

November 22, 1983

Malo, 'Interview with Mr. Xi Zhongxun'

Citation:

"Malo, 'Interview with Mr. Xi Zhongxun'", November 22, 1983, Wilson Center Digital Archive, 2882 TOPO 2917, Direction Asie & Océanie, 1980-1986, série CH sous-série 1 dossier 4, Ministère des Affaires Etrangères, La Courneuve, France. Obtained by Joseph Torigian and translated by Salomé Tulane.
<https://digitalarchive.umd.edu/document/208850>

Credits:

This document was made possible with support from MacArthur Foundation

Original Language:

French

Contents:

Translation - English

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Telegram on Arrival

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Peking 2782

November 22, 1983

Received Au Sct November 22, 1983 A 12H 5

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Subject: Interview with Mr. Xi Zhong Xun

The delegation of the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party is leaving Beijing tonight for Paris, at the invitation of the PCF. This is taking place in response to the trip Georges Marchais made here, in October 1982.

The delegation, which includes eight people, is headed by Xi Zhong Xun, member of the Political Bureau and Secretary of the Central Committee, assisted by Qiao Shi, former Director of the Liaison Department, nominated in September at the Head of the General Office which coordinates the activities of all the organisations falling under the C.C.'s responsibility. Both are prominent figures, close to Deng Xiaoping and Hu Yaobang.

I hosted a dinner party last night at the residency for Messrs. Xi and Qiao as well as their travelling companions, the day before they left for France. My guests said they were very happy they were able to undertake this first official trip in our country (a few years ago, Xi Zhong Xun, who was then governor of Guangdong, had a 48 hours stopover in Paris, Qiao Shi also briefly went through our capital on his way back from an assignment in Algiers) where they are going, "not only in order to reinforce the contacts between the two parties, but also between the two countries".

I took the opportunity of that confident and relaxed meeting with two of the regime's most eminent personalities to ask them about the domestic situation.

Xi Zhong Xun told me that it was economically excellent. The responsibility system brought unprecedented prosperity in the countryside. "In spite of some local resistance" the government was determined to generalise it. The results had proven it correct. This year, China will have a record cereal harvest. In some provinces, such as Liaoning, they might even lack silos to store grain.

I asked Mr. Xi if some of the political debates, which the press recently reported on, did not risk disrupting that production and development effort. The campaign launched a few weeks ago against "intellectual pollution" is for some - perhaps insufficiently informed - observers reminiscent of worrying memories. Many editorials that succeeded one other - and that were not seemingly always going in the same direction - gave a sense of hesitation, and led to fears of a downward spiral. Some would not hesitate to compare that situation with the one that preceded the Cultural Revolution.

Mr. Xi answered in the clearest of fashion that that fear "had no basis". The orientations set by the third plenum and approved by the 12th Congress of the party would not be changed. For China, the main task was economy development. The

country's modernisation had to be accelerated, and the policy of reform and opening up internationally had to be resolutely continued. That policy was intangible. Hu Yaobang reminded a Korean delegation he received this morning of it.

The issue of intellectual pollution is "a small problem" affecting the country's cultural life. Some unhealthy phenomena have recently been observed. China wishes - like other countries - to harshly condemn those importing or circulating decadent or pornographic material, whose impact is disastrous on youth. Those engaging in that kind of activities are criminals. There is however no question of regarding as criminals those who, in cultural or intellectual circles, express divergent views, even if they are erroneous. People should be able to talk, share ideas, if possible these comrades should acknowledge their mistakes, but certainly not be threatened or terrorised. We should above all avoid that "some people attempt to make issues in that field look worse than they actually are, in order to harm the atmosphere of stability and unity". That is the reason why the Central Committee had, very recently, given instructions to newspapers to silence that campaign. I did actually notice that, after the publication of a "Commentary" on November 16 (my telegram 2750), things appear to have clarified.

Mr. Xi Zhong Xun, whom I was meeting with for the first time in private, came across as a man of the land, direct, cheerful, confident, speaking with ease as a leader who has been associated, since Yanan, to all the adventures of the Chinese revolution, and of uncommon character, whom years of military campaigning as well as the hardships of ultra-leftism had strengthened. In contrast, Qiao Shi came across like a man from another world. He has the keen intellect of these open-minded and performance-driven Shanghainese that have been climbing the ladder of the higher administration and the State for a few years and that are starting to fill key positions in the Party, which is arousing suspicion. There is no question that Qiao Shi is one of the CCP's rising stars.

I am sending in a separate telegram a biography of Xi Zhong Xun and Qiao Shi. (CLM)221835-PA-./.

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