

LEARN FROM MAO ZEDONG

May 7, 1949

The Chinese people's great revolution is on its way to nationwide victory. The young people of our country must press ahead, taking part in building a new China. We must have a leader recognized by us all, for such a leader can guide us in our advance. The practice of the revolutionary movement of the last thirty years has given the Chinese people that leader, namely, Mao Zedong. And our slogan at this National Youth Congress is:⁴⁴² "Advance under the banner of Mao Zedong!" We are determined to hold this banner high and forge ahead. Today, at this congress, I wish to explain several major points to show why Comrade Mao Zedong deserves our respect and how we should learn from him.

Learning from Mao Zedong is not just a slogan, the words are rich in content. When you delegates go back after this congress, you should tell all our young people — in the villages, factories and cities, in the Liberated Areas and in areas under Kuomintang rule — what this congress advocates, so as to mobilize and win over to our side millions of them who will advance together with us. The best way for us to do that is to call upon them to follow the banner of Mao Zedong. In calling on all our young people to march forward behind this banner, we must know how it has become the banner it is today. Mao Zedong is a great man sprung from our own Chinese soil. When doing propaganda work among the young people of the country, or when learning from him by yourselves, you must not regard Mao Zedong as a chance leader, a born leader, a demi-god or a leader impossible to emulate. If you see things that way, it will become empty talk to accept him as our leader. If one couldn't learn from him, he would be isolated from

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us, wouldn't he? Wouldn't we be making Mao Zedong into a deity apart? That's the kind of leader publicized in feudal and capitalist societies. Our leader is born of the Chinese people, has flesh-and-blood ties with them and is deeply rooted in the land and society of China. He is a people's leader born of China's revolutionary movements in the past hundred years and, since the May 4th Movement, of the long years of accumulated revolutionary experience. In learning from Mao Zedong, we must therefore learn from him in a comprehensive way, in the light of his historical development — not just by looking at his great achievements today and neglecting the process of his growth.

Chairman Mao often says that he was born and bred in the countryside and that when he was young he, too, was superstitious and backward in some aspects of his thinking. He was most unhappy about a textbook published in the Shanxi-Chahar-Hebei border area, which said that even at the age of ten he had opposed superstition and that from the time he was a child he had not believed in gods. He says that, quite the contrary, when he was a little boy, he did believe in gods and, what's more, was very pious. When his mother was ill, he prayed to Buddha for help. Wasn't that superstitious? The story about Chairman Mao in that textbook turned things the other way round when it said that he wasn't superstitious as a child and that he was born with innate wisdom and had broken with superstition. Chairman Mao says that doesn't accord with the facts. Besides, generally speaking, in the feudal society of that period, it was impossible for anyone, whether from a peasant or a worker's family, to break with superstition all at once. Chairman Mao was born in a village at the end of the 19th century, so it was impossible for him not to be a little superstitious. Why is it necessary to explain this? Because we must not think that since some of our youth are still superstitious, they cannot be educated and should be excluded. Yesterday's superstitious child was able to become today's Chairman Mao (of course, I'm not saying that every child can become a Chairman Mao). Superstition can be done away with. Weren't you also superstitious a few years ago? You can't deny that you snivelled when you were kids! You must not refuse to acknowledge the weaknesses of childhood just because you've made progress.

Chairman Mao often says that he is also a reader of ancient classics. Everything hinges on whether you know how to read them. Chairman Mao was very fond of reading such books in his younger days. Now, when writing and speaking, he often draws on historical experience and lessons and is very skilful in doing so. Reading classics broadened

and enriched his knowledge and made him all the greater. On May 4, I read an article by Comrade Fan Wenlan⁴⁴³ in which he said that around the time of the May 4th Movement he devoted himself to the study of Chinese classics and ancient things. But once he began to acquire a correct perspective, things of the past became a help to him in the compiling and writing of Chinese history, and he has made use of them with great skill. So we should not think that some of our young people who like to read ancient books and study things of the past cannot be progressive. We should not refuse to unite with people and educate them simply because they have old ideas. We should not give them the cold shoulder because they're a little backward. As long as they're willing to make progress, they can remould themselves. As Chairman Mao has said, this is how he himself was remoulded.

Chairman Mao also often says that when he starts studying something, he first tackles one aspect of it, and if he doesn't understand it, he keeps boring into it until he's got it clear. When Chairman Mao joined the revolution after the May 4th Movement, he first lived in the city and devoted himself to the workers' movement. At that time, Mr. Tao Xingzhi²⁷⁴ was advocating a movement for rural development. Comrade Yun Daiying²⁷³ wrote a letter to Chairman Mao, saying that they might follow Tao Xingzhi's example and go to work in the countryside. Chairman Mao replied: "We've got more work than we can handle in the cities; how can we possibly go to work in the countryside?" This shows that he hadn't given his attention to that aspect of the problem at the time. But he did so soon after and he learned all about the peasant movement, linking it with the revolutionary movement in the towns. Still later he studied military affairs. He mastered them all and acquired a comprehensive knowledge. This should tell us that if some young people like to concentrate on one aspect of a problem before grasping it in its entirety, we should not discourage their interest. If they are reluctant to participate in political activities, we should take time to educate them and not shut them out.

I have cited these three examples to show that being a child of a peasant family in feudal society, Chairman Mao too was once superstitious, read books written in ancient times and, when studying a problem, paid attention only to one aspect at first. His greatness lies in the fact that he awakened from superstition and rejected what was outdated; it lies even more in the fact that he dared to face up to the past. We can see that in societies ruled by the people, to say nothing of old society, there are those who, once they've made progress, think that they were

just fine all along, that they were “born sages”, and they speak of themselves as if they were perfect, with no shortcomings at all. Others also speak of them in that way, and they like to listen to such praise. This is very dangerous. So we must not abandon those young people who are superstitious and backward, who see things only from one side instead of seeing them whole. Rather, we should educate them. We should help them learn from us and, at the same time, we should learn from them; our young people must learn from each other. Chairman Mao is a people’s leader born of the experience and lessons of a history of several thousand years, of the revolutionary movements of the last hundred years, and of direct struggle over the last thirty years. This is the way we should look at Chairman Mao’s development. And this view will help comrades to overcome any arrogance they may feel. If such was the case even with Chairman Mao, what is there for us to be conceited about? Which of us does not make mistakes? Which of us has no shortcomings? Is there anything to be complacent about? We are all far, far behind Chairman Mao.

We must learn from Mao Zedong because he is a leader who is very good at adhering to principles while applying them in a flexible way. Since he became one of its leaders, the Chinese revolution has gradually found the right orientation. Chairman Mao has been correct in all the four stages of the Chinese revolution and he represents the correct orientation for the Chinese people. At the beginning, both the Central Committee of the Party and sections of the revolutionary masses often made mistakes in orientation and lost their bearings. But Chairman Mao has always had the right orientation. Chairman Mao’s views during the Great Revolution (1924-27) were correct, but they were not accepted by the leadership of the time. He was right during the ten-year civil war (1927-37), but some comrades made mistakes and didn’t fully agree with him. During the War of Resistance Against Japan (1937-45), the whole Party recognized Comrade Mao Zedong’s leadership, and we won victory. In the present War of Liberation (1946-49), he has further proved to be correct. Therefore, Chairman Mao’s orientation is the correct orientation for the Chinese people. He has time and again pointed out the truth and upheld the truth. And that is why we often say that Chairman Mao has applied the truth of world revolution — the universal truth of Marxism-Leninism — to China and has integrated it with China’s revolutionary practice to create Mao Zedong Thought. Mao Zedong is a man who points out the truth and upholds and develops it. His orientation has been correct at the many

crucial historical junctures of the Chinese revolution over the past thirty years.

There are two things we must learn from Chairman Mao in connection with upholding principle. One is to persist in an orientation and the other is to concretize it. Its concretization is impossible if only one person understands it, or if only a few people accept it; this must depend on the masses. For principles to be put into practice, they must be given substance and be approved and implemented by the majority. There are difficulties in adhering to the truth. Not only has Chairman Mao pointed out what the principles are, he has also formulated concrete policies and tactics to put them into practice, and his policies for a given historical stage are suited to that stage.

Our young people will realize this when they study the *Selected Works of Mao Zedong*. During the Great Revolution, it was imperative to develop the peasant movement in depth so as to meet the demand of the peasants for land. This truth was made clear by Chairman Mao in his *Report on an Investigation of the Peasant Movement in Hunan*, in which he supported and elaborated upon the methods put forward by the peasants, offering not only theory, but also the ways to apply it in practice. The trouble was that it was rejected by the leading body of the Communist Party of the time, and the Great Revolution ended in failure. During the civil war, Chairman Mao wanted to promote political work in the army. If you study the draft resolution he proposed at the Ninth Party Congress of the Fourth Army of the Red Army, you'll find that the political work now conducted in the People's Liberation Army can be traced all the way back to then. But it took many years to implement Chairman Mao's ideas step by step, and there were many twists and turns along the way. Although these ideas were generally accepted in form, their power was felt in actual practice only after a long time. During the War of Resistance Against Japan, we needed to unite with Chiang Kai-shek's government in order to fight Japanese aggression, and though we knew very well that he was wavering and half-hearted, still we had to push him to fight, for only thus could the strength of the whole nation be mobilized. We had to unite with him, and we also had to be watchful and struggle against his reactionary tendency. This is what we call "unity as well as struggle". In order to use this tactic to carry on the War of Resistance and to expand the people's own forces, we had to convince many people. Within the Anti-Japanese National United Front, there were people who said: Since you want unity, there shouldn't be any criticism. Some

people inside our Party shared this view. So there were many complicated struggles before this principle was really applied. The War of Liberation has been going on relatively well, but there have been minor setbacks and errors too. For instance, “Left” mistakes were made during the agrarian reform, and they were not fully rectified until the publication of Chairman Mao’s report on December 25, 1947.⁴⁴⁴

All this points up the fact that it requires great effort and much concrete work to put a principle, a truth, or a policy into practice. Besides upholding the truth and pointing out the correct orientation, Chairman Mao has worked out many specific policies and tactics for applying a truth or a principle. Otherwise we could not bring the revolution to victory. Chairman Mao does not indulge in empty talk about truth but integrates truth with practice and gives it substance. That is how we have won our present victories. In learning from Mao Zedong, our young people must study his specific policies and tactics as well as the orientation, principles and truths he points out; only thus can our work be closely linked with reality. Young people must not indulge in empty talk but should go into action. Lenin, the great revolutionary leader of the world’s proletariat, called for “fewer pompous phrases, more plain, *everyday* work”.⁴⁴⁵ This is a precious teaching for our young people. Mao Zedong Thought has the distinctive feature of giving concrete expression to universal truth and applying it on Chinese soil. Our young people should learn to do likewise.

When Chairman Mao gives universal truth concrete expression and applies it to China, he doesn’t just confine himself to working out the measures. Nor is it a case of a few individuals carrying those measures out by themselves, regardless of whether they are understandable or acceptable to others. No, it’s not like that at all. Chairman Mao explains a truth tirelessly, going over it again and again, until it’s accepted by everyone and turned into strength. So in order to transform the leaders’ understanding and wisdom into the strength of the masses, it is necessary to go through a process of education and persuasion and sometimes even a period of waiting, waiting for the masses to come to an awakening. When Chairman Mao’s views have not yet been accepted by everybody, he waits. He explains his views whenever there is an opportunity, doing more educating and persuading. He has run into this situation inside the Party too, when his opinion wasn’t accepted by others. As I said earlier, that was the case during the ten-year civil war. We wanted to attack big cities, but Chairman Mao saw that our forces were inadequate. He maintained that we should concentrate

our efforts on building base areas, not on striking at the cities. But his views weren't accepted by the majority who wanted such attacks, and he had no alternative but to follow the majority. The result was that we were defeated. Then he promptly said at a meeting: "Well, we've lost; this proves that our method is wrong. Let's change it." When the others still wouldn't go along, he had to wait again and follow the majority. Take the Long March which I've mentioned. We were defeated in Jiangxi, having blindly fought a war of attrition; in the end we couldn't hold out and were forced to evacuate. But in the course of the Long March, Chairman Mao again put forward his correct views, rectified the erroneous line at the Zunyi Meeting and led the Red Army out of danger by taking it across the snow-capped mountains and the marshland into northern Shaanxi. His views finally proved to be correct, while those of the majority were wrong. All this shows us what must be done when correct ideas are not accepted by other people. We must wait and we must persuade. But, organizationally, we must submit to the decisions taken by the majority. When the masses are deceived, it isn't easy for them to accept the truth, but they will support the correct views after they have gradually become awakened.

Thus very often correct views will triumph and become acceptable only after many twists and turns and a period of waiting. Of course, this period of waiting is a painful one. If the Party's leading organs had accepted Chairman Mao's views earlier, the revolution would not have sustained such great losses and we would have become much stronger. Since the influence of our backward Chinese society is felt inside the Party and the revolutionary organizations, it often happens that correct opinions are not easily understood at once. Thus, we have to wait and do some persuading, and go through a painful process. However, there will be less of that in our future work. This is because the Central Committee of our Communist Party today is not the same as it was in those days. The overwhelming majority of our comrades accept Mao Zedong as their leader and have real faith in him, and he enjoys the support of the people. But this is true only as regards the general orientation. For instance, all agree with the general principle of carrying the revolution through to the end and engaging in new-democratic construction. But there will still be much controversy over specific policies and specific work. Hence the need to learn, to learn from Chairman Mao's persistence in upholding the truth, clarifying principles and orientation, and giving them concrete expression so as to turn them into the people's strength. These things cannot be ac-

complished in haste. To push the revolution forward we must have great perseverance, patience and indomitable will. Only then will we win final victory. We must not think that it's enough just to raise a simple slogan. We should not be discouraged when a slogan fails of its effect, or be complacent and tempted to rest on our oars when it succeeds. If we did that, we wouldn't be worthy students of Chairman Mao. He has persisted in giving the universal truth of Marxism-Leninism concrete expression on Chinese soil and turning it into the strength of the masses, and this accounts for our great victories in the Chinese revolution. Today, not only does the Chinese Communist Party respect him, but all the people who are enjoying the fruits of victory of the revolution will have faith in him and trust him wholeheartedly.

Another thing we must learn from Chairman Mao in upholding truth and making it prevail is that the principles he puts forward always take the majority of people into consideration and are in their interests. It's true that he is the leader of the Chinese Communist Party, but at the same time it is generally acknowledged that he is the leader of the whole nation. As far as the Communist Party is concerned, he represents the proletariat. Numerically, the Chinese proletariat consists of only several million people, less than one per cent of the population. How is the Communist Party, which represents this class, to win victory in the Chinese revolution? Chairman Mao makes it his central objective to apply the proletarian Marxist ideology to Chinese reality, win over the overwhelming majority of the people and rally them around the proletariat to bring the revolution to victory. He does not confine himself to a tiny circle and indulge in empty talk about revolution. Chairman Mao understands that in order to wipe out the fiercely reactionary enemy, it is necessary to muster all the forces available and not just rely on the vanguard to do everything. The proletariat is the vanguard, but we can't rely on the vanguard alone.

During the Great Revolution, Chairman Mao was already aware that the peasants were the largest ally and that the people's revolution could not triumph without them. And sure enough, the revolution suffered defeat because his views weren't listened to. Later, when we got to the countryside, Chairman Mao saw that in order to carry out the revolution it is necessary not only to rely on the peasants, but also to win over the middle and petty bourgeoisie. As Chiang Kai-shek's counter-revolutionary treachery became further exposed, only the comprador-bureaucrat and feudal landlord classes supported him. But

a group of people inside the Communist Party made “Left” deviationist mistakes and were very narrow in their outlook, holding that the middle and petty bourgeoisie were unreliable. They didn’t listen to Chairman Mao, and the result was that the revolution suffered another setback and we had to march 25,000 *li*. Then Chairman Mao proposed that we unite with Chiang Kai-shek and other members of the upper strata to resist Japanese aggression. But some people said that if we wanted unity, there shouldn’t be any struggle. Chairman Mao replied that Chiang and the others were our domestic enemy; we were uniting with them in order to fight the national enemy. But they were not reliable partners or allies, and we must guard against them; otherwise, they might turn on us. We took measures to avert Right deviations and to prevent unqualified compromises. During the present War of Liberation, “Left” deviationist mistakes were made in agrarian reform in the countryside. In order to eliminate the landlord class, landlords were given poor land or no land at all so that they could not eke out a living; or too many people were classified as feudal rich peasants or landlords. Moreover, on the question of executions, it was stipulated that no one should be executed except for those who had committed serious crimes, refused to mend their ways and were bitterly hated by the people. But, sometimes, when the people were filled with wrath, these distinctions were not made, and the leadership did not attempt to persuade the masses, so too many people were put to death. This had an adverse effect on our united front with the peasantry, and particularly with the middle peasants. This mistake was also corrected by Chairman Mao.

From these four revolutionary stages we can see that Chairman Mao’s view on the united front is that we should bring together the broadest possible army of allies and defeat our enemies one by one. During the War of Resistance, our aim was to defeat Japanese imperialism. Since the Japanese imperialists were driven out of our country, we have gone on to defeat the Kuomintang reactionaries and topple the reactionary regime in China. In the countryside, overthrow the feudal landlord class — the foundation of the reactionary regime. Internationally, oppose U.S. imperialist aggression against China. Under these slogans we have united more than 90 per cent of the people, including large numbers of peasants. So Chairman Mao tells many cadres in our Party that when they write their diaries every day, if they just jot down “unite the 90 per cent” and nothing else, that will be enough. I think that our biggest achievement under his leadership is that we have won over the vast majority to the common cause of

overthrowing reactionary rule. This our young people should learn. To apply the universal truth of Marxism-Leninism successfully in our country, we must combine it with Chinese realities, undertake many concrete, arduous tasks, forge ahead unflinchingly, struggle for a long time and get the vast majority of the people, including large numbers of young people, to follow us in our march forward. We cannot rely only on this small contingent of ours.

The most important role of the Youth Federation is to organize young people throughout the country and inspire and educate them, so that they will study, progress and march forward with us. Among the young people we unite with we do not include reactionaries; we must not allow them to sneak in. But we must embrace all young people who are ready to fight for the cause of New Democracy. Though different in ideology, they are now ready to study Marxism-Leninism and Mao Zedong Thought. Some of them still have superstitious and backward ideas, place technological expertise above all else and are one-sided in their approach, but we should include them nevertheless. We can educate and remould them. That is why we have put forward the slogan which is also our objective: "Learn from Mao Zedong!" This is acceptable to all young people, not only progressives but others as well. Naturally, to unite with and educate young people doesn't mean that we tell them only about the merits of the Communist Party, and not about its mistakes. At this youth conference, instead of trying to cover up the mistakes of the Communist Party, we have made many of them known. Some of the things about the Party that I have discussed today were not known to you before, and they may still be unknown to some comrades within the Party, but now you know them. Today you are representing not just several million young people but tens of millions or even a hundred million. You are, therefore, asked to note that the Communist Party must not be rash and force its ideas upon so many young people. It is the Kuomintang's way to force people to accept what they don't want to, imposing restraints upon people, just like the Goddess of Mercy throwing the magic tightening ring onto the head of the Monkey King. In teaching people to learn from Mao Zedong, we shall not resort to coercion. What we have put forward is just a slogan, a resounding slogan to which young people in their millions will respond. For today Chairman Mao is the leader not only of the Chinese youth but also of the whole Chinese people and of the Chinese Communist Party. He is a banner for us to follow.

Here, a word of explanation is needed regarding the question of freedom of thought. Reactionaries, including Chiang Kai-shek, often claim that they are for freedom of thought. As everybody knows, that is nonsense, for what freedom is there under Chiang Kai-shek's rule? The people are suffering oppression and exploitation. Only the small handful of reactionary landlords and bureaucrat-capitalists are free — free to exploit, oppress and slaughter the people. In the bourgeois-democratic countries, only the bourgeoisie have freedom of thought, which is denied to the workers and peasants. In our new-democratic country, the people will enjoy full freedom of thought. Aside from reactionary ideology, all other kinds will be allowed to exist. Not only progressive, socialist or communist but also religious ideas may exist. The propagation of reactionary ideas is not allowed, but apart from that, there is freedom of speech, the press, assembly and association. The Communist Party holds that historical materialism is correct and that Mao Zedong Thought is correct. These ideas, of course, should be propagated. But it does not mean that other ideologies are not allowed to exist. We educate people in our ideology, but they are free to choose whether to listen or not, whether to accept or not. This is the only approach that is truly educational and appropriate to leadership — an approach of working together with other people, a co-operative approach.

Our slogan is “Learn from Mao Zedong!”, but we need not confine ourselves to the study of Mao Zedong Thought. Under this slogan, our young people must study various subjects, such as new-democratic construction, economics, politics and culture and the many different specialized fields in the sciences and technology. All these should be studied. Dedication to study — that is one of Chairman Mao's characteristics. He studies day in, day out, and never feels satisfied. He often says that he doesn't understand this or that subject and needs to study it. To be his pupils, we must learn this spirit from him.

In making these remarks, of course I have not introduced to you all of Chairman Mao's merits or all of his principal doctrines. I've only taken up a very small part of Mao Zedong Thought. Chairman Mao's achievements in founding a people's army, his military strategy and tactics; his political writings *On New Democracy* and *On Coalition Government*; his articles on economics; in culture, his *Talks at the Yan'an Forum on Literature and Art*; his new contributions to philosophy and his Marxist ideological system; and all the rest — his

achievements are enormous. They are not only wide-ranging, but specialized, profound. I don't intend to say more about them here.

As for Chairman Mao's attitude towards study, his own motto is "seek truth from facts". He is most honest, unequivocal about what is right and what is wrong. He is strongly opposed to conceit and impetuosity. In the thirty years of the revolutionary movement, he has matured through the struggle against conceit and impetuosity. He has a modest and prudent style of work. He has both the revolutionary sweep and the efficiency Stalin spoke of in the book *The Foundations of Leninism*. So in order to learn from him to seek truth from facts, we should have an honest attitude and style of work and should not acquire habits of superficiality, conceit or impetuosity. The Chinese Communist Party has learned this lesson through the people's revolutionary movement. I too have been impatient in the past. Of course it's not easy for the younger generation to learn this. We must be careful and conscientious and make as few mistakes as possible. Mistakes are unavoidable, but we must not repeat them. There is no young person who won't stumble or suffer setbacks. But you should not lose heart when you meet with setbacks. In our revolutionary struggle, no one knows how much blood has been shed, how many reverses have been suffered, or how many people have fallen. But we should not lose heart even in the most difficult times. As Chairman Mao said, we should pick ourselves up, wipe off the blood, bury our fallen comrades and go into battle again. This is the kind of willpower and courage we must have.

Today we're about to win nationwide victory, and a great new day is dawning for us. But we must not become arrogant because we are winning; we must not think that we are all-powerful and can be oblivious to the lessons of the past. Chairman Mao says that winning nationwide victory is only the first step in a long march of ten thousand *li*, and there is much arduous work waiting to be done. Here two lessons merit our attention. One is that we must not look down on others and become alienated from the masses; the other is that we must not degenerate politically. These are the enemies, so to speak, of our young people. We must rid ourselves of impetuosity, arrogance, dejection, discouragement and demoralization; we must learn from Mao Zedong's style of study and style of work, be honest, seek truth from facts, work conscientiously and advance steadily and courageously. Only thus can we get millions upon millions of young people to march forward

with us. Only thus can we bring about the democratic emancipation of the people of the whole country, achieve national independence, build a new-democratic new China and strive for a lasting world peace. Our slogan is: “Young people of the whole country, unite and march forward under the banner of Mao Zedong!”