

September 4, 1964

**Discussion between Mao Zedong and Somsri, Head of
the Cultural Group of the Laotian Patriotic Front**

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Summary:

Mao Zedong advising Sangsri on how to strengthen Communism in Laos, including learning from Chinese mistakes.

Original Language:

Chinese

Contents:

Translation - English

MAO ZEDONG AND THE HEAD OF THE CULTURAL GROUP OF THE LAOTIAN PATRIOTIC FRONT^[1] SOMSI [Desakhamphu]^[2]

Beijing, 4 September 1964

Mao Zedong: Your struggle is heroic. You are fighting on the first front, the front against U.S. imperialism. You have learned how to carry out the mass line and you are able to unite the majority—the workers, the peasants, and other patriotic figures—to participate in the joint struggle against U.S. imperialism. It is certain that you will win.

In order to carry out mass work, it is necessary to behave as the masses do. In order to make friends with the masses, first of all you need to share their spirit, and then you need to dress in the same way as they do. You should wear the same clothes as they wear. You also need to eat the same food as they eat. Whatever they eat, you eat. You also need to labor together with them. Otherwise they will fear you. You are intellectuals. Are you their friends or their enemies? They are not clear about this. If you are their friends, you should dress, eat, live and labor in the same way as they do. After one or two months, you become familiar to them. By doing so you will be able to unite with them in the struggle against U.S. imperialism.

I am not just talking about you, the cultural group. The army should follow the same principles. You are able to do this, which the imperialists are unable to do. The reactionaries exploit the masses and oppress the masses. Your army should carry out operational tasks, and should also carry out mass work. Our military has done this. We have tried for several decades, and have worked out the “The Three Disciplines and Eight Attentions.” The first discipline is that all soldiers should obey orders. Without obeying orders, everyone cares about everyone else’s business; this is not the correct way. Is your cultural work team under good discipline?

Lian Guan:^[3] They are very well disciplined.

Mao Zedong: Without discipline, the cultural work team cannot do a good job. The second discipline is not to take a single needle and thread from the masses. Then, what should the army do? What should they wear and what should they eat? You cannot demand these things from the workers and peasants. In addition to getting some from the enemy, our government will have to collect some taxes. We will need to collect some food tax and some commercial tax. We cannot exist without collecting some taxes. After collecting the taxes, part [of the income] should go to the army and part should go to the masses. We should let the common people share the benefit. Our party, our government and our army are the party of the workers and peasants, the government of the workers and the peasants, and the army of the workers and peasants. We have tried for several decades, and have won a victory. But we have also committed mistakes several times. For example, twice we have committed right-leaning mistakes, and three times we have committed left-leaning mistakes. You are fine. You have not committed the mistakes that we have committed.

Somsi: This is because we have drawn lessons from the comrades who have committed the mistakes, and therefore we are in a position not to commit the same mistakes.

Mao Zedong: When one commits mistakes, it is important to see what mistake it is. When the mistake concerns political lines, it could cause huge losses. For example, in 1927, [our party] committed a big mistake, which resulted in huge losses, and the party membership was reduced from 50,000 to less than 10,000. In order to correct the mistake, we took up guns to fight, and, as a result, we found a way out. Then we created several base areas and possessed an army of 300,000. But arrogance emerged at that time, and a left-leaning opportunist mistake was committed, leading to the loss of all the base areas in the South. [We] began the Long March of

“ten-thousand li.” When we arrived in the North, from among the 300,000 soldiers, only 20,000 survived. But we felt comfortable at that moment. Why did we feel comfortable? This was because those who had committed the mistakes were no longer able to raise their heads. We used the method of persuasion, that is, through the rectification campaign, to unite with them. We did not abandon a single one of them. Finally we won today’s victory. When you come to China, you see some good things. But you also need to see our mistakes. Without an understanding of our mistakes, you will not benefit. We have won a victory, and we have conducted socialist construction for fifteen years, yet our cultural circle is not as good as yours. Several millions serving in the circle are bourgeois intellectuals left by the Guomindang [Kuomintang]. Among university professors, middle-school teachers, primary-school teachers in education, many are bourgeois intellectuals. There are also [bourgeois intellectuals] among drama actors, painters, and singers in the cultural circles. There are many among journalists, and some in the movie-making business. Now we have begun another rectification campaign, and they cannot endure it. I will be happy to see that in the coming year or two bourgeois intellectuals will not sleep well as a result of the rectification campaign.

....

Mao Zedong: You should not look down upon yourself because your country is a small one. What’s wrong with being from a small country. Heroes can emerge in a small country. Do you know the name of the chairman of the Indonesian Communist Party?

Somsi: Aidit. [\[4\]](#)

Mao Zedong: Yes, it is this comrade. I once asked him where he was from. He said that he was from a small island located southwest of Sumatra, and that he belonged to a minority race. You see, he is from such a small place, and how can he become the chairman of the Indonesian party? He told me that although that was a small place, Indonesia’s language took the one there as the standard, and that it was there that the Indonesian Communist Party was the most active. Marx was from a minority race, he was a Jew. Jesus was also a Jew. In the past the Jews were a minority race. The Confucius of China lived in the State of Lu, which had only a population of several hundred thousand. He created the first school in Chinese history. But no one would take notice of him. He then tried to find a job in other states, and, again, no one would take notice of him. He had no other choice but to wander around. He propagated the feudal morals to serve the interests of the landlord class. Later everyone would call him a sage.

The intellectuals left over by the old society have to be transformed, something to which we did not pay much attention in the past.

Who will overcome whom? Will the capitalist class overcome the proletarian class, or will the proletarian class overcome the capitalist class? This problem has not been solved yet. Some people do not understand this. Khrushchev is one of them. You see, the Soviet Union has existed for forty some years, and now capitalism has been restored there. The party that was established by Lenin, and the Soviet Union that was established by Lenin, after forty some years, have become capitalist, and have adopted revisionism. We have tried only for fifteen years. In the future, Marxism-Leninism will win. How to educate the young people is a big question. If we lose our vigilance and fall asleep, thus becoming self-satisfied, the capitalist class will emerge to grab political power, and capitalism will come back. If Marxism fails to overcome revisionism, revisionism will overcome Marxism, and, as a result, capitalism will be restored. Under the signboard of Communism to carry out policies of capitalism, you know, this is a problem which is difficult to resolve in a decade or several decades.

When you return to your own country, please report to your Central Committee that hope is on our side. Khrushchev is not a good person. But he also has helped us. He has helped us to understand the Soviet Union—how the first socialist country has deteriorated into revisionism. Not only has he helped the Chinese, but also he has helped you and has helped revolutionary people all over the world. There are three types of bad guys in the world: the imperialists, the revisionists, and the reactionaries in various countries.

[1] Neo Lao Hak Sat, front organization of the Pathet Lao

[2] Editor's Note: In the original translation contained in "77 Conversations," this individual was misidentified as "Sangsiv." Nick Zeller notified the Cold War International History Project that the individual's name is in fact Somsri Desakhamphu— July 2020.

[3] Lian Guan was deputy secretary general of the Standing Committee of the People's National Congress of the People's Republic of China, who was assigned to accompany the Laotian delegation during its visit to China.

[4] Dipa Nusantara Aidit (1923-1965), belonged to a group assuming power in the Indonesian Communist Party in 1951. He led the party as General Secretary during a period of tremendous growth in the membership. Aidit was executed after the military coup in November 1965.