

September 1956

Minutes, Mao's Conversation with a Yugoslavian Communist Union Delegation, Beijing, [undated]

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Summary:

Mao apologizes to Yugoslavian Communist Union Delegation for poor relations in the past, citing pressure from Stalin and the Soviet Union as the primary reason.

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[undated][1]

We welcome you to China. We are very pleased at your visit. We have been supported by you, as well as by other brotherly [Communist] parties. We are invariably supporting you as much as all the other brotherly parties. In today's world, the Marxist and Communist front remains united, whether in places where success [of Communist revolution] is achieved or not yet achieved. However, there were times when we were not so united; there were times when we let you down. We listened to the opinions of the Information Bureau[2] in the past. Although we did not take part in the Bureau's [business], we found it difficult not to support it. In 1949 the Bureau condemned you as butchers and Hitler-style fascists, and we kept silent on the resolution [condemning you], although we published articles to criticize you in 1948. In retrospect, we should not have done that; we should have discussed [this issue] with you: if some of your viewpoints were incorrect, [we should have let] you conduct self-criticism, and there was no need to hurry [into the controversy] as [we] did. The same thing is true to us: should you disagree with us, you should do the same thing, that is, the adoption of a method of persuasion and consultation. There have not been that many successful cases in which one criticizes foreign parties in newspapers. [Your] case offers a profound historical lesson for the international communist movement. Although you have suffered from it, the international communist movement has learned a lesson from this mistake. [The international communist movement] must fully understand [the seriousness of] this mistake.

When you offered to recognize new China, we did not respond, nor did we decline it. Undoubtedly, we should not have rejected it, because there was no reason for us to do so. When Britain recognized us, we did not say no to it. How could we find any excuse to reject the recognition of a socialist country?

There was, however, another factor which prevented us from responding to you: the Soviet friends did not want us to form diplomatic relations with you. If so, was China an independent state? Of course, yes. If an independent state, why, then, did we follow their instructions? [My] comrades, when the Soviet Union requested us to follow their suit at that time, it was difficult for us to oppose it. It was because at that time some people claimed that there were two Titos in the world: one in Yugoslavia, the other in China, even if no one passed a resolution that Mao Zedong was Tito. I have once pointed out to the Soviet comrades that [they] suspected that I was a half-hearted Tito, but they refuse to recognize it. When did they remove the tag of half-hearted Tito from my head? The tag was removed after [China] decided to resist America [in Korea] and came to [North] Korea's aid and when [we] dealt the US imperialists a blow.

The Wang Ming line[3] was in fact Stalin's line. It ended up destroying ninety percent of our strength in our bases, and one hundred percent of [our strength] in the white areas.[4] Comrade [Liu] Shaoqi[5] pointed this out in his report to the Eighth [Party] Congress.[6] Why, then, did he not openly attribute [the losses] to the [impact of] Stalin's line? There is an explanation. The Soviet Party itself could criticize Stalin; but it would be inappropriate for us to criticize him. We should maintain a good relationship with the Soviet Union. Maybe [we] could make our criticism public sometime in the future. It has to be that way in today's world, because facts are facts. The Comintern made numerous mistakes in the past. Its early and late stages were not so bad, but its middle stage was not so good: it was all right when Lenin was alive and when [Georgii] Dimitrov was in charge.[7] The first Wang Ming line dominated [our party] for four years, and the Chinese revolution suffered the biggest losses.[8] Wang Ming is now in Moscow taking a sick leave, but still we are going to elect him to be a member of the party's Central Committee. He indeed is an instructor for our party; he is a professor, an invaluable one who could not be purchased by money. He has taught the whole party, so that it would not follow his line.

That was the first time when we got the worst of Stalin.

The second time was during the anti-Japanese war. Speaking Russian and good at flattering Stalin, Wang Ming could directly communicate with Stalin. Sent back to China by Stalin, he tried to set [us] toward right deviation this time, instead of following the leftist line he had previously advocated. Advocating [CCP] collaboration with the Guomindang [the Nationalist Party or GMD], he can be described as “decking himself out and self-inviting [to the GMD];” he wanted [us] to obey the GMD whole-heartedly. The Six-Principle Program he put forward was to overturn our Party’s Ten-Principle Policy. [His program] opposed establishing anti-Japanese bases, advocated giving up our Party’s own armed force, and preached that as long as Jiang Jieshi [Chiang Kai-shek] was in power, there would be peace [in China]. We redressed this deviation. [Ironically,] Jiang Jieshi helped us correct this mistake: while Wang Ming “decked himself out and fawned on [Jiang],” Jiang Jieshi “slapped his face and kicked him out.” Hence, Jiang Jieshi was China’s best instructor: he had educated the people of the whole nation as well as all of our Party members. Jiang lectured with his machine guns whereas Wang Ming educated us with his own words.

The third time was after Japan’s surrender and the end of the Second World War. Stalin met with [Winston] Churchill and [Franklin D.] Roosevelt and decided to give the whole of China to America and Jiang Jieshi. In terms of material and moral support, especially moral support, Stalin hardly gave any to us, the Communist Party, but supported Jiang Jieshi. This decision was made at the Yalta conference. Stalin later told Tito [this decision] who mentioned his conversation [with Stalin on this decision] in his autobiography.

Only after the dissolution of the Comintern did we start to enjoy more freedom. We had already begun to criticize opportunism and the Wang Ming line, and unfolded the rectification movement. The rectification, in fact, was aimed at denouncing the mistakes that Stalin and the Comintern had committed in directing the Chinese revolution; however, we did not openly mention a word about Stalin and the Comintern. Sometime in the near future, [we] may openly do so. There are two explanations of why we did not openly criticize [Stalin and the Comintern]: first, as we followed their instructions, we have to take some responsibility ourselves. Nobody compelled us to follow their instructions! Nobody forced us to be wrongfully deviated to right and left directions! There are two kinds of Chinese: one kind is a dogmatist who completely accepts Stalin’s line; the other opposes dogmatism, thus refusing to obey [Stalin’s] instructions. Second, we do not want to displease [the Soviets], to disrupt our relations with the Soviet Union. The Comintern has never made self-criticism on these mistakes; nor has the Soviet Union ever mentioned these mistakes. We would have fallen out with them had we raised our criticism.

The fourth time was when [Moscow] regarded me as a half-hearted Tito or semi-Titoist. Not only in the Soviet Union but also in other socialist countries and some non-socialist countries were there some people who had suspected whether China’s was a real revolution.

You might wonder why [we] still pay a tribute to Stalin in China by hanging his portrait on the wall. Comrades from Moscow have informed us that they no longer hang Stalin’s portraits and only display Lenin’s and current leaders’ portraits in public parade. They, however, did not ask us to follow their suit. We find it very difficult to cope. The four mistakes committed by Stalin are yet to be made known to the Chinese people as well as to our whole party. Our situation is quite different from yours: your [suffering inflicted by Stalin] is known to the people and to the whole world. Within our party, the mistakes of the two Wang Ming lines are well known; but our people do not know that these mistakes originated in Stalin. Only our Central Committee was aware that Stalin blocked our revolution and regarded me as a half-hearted Tito.

We had no objection that the Soviet Union functions as a center [of the world revolution] because it benefits the socialist movement. You may disagree [with us] on this point. You wholeheartedly support Khrushchev's campaign to criticize Stalin, but we cannot do the same because our people would dislike it. In the previous parades [in China], we held up portraits of Marx, Engels, Lenin and Stalin, as well as those of a few Chinese [leaders]—Mao, Liu [Shaoqi], Zhou [Enlai], and Zhu [De][\[9\]](#)—and other brotherly parties' leaders. Now we adopt a measure of "overthrowing all": no one's portrait is handed out. For this year's "First of May" celebration, Ambassador Bobkoveshi[\[10\]](#) already saw in Beijing that no one's portrait was held in parade. However, the portraits of five dead persons—Marx, Engles, Lenin and Stalin and Sun [Yat-sen]—and a not yet dead person—Mao Zedong—are still hanging [on the wall]. Let them hang on the wall! You Yugoslavians may comment that the Soviet Union no longer hangs Stalin's portrait, but the Chinese still do.

As of this date some people remain suspicious of whether our socialism can be successfully constructed and stick to the assertion that our Communist Party is a phony one. What can we do? These people eat and sleep every day and then propagate that the Chinese Communist Party is not really a communist party, and that China's socialist construction is bound to fail. To them, it would be a bewildering thing if socialism could be built in China! Look out, [they warn]. China might become an imperialist country—to follow America, Britain, and France to become the fourth imperialist country! At present China has little industry, thus is in no position [to be an imperialist country]; but [China] will become formidable in one hundred years! Chinggis Khan[\[11\]](#) might be brought to life; consequently Europe would suffer again, and Yugoslavia might be conquered! The "Yellow Peril" must be prevented!

There is absolutely no ground for this to happen! The CCP is a Marxist-Leninist Party. The Chinese people are peace-loving people. We believe that aggression is a crime, therefore, we will never seize an inch of territory or a piece of grass from others. We love peace and we are Marxists.

We oppose great power politics in international relations. Although our industry is small, all things considered, we can be regarded as a big power. Hence some people [in China] begin to be cocky. We then warn them: "Lower your heads and act with your tails tucked between your legs." When I was little, my mother often taught me to behave "with tails tucked between legs." This is a correct teaching and now I often mention it to my comrades.

Domestically, we oppose Pan-Hanism,[\[12\]](#) because this tendency is harmful to the unity of all ethnic groups. Hegemonism and Pan-Hanism both are sectarianism. Those who have hegemonious tendencies only care about their own interests but ignore others', whereas those Pan-Hanists only care about the Han people and regard the Han people as superior to others, thus damaging [the interests of] all the minorities.

Some people have asserted in the past that China has no intention to be friends with other countries, but wants to split with the Soviet Union, thus becoming a troublemaker. Now, however, this kind of people shrinks to only a handful in the socialist countries; their number has been reduced since the War to Resist America and Assist Korea.[\[13\]](#) It is, however, a totally different thing for the imperialists: the stronger China becomes, the more scared they will be. They also understand that China is not that terrifying as long as China has no advanced industry, and as long as China continues to rely on human power. The Soviet Union remains the most fearsome [for the imperialists] whereas China is merely the second. What they are afraid of is our politics and that we may have an enormous impact in Asia. That is why they keep spreading the words that China will be out of control and will invade others, so on and so forth.

We have been very cautious and modest, trying to overcome arrogance but adhering to the "Five Principles."[\[14\]](#) We know we have been bullied in the past; we understand how it feels to be bullied. You would have had the same feeling, wouldn't you?

China's future hinges upon socialism. It will take fifty or even one hundred years to turn China into a wealthy and powerful country. Now no [formidable] blocking force stands in China's way. China is a huge country with a population of one fourth of that of the world. Nevertheless, her contribution to the world is yet to be compatible with her population size, and this situation will have to change, although my generation and even my son's generation may not see the change taking place. How it will change in the future depends on how [China] develops. China may make mistakes or become corrupt; the current good situation may take a bad turn and, then, the bad situation may take a good turn. There can be little doubt, though, that even if [China's] situation takes a bad turn, it may not become as decadent a society as that of Jiang Jieshi's. This anticipation is based on dialectics. Affirmation, negation, and, then, negation of negation. The path in the future is bound to be tortuous.

Corruption, bureaucracy, hegemonism, and arrogance all may take effect in China. However, the Chinese people are inclined to be modest and willing to learn from others. One explanation is that we have little "capital" at our disposal: first, we did not invent Marxism which we learned from others; second, we did not experience the October Revolution and our revolution did not achieve victory until 1949, some thirty-two years after the October Revolution; third, we were only a branch army, not a main force, during the Second World War; fourth, with little modern industry, we merely have agriculture and some shabby, tattered handicrafts. Although there are some people among us who appear to be cocky, they are in no position to be cocky; at most, [they can merely show] their tails one or two meters high. But we must prevent this from happening in the future: it may become dangerous [for us] in ten to twenty years and even more dangerous in forty to fifty years.

My comrades, let me advise you that you should also watch out for this potential. Your industry is much modernized and has experienced a more rapid growth; Stalin made you suffer and hence, justice is on your side. All of this, though, may become your [mental] burden.

The above-mentioned four mistakes Stalin committed [concerning China] may also become our burden. When China becomes industrialized in later years, it will be more likely that we get cocky. Upon your return to your country, please tell your youngsters that, should China stick her tail up in the future, even if the tail becomes ten thousand meters high, still they must criticize China. [You] must keep an eye on China, and the entire world must keep an eye on China. At that time, I definitely will not be here: I will already be attending a conference together with Marx.

We are sorry that we hurt you before, thus owing you a good deal. Killing must be compensated by life and debts must be paid in cash. We have criticized you before, but why do we still keep quiet? Before [Khrushchev's] criticism of Stalin, we were not in a position to be as explicit about some issues as we are now. In my previous conversations with [Ambassador] Bobkoveshi, I could only say that as long as the Soviet Union did not criticize Stalin, we would be in no position to do so; as long as the Soviet Union did not restore [diplomatic] relations with Yugoslavia, we could not establish relations with you.[\[15\]](#) Now these issues can be openly discussed. I have already talked to the Soviet comrades about the four mistakes that Stalin had committed [to China]; I talked to [Soviet Ambassador Pavel] Yudin[\[16\]](#) about it, and I shall talk to Khrushchev about it next time when we meet. I talk to you about it because you are our comrades. However, we still cannot publish this in the newspapers, because the imperialists should not be allowed to know about it. We may openly talk about one or two mistakes of Stalin's in the future. Our situation is quite different from yours: Tito's autobiography mentions Stalin because you have

already broken up with the Soviet Union.

Stalin advocated dialectical materialism, but sometimes he lacked materialism and, instead, practiced metaphysics; he wrote about historical materialism, but very often suffered from historical idealism. Some of his behavior, such as going to extremes, fostering personal myth, and embarrassing others, are by no means [forms] of materialism.

Before I met with Stalin, I did not have much good feeling about him. I disliked reading his works, and I have read only "On the Basis of Leninism," a long article criticizing Trotsky, and "Be Carried Away by Success," etc. I disliked even more his articles on the Chinese revolution. He was very different from Lenin: Lenin shared his heart with others and treated others as equals whereas Stalin liked to stand above every one else and order others around. This style can be detected from his works. After I met with him, I became even more disgusted: I quarreled a lot with him in Moscow. Stalin was excitable by temperament. When he became agitated, he would spell out nasty things.

I have written altogether three pieces praising Stalin. The first was written in Yanan to celebrate his sixtieth birthday [21 December 1939—ed.], the second was the congratulatory speech [I delivered] in Moscow [in December 1949—ed.], and the third was an article requested by Pravda after his death [March 1953—ed.]. I always dislike congratulating others as well as being congratulated by others. When I was in Moscow to celebrate his birthday, what else could I have done if I had chosen not to congratulate him? Could I have cursed him instead? After his death the Soviet Union needed our support and we also wanted to support the Soviet Union. Consequently, I wrote that piece to praise his virtues and achievements. That piece was not for Stalin; it was for the Soviet Communist Party. As for the piece I did in Yanan, I had to ignore my personal feelings and treat him as the leader of a socialist country. Therefore, that piece was rather vigorous whereas the other two came out of [political] need, not my heart, nor at my will. Human life is just as contradictory as this: your emotion tells you not to write these pieces, but your rationality compels you to do so.

Now that Moscow has criticized Stalin, we are free to talk about these issues. Today I tell you about the four mistakes committed by Stalin, but, in order to maintain relations with the Soviet Union, [we] cannot publish them in our newspapers. Since Khrushchev's report only mentioned the conflict over the sugar plant while discussing Stalin's mistakes concerning us, we feel it inappropriate to make them public. There are other issues involving conflicts and controversies.

Generally speaking, the Soviet Union is good. It is good because of four factors: Marxism-Leninism, the October Revolution, the main force [of the socialist camp], and industrialization. They have their negative side, and have made some mistakes. However, their achievements constitute the major part [of their past] while their shortcomings are of secondary significance. Now that the enemy is taking advantage of the criticism of Stalin to take the offensive on a world-wide scale, we ought to support the Soviet Union. They will certainly correct their mistakes. Khrushchev already corrected the mistake concerning Yugoslavia. They are already aware of Wang Ming's mistakes, although in the past they were unhappy with our criticism of Wang Ming. They have also removed the "half-hearted Tito" [label from me], thus, eliminating altogether [the labels on] one and a half Titos. We are pleased to see that Tito's tag was removed.

Some of our people are still unhappy with the criticism of Stalin. However, such criticism has positive effects because it destroys mythologies, and opens [black] boxes. This entails liberation, indeed, a "war of liberation." With it, people are becoming so courageous that they will speak their minds, as well as be able to think

about issues.

Liberty, equality, and fraternity are slogans of the bourgeoisie, but now we have to fight for them. Is [our relationship with Moscow] a father-and-son relationship or one between brothers? It was between father and son in the past; now it more or less resembles a brotherly relationship, but the shadow of the father-and-son relationship is not completely removed. This is understandable, because changes can never be completed in one day. With certain openness, people are now able to think freely and independently. Now there is, in a sense, the atmosphere of anti-feudalism: a father-and-son relationship is giving way to a brotherly relationship, and a patriarchal system is being toppled. During [Stalin's] time people's minds were so tightly controlled that even the feudal control had been surpassed. While some enlightened feudal lords or emperors would accept criticism, [Stalin] would tolerate none. Yugoslavia might also have such a ruler [in your history] who might take it well even when people cursed him right in his face. The capitalist society has taken a step ahead of the feudal society. The Republican and Democratic Parties in the United States are allowed to quarrel with each other.

We socialist countries must find [better] solutions. Certainly, we need concentration and unification; otherwise, uniformity cannot be maintained. The uniformity of people's minds is in our favor, enabling us to achieve industrialization in a short period and to deal with the imperialists. It, however, embodies some shortcomings, that is, people are made afraid of speaking out. Therefore, we must find some ways to encourage people to speak out. Our Politburo's comrades have recently been considering these issues.

Few people in China have ever openly criticized me. The [Chinese] people are tolerant of my shortcomings and mistakes. It is because we always want to serve the people and do good things for the people. Although we sometimes also suffer from bossism and bureaucracy, the people believe that we have done more good things than bad ones and, as a result, they praise us more than criticize us. Consequently, an idol is created: when some people criticize me, others would oppose them and accuse them of disrespecting the leader. Everyday I and other comrades of the central leadership receive some three hundred letters, some of which are critical of us. These letters, however, are either not signed or signed with a false name. The authors are not afraid that we would suppress them, but they are afraid that others around them would make them suffer.

You mentioned "On Ten Relationships."[\[17\]](#) This resulted from one-and-a-half-months of discussions between me and thirty-four ministers [of the government]. What opinions could I myself have put forward without them? All I did was to put together their suggestions, and I did not create anything. Any creation requires materials and factories. However, I am no longer a good factory. All my equipment is out-of-date, I need to be improved and re-equipped as much as do the factories in Britain. I am getting old and can no longer play the major role but had to assume a minor part. As you can see, I merely played a minor role during this Party's National Congress whereas Liu Shaoqi, Zhou Enlai, Deng Xiaoping[\[18\]](#) and others assumed the primary functions.

[\[1\]](#) The content of this conversation suggests that it occurred between 15 and 28 September 1956, when the CCP's Eighth National Congress was in session.

[\[2\]](#) This refers to the Information Bureau of Communist and Workers' Parties (Cominform), which was established in September 1947 by the parties of the Soviet Union, Bulgaria, Romania, Hungary, Poland, France, Czechoslovakia, Italy, and Yugoslavia. The Bureau announced that it was ending its activities in April 1956.

[\[3\]](#) Wang Ming (1904-1974), also known as Chen Shaoyu, was a returnee from the Soviet Union and a leading member of the Chinese Communist Party in the 1930s. Official Chinese Communist view claims that Wang Ming committed "ultra-leftist"

mistakes in the early 1930s and “ultra-rightist” mistakes in the late 1930s.

[4] The white areas were Guomindang-controlled areas.

[5] Liu Shaoqi was vice chairman of the CCP Central Committee and chairman of the Standing Committee of the People’s National Congress. He was China’s second most important leader.

[6] The Chinese Communist party’s eighth national congress was held in Beijing on 15-27 September 1956.

[7] Georgii Dimitrov (1882-1949), a Bulgarian communist, was the Comintern’s secretary general from 1935 to 1943.

[8] Mao here pointed to the period from 1931 to 1935, during which the “international section,” of which Wang Ming was a leading member, controlled the central leadership of the Chinese Communist Party.

[9] Zhu De was then vice chairman of the CCP Central Committee and vice chairman of the PRC.

[10] Bobkoveshi was Yugoslavia’s first ambassador to the PRC, with whom Mao Zedong met for the first time on 30 June 1955.

[11] Chinggis Khan, also spelled Genghis Jenghiz, was born about 1167, when the Mongolian-speaking tribes still lacked a common name. He became their great organizer and unifier. Before his death in 1227, Chinggis established the basis for a far-flung Eurasian empire by conquering its inner zone across Central Asia. The Mongols are remembered for their wanton aggressiveness both in Europe and in Asia, and this trait was certainly present in Chinggis.

[12] The Han nationality is the majority nationality in China, which counts for over 95 percent of the Chinese population.

[13] The “War to Resist America and Assist Korea” describes China’s participation in the Korean War from October 1950 to July 1953.

[14] The five principles were first introduced by Zhou Enlai while meeting a delegation from India on 31 December 1953. These principles—(1) mutual respect for territorial integrity and sovereignty, (2) mutual non-aggression, (3) mutual non-interference in international affairs, (4) equality and mutual benefit, and (5) peaceful coexistence—were later repeatedly claimed by the Chinese government as the foundation of the PRC’s foreign policy.

[15] China did not establish diplomatic relations with Yugoslavia until January 1955, although the Yugoslavian government recognized the PRC as early as 5 October 1949, four days after the PRC’s establishment.

[16] P. F. Yudin (1899-1968), a prominent philosopher and a member of the Central Committee of the Soviet Communist Party from 1952 to 1961, was Soviet ambassador to China from 1953 to 1959.

[17] “On Ten Relationships” was one of Mao’s major works in the 1950s. He discussed the relationship between industry and agriculture and heavy industry and light industry, between coastal industry and industry in the interior, between economic construction and national defense, between the state, the unit of production, and individual producers, between the center and the regions, between the Han nationality and the minority nationalities, between party and non-party, between revolutionary and counter-revolutionary, between right and wrong, and between China and other countries. For an English translation of one version of the article, see Stuart Schram, ed., *Chairman Mao Talks to the People* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1974), 61-83.

[18] Liu Shaoqi, Zhou Enlai and Deng Xiaoping were all leading members of the Chinese Communist Party. At the Party’s Eighth Congress in September 1956, Liu and Zhou were elected the Party’s vice chairmen, and Deng the Party’s general secretary.