

March 16, 1965

**Vice Premier Lu Dingyi Receives Five Members of a
Friendship Delegation from the Syrian Arab
Republic including Culture and National Guidance
Minister Sulaiman al-Keiche**

Citation:

"Vice Premier Lu Dingyi Receives Five Members of a Friendship Delegation from the Syrian Arab Republic including Culture and National Guidance Minister Sulaiman al-Keiche", March 16, 1965, Wilson Center Digital Archive, PRC FMA 107-01061-04. Translated by David Cowhig.
<https://wilson-center-digital-archive.dvincitest.com/document/120588>

Credits:

This document was made possible with support from Henry Luce Foundation

Original Language:

Chinese

Contents:

Translation - English

PRC Committee for Cultural Liaison with Foreign Countries Document

Reading restriction: Secret

Destroy after reading: for Party members and cadres at the deputy section chief level and above

Text (65) No. 14

Vice Premier Lu Dingyi Receives Five Members of a Friendship Delegation from the Syrian Arab Republic including Syrian Culture and National Guidance Minister Sulaiman al-Keiche [Sulayman al-Khushsh]

(Not reviewed by Deputy Prime Minister Lu)

Time: March 16, 1965

Venue: Anhui Hall, Great Hall of the People

Also attending: Zhang Xiruo, Hu Yuzhi, Chen Zhongjing, Xu Ping

Introductions: Lin Zhaonan

Interpreter: Shi Jie

Notetakers: Liu Yi and Meng Bo

Vice Premier Lu (hereinafter referred to as Lu): You have been very busy. Have you had a chance to rest?

Sulaiman: Yes, I had a good rest, thank you.

Lu: Yesterday, you had a long talk with Vice Premier Chen Yi. The head of delegation (referring to Syrian Foreign Minister Muvid) spoke very well.

Sulaiman: Thank you. We are very happy to have the opportunity to hold talks with Marshal Chen Yi and other leaders. We feel that Marshal Chen Yi speaks very frankly. From the conversation, we realized the close friendship between China and Syria. We were able to address issues at such depth that we expect that Sino-Syrian relations will develop even further. During the past few days, we have found that China and Syria's share similar views on international issues. We oppose US imperialism and support the struggle against Israel. Without a doubt, our Syrian people support the Chinese people in their efforts to liberate Taiwan, a part of China's national territory. We find common cause in the struggle against imperialism.

Lu: Yesterday, your Excellency said that China is Syria's elder brother. You are being too modest. We are equals and you are too modest. We are revolutionary friends and comrades-in-arms. Yesterday, the head of delegation said that the fight against imperialism is the foundation for our unity. In the struggle against US imperialism, in particular, we have a little experience to contribute. We will be pleased if it proves useful to you. We only provide it to you as a point of reference however. Don't copy it indiscriminately. In the past, we made two kinds of mistakes during the Chinese revolution. One kind was rightist -- reformist or revisionist -- and the other kind was leftist -- dogmatism or indiscriminately copying the Soviet Union.

We suffered two big failures as a result of these mistakes. Later, we summed up our experience and found our own distinctively Chinese revolutionary path. We call it the fusion of Marxism-Leninism and of China's specific revolutionary experience. The

most representative figure is Comrade Mao Zedong. He led us to victory in the revolution. What are we to discuss today? We are to talk about cultural and educational issues, aren't we? Let's have a good discussion.

Sulaiman: We will soon have a very straightforward discussion. Our two countries have had cultural cooperation agreements. Now I tell you that it would not have been necessary to come to China just to sign a new cultural agreement. We could have signed the agreement with the Chinese ambassador in Damascus. We came to China to learn from you and to see for ourselves what the Chinese Cultural Revolution and China's cultural path are like.

For example, we would like to understand China's higher education policy and overall education policy. Specifically, we want to understand the general curriculum of Chinese primary and secondary education. We are interested in questions such as how does China cultivate intellectuals who have both theoretical and practical knowledge? We want to understand how China cultivates expertise in medicine, engineering, and agriculture. How do Chinese law schools train lawyers? These are the kinds of educational issues we want to understand.

On the cultural side, we want to learn about the mission of the Ministry of Culture and how it is organized. We are especially interested in how China promotes the development of folk culture and art. Naturally, we also want to know how China creates new movies and theatrical productions. We have too many questions about education. Another thing we are interested in is how China organized its work to wipe out illiteracy. We especially want to know how you transformed a capitalist education policy to a socialist education policy. We would welcome it if you could give us more about those issues.

Lu: Ok, let's discuss it. We gradually came to understand the cultural education for socialism. At first, when we were victorious nationwide, all the schools, institutions, and cinemas of the Kuomintang came into our hands. At that time, the imperialists were still running schools in China. We still allow them to do so. For example, the imperialists established a big hospital in Beijing, Peking Union Hospital and ran two universities, Yanjing University and Fu Jen University. These were all the work of the US imperialists.

Zhang Xiruo (hereinafter referred to as Zhang): The United States has also run secondary schools and primary schools.

Lu: There were just a few of them. Our first step was to merge the imperialist schools.

Sulaiman: That was the first step towards nationalizing them.

Lu: Yes, but we had to wait for the right conditions; that is, the economic conditions to improve. We waited two or three years before we took them over. In 1949, the People's Republic of China was established. In 1950, there was the War to Oppose America and Assist Korea. That was when we took over Peking Union Hospital and those universities. Those schools enrolled the best students, but only graduated one or two students each year because many students flunked out. About half of the graduates live abroad.

Sulaiman: Did those people turn around and oppose China?

Lu: Some of them have taken US citizenship.

Sulaiman: The people educated by the imperialists not only took US citizenship but

also oppose China.

Lu: Some did that but not all of them.

Sulaiman: Naturally.

Lu: Some of the graduates are in China. Now they are very good physicians. Only one or two of them oppose China. They live not only in Beijing, but in Shanghai and Guangzhou as well. The cultural and educational work the imperialists did in China was very deceptive. Some people say that the imperialist built schools and hospitals in China. Isn't that a good thing? One of the special characteristics of US imperialism is that it conducts cultural infiltration.

Zhang: They used Chinese money to build and run schools.

Lu: They used the Boxer Indemnity to build schools. At the time of the War to Oppose American and Assist Korea, the political conditions were to our advantage since people could see that the imperialist had come to fight with us. As the same time, our economic conditions were better, so we took the schools back. But education at that time was not socialist education. At that time, because of lack of experience, we didn't understand the distinction between capitalist education and socialist education and between capitalism and socialism. So we slavishly followed the example of the Soviet Union. At that time, we believed that the culture and education of the Soviet Union was socialist.

However, after a few years we gained some experience. The more students studied and the further they got along in their studies, the less they liked doing physical labor. It is that way in your country as well. Elementary school graduates don't want to be peasants. Middle school graduates don't want to be factory workers. University students just live in the clouds. We feel that this method is wrong. Here is an interesting story. A middle school student is a poor peasant from the city one day received a visit from his father who came wearing peasant clothes. The student told the other students that this is not my father.

We began to feel that the Soviet education policy was not quite right. We put forward our slogan, that is, "Education Serves the Proletariat and Politics" and "Education and Productive Work Complement One Another". Later, Khrushchev appeared on the scene and we understand the issue more clearly. We could see why Khrushchev's revisionism could appear in a socialist country. This was no accident. It has a social basis. This social basis is the high-income class. Many things originate from the high-income class including economic corruption and in politics, ignoring the class struggle. It seems that culture too is an important factor. If we do not change this practice, than a Khrushchev will also appear in China. In this way, we came to understand things more clearly and so we started to stress the process of understanding.

We have more than 410 colleges and universities. These are institutions of higher education; secondary education which is divided into junior and senior secondary school of three years each and elementary schools; and elementary education which is also divided into two parts, primary for three years and upper level for two years. This is a copy of the system in the United States. We inherited it, but we are also changing it. We changed the length of elementary school to five years.

There are 90 million school-age children. The poorest children aren't able to go to school. They are only 60 percent of the school age population so since we have 90 million in school-age children now and that will increase later to 114 million. We need to serve all the children. The state can't accomplish this on its own and we cannot

rely just on full-time schooling. The state can only afford to pay for 60 - 70 million children to attend school. Therefore there is industrial work-study and agricultural work-study - half study and half agricultural labor.

There are many problems in elementary education. To take two examples, it is very difficult for girls in the countryside to go to school. Some of this is due to old-fashioned traditional thinking. Some peasants think that only boys and not girls should be educated. Girls should do housework, take care of the pigs and geese and for their younger brothers. Thus the rate of girls' enrollment in school is lower than that of boys. Also there are silly, blind, awkward, or mute children who are fooled. When people draw a circle and tell him not to go out, he doesn't dare come out. He rolls around, tearing his clothes. When we look more closely, we see that the child is the son of a poor peasant and his family has been poor peasants for several generations. If it takes him two days to get out of the circle, we know by that just how powerful the oppression of the old society has been. Poor children were made stupid.

Now these child do well in school. For such people we set up work-study programs in which students do factory work or agricultural work half time. These schools have absorbed 30 million students. They work when there is a lot of work to do and then go to school during the slow season. Some take classes early in the morning, late at night or even at noontime. Where girls can't go to school, educational material can be sent to the home. Educational methods have changed.

In short, education has been very difficult. Now we have to change. A teacher can teach several classes if he spends ten minutes with one class and then goes on to the next. In this way, going from classroom to classroom, he can teach four to six classes. A class leader chosen by the can maintain order. Examination methods must change too. We can't treat students like enemies whom we suddenly attack. The former method was not to tell the students the topic of the test until they get to the examination room. Now we tell them what the subject of the test will be.

If the state were responsible for all education, we could only manage to cover 50 percent-60 percent of the school age population. With this method, we can cover 100 percent. We haven't fully reached out goal. Now we only have 71 percent coverage. We also eliminate illiteracy this way too. No matter whether the workers are on morning, day or night shifts. We used to concentrate on two things: expanding access to elementary education and eliminating illiteracy. These two goals were separate ones at higher levels but couldn't be kept separate in the countryside. Separating the two didn't make sense. Studying Chinese characters is hard. They can't learn them all in a short time. To be able to read, they will need to learn two to three thousand characters. Therefore, education and fighting illiteracy must be combined. Separating them was a mistake we made.

Yusuf Shaqrah (Secretary-General of the Syrian Ministry of Culture): So your plan for fighting illiteracy was wrong?

Lu: We didn't have a plan to fight illiteracy. The illiteracy rate used to be 80 percent. Now it is 30 percent among adults 25 - 40 years old. Fifteen years have passed and we haven't been able to implement our literacy plan. In the countryside we can't separate fighting illiteracy from general educational work. In the villages we have many people in the part time work-study arrangements. We use several methods. One is to give the peasant a plot of land and let him work and study there. Another is to have the peasant go to school and return home to work and to eat. That program has already graduated many classes of students.

Since 1958, these students are different from full-time students. He may work and the state will pay for it. The state gives a full-time student 10 - 20 RMB per month. The state invests in these students who study half time and do agricultural labor half

time. Some of these students also take a senior high school course. The state makes an investment in them, provides them with land, and builds a house for them. The students come from the factories and the countryside. When they graduate, they return to the factories and the countryside. After three years, these students become self-sufficient. What does self-sufficient mean? Self-sufficiency means not relying on state funding but instead using one's own earnings to pay for books and notebooks. All this will take time to accomplish. I am afraid that eight or ten years will not be enough.

Shaqrah: Are a large proportion of the workers enrolled in these programs?

Lu: No more than half. The proportion of rural people who do have agricultural work and half studying is about one-third.

Shaqrah: Is it the same in the city.

Lu: The city is relatively easy to take care of. I was talking about both urban and rural areas.

Shaqrah: Does Beijing have work-study schools.

Lu: There is no work-study primary school in Beijing yet but there are some in the suburbs.

Abdar-Rahman Badr ad-Din (Director of the Education Department of the Syrian Ministry of Education): I have a question. Are there schools or technical schools in cities in rural areas?

Lu: Yes, there are technical schools.

Badr: Is the technical school a senior high school and a junior high school?

Lu: All the technical schools are getting ready for work-study students now.

Badr: In this kind of system, do the students learn geography history and arithmetic in the schools. Does this affect what they learn?

Lu: No, that doesn't happen. The most important thing in primary school is to learn language and mathematics. Once you master language, you can read anything.

Badr: This is the right way to fight illiteracy. If you are training scientists, you still have to rely on full-time.

Lu: We are still experimenting, we use both full-time and part-time but we know work-study is promising. Perhaps full-time schooling won't last another hundred years though.

Badr: We believe we need both systems need to enrich the knowledge of workers and peasants. We will need to rely on full-time schooling in order to storm the fortress of the sciences however.

Lu: Yes, we will have to leave history to draw its own conclusions about that.

Sulaiman: There are work-study primary schools. Are there work-study middle schools as well?

Lu: Student can enroll in both work-study primary school and work-study middle schools. They can also enter middle schools as full-time students. Now the state has set up many factories, tractor stations, electric powered irrigation and drainage systems, stud farms, weather stations, farm tool factories etc. in the rural areas. They have their own student workers and don't need to ask the state to provide them.

Shaqrah: This is a good method.

Lu: Yes, a good method. People work in the own local area, earn work points, and don't ask the country for money. We envision that it will take 30 years. If half of the new generation of peasants get training through work-study at an agricultural secondary school or agricultural technology, conditions in the countryside will be radically transformed within 50 years.

Shaqrah: Is this method being adopted widely?

Lu: Yes it is being spread.

Shaqrah: Is it in every rural area?

Lu: Not necessarily everywhere. It hasn't reached some areas.

Shaqrah: Could you say that all rural elementary schools have it?

Lu: There are two kinds of primary schools and two kinds of junior high schools. If you are interested, we can give some materials to look at. Some counties are doing a good job.

Shaqrah: We would like to see magazines and articles on the topics of culture and education. We would like whatever written materials on the questions we just raised. Another topic of interest is about corporate cultural activities, movies, folk art and drama. We would like to see information about how culture is sent to the villages. I heard that you have a famous slogan about sending film teams to the countryside. We would like to learn more about those things. We are very interested in them. We hope that the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Culture will arrange for us to see the actual situation and to take a look at the school and cultural facilities. I am afraid that this is difficult and the translation will be difficult. If there are students who speak English or French, they would be able to interpret for us.

Xu Ping: You won't have much time in Beijing. Some of you could visit other parts of China.

Lu: Full-time schools also allow students to participate in labor to help farmers harvest and collect manure. We also are considering doing work-study in the liberal arts of higher education. This would include what you call literature, philosophy, economics, law, and education.

There are also two kinds of laws. I just went to see four students who were seriously injured while participating in anti-American demonstrations in the Soviet Union. In the Soviet Union they called those students scoundrels. One is a graduate student and three are college students. The most seriously injured was the graduate student. He was a university teaching assistant. He went there to study, to study their laws. We

here have a different kind of law. Ten million people participated in demonstrations in support of the struggle of the Vietnamese people against the Americans. Legal scholars should always be as one with the masses.

The medical problem I just mentioned is very difficult. That is true for the Soviet Union and it is true for us as well. We only treat the city and not the countryside. Poor peasants can't get their medical problems treated. If they get sick, they don't go to the hospital. In the city too, medicine only cares for the cadres and not for the masses. Now we must turn this around. We can't do this in a day. We organized physicians to go to the countryside for a few months. Now many famous Beijing physicians go to the countryside. The peasants are very pleased. If they are sick, they see the physician and are satisfied. By the physicians going to the countryside, we can understand which illnesses are prevalent there. We can organize short training courses and do some sanitation work.

In the future, medical education should be greatly reorganized. There are 500 kinds of diseases in medical books, but what is there varies from region to region. For example, there is a great deal of dysentery in the south. For example, there are many schistosomiasis in the swamplands. This will change. If there is a disease in a certain area, physicians in that area will study that disease. Naturally, there will still be those who study all 500 kinds of disease.

Traditional Chinese medicine and other local medical traditions can be used. Currently, China has 600,000 traditional Chinese medicine practitioners and 600,000 Western medicine practitioners. Cooperation between the two sides will be beneficial. Chinese medicine handles bone fractures well and they could also use the X-rays of Western medicine.

Sulaiman: We have Arab traditional medicine but nobody pays attention to it.

Lu: Yes, we should pay attention to it.

Sulaiman: For example, an Arab traditional physician treats a bone fracture very well.

Lu: I also want to give you some information that hasn't been published yet. Chinese anesthesia, without using anesthetic drugs, but instead 52 needles on the hands and feet, you perform surgery, remove bones, take out a lung and the patient can speak to you and drink water while you are operating on them. After the operation, the patient walked out of the ward, and told his family very clearly, you can go home, I am fine. There are no anesthetic after-effects. This is also self-reliance. This is the first issue, that is what we have on that.

Cultural issues, Vice Minister of Culture Hu Yu can talk more them. Cultural issues are very serious and we need to study whether our organization methods are effective. Our Ministry of Culture is divided into four departments. The first department is art, including drama, art and dance. The second is film, the third part is managing publishing, and the fourth part is managing cultural objects and books. We need to study whether that organization is effective. A very broad range of topics is managed. In the cultural area, we are chiefly doing Cultural Revolution.

Culture is the superstructure which serves the economic foundation. The economic foundation of society is socialism which depends upon the workers along with the lower and middle poor peasants who comprise 70 percent of the population. Moreover, among the upper and middle peasants, there are still five percent who oppose us. Probably fewer than 5 percent. Don't imagine that 100 percent all support us. Some like the US, some like Chiang Kai-shek, some like revisionism. We rely on the workers and the peasants. That means that we should express the wishes of

these people. We must also serve the cadres, but the cadres must also learn from the workers and the middle peasants. Old things, both the Chinese or Western cultural heritages, have good and bad sides to them. The good sides are things like technical skills. The bad side includes things like promoting feudalism and capitalism.

Ballet skills were used to make Swan Lake. The skills used in Swan Lake are very good but the most important things are the main characters. The ballet sings the praises of the prince and princess. The prince is the son of the biggest landlord and the princess is the daughter of the biggest landlord. We can use these same skills to portray the workers, peasants and soldiers. We have been working on this problem for twenty years. We have had many failure during those twenty years. That is until last year when we had many modern operas in the style of Peking Opera. Drama was relatively easy. Peking Opera and ballet were difficult to conquer, like a feudal fortress. In the future, you will be able to see Peking Operas like see Peking Opera such as "The Sha Family's Creek", "The Legend of the Red Lantern", and "Taking Tiger Mountain By Strategy". These operas use the all the old skills of reading, singing, acting, and fighting. The old artists admire them. The way to change them was for the people who write, direct and act in operas to go out among the worker, peasants and soldiers in order to deepen their ties with them.

If they only perform the old operas for a long time, all they will think about will be emperors, generals and brilliant talents. When they try to portray the workers and the peasants, the portrayals will not be authentic. These people need to be sent among the workers, peasants and soldiers in order to transform themselves. Once they transform themselves, their minds will not be on emperors, generals and brilliant talents. They will envy the workers and the heroes of the peasants. As their feelings change, they will be able to portray these people.

These people are very skilled. For example, the actors in Peking Operas have a high salary but in the city they still think that their salary is too low. Once he goes out among the workers and the peasants, he realized that a hero's salary is very low. They will feel embarrassed. Worker, peasant and soldier heroes made great contributions to the country. When they think about what contributions they themselves have made to the country and the masses ask them how much they make in a month, they will not dare tell anyone. When they get back home, they will ask for their salary to be reduced. They will want to study from the workers, peasants and soldiers, and reform themselves.

We can't expect to do this quickly. We have been working on this for twenty years. We have gone through many twists and turns. Theatrical productions, film and opera have developed very quickly. Film has developed relatively slowly. Shooting a film takes six months to a year. Some moves are better. There is the question how much of our heritage to we want to retain? We still need it so that we can use it to perfect our skills. We advocate letting a hundred flowers bloom and letting a hundred schools of thought compete.

The important thing is not to become fossilized. Opposing opinions are welcome. There can be different factions but we cannot change the bottom line, which is socialism. We cannot be too strict because we want people to speak out. We learned this from the Soviet Union. Stalin in his later years got too rigid. He didn't allow people to express different opinions and did not allow different schools of thought.

Let's talk about it. Our view is that culture is the superstructure and the superstructure must serve as the foundation. It must be anti-imperialist, anti-feudal, anti-capitalist, portray the workers, peasants and soldiers, with the workers and peasants portrayed as heroes, and to portray some workers and peasants as advanced and others as backwards. This is internal problem of the people. It is manifested in literature and art. We must have socialist politics, a socialist economy,

and a socialist culture. The Cultural Revolution will take a long time. We will need to continue the Cultural Revolution for another century. As for cultural agreements and plans, the draft you proposed is very good.

Shaqrah: We have a draft agreement. It will be better to sign it in Beijing.

Lu: You can sign it in Beijing. Do you leave Beijing on the 19th? Your boss is talking with our boss.

Zhang: You can talk about it first.

Chen Zhongjing (hereinafter referred to as Chen): We can sign it before the 19th.

Shaqrah: We may be able to solve the problem in an hour.

Lu: Could you designate a comrade who could talk it over with us?

Sulaiman: The two of them (indicating Shaqra and Badr) will take part.

Chen: I and him (indicating to Comrade Xu Ping) - Deputy Director of the Foreign Language Committee.

Sulaiman: The lady (referring to the Deputy Director of the Cultural Exchange Department of the Syrian Ministry of Education) is also participating.

Shaqrah: You need to find a French translation. An English translation would also do.

Chen: Alright.

Shaqrah: We have prepared a draft cultural agreement in French. We think that the agreement has identical Arabic, Chinese and French versions.

Lu: That's it, we have a comrade in the Higher Education Ministry participate so we will have a three on three discussion.

Shaqrah: Who will sign on your side?

Chen: What do you think? Who should sign it?

Shaqrah: The head of delegation should sign.

Sulaiman: We can solve the problem by dividing into two. One meeting for discussion and the other for signing. We have a change. The four present (except Sulaiman himself) have all participated in the negotiation of the agreement. The Foreign Minister will sign on behalf of all the parties. I will be present.

Lu: You will have four on your side and we will have four on our side.

Shaqrah: When will we sign? Tomorrow is better.

Chen: I leave the day after tomorrow, on the 19th.

Lu: Let's handle it this way. We'll eat, rest for a while, watch and play and have our pictures taken.

Distribution: Central Committee Foreign Affairs Office (2), Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Central Committee Investigations Department, Central Committee Foreign Liaison Department, Central Committee Propaganda Department, Central Committee Organization Department, Academy of Sciences, China Association for Science and Technology, Ministry of Culture, Ministry of Higher Education, Ministry of Education, Ministry of Health, State Physical Culture and Sports Commission, Xinhua News Agency, All-China Journalists' Association, China Federation of Literary and Art Circles, China Writers Association, China Radio and Television Association, Religious Affairs Bureau, Iraqi Association, Chinese Academy of Sciences Department of Philosophy and Social Sciences.

Foreign Affairs Bureau (3), International, China Construction, Diplomatic Bookstore.

Zhang, Chu, Li, Ding, Cao, Chen, Tao, General Office (4), First Division, Second Division, Third Division (2), Fourth Division, Fifth Division, Publicity Division (2), Foreign Assistance Division, International Organizations Division, Research (2), exchange, performance, Cadres Department, Party Office (2), Archives, Reception Group.

Asia, Africa and Latin America Culture Research Institute, Second Foreign Languages Institute (3), China-Syria Friendship Association, exhibition studio.

Four copies retained. 68 copies printed.

Issued by the PRC Committee for Cultural Relations with Foreign Countries, April 13, 1965