. Ever since the outbreak of the war of resistance our Party has advanced a step in the study of present-day China and the world, basing itself on the universal truth propounded by Marx, Engels, Lenin and Stalin, and the study of China's past has also begun. Such phenomena are good.

Two—But we have our defects. I think if we do not correct these defects, we shall not be able to advance a step further in advancing the merging of the universal truth propounded by Marx, Engels, Lenin and Stalin with the concrete practice of the Chinese Revolution. Let us first of all speak about the study of the present conditions. In spite of the fact that ours is such a large political party, yet the data we have collected concerning the political, military, and cultural conditions of our country and other nations of the world are incomplete. Our study is unsystematic, though we have had some results in our study of national and international conditions. Speaking in general, we have not in the past twenty years done anything in the way of collecting materials concerning the above-mentioned problems, and stressing or emphasising on careful study and elaborate systematisation. We have not created the atmosphere for investigation and study of the objective real condition. "Closing one's eyes to catch sparrows," or "blind men trying to grab fish," sadly lacking in details, blowing an empty trumpet, and satisfied with knowing a little and understanding only a half, is our style of work. Such extremely bad style of working which is completely in contrast to the fundamental spirit and method of work of Marxism-Leninism is still followed by many of our comrades. Marx, Engels, Lenin, Stalin taught us to study seriously the existing conditions starting from the real objective circumstances and not from our subjective wishes, but many of our comrades are acting directly in contrast to this guiding truth.

Next, let us talk of the study of history. Although a small number of members and non-

member comrades are undertaking this work, yet in general it has not been properly organised. Many Party members are completely ignorant of Chinese history of the last century (yesterday's or of ancient time—day before yesterday's). Many students of Marxism-Leninism can refer to Greek history and recite maxims of Marx, Engels, Lenin, and Stalin, but I am sorry to say, they have forgotten their forefathers. (They know nothing about China.) The atmosphere for serious study of the existing conditions and history is not: present.

Let us now take up the study of international revolutionary experience and the universal truth of Marx, Engels, Lenin, Stalin. Many comrades learn them for the sake of Marxism-Leninism and not for the revolutionary practice of China. Thus though they have learned a great deal, yet they cannot digest it; though they can quote from Marx, Engels, Lenin, and Stalin, yet they cannot apply their maxims to the concrete study of Chinese history and the present conditions in China, to analyse and solve any problem that arises from the Chinese Revolution. This attitude towards Marxism-Leninism is inordinately harmful, especially for cadres above the middle order and young students.

In the above I have talked of the existing conditions from three aspects: not paying attention to the study of existing conditions, to the study of Chinese history, and in the application of Marxism-Leninism to practical Chinese problems. These are extremely bad styles of work and their spread will be detrimental to many of our comrades.

In reality at present there are many comrades in our ranks influenced by such bad working style. They do not make a systematic and close study and investigation of the concrete circumstances of places both inside and outside of a region, a district, a province or even our country. Instead, basing themselves on their incomplete knowledge and "I-think-it-is-quite-obvious" way they make resolutions and draw conclusions. Is not such a subjective style of working still existing in a great number of our comrades?

Completely ignorant of or merely knowing a little of our own history is to them not a shame but on the contrary an honour. Very few really know the history of the Chinese Communist Party and of China since the Opium War, a period of great importance. No one has really and seriously begun to study the economic, political, military and cultural history of China in the last century. Since they know nothing about their own country there remain for them only Greek and foreign stories (limited to stories only) which are pitifully enough found among old paper heaps in foreign lands and shipped here in abstract form. During the last decades many returned students committed this mistake. They shipped back, in the raw, after their sojourn in Europe, America and Japan what they learned there, playing the role of the gramophone and forgetting that their duty was to create something out of the imported stuff. The Communist Party was infected by it too.

We are learning the teachings of Marx, Engels, Lenin and Stalin but the way many of us learn them is directly in opposition to them. That is to say these people departed from the fundamental principle about which Marx, Engels, Lenin and Stalin have been untiringly warning others: The unity of theory and practice. Accordingly they invented a contrary principle: The separation of theory and practice. Consequently both in schools and in education of cadres while so employed, the teachers of philosophy never ask the students to study the logic of the Chinese Revolution, the teachers of economics never ask students to study the characteristics of Chinese economics, the teachers of military science never ask students to study the characteristics of Chinese military problems, etc. This resulted in the propagation of the incorrect and in misleading the students. What one learns in Yen-an is inapplicable in Fuhsien, thirty miles away. Since teachers of economics cannot explain National Currency and the Border Region

Currency's drop in relation to the former, so naturally the students cannot either. Little boys and girls of seventeen and eighteen are taught to cram "Capital" and "Anti-Dühring." Thus a perverse feeling or aversion is created among the students, which results in loss of interest for Chinese problems, for the instructions of the Party, and what arrests and absorbs their attention is the stuff they learned from their teachers—dogmas that are called immutable in posterity.

Of course not everybody corresponds to the extremely bad picture I mentioned above, but such things really do exist which is very harmful and should not be considered as unimportant.

Three—In order to make my point clear, I shall compare the two contradictory attitudes. First of all the subjective attitude.

With such an attitude one does not study systematically and minutely the surrounding environments and relying on one's own subjective enthusiasm one has only a fleeting glimpse of the present physiognomy of China. Thus history is cut up into parts, knowing Greece but not China and one has no idea of China of recent or ancient times. Thus one studies aimlessly and abstractly the theory of Marx, Engels, Lenin, and Stalin, never wondering what relation it has with the Chinese Revolution. One studies theory for theory's sake, Marxism-Leninism for the sake of Marxism-Leninism, and not for solving any theoretical or tactical problem that arises from the Chinese Revolution. *The arrow is shot without an aim.* Marx, Engels, Lenin and Stalin teach us to start out from real facts and matter existing in the objective world and then deduce laws from them to serve as guiding principles for our action. In order to attain this aim we must possess many detailed data and study them scientifically, analytically and comprehensively. On the contrary many of us do not do so. Many who are doing practical work do not pay attention to the study of objective conditions and basing themselves solely on enthusiasm, mistake their feeling for policy.

Both of these two types have lost sight of objective reality and are ideologically subjective. When they make speeches there is long line of ABCD points then 1-2-3-4's and when they write articles there is only an agglomeration of meaningless words. They close their eyes to facts, attempt to gain support of the masses by attractive oratory, are decorative but not substantial, brittle and not solid, think themselves infallible and the first under heavens, and act like the inspector-general (of Gogol's play) at large.

Such then is the style of work of some of the comrades in our ranks, such style of working is harmful to himself, if it is regarded as the principle of action, is harmful to others if used to teach others, and is detrimental to the revolution if it is applied as the guiding principle. To sum up, such unscientific and un-Marxist subjective methodology is a great foe of the Communist Party, of the proletariat, of the people, of the nation and is an expression of impurity in one's Party consciousness. It is imperative that we must vanquish this mighty foe menacing us, for only by vanquishing subjectivism can truth see light, can revolution be victorious and Party consciousness be consolidated. Without a scientific or completely scientific attitude, in other words, without a Marxist or completely Marxist attitude which regards that theory and practice are unified, one can be said to be without Party consciousness or possessing half, incomplete consciousness. There are two lines (in Chinese literature) which portray such people:

“Rushes grown on the top of the wall are heavy in head, light in feet, with roots running shallow into the earth;

“While bamboo shoots grown on the hills are sharp in mouth, thick in skin and empty inside.”

This is a good picture of those who are unscientific in attitude, who only know to recite dogmas, who have degrees but no real knowledge, and who play a practical joke on Marxism

Leninism. If anybody really wants to correct his mistakes I advise him to commit these two lines to memory, or if he is brave enough to write them down and paste them on his wall. Marxism-Leninism is a science and science is a truthful branch of learning, in which nothing untrue and insincere is tolerated, so let us be more sincere.

The second type: The Marxist-Leninist attitude, i.e., the dialectical and historical materialistic attitude.

Under this one investigates and studies the surrounding environment systematically and minutely, relying not on subjective enthusiasm only but combined with revolutionary zest, with realistic spirit. Thus one does not cut up history into different parts, not only know Greece but also China, not only know the revolutionary history of foreign countries but also that of China, and not only know what is happening today but also what happened yesterday, and the day before yesterday.

Thus one studies Marxism-Leninism with a definite aim, connecting it with the actual Chinese revolutionary movement and turns to it to find a solution for the theoretical and practical problems arising from the Chinese Revolution. This is the attitude of shooting the arrow with an aim, “aim” being the Chinese Revolution, and the “arrow” being Marxism-Leninism. We members of the Chinese Communist Party look for this “arrow” only for the purpose of shooting it against the “aim” of the revolution in China and in the East. Otherwise this “arrow” would be merely a plaything and utterly useless. This is called the finding of the truth by facts, “facts” being the existing objective matter and incidents, “truth” being their internal connection, i.e., the law that governs the objective world, and “finding” being our effort to study. Starting out from the actual conditions in places both inside and outside of the country, the province, the district and the region and deriving from it its inherent law but not the law of our own fabrication, we shall find out the internal connection of the changes in our surroundings and take it as the guide for our action.

In order to do so, we must not depend on our subjective conjectures, our enthusiasm and on books, but on objective existing facts and “the possession of detailed materials,” deducing a correct conclusion from these facts and materials. Such conclusions will not be the enumeration of phenomena into A B C D or essays that contain words but no meaning, but scientific conclusions. Such an attitude demands the intention of finding truth by facts and not that of trying to gain the support of the masses by attractive oratory. Such is Party consciousness, the style of work based on unity of theory and reality and the attitude that a Communist ought at least to have. With such an attitude one is not “heavy in the head, light in the feet, with roots shallow in the ground,” nor “sharp in mouth, thick in skin, and empty inside.”

Fourth—Basing myself on the opinion mentioned above, I offer the following suggestions:

1. We must bring before our Party the task of studying minutely and systematically our surrounding environments. We must base ourselves on the historical-materialistic method to study closely the activities in the economic, financial, political, military, cultural and Party work fields, of our enemy, of our friends and of ourselves. Then deduce from our study the necessary conclusions we ought to deduce. To achieve this aim we must direct the attention of our comrades to investigate and study these real matters and incidents. We must make our comrades understand the main task of the Communists in their leading institutions lies in the apprehension of conditions and mastering policy. The former is to know the world, and the latter to transform the world. Make our comrades understand that without making investigations one has no right to voice an opinion and that speaking at random and mere enumeration of phenomena is utterly useless. For example, if we do not understand the condition of propaganda of our enemy, our

friends, ourselves, then we are unable to form a correct decision regarding our propaganda policy. No matter in what department of work, we must first understand the circumstances before we can solve any problem satisfactorily. To start the movement for investigation and study in our Party as a policy of the Party is the fundamental factor for changing the style of work of the party.

2. We must get together certain personnel to work on Chinese history of the last century, working separately but in co-operation, and doing away with the hitherto disorganised way of working. We ought, first of all, to study analytically the economic, political, military, and cultural history of this period before studying it comprehensively.

3. For cadres in offices and schools we ought to take the practical problem of the Chinese Revolution as the centre of our study and start out from it to study Marxism-Leninism. The way to study Marxism-Leninism isolatedly and statistically should be discarded. In studying Marxism-Leninism, the central material ought to be *The History of the C.P.S.U. (B)* assisted by other materials. For it is the highest comprehension and conclusion of the world Communist movement, the symbol of combination of theory with practice and the only perfect symbol found in the world. When we learn how Stalin and others merged the universal truth of Marxism-Leninism with the concrete practice of the revolution in the Soviet Union, we shall know how to perform the same work in China.

We have run into many wrong paths, but mistakes are the forerunners of the correct. I believe that in such rich and lively environments of Chinese and World Revolution the transformation of the way we study will certainly bear good results.