Liu Shaoqi’s Speech to Students Studying in the Soviet Union (July 29, 1952)

Many of you will soon be leaving for the Soviet Union. Only a little over a hundred students are going this year, and almost all of them are qualified to enter universities there directly upon arrival. More could have gone, but due to insufficient time for preparation, the number will have to be increased next time. Students who went to the Soviet Union last year encountered many difficulties—primarily a lack of Russian language proficiency—which is why it is essential to master the language before leaving China. Political preparation is also required; these are the two main priorities. Why not handle this preparation over there? Because it would be too burdensome for the hosts—they would have to hire special instructors and find housing for you. By preparing here in China, you will be able to enter universities in the Soviet Union immediately. After four or five years of study, you will return home—by which time our first Five-Year Plan will likely be complete. We look forward to your return so you can take part in the second Five-Year Plan.

Sending you to the Soviet Union to study is a form of investment. Industrial development requires investment, and the training of personnel is the first priority. While an investment in a new factory might yield products within two or three years, an investment in education and culture might not show results for a decade. The national budget is divided into four major categories: the economy, culture, national defense, and administration. The first two account for a certain percentage, and the latter two for another. The state is currently allocating significant funds to education—taking full responsibility for all universities. Whether a student comes from a worker or peasant family, or from the family of a capitalist, they are provided with food and an education; in return, they are expected to serve the nation upon graduation.

Furthermore, a great deal of money is being spent to send people to the Soviet Union. The cost of sending one student to the Soviet Union is equivalent to the cost of educating twenty-five to thirty university students here in China. Do not fall into the trap of thinking that because the funds come from the state, they do not matter—as if you would only feel the "pain" of the expense if it came from your own pocket or your parents'. If you harbor such an attitude, you are not qualified to go to the Soviet Union. This substantial investment is made with the hope that you will learn more effectively and thoroughly there than you could at home, so that upon your return, you may better serve the people. Universities there are generally better run and more practical than those in China. Therefore, I urge you to study diligently so that, upon your return, you can help resolve problems that the Chinese people are currently unable to solve on their own.

In addition to the Chinese government, the Soviet government also incurs significant expenses—such as providing classrooms and dormitories for our students—so while we cannot send too many, we must send some, as there are things that cannot be learned domestically.

Before setting out to study, one must first make a firm resolution: to study for the sake of the people and the nation, and upon completion, to work for the people and the nation. You must be fully prepared to cast aside any selfish or self-serving attitudes! There are various motivations for pursuing an education; if one's mindset is not aligned correctly, it will lead to problems later on. Everyone naturally harbors some personal interests or plans; if the needs of the people and the nation require you to sacrifice these personal aspirations, yet you find yourself unable to let them go, you will inevitably end up at odds with the nation and the people. If you cannot make the resolve to sacrifice your personal plans, then do not go to the Soviet Union. If you go without making this commitment, you will encounter constant setbacks, and others will simply not trust you. After all, if you harbor individualism, why should anyone trust someone driven by such "individualism"? You might feel upset about not going—well, let yourself feel upset for a moment—but going without the right resolve will only lead to even greater distress and constant obstacles at every turn. Everyone must ask themselves whether they can make this commitment; you will be required to sign a pledge to the organization. Thirty-one years ago, when we went to the Soviet Union to attend the University of the Toilers of the East, we were about the same age as you—having just graduated from high school and completed one year of university. We had only heard that the October Revolution had taken place there, and we were eager to see what it was actually like. More than twenty of us went together—comrades such as [Name] and [Name]. More than half of them had not truly committed themselves back home; they merely thought that by studying abroad, they could return to secure high official posts or boast about their experiences. In the end, upon their return, they abandoned the revolution. They turned away from the revolutionary cause, spending their time boasting and writing articles. Cao Jinghua was one such person—though, to his credit, he was relatively decent and never spoke ill of the revolution.

Later, the Soviet Union established Sun Yat-sen University for the Chinese, and many more people were sent from China to study there—including members of both the Communist Party and the Kuomintang (at that time, the Kuomintang was still considered revolutionary). Upon their return, some—such as Bo Gu, Wang Ming, and Yang Shangkun—went on to engage in the revolution. However, a large number became counter-revolutionaries, such as Kang Ze and others, while still others simply ceased to be involved in the revolution at all. Therefore, the first issue to clarify before heading to the Soviet Union is the commitment to serve the people wholeheartedly—one must be determined to follow the Communist Party and, eventually, to join its ranks. Without this resolve, one will neither learn effectively while there nor be of any use upon returning. Furthermore, one must be mindful of how one perceives the Soviet Union once there. Before leaving, we—like many others—had assumed that everything in the Soviet Union was perfect. We traveled via Vladivostok, but upon arrival, we were struck by things that seemed wrong; for instance, seeing so many beggars at the railway stations, we began to wonder: "Has the revolution really resulted in so many beggars?" Even the stationmasters were destitute—lacking decent leather shoes or even socks—a stark contrast to the affluent and imposing stationmasters we were accustomed to in China. There was no coal for the trains, so passengers had to haul wood down from the hills to fuel the engines. The journey from Vladivostok to Moscow took three months. In short, nothing was as we had expected. How, then, were we to interpret these realities? Among our group, there was much discussion, but we ultimately concluded that the Soviet Union's spirit of internationalism was truly exemplary: despite having many beggars of their own, they still shared their bread with us to support the Chinese revolution.

The situation in the Soviet Union today is, of course, different from what it was back then; everything there has become quite beautiful. People often talk about their daily lives—women wear rouge and lipstick, sport gemstone rings, and so on—things that we might not be accustomed to. In China, focusing on one's personal lifestyle is considered backward; it is politics, work, and study that are seen as progressive. While this may be appropriate for China, the Soviet Union is in a different stage—a time when people can focus on their quality of life. Their high standard of living is built upon a foundation of productive labor. The purpose of a revolution is not to make life worse, but to make it better. In the Soviet Union, exploitation has been eliminated; therefore, if someone dresses elegantly or wears gemstone rings, it is a testament to the quality of their labor—one could not afford such finery without having performed good work. In China, by contrast, one cannot live in luxury or dress elegantly without exploiting others; one cannot amass such wealth without resorting to corruption.

You may encounter many things in the Soviet Union that do not align with your expectations. Nevertheless, the Soviet Union is indeed more advanced than China—its industry is superior, its steel production is robust (China produces two million tons of steel annually, whereas the Soviet Union produces twenty to thirty million tons), and its agriculture is organized on a large, industrial scale. In many respects, it is more advanced than China—most notably, its socialist system is free from exploitation. Does this mean everything is perfectly abundant? Not necessarily. For instance, items like thermos flasks and fountain pens are relatively scarce, and their importation is restricted. Furthermore, because good fountain pens are hard to come by, ink for them is also difficult to find; you would do well to bring both a good pen and a supply of ink with you.

The Soviet Union's heavy industry is of high quality and produces a vast output. Its light industry is also excellent, though it offers less variety than what is found in China—a result of China's reliance on handicraft production. The Soviets, by contrast, rely on mechanized industry; they wouldn't set up a factory just to manufacture sandalwood or goose-feather fans. Because demand is high, the selection of goods displayed in shops is often limited. In China, perhaps business is not as brisk, which is why the shops are filled to the brim with merchandise. Additionally, in the Soviet Union, one often has to stand in line to make a purchase, and customers are generally not permitted to pick and choose their items; even getting hot water at a railway station requires waiting in a queue. Problems can arise in many areas, and you might find yourself wondering: "How can socialism still look like this?" And that's just in terms of material conditions. You may also encounter things that are less than satisfactory when it comes to people—you might run into "bad elements." Imperialists may send in agents, who in turn might bribe "White Russians" or certain backward individuals among the Soviet population. While the general level of political consciousness among Soviet citizens is high, there are still those who are backward. Even among students, there can be backward individuals—or even truly bad ones. Should you encounter such situations, you might begin to have doubts; that is why I am telling you this now—to help you prepare mentally. The Soviet Union is no paradise; it is impossible to have perfectly transformed every single person in just twenty or thirty years—though, naturally, the vast majority of Soviet citizens are good people. Back when we first went there, many people looked down on the Chinese; both adults and children would follow us around, calling out "Hey, fellow!" (or "buddy!"). Things are different now, of course—people applaud and welcome the Chinese, and no one calls out "Hey, fellow!" anymore.

Nevertheless, there is still much work to be done in the Soviet Union—factories for items like thermos flasks or fountain pens, for instance, still need to be established. But we must remember that we are still far behind them in many respects; do not fall into the trap of thinking that they are inferior to us in every way. Last year, some people arrived there and immediately became arrogant—such conceit is a manifestation of nationalism, and it is wrong. In some cases, it might have been better if these people had never gone at all; their presence there only caused harm. People there speak well of you because the Chinese Revolution has succeeded; precisely for this reason, we ought to be even more humble. There are still many areas where we lag behind them, and we must continue to learn from them earnestly. When you are there, try to view things comprehensively—look at the big picture rather than focusing solely on isolated incidents. This will help curb any sense of arrogance. You must be modest and truly learn from them. After all, we still have many pedicabs on our streets and use wooden plows to till our fields—what is there to be proud of in that?

Soviet universities are better run than those in China. Students from Tsinghua or Yenching might find Soviet universities inferior to their own, but Tsinghua and Yenching have followed an imperialist path—a fundamental error. In such institutions, one might study theories that are detached from reality—hollow, esoteric, and ultimately useless. We do not want you to study things that are overly abstract or inscrutable; rather, we want you to learn practical skills so that, upon your return, you can address China's real-world problems—such as transforming a pedicab into an automobile.

Next year, we will launch our First Five-Year Plan, which entails extensive retrofitting, expansion, and the construction of numerous factories and railways—all of which require a great deal of talent. Take railway construction, for instance: two-thirds of the work lies in determining the route, while the actual construction accounts for only one-third. This requires thorough exploration, which in turn demands a large number of geologists. Currently, China has only a few thousand people trained in geology, yet the First Five-Year Plan alone requires tens of thousands. China today has the capital and the labor force, but we lack the knowledge of where best to site our factories and railways. ...

This year, all high school graduates have been sent to universities—regardless of their academic standing. While this has inevitably lowered the standard of higher education, it was unavoidable; we simply lacked both the necessary number of students and faculty. We have already invited many Soviet experts, but the cost of bringing in just one such expert far exceeds the living expenses of twenty-five to thirty university students. (Furthermore, there are complex issues regarding the exchange rates and currency systems between China and the Soviet Union—matters that cannot be resolved at present and must await China's own currency reform.) We hope that by sending more of you abroad to study, you will eventually be able to take the place of these Soviet experts. We do not ask that you master esoteric, high-flown theories; we only ask that you learn to solve practical problems—ensuring, for example, that railway tracks and support pillars do not collapse. The Soviet Union possesses a wealth of practical experience—they, too, saw many of their own pillars and tracks collapse in the past. In the early days, when the Soviets hired an American engineer, his salary was as high as that of the President of the United States. Developing industry presents many challenges. While China possesses capital, a labor force, and machinery—the latter largely

obtainable through the assistance of the Soviet Union and other people's democracies—we critically lack engineers. No mine or factory can be developed without prior exploration; furthermore, a facility should not be established unless there are proven reserves sufficient for fifty to one hundred years of operation. For instance, China is rich in oil, yet we do not know exactly where it lies or in what quantities.

The development of industry follows four stages: exploration, design, construction, and operation. Each stage requires highly skilled technical personnel—a resource we currently lack in both number and expertise. Consequently, the first step in industrialization is the training of personnel. This is not a task that can be completed overnight; it will take at least five years. While we await the development of our own experts, we will send individuals abroad for training and invite foreign engineers willing to assist us. Once you return, we will have the capacity to manage things ourselves.

Investing in your education abroad—sending thousands each year, with a similar number returning annually after five years—represents a manageable portion of the national budget. While the cost per individual is significant (educating one university student domestically costs as much as maintaining five soldiers; the cost abroad is even higher), training talent—whether at home or abroad—always requires investment. Once you have completed your studies and returned to solve practical problems for the people, the initial expenditure will be more than recouped.

You must commit yourselves to the revolutionary cause. Cast aside individualism and arrogance; do not fuss over trivial matters—think carefully before you speak. Foster unity among your fellow students and comrades, and strictly observe discipline. Chinese people—students in particular—are prone to "liberalism" (a lack of discipline). In the Soviet Union, however, discipline is rigorous. The Chinese bourgeoisie is accustomed to unchecked freedom and often perceives the imposition of discipline as an affront or an insult—this attitude is unacceptable. You must reject such liberalism and embrace organization. Schools there feature social and mass organizations, as well as Party and Youth League branches. Once you arrive, you must adhere to all regulations and study diligently. I hope you all graduate with top marks—a "five" (the highest grade). A "four" is acceptable, but a "three" is less than ideal; should you receive a "two," you might as well pack your bags and come home. Even then, you will still be able to find some work and earn your keep. If you fail to meet the political requirements, you will be packed up and sent back. Therefore, unless you have fully made up your mind and given the matter careful thought, it is best not to go at all—otherwise, you might simply end up being sent back.

Among those who return from abroad, even those committed to the revolution may display one of two attitudes: some are arrogant and look down upon those who remained in China, while others take a pragmatic, realistic approach—observing the situation first before offering any suggestions. Those in the first group, who find fault with everything upon their return and attempt to solve problems by relying solely on their own notes or textbook formulas, are bound to fail. In the past,

all those who returned with an arrogant attitude met with failure. Therefore, one must adopt a humble attitude.

I hope that, upon arriving at your destinations, you will build good relationships and master a technical skill. The revolutionary struggle is largely complete; the enemies—imperialism and feudalism in China—have been defeated. Only the bourgeoisie remains, and there are ways to deal with them; they can be educated and transformed. You are not being sent abroad to study how to handle that issue. Your task is to focus on national construction—to industrialize the country and overcome China's backwardness. This is an even more arduous undertaking than defeating Chiang Kai-shek and overthrowing the reactionary regime. Back then, we spent only eight months in the Soviet Union, but that was because we were learning how to carry out a revolution. Mastering a technical skill, however, requires more than eight months. Once industrialization is underway and a foundation has been established, further progress will be faster and easier. Success is assured as long as there is a foundation—and it is this foundation that you are tasked with building. The proletariat must have its own intellectuals, and you are precisely that new kind of intellectual. The people have nurtured you; they are, in effect, your mother. You must serve the people, stand alongside them, and be intellectuals who respect the people.

If you approach your studies with this mindset, you will achieve results. As long as you learn well, the cost is of little consequence. In the future, every endeavor will require specialized knowledge and technical expertise. As for us, much of what we were once familiar with is gradually becoming obsolete, yet we are still called upon to take on tasks we are not trained for. There are many difficulties, but once you return after four or five years of study, things will become much easier to manage. It is sufficient for each of you to master one or two technical skills; no single person is expected to solve every problem alone. If we don't send you there, we could save 42 million rubles—roughly 2 million-plus US dollars—over five years. But a few million dollars isn't enough to build a decent factory, and even tens of millions wouldn't suffice for a major industrial facility; when we build, we're talking about factories costing hundreds of millions of dollars. This expenditure is unavoidable, and in the grand scheme of things, it's merely a fraction of the cost of one large-scale plant. If we have thousands of students returning from the Soviet Union and place them in our factories, they will help minimize errors, boost production, and effectively recoup the initial investment. In any undertaking, one must always carefully weigh the costs and benefits.

Regarding the question of whether it is possible to join the Party while in the Soviet Union: Yes, it is. If you do not yet meet the requirements, keep striving; do not harbor resentment toward the Party—the Party holds no prejudice against you. Even if a particular branch secretary happens to hold a bias against you, it does not mean that every branch secretary or every Party member feels the same way. It may simply be that the Party has not yet gained a clear enough understanding of you. Truly understanding a person can take at least a decade. If you have not been admitted after three or four years, it is only logical—it simply means the process of getting to know you is still ongoing. Give others the time to understand you properly; you can join the Party once they have come to trust you. It is far better to wait than to join, only to perform poorly or prove inadequate, and subsequently be purged.

Those who seek petty advantages often end up suffering a major loss, while those who are willing to "suffer" a major loss often gain great respect. Let others take the easy or favorable tasks, while you take on the difficult ones—this may mean "suffering" a loss, but it is only a minor one. By doing this, you will earn the affection and trust of those around you. Conversely, if you constantly try to take advantage of others, you will inevitably be labeled as someone who is unreliable—the kind of person who is always looking for a petty gain.

I hope that all of you will eventually join the Party. If you are unable to do so while abroad, you may join upon your return to China. Joining the Party as an organizational matter is relatively straightforward; however, preparing oneself ideologically and politically to meet the requirements for membership is a long-term process and far from easy. Within the Party, there may still be a small number of "bad elements" or backward individuals. Meanwhile, outside the Party, there are many proactive, progressive individuals—some of whom may even be better than certain Party members. This is precisely why Party rectification is necessary: to purge the bad elements and welcome in those progressive individuals from outside the Party.