

February 1, 1963

**Memorandum of Conversation between the
Delegates from the Society for Soviet-Chinese
Friendship (OKSD), Li Xigeng and Li Zhanwu, with
the Society's General Secretariat, 18 November
1962**

Citation:

"Memorandum of Conversation between the Delegates from the Society for Soviet-Chinese Friendship (OKSD), Li Xigeng and Li Zhanwu, with the Society's General Secretariat, 18 November 1962", February 1, 1963, Wilson Center Digital Archive, GARF f. 9576, op. 18s, 1963, d. 217, l. 30-36. Obtained and translated by Austin Jersild.
<https://digitalarchive.umd.edu/document/116832>

Summary:

A Soviet delegation visiting China meets with local representatives of the Society for Soviet-Chinese Friendship (OKSD) and the two groups have a tense conversation about the Soviet handling of the recent Cuban Missile Crisis.

Credits:

This document was made possible with support from Leon Levy Foundation

Original Language:

Russian

Contents:

Translation - English

Secret. Copy No. 3
1 February 1963
No. 173s

Memorandum

Of conversation between the members of the delegation of the Society for Soviet-Chinese Friendship with the deputies of the general secretariat of the OKSD, comrades Li Xigeng and Li Zhanwu

18 November 1962

After the meeting, which was arranged in honor of the delegation of the TsP [Central Administration] of the OKSD, the delegation invited to their hotel the deputies of the general secretariat of the OKSD, comrades Li Xigeng and Li Zhanwu, the secretary for [external] ties Cde. Yao Jian and the translator, Zhang Mingao, who had been constantly working with the delegation.

The leader of the delegation, Cde. M.A. Prokof'ev, thanked the Chinese comrades for the warm reception and hospitality, and for the work of the comrades that accompanied our delegation during our trip to the PRC.

Cde. M.A. Prokof'ev emphasized that the delegation had seen many interesting [things] and took away a feeling of friendship from the Chinese people toward Soviet people.

M. Prokof'ev noted that the solidarity of the Chinese people with the people of Cuba had made a great impression on the Soviet delegation. We saw demonstrations of large crowds in Beijing, with many slogans [on placards]. Soviet people as well express their warm support for the battle of the Cuban people for their freedom and independence. In our presentations before the members of the Society of Chinese-Soviet Friendship we spoke about how the Soviet and Chinese people are rendering support to the fighters of Cuba. We also described concrete examples of help that have been rendered by the Soviet people and that is being rendered by the Soviet people to the Cuban people in the construction of a new life. We were very struck by the fact that when your speakers discussed [Chinese] support for the battle of the Cuban people, their words were met by enthusiastic applause throughout the auditorium, while at the same time our speeches on this topic were received coldly.

Li Xigeng asked us to share the views of the delegation.

G.A. Legunov noted that this was his first trip to the PRC. He was grateful to the Chinese comrades for the opportunity to visit communes, and to meet with their chairmen and party organizers. Besides this, he wanted to meet with [agricultural workers], the leading figures in production, simple people, and share with them work experiences and talk about his collective farm. Unfortunately he was not able to have such exchanges.

Cde. V.F. Feoktistov expressed his gratitude for the warm reception granted to our delegation, and noted the heartfelt welcome of the delegation from the chairmen of the people's committee of Guangdong province and the famous Chinese revolutionary c. Chen Yue, one of the leaders of the Guangzhou Commune. At this meeting many warm words were said about our friendship, and the shared [skreplennoi] blood of the Soviet and Chinese people. However, in a local newspaper, Nanfang ribao, which was given to us on the airplane by the Chinese comrades, the meeting was reported dryly and tediously.

In his answer c. Li Xigeng informed us that in his opinion the Soviet delegation was granted a warm reception everywhere, which serves as an expression of our friendship. Referring to the remarks of c. Legunov, c. Li Xigeng noted that the Soviet comrades do not completely comprehend the essence of the people's communes in the PRC, and they have doubts about whether or not they are a socialist form of economy. Many Soviet delegations have visited people's communes, and we believe this is good.

Cde. Li Xigeng admitted that indeed the delegation had not sufficiently met with the people, but explained this as a consequence of the lack of time in connection with the visiting of so many cities.

"In May of this year," reported c. Li Xigeng, "a special tourist group of OKSD activists visited the PRC, and one of their members was a collective farm chairman from Uzbekistan who spent much time in a people's commune and even became acquainted with the methods of vegetable cultivation. In [our] case the main thing has been the lack of time."

Then c. Li Xigeng moved to the question of Cuba.

He noted that there is a basis to the observations of c. Prokof'ev. The Chinese people have profoundly experienced the Cuban crisis. This is the most acute question of the contemporary era. Cuba is a small state, located just tens of kilometers from the USA. But, as Castro has informed us, Cuba does not want to trade away its sovereignty, and does not want to bow its head before American imperialism.

For the rest of the discussion c. Li Xigeng continued in a very agitated state.

He informed us that "genuine communists must conduct themselves like Fidel Castro. The USSR has removed its rockets from Cuba. That is its affair, and regarding this it is difficult to present one's opinion. But we think that before the military threats of the imperialists we should not retreat or yield. We must fight, not sacrifice our sovereignty, and conduct a ceaseless struggle—only then can we defend Cuba."

At present the USA requires that the Soviet government remove its airplanes from Cuba, and requires "local inspections." I do not understand, continued c. Li Xigeng, why the USSR must remove its rockets, and not the USA? "Indeed the USA has scattered its military bases throughout the entire world. Why do we not require their liquidation? The Chinese people is also for peace, but for peace without yielding to imperialism."

Regarding the remarks of c. V.F. Feoktistov, c. Li Xigeng promised to send us excerpts from all the newspapers where information was provided about our delegation. Regarding this he noted that as a former newspaper worker himself, he understood how difficult it is "leave space" in the newspaper. "This is the main reason [for the absence of attention to your delegation]."

Then c. Li Xigeng added that there still is one question that we have not discussed. This issue was the Indo-Chinese conflict.

The Soviet government, he said, supported us—this was noted in the leading [newspaper] "Pravda". "But now we have found out that the Soviet government helps India with airplanes. This is a fact. Nehru spoke about this at a meeting. And indeed the Chinese people ask us, the workers of the Society for Chinese-Soviet Friendship: why does the Soviet Union behave this way? How are we to answer? This is not your business, [we say], and you should not doubt the feelings of the

Soviet people to the Chinese people.”

In conclusion c. Li Xigeng said that he considers this conversation extremely useful.

Then c. Li Zhangwu presented a few words.

He informed us that in connection with the remarks of c. Feoktistov he wanted to address the question of the treatment in the Soviet press of the visit of the last Chinese delegation to the USSR. We were satisfied with the reporting of our trip in Kishinev and Riazan'. It was worse in Leningrad and Moscow. Li Zhangwu noted that the speech of the head of the delegation, Peng Chun, at the meeting of social organizations in Moscow received only one sentence in Pravda. And the Chinese comrades viewed this speech as one of their most important during their trip to the Soviet Union.

And generally, noted c. Li Zhangwu, if you compare the coverage of the stay of the delegations of the OKSD and the OSKD in the central Chinese and Soviet press, the comparison will not be to the benefit of the Soviet side. We cover more, and place these remarks on the first page, argued c. Li Zhangwu. “I believe that this is an internal affair of each country, but since the matter was raised, I must comment.” Then he moved to the question of Cuba.

The leading and other articles of the newspaper Renmin ribao express the will of all the Chinese people. The Moscow declarations and the Moscow communications declare that American imperialism is an evil enemy. The last letter of F. Castro to Wu Tang is a heroic declaration of the sovereignty of Cuba. And in this Castro has illustrated that he is a great revolutionary.

The Chinese people decisively supports the 5 requirements of Castro. Cde. Mikoian spoke about this in his speech at the University of Havana.

The removal by the Soviet Union from Cuba of its so-called ‘offensive weapons’ is the business of the USSR. But a question of principle arises here—the position before the enemies of peace. And I personally and decisively support the reports in our press, added c. Li Zhangwu.

Then Yao Jian, a worker in the central administration of the OKSD, made a report.

He informed us that Lenin taught [us] how to penetrate to the essence of the matter, and not be deceived by any superficial issues. A communist must possess sharp vision and not accept enemies for friends. He provided as an example of his ideas: the USSR removed its guided missiles from Cuba, the USA required the removal of the rockets; and now they require the removal of bombers. And historical experience teaches that he who gets a centimeter requires a meter [he who gives an inch gives a mile], and the strong always threaten the weak.

The Soviet Union required the liquidation of the bases of the USA in Turkey. But as a result the USSR has taken its rockets from Cuba, and the USA has not liquidated its base.

It is worthwhile to follow these matters, and the position a communist should take becomes clear. We believe that the best evidence [consists of] facts.

Then c. Yao Jian addressed the matter of the communes. He informed us that there are differences of opinion on this issue. The Chinese comrades believe that this is a

great initiative and a new phenomenon. And our people correctly are constructing their life as they consider rational. The USA was against the collective farms in the USSR, but we supported them. Now the USA is against our communes, and we must support each other.

Articles have appeared in the Soviet press which have addressed the aspiration to “skip several stages” in the development of the agricultural economy. We understand that such things refer to our communes. We emphasize that the commune is socialist, which however, has its specificities—the combination of the people’s power with production. And we want you to understand correctly our communes. We do not intervene in matters pertaining to your collective farms.

Cde. V.Ia. Sidikhmenov noted that no one in the Soviet delegation said anything negative about the people’s communes, and that is not the matter at hand.

Cde. Li Xigeng, not giving c. Yao Jian a chance to finish, again began to speak. He said that the questions of visiting the communes, the press—these are trifles and are not important. We can resolve these issues quickly. The main thing is the Cuban question, and the issue of Chinese-Indian relations. As a communist, he said passionately, the positions of several members of the CC of the CP of India deeply inspire me. Twenty-three of 110 of the members of the CC are against the policies of Nehru. They oppose the repressions on the part of the opportunists in the party and on the part of Nehru. Several of them have been arrested. They are genuine internationalists and communists. There are others in the CC of the CPI who are wavering. The chair of the CC is truly traitorous in his positions.

Then Li Xigeng reminded us that when the reactionary Guomindang prepared an offensive against the Soviet Union, the Chinese communists resolutely opposed these plans. I am reminded of meetings with your activists from groups in May of this year in Shanghai with Chinese veterans of the revolution. Retired General Shimanov met with one female elderly revolutionary who had long been in prison because of his solidarity with the Soviet Union at that time. She said that even if they had threatened her with death she still would have opposed the aggressive plans of the Guomindang. And now we find out that Nehru said that the Soviet Union in the first half of December is going to provide India with airplanes!

Cde. M.A. Prokof’ev answered Li Xigeng and the remaining Chinese comrades by saying that the Soviet delegation was not here to engage in a discussion about Cuba and other issues. The Soviet comrades told of their other impressions of the trip. As a communist and a Soviet person, I am able to say, said c. M.A. Prokof’ev, that the fate of Cuba is dear to Soviet people, as is the fate of the entire socialist camp. And we will do and are doing everything to stand behind Cuba and behind peace. “Soviet people are also in the favor of the peaceful resolution of the Indo-Chinese conflict,” further said c. Prokof’ev. “The enflaming of this conflict only serves the interests of the imperialists. And we cannot imagine that our government is right now providing military airplanes to India. On these matters we believe that is necessary to believe the head of our government, N.S. Khrushchev, and not Nehru.”

Cde. Li Xigeng answered that he believes his own newspapers, and he believes in the facts. If that is not the case, then let the Soviet government provide evidence. “You ask your competent organs about this when you return home,” said c. Li Xigeng.

Cde. Li Xigeng further said that the Chinese comrades are not against talks. “We can conduct negotiations with the USA and even make concessions. The example of Laos proves this. But we are against concessions on matters of principle.”

Before the Second World War the USSR concluded a non-invasion pact with Hitler.

And what happened? The war all the same developed, and treaty remained a treaty. 'The tiger remains a tiger.' And the Cuban people do not believe the promises of the USA, to the extent that they know their aggressive plans. The capture of American spies in Cuba not long ago confirms this."

All that has been said above explains the coldness of the Chinese people to the declarations of c. Prokof'ev about Cuba at the meetings. 'Coldness—this is the expression of the feelings of the Chinese people.'

Cde. Prokof'ev answered that Soviet people know well [the nature of] imperialism. In the particular situation above there are two possible scenarios: either the USA yields before the power of the socialist camp and Cuba receives the opportunity to develop further their country; or the USA cannot maintain its promises and threatens war. Then the socialist camp will find the strength and means of help for Cuba. We always have stood and stand today in guard of the interests of Cuba. But let's speak openly: if there is going to be war, indeed will the rockets in Cuba decide the matter? It is necessary to learn about tactics.

Cde. Li Xigeng noted that there are two [kinds of] tactics: the tactics of ceaseless struggle and the tactics of agreements and concessions. Which one of these will defend the Cuban revolution? "If rockets will not decide the course of the war, then why did we bring them to Cuba?" "Indeed does the removal of the rockets guarantee a non-invasion from the USA?" This is like throwing oil on a fire.

Further c. Li Xigeng added: "When we read that Soviet ships have decided to verify their cargo, we just cannot endure this. The Soviet people is a heroic people, which has spilled much blood. And I am astonished to wonder how they can allow their ships to be inspected. The USA has scattered its bases throughout the whole world, and do they allow anyone to conduct inspections? We have more rights to do this [than they have to inspect us]. And it is difficult for us to see how all this [is possible] for the Soviet people, having such a heroic past."

Cde. Sidikhmenov asked c. Li Xigeng what would happen if the conflict led to a nuclear war?

Cde. Li Xigeng answered that continual concessions can lead to war, as F. Castro correctly put it: "We are for peace, but not for a pacifist peace."

Cde. Li Xigeng in conclusion emphasized that he spoke as a committed communist. He is glad that the Soviet comrades shared their ideas—this is an expression of genuine friendship, a straightforward, honest discussion. This is the first time that the Soviet delegation presented their opinions in such a friendly fashion.

Cde. Li Xigeng noted at the end that he presents all this here, in the presence of Soviet comrades. He would never say all this in the USSR at a large meeting in the presence, let's say, of thousands of people.

Cde. Prokof'ev, concluding the conversation, again expressed his gratitude in the name of the Soviet delegation for the warm hospitality shown by the Society of Chinese-Soviet Friendship and the accompanying comrades.

The conversation lasted 2 hours.

Signed: V. Feoktistov