

**June 15, 1971**

**Important Instructions from Premier Zhou for the  
Comrades Traveling to Pyongyang to Apologize to  
Korea**

**Citation:**

"Important Instructions from Premier Zhou for the Comrades Traveling to Pyongyang to Apologize to Korea", June 15, 1971, Wilson Center Digital Archive, Hebei Provincial Archives, 855-10-80-9, 110-125. Obtained by Shen Zhihua and translated by Jeffrey Wang and Charles Kraus.

<https://wilson-center-digital-archive.dvincitest.com/document/115333>

**Summary:**

Zhou Enlai speaks with a Chinese delegation traveling to Pyongyang to apologize to North Korea. He emphasizes the importance of self-criticism, the historic camaraderie between China and North Korea, and matters regarding cultural exchange with North Korea.

**Credits:**

This document was made possible with support from Leon Levy Foundation

**Original Language:**

Chinese

**Contents:**

Translation - English

Secret

Quotations from Chairman Mao [Zedong]

“In our international relations, we Chinese people should get rid of great-power chauvinism resolutely, thoroughly, wholly and completely”

Important Instructions from Premier Zhou [Enlai]  
for the Comrades Traveling to Pyongyang to Apologize to [North] Korea

(Not yet proofread by the Premier)

Time: 15 June 1971, 12:25 a.m. – 2:30 a.m.

Location: East Hall, Great Hall of the People

Present: Shi Shaohua, Cao Cheng, Han Nianlong, Zhao Zhenghong, Fu Zhixing, Wang Hairong, Liu Chun, Wang Xiaoyun, Song Zhong, Zou Boxian, Xu Yinsheng, Zhuang Zedong, Xi Enting, Lin Huiqing, Zheng Minzhi, Zhang Ruijie, Yang Changlin, Jiang Peizhu, Wang Xiaoxian, Jiang Chengzong

Documentation: Wang Jiadong

Summary of Premier Zhou's Instructions

1. Study the Documents Well, Arm Yourself with Ideology
2. [North] Korea is our Closest Neighbor
3. What to Apologize to [North] Korea For
4. Negotiate with [North] Korea on the Afro-Asian Invitational Tournament
5. Allowing Discussion on International Trends with [North] Korea
6. Regarding the 11 July Celebrations
7. [North] Korea Wants Our Art Troupe
8. Xinhua News Agency Must Hurry to Publish the Article on the Visit to [North] Korea
9. The Visit to the United States and Canada depends on Political Trends
10. The Table Tennis Exhibition Must be Available for Viewing by All Work Units in Beijing
11. Regarding Footage of the 31st Table Tennis Game
12. Regarding the Issue of Table Tennis Paddles
13. Instructions for Comrade Fu Zhixing
14. The National Sports Committee Must Establish a Revolutionary Committee prior to 1 July

On 14 June [1971], our great leader Chairman Mao approved for Vice Minister Han Nianlong and Comrades Zhao Zhenghong, Song Zhong, Xi Enting, and Zhang Ruijie to travel to Pyongyang and apologize to [North] Korea. Premier Zhou provided important instructions as follows:

1. Study the Documents Well, Arm Yourself with Ideology

Premier Zhou said: The Chairman has already approved your visit to [North] Korea. You have read all the approved documents! (Xi Enting responded: I did not read them.) Why did you not read it? So your group does not believe in the masses. (Comrade Zhao Zhenghong responded: I only saw the file when I got into the car.) Can you not show it to him immediately? You people look down on him. There are two kinds of inequality among you four people. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs is being

unfair to the National Sports Committee, and the leading comrades of the military are being unfair to young people.

The conversation records between Premier Kim [Il Sung] and Comrade Shi Shaohua as well as the conversation records between Comrade Kim Seong-geol [Kim Song Gol] and the Chinese journalism delegation were both sent out on 12 June [1971]. The people who are traveling [to North Korea] should have seen these! (Zhao Zhenhong, Song Zhong, and Xi Enting all responded: No we have not read them.) Comrade Han Nianlong, why do you not do some ideological work? Asking them to go [to North Korea], and they do not even read the materials! You must manage this matter. (To comrade Zhang Ruijie) You are the one managing foreign travels? Why did you not allow them to see the materials? Why do you not care about others? You people never care about others. It is this between groups within [our] organization, not to mention between [us] and [other] countries. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs is a big department, [so] it really should take care of all aspects [of this situation]. You people must [complete] self-criticisms. It is difficult for me to manage every phase and every project. Not only do I not have the energy to do this, but [in principle] I should not be doing this. Comrade Han Nianlong, are your thoughts unclear about this issue or are you simply busy? (Response: I did not think of it.) On the night of 11 June, I talked [this] over with Zhao Zhenhong and Song Zhong. Xi Enting wrote a letter to me. Originally he did not have to go. (To Xi Enting) Indeed I cannot blame you! You people are supercilious. I am going to make criticisms [of you].

After I met with the [North] Korean Vice Minister of Foreign Affairs Kim Yong-taek [Kim Yong Thaek], he went back to report to Premier Kim [Il Sung]. Their Minister of Foreign Affairs told the Chinese Ambassador on 18 March [1971] that Premier Kim is very satisfied and said to forward Premier Kim's views to me. On 19 March, I told the Guangzhou Foreign Affairs Office to inform the table tennis delegation in Hong Kong of this situation. (Zhao Zhenhong and Song Zhong said that they did not know of this matter. Wang Xiaoyun said that he had heard of some similar matter but did not know it was from Premier Kim. Comrade Zou Boxian said the message was conveyed.) Your hearts have already flown off to Nagoya. You are inattentive, not listening [to instructions]. [You] can only think of trophies while on the front line. Wang Xiaoyun's mind is full of what he should say to the Japanese. Song Zhong, do you not remember? (Response: No impression.) You probably only notified the Foreign Affairs Office and did not forward the message to Song Zhong. I have to remind you of everything, how can this go on? The work of the Management Section of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs must be satisfactory in all aspects and must notify all parties. Their minds are impression-less, most people do not know what is going on, and [our] strengths cannot show. You do not think of others.

The two conversations were very friendly. Comrade Kim Seong-geol talked about their opposition to Sadaejuui [Sataechuui]. [But] it is not directed towards China, but rather the Soviet Union. He discussed [North] Korea's position towards the Soviet Union and the friendship between [North] Korea and China. It was all explanations. Comrade Shi Shaohua, bring them a few copies again. They can only leave after they have finished reading. If you do not read this then you will not know their true feelings. Comrade Han Nianlong, you must read with them. I am sorry people?!

## 2. [North] Korea is our Closest Neighbor

Premier Zhou said: Our two closest neighbors are [North] Korea and Vietnam.

Premier Kim has met many of our people. He has also met our experts. He met with comrade Shi Shaohua when he went over there [to Korea]. He also met with medical teams. They know I have met with the [North] Korean badminton team. Vice Premier Li Xiannian met with their tourism delegation. They discussed their affairs. [But if] we do not talk about our affairs, how can we maintain [our relationship] with them? I

hasten to tell you (referring to Comrade Shao Shihua) to inform them [of our affairs]. Otherwise we are not being open and upright towards our brothers-in-arms. We often talk much about our achievements, [and] when we discuss our weaknesses, we only speak of principles and not specifics. Covering up our mistakes is not in accordance with Maoist thinking. Why should you be embarrassed to speak of mistakes? The “16 May Corps” was trying to destroy Sino-Korean friendship. (Comrade Shi Shaohua said: We talked about it, we also talked about the “16 May Corps.” They were happy [with this].) For our brothers-in-arms, we must humbly serve them with one’s heart and soul, [we] must respect them. When I spoke with Premier Kim in Pyongyang, I spoke of our mistakes. He also discussed the process of how they came to understand Soviet revisionism.

Some people have said that [North] Korea only turned around because [North Korea] is afraid of Japanese militarism. What kind of talk is that! [North] Korea is very familiar with Japanese militarism. When I went to Pyongyang, Premier Kim said many things. I have said many times, it was Premier Kim who first broached opposing the revival of Japanese militarism. It should be said that there was widespread opposition against the revival of Japanese militarism [in China] only after I came back from Pyongyang.

During the First Sino-Japanese War [of 1894-1895], Korea’s An Jung-geun [An Chunggun] assassinated Ito Hirobumi, firing the first shots. It was Korea who supported us first. They also participated in the Sun Yat-sen led 1911 Xinhai Revolution. Korean comrades have participated in each of the five wars since the founding of our [Chinese Communist] Party 50-years ago. During the Northern Expedition, Comrade Choe Yonggeon [Choe Yonggon] fought in our country. During the Agrarian Revolutionary War [the Second Chinese Revolutionary Civil War], their army was in Northern Shaanxi and crossed the Yellow River. They lost many comrades. They also worked in the White Areas [areas occupied by the Nationalists], participating in the workers struggle. Koreans were in the North [of China], and they were also in Shanghai. During the War of Resistance against Japan, Premier Kim commanded the struggle in Northeast [China]. Many Korean comrades participated in the [Northeast] Anti-Japanese United Army. During the War of Liberation [the Chinese Civil War from 1946-1950], Korean comrades organized a combat division. Inside of Vice Chairman Lin [Biao’s] Fourth Field Army, they had two such [Korean] divisions. There were many Korean comrades who fought in the Taihang Mountains and at Jinchaji and Yan’an. During the War to Resist America and Aid Korea [the Korean War], our cooperation in combat was even more intimate. Our Korean brothers-in-arms are remarkable. Throughout our Party’s 50-years of history, the Korean comrades have done a lot [for us] in a lot of places. When we secretly sent comrades to the Soviet Union, they were escorted by the Korean comrades. Our friendship was cemented with fresh blood. How can you say that the Korean comrades will push us away? Our views only differed on one affair, which is the issue of Japanese revisionism. In 1967, Comrades Choe Yong-geon and Pak Seong-cheol [Pak Song Chol] came to China. We told them then that, despite our different views, we will never [criticize by] pointing names [at you] in the newspapers. But there were some bad people among us, not just Wang [Li], Guan [Feng], Qi [Benyu], Yang [Chengwu], Yu [Lijin], and Fu [Chongbi]; there was also the boss, the “humble little commoner” [Chen Boda]. They were very active in the Northeast [of China]. There was a classroom in Jilin’s Yuwen Middle School which was dedicated to Premier Kim, [but] it was destroyed. It is currently being repaired. Li Fanwu was a capitalist roader, [he was] impenitent. In Sino-Korean relations, the Chinese side has made more mistakes [than the Koreans]. This was true particularly during the “leftist” period. From June to September of 1930, it was the Li Lisan period. From 1931 until 1935, it was the Wang Ming period. Additionally, Liu Shaoqi was sabotaging the Northeast in 1930. He revolted three times: once in the Northeast, once in Changsha, and once in Wuhan. Liu Shaoqi destroyed the Party in the Northeast. Because of the erroneous line within the Chinese Party, our Party is more responsible [for the mistakes] within Chinese-Korean relations.

Regarding the history of combat, we can study it further and gradually restore the history to what it should be. These are matters of the past. We can gradually deepen our understanding. This way [North] Korea will gradually become closer to us. Prior to the Zunyi Conference [in 1935], our Party's history was not even fourteen-years [in length]. The Zunyi Conference established and confirmed Chairman Mao's leadership position, [and] since then our Party has existed for thirty-six years. During this period, despite the correct guidance of Chairman Mao's leadership, we have still made mistakes and bad people, such as Liu Shaoqi, have still emerged. We personally have not done many things well. Even after the "Ninth Party Congress" [in 1969] and Second Plenary Session of the Ninth Central Committee, we have still made mistakes. Of course this is referring to a small area and a small group of people. So it can be seen that it is not easy for a party, especially a large party, to avoid mistakes. [We] should allow people to make mistakes and allow them to correct [their] mistakes. Some party problems should be fixed gradually. It is not okay to force people to change. The Chairman is most [strongly] against [forcing] others to wear hats [to be labeled].

### 3. What to Apologize to [North] Korea For

Premier Zhou said: As brothers-in-arms, we must think of them in regards to every issue. The [North] Korean Table Tennis Team going to Japan only has fifteen people. Originally, they did not intend to go [to Japan]. But we hoped that they would. To resolve the difficulties, we adopted two approaches: we would not compete with the players of the Lon Nol Clique, but they [the North Koreans] can. In this way, the problem would be resolved. On this issue, Comrade Cao Cheng did not properly forward my conversation with Minister of Foreign Affairs Kim Yong-taek. Song Zhong, you said that you treated [North] Korea as a brother-in-arms that day and that you treated [Japanese Prime Minister] Eisaku Sato as a united front [partner]. Do you really think that? I absolutely do not believe what you say, because you did not actually do [what you told me].

In your report you mentioned that you explained to the [North] Korean side about how our delegation committed mistakes of principle after our delegation reached Japan; that you did not implement the principles which were negotiated between [North] Korea and China. Your mind is filled by trophyism and great power chauvinism.

The first specific issue we are going to talk about is that Xi Enting should not have beaten Comrade Pak Sin-il [Pak Sin Il] [in table tennis]. According to the principles which were previously negotiated, [Xi Enting] was supposed to create opportunities which would have allowed Comrade Pak Sin-il to obtain a better score. They might say that this is not that big of a deal. [But] we must be firm on this point. Their Vice Premier told me that Pak Sin-il is one of their better athletes. The men's team in [North] Korea is ranked ninth [in table tennis], and South Korea's is ranked eighth. What a coincidence. There was no way [to make a] change to this [the rankings?]? Were we incapable at that time? (Comrade Xu Yinsheng responded: At that time they did not play well. We were also very nervous, [so] we could not take care of them.) [So if you are] nervous, [you] do not care for others. How is that acceptable? The coaches should also pay attention [to this]. I forwarded to you Premier Kim's views, but they did not have an impression upon you]. I even forwarded to you materials about heroic deeds as well as the article commemorating the 100th anniversary of the Paris Commune, and I also wrote a letter. (Mass response: we all studied [these materials].) This, you should all remember. (Zheng Minzhi said: We still remember the Premier's instructions for the women's team.) Sometimes you pay attention, sometimes you do not pay attention.

The second specific issue is that the spokesperson for the Chinese delegation issued a statement regarding the four-country proposal. You did not discuss the issue first with [North] Korea. You did not take joint action.

The third [issue] concerns the six country Afro-Asian Friendship Table Tennis [Invitational] Tournament. The [North] Korean representative was absent when Eisaku Sato held a press conference to announce the decision [about the tournament]. Although our delegation sent someone to ask the [North] Korean comrades to attend, no one resolutely asked Eisaku Sato to make the announcement after the arrival of the [North] Korean representative. In the end, by the time the [North] Korean comrades had rushed to the announcement, the press conference was already over.

The fourth specific issue is that Korean nationals in Tokyo held a reception for the [North] Korean delegation and invited our delegation to attend through our liaison office in Japan. But due to improper liaison work, our delegation could not attend the reception.

We can say more about what we did wrong in relation to [North] Korea.

If Premier Kim receives you, then you must provide a good apology. You can talk about any of our shortcomings and mistakes.

(To comrade Xi Enting) When you greet Comrade Pak Sin-il, say that you had wanted to come to [North] Korea [on your own volition] and we supported [this decision]. Invite them [the North Korean table tennis players] to visit China. Invite them to a [table tennis] invitational. For the [North] Korean women's team, can we help them a bit? If they do not mention [anything about the women's team], then neither should we. We want to be happy to help others.

You want to act according to the circumstances. [Your] attitude must be sincere.

(Comrade Liu Chuntong said: [We] have already had Comrade Han Nianlong report the roster [of individuals traveling to Korea] to the [North] Korean Embassy in China. Counselor Kim Jae-suk [Kim Jae Suk] said: "We cooperated quite well over the 31st Table Tennis Match. There were no issues. Despite provocations by American and Japanese reactionaries, our score was still excellent. Therefore, the problem which you are apologizing for does not exist. We enthusiastically welcome the visit of Comrade Han Nianlong and others [to North Korea]." The [North Korean] Ambassador made a similar statement.)

Premier Zhou: Even if their statement was like this [and their] attitude was out of the ordinary, you will still do as instructed. Our style should also be honorable. (To Comrade Zhao Zhenghong) Do you understand now? (Response: If one committed crimes then one should admit to them and [engage in] self-criticism when the opportunity arises.) Crimes are not necessarily crimes, they are mistakes. Have you had a meeting today yet? (Response: Yes. The opinions were very sharp.) If you have something to say, say it. They [your opinions] should be incisive. That is, after all, the ideology of the Chairman.

Your visit shows the friendship between brothers. The [North] Korean Foreign Affairs Ministry and their National Sports Committee will receive you. Vice Premier Kim Il and Vice Premier Pak Seong-cheol may also receive you.

Do not stay in [North] Korea for too long. It is best to return on 18 [June 1971].

#### 4. Negotiate with [North] Korea on the Afro-Asian Invitational Tournament

Premier Zhou said: Regarding the Afro-Asian Table Tennis Invitational Tournament, we must negotiate with [North] Korea before we can hold the Six Country Preparatory

Conference. The 10th anniversary of the [signing] of the Sino-Korean Treaty of Friendship, Cooperation, and Mutual Assistance is on 11 July of this year. The Six Country Preparatory Conference can be held after the anniversary, [so] prepare to hold it during the second half of July. Inviting Mauritius is advantageous, as that country still has relations with the Jiang [Jieshi] [Chiang Kai-shek] bandits. It is beneficial if they come, [we] can work with them. The six countries include the United Arab Republic [Egypt], Nepal, and Japan. Eisaku Sato was originally going to visit China in late June, [but] we can postpone his visit. The Afro-Asian Invitational does not have to be held in September. It can be held in October. Do not force others to participate in [our] National Day celebrations on 1 October. We can even propose to hold the Afro-Asian Invitational after October. In reality, we will be too busy during National Day celebrations. So July or October would be more appropriate.

First we must reach an agreement with [North] Korea. We will still propose [to hold] the Afro-Asian Friendship Invitational Tournament. Inviting Latin American [countries] depends on their opinion, [but] we will not raise the issue first. Eisaku Sato proposed Africa and Asia [only]. He said this way we can weaken the contradictions within the "Asian Table Tennis Union," and estimated that twenty or thirty countries would participate in the Afro-Asian Invitational Tournament. If too many countries participate, then the International Table Tennis Federation might see [the Afro-Asian Invitational Tournament] as a threat.

We have to respect [North] Korea's view about whether or not to invite South Korea. If they want to invite [South Korea], then we will send out the invitation. We need to respect the views of the [North] Korean comrades on this issue. If they say do not send an invitation, then we will not. We must respect their views throughout the duration of the Afro-Asian Invitational Tournament.

#### 5. Allowing Discussion on International Trends with [North] Korea

Premier Zhou said: If the [North] Korean comrades ask about international trends then you should be prepared to discuss [them]. The current struggle is still very intense and complicated. We published a commentary in the newspapers which exposed the American 7th Fleet's massive joint military exercise with Japan's "Maritime Self-Defense Force" in Korea's East Sea. The United States withdrew one division. Japan has set-up many "Self-Defense Forces." They [the North Koreans] have even more materials [than us] about South Korea and Japanese militarism. If they want to provide [these] materials to us, you must send the materials back [to China]. I have said this before.

The second issue concerns Okinawa. The signing will take place on 17 June. Xinhua News Agency has not yet received the full text [of the agreement]. Taiwan has been shooting off rounds. Their Foreign Ministry issued a statement on 10 June, and the newspapers of the Jiang bandits have been criticizing the United States and Japan for not informing them beforehand. They also mentioned the Senkaku Islands. They even mentioned me by name. The American Secretary of Treasury arrived in Taiwan on 1 June mainly to discuss trade issues, and he left on 9 June. On 10 June, they started shooting off rounds. These struggles are complex.

It now seems that the United States will withdraw some troops from the Far East. The United States' foreign military deployment is too great of a burden, and the people strongly oppose it. They are actively arming Japan. This is the United States' greatest gamble. They will also withdraw some troops from Vietnam. Our struggle against Japan is even more complex. (Towards Wang Xiaoyun) You must pay close attention to the discussion of certain issues. You can also ask Premier Kim if he has any views.

If they [the Soviet Union] do not resolve the issues in the Middle East, then it will be

difficult to act in the Balkans. They are currently drawing up spheres of influence in the Middle East. Romania and Bulgaria are difficult to manage. Yugoslavia and Albania are independent in nature. The United States also does not believe that Yugoslavia is within the Soviet Union's sphere of influence. If the issues in the Middle East and Europe are not resolved, then it is not realistic to open up a battlefield in Yugoslavia and Albania.

We have already informed [North] Korea about our talks with Romania. We can conduct relations between countries. [Although] they do not mention the Five Principles [of Peaceful Coexistence], the content is more or less the same. In addition, there is also the concept of equality between countries regardless of size.

Regarding Ceylon, we will agree to handle it. The [Chinese] Ambassador met with Mrs. [Sirimavo] Bandaranaike. Mrs. Bandaranaike also said that there was probably some deceit [going on]. It is now easier for Mrs. Bandaranaike to control the situation [in Ceylon]. When she took power, it was not.

In sum, your attitude must be sincere. Care for the relationship so that [our] two parties and countries can become even closer.

#### 6. Regarding the 11 July Celebrations

Premier Zhou said: We need to send a Party delegation. It can be led by Vice Premier Li Xiannian. Comrade Geng Biao can also go because he has also gone to Hanoi. The [People's Liberation Army] General Staff should send either Peng Shaohui or Wang Xinting. The Foreign Economic Relations Commission should send either Fang Yi or Li Qiang. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs will send one additional person. There will be a total of five people traveling. Do the [North] Korean comrades want me to go? I have been to this place too many times and I have not gone anywhere else. This is not good. We need to arrange for people to travel to all places and broaden [our experiences]. If we want to invite them [to China], then we need to act sooner.

#### 7. [North] Korea Wants Our Art Troupe

Premier Zhou said: [North] Korea wants us to send an art troupe [to Korea]. The Beijing Ballet Troupe is going to visit Europe and Africa. We can consider sending the Shanghai Ballet Troupe. We cannot just perform "The White-Haired Girl." We should also arrange for another performance of the "Red Detachment of Women." If they are traveling to [North] Korea then they must also travel to Vietnam. I feel that the techniques of the Shanghai Ballet Troupe have improved, [but] their political situation is unclear. We can consider sending the delegation during [North] Korea's National Day (9 September).

#### 8. Xinhua News Agency Must Hurry to Publish the Article on the Visit to [North] Korea

Premier Zhou asked comrade Shi Huatong to explain the situation of the Chinese journalism delegation's visit to [North] Korea.

Premier Zhou said: They are civilian journalists. They need to quickly publish their report. They returned on 6 June and nothing has been published, even on 14 June. People will become aware [of this delay].

...



[text omitted]

After Premier Zhou provided important instructions, he then played table tennis with comrade Zhuang Zedong and others.