

December 25, 1959

**Record of Conversation from Vice Premier Chen Yi's
Reception of the Envoys of Fraternal Countries to
China**

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Summary:

Chen Yi briefs diplomats from the Soviet Union and elsewhere in Eastern Europe on the overseas Chinese crisis in Indonesia.

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Record of Conversation from Vice Premier Chen Yi's Reception of the Envoys of Fraternal Countries to China

Time: December 25, 1959 at 9 AM

Location: Zhongnanhai Hall of Barbarian Tributes

Attendees: Vice Ministers of Foreign Affairs Zhang Hanfu, Vice Minister Zeng Yongquan and Geng Biao;

Directors Chen Shuliang and Yu Peiwen; Deputy Directors Shen Ping and Kang Maozhao

Interpreters: Li Yueran and Yan Mingfu

Notetaker: Yu Yulin

(Guests: Soviet Union: Chargé d'affaires Antonov; Bulgaria: Counselor Ta-te-fu-shen [sic]; Albania: Ambassador Parifti; Poland: Chargé d'affaires Fu Lato [sic]; Czech Republic: Chargé d'affaires Shi-ji-ki-na [sic]; German Democratic Republic: Ambassador Wang Dai'er [sic]; DPRK: Counselor Ma Dong-san; Mongolia: Counselor Dange Solun; Vietnam: Ambassador Tran Tu Binh; Romania: Ambassador Chahalescu; Hungary: Chargé d'affaires Xi-ge-di [sic])

Vice Premier Chen: Comrades, we have prepared a response to the letter from the Indonesian Foreign Minister. Comrades, please pass the letter to your governments and party central committees. Now let's read the letter once (asks the interpreter to read the letter aloud). Now let me explain the policy of the Chinese Party and Government on the Overseas Chinese and then discuss Indonesia's discrimination against Chinese and the entire Indonesia issue.

Due to imperialist aggression and China's feudal rule, the Chinese people were exploited. Many fled overseas to make a living. Over the years, these emigrations resulted in a large number of Chinese living overseas. According to incomplete statistics, there are about 13 million Overseas Chinese scattered all over the world: there are 40,000 in Japan, 300,000 in the Philippines, 400,000 in Myanmar, 3 million in Thailand, 2 million in Indonesia, 300,000 in India, and more than 20,000 in South Africa. There are also 300,000 in the United States and over a million in Latin America. Over 1.1 million of the 1.5 million population of Singapore are Overseas Chinese.

Charge Antonov said, laughing: This really can be called "China's Singapore". I hadn't heard that figure before.

Vice Premier Chen: There are more than two million overseas Chinese in Malaya's population of more than six million. Overseas Chinese are mostly business people working in occupations such as small business hawkers, launderers, barbers, and Chinese restaurants. There are also many Overseas Chinese working in oil plants, rubber plants and tin mines in Southeast Asian countries. Some run banks and do considerable exporting in businesses such as rubber. Only a small number of them belong to the capitalist class. That is, there are upper, middle and lower strata people

among the Overseas Chinese but very few of them belong to the capitalist class. Overseas Chinese capitalists are especially influential in Singapore and Malaya. There are more petty capitalists than big capitalists. The vast majority of overseas Chinese are working people, small business hawkers. Many work on steamships. Some do physically demanding jobs as drivers or furnace stokers. Some Chinese families have been in Indonesia for twenty generations. Some from families who have been there since 1500 can't speak Chinese at their historical circumstances. Old China was politically corrupt, people could not make a living and so went overseas to make a living. Overseas Chinese are hardworking, are good at business, and so established businesses and raised families abroad. There are also an Overseas Chinese issue between us and the fraternal socialist countries. About 100,000 Overseas Chinese live in Vietnam, Korea, Mongolia and in our big brother the Soviet Union. Naturally, the Overseas Chinese issue in the fraternal socialist countries is not a bilateral problem for us.

A special characteristic of the Overseas Chinese is that they are among the least willing to assimilate. They are stubborn and conservative. When they die abroad, they wish to be buried back in China. To take one example, a member of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference named Situ Meitang, who died recently at the age of 94 [sic. Situ Meitang died in 1955 at the age of 87]. He lived in the United States for 69 years but he never learned to speak a word of English. When Sun Yat-sen went to the United States during the revolution, Situ gave Sun a lot of help. Situ was a leader in Overseas Chinese society in the United States.

Overseas Chinese are patriotic and are very loyal to their communities. However, there are also some people engage in speculation, are loan sharks, or commit some crimes although they are only a small minority. The working people and the poor who comprise the vast majority of the Overseas Chinese are honest people. Many of them, deceived by the British, Dutch, and French invaders, were recruited to work in colonial areas to develop the economy. The way there were taken from China was in a kind of human trafficking. When I was young, I also went to France to work. At the time, it was not possible to go to France to study. We couldn't afford it. So I too became an Overseas Chinese.

That gives you some historical background on the Overseas Chinese. Only a very small proportion of them, the upper strata of the capitalist class cooperate with the imperialists and the colonialists and help them suppress and oppress the people. Most of them are laborers who are treated very cruelly. Many regions, over the course of history, have seen massacres of Overseas Chinese. There were two serious incidents in Indonesia, one by the Dutch and one by the Japanese when they occupied Indonesia. Before China was liberated, the country was very weak and the Overseas Chinese were in a very difficult situation. They got no help from their homeland --- it was as if they were stateless persons subject to the whims of outsiders.

After China was liberated, the Chinese Communist Party Central Committee and the Chinese government established a policy on Overseas Chinese. On the one hand, Chinese researchers have studied the history of the Overseas Chinese. On the other, China had common interests with the Overseas Chinese in the struggle against imperialism and colonialism in Southeast Asia, Asia, Africa and Latin America. Setting out from that common interest, New China hopes that the Overseas Chinese will foster friendship between China and the countries they live in. We maintain that Overseas Chinese issues should be solved through negotiation. Their countries of residence in Southeast Asia, Asia, Africa and Latin America should protect their legitimate interests (we don't protect their illegitimate interests). This way, we can eliminate the fear that those countries have of China. This will deprive the imperialists of any pretext for slandering the Overseas Chinese with statements like 'The Overseas Chinese are a Fifth Column' or that 'The Overseas Chinese are subversives'.

Our policy is based on the following principles:

First, the Chinese government earnestly hopes and encourages the Overseas Chinese to acquire the nationality of their country of residence and become citizens there. Most Overseas Chinese have lived in those countries for generations and so have strong attachments to those countries where they married foreign wives and had children. Many do not speak Chinese. We want to persuade them to acquire local nationality and to maintain a close relationship with China. That way they can contribute to friendship between their country and China. Of course, that is their choice to make. Once they become citizens of their own country, they are no longer Chinese nationals. They should be protected by local laws and participate in political activities as local citizens. In this way, their fears about living there are taken care of and the Chinese government is relieved of responsibility for them.

Second, many people are want to retain their Chinese nationality. Such people can only live abroad as Chinese expatriates. They should abide by the laws of the local state, can operate legitimate businesses, but cannot participate in local political activities. Therefore, we have dissolved Chinese Communist Party organizations among the Overseas Chinese. If they want to join the Communist Party, they will have to return to China. Before liberation, due to Chiang Kai-shek's brutal persecution of the Communist Party, many Communists fled abroad. Our Party's decision to dissolve the Chinese Communist Party's organizations among the Overseas Chinese is entirely due to considerations of each country's situation and our common interest in the anti-imperialist struggle.

Charge Antonov: Has this decision already been made?

Vice Premier Chen: Yes, we dissolved the Party organizations. We did that at Liberation. The leaders of Asian and African countries have been very supportive of this.

Third, some overseas Chinese are neither willing to choose local nationality nor are they able to make a living abroad voluntarily decide request permission to return to China. They will be repatriated. These are our three principles for handling the issue of the Overseas Chinese. This is completely fair and reasonable. This shows that China does not want to create disputes over the Overseas Chinese issue. This will also take away a pretext imperialists use to attack China, eliminate the fear that Southeast Asian countries have of China, and give the Overseas Chinese an opportunity to return to China to participate in building socialism. As I said earlier, the legitimate interests of overseas Chinese must be protected. We certainly do not protect those who speculate, disrupt the local economy, exploit local people, spy, or support Chiang Kai-shek.

As soon as China was liberated, our party began to consider policies to solve the Overseas Chinese issue. During the 1955 Bandung Conference, the treaty on dual citizenship signed by Premier Zhou Enlai and the Indonesian Prime Minister implemented these principles. Our Party has long foreseen that a big dispute would break out about the Overseas Chinese issue. Now, our Party's foresight has turned out to be correct. Our Party and government are concerned about the anxieties of the Southeast Asian countries. Those countries are very scared because the socialist camp led by the Soviet Union is getting stronger by the day just as China is getting better day by day, and because the Overseas Chinese have some economic power in those countries. They are very scared. Our policy is to dispel their doubts and fears. The facts show that all the accusations made against the Chinese government are false.

We can try thinking about the Overseas Chinese issue not as a problem of Overseas Chinese but as an ethnic minority issue. Can we consider think about it this way? On

the one hand, these countries have many Overseas Chinese in these countries. Some have several million Overseas Chinese, some hundreds of thousands, and they all have some economic power. They have contributed to the development of local seaports, mines and farms. They have paid taxes for generations. We have every reason to expect that they could participate in local government as a minority. But might they be discriminated against like the Jews have been? They are not Gypsies, but the Chinese government does not adopt such a policy and does not raise this issue with some other countries as their own domestic minority issue, it does so for the sake of cooperation with them and to eliminate their doubts and fears for the sake of our common fight against imperialism and colonialism.

On this issue, we should exercise self-restraint and make some sacrifices. Many Overseas Chinese support the Chinese government's handling of the issue as an Overseas Chinese issue although some others strongly oppose it. Overseas Chinese in Singapore and Malaya oppose it. They oppose a dual citizenship treaty. They feel that they are already Malaysians and so there is no need for them to choose their nationality once again. Malaya has a population of more than 6 million of whom nearly half are overseas Chinese. The city of Singapore has been partitioned from Malaya. It has a population of more than 1.5 million, of which more than 1.1 million are Chinese. Singaporean Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew is Chinese. We cannot intervene on this issue either. In the future, there will be a big dispute in Malaya and in Singapore about the Overseas Chinese issue. The Chinese government has always maintained a cautious policy. We hope that the Malays and the Overseas Chinese will form a country, oppose the exploitation and crush British imperialism. This is why we do not regard the Overseas Chinese issue there as a minority issue. We do approve of their choice to take the local nationality. This is because of the historical background of the overseas Chinese issue there.

Now I want to talk about the overseas Chinese issue in Indonesia. This issue is a hot one at the moment. If this issue had been handled in accordance with the dual nationality treaty signed by Premier Zhou and the Prime Minister of Indonesia at the 1955 Bandung Conference, it wouldn't be a difficult problem to solve. Many people Indonesian nationality and become Indonesian citizens. This has become a domestic problem in Indonesia. The rest are Overseas Chinese, and that issue is easily solved. If some Overseas Chinese commit a crime, they can be deported. This is not a problem.

The problem is that after it signed the dual citizenship treaty in 1955, the Indonesian government and the Indonesian capitalists rejected the treaty and have refused to implement it. The way they see it, if the treaty were to be implemented, most of the two million Overseas Chinese would become Indonesian citizens. They possess technical skills, education and have accumulated some wealth. They believe that while these people would superficially be capitalists joining the capitalist class of Indonesia, they would actually be supporting and strengthening the Communist Party of Indonesia. They are afraid of this and so refuse to implement the treaty. These concerns have long been an important factor in Indonesian political life.

Overseas Chinese were very active in the struggle against the Japanese. All parties in Indonesia receive support and assistance from overseas Chinese. The Indonesian capitalists fear that now this assistance will go to the Indonesian Communist Party in the future. In the past, the Overseas Chinese donated money to support anti-Dutch and anti-Japanese activities. They participated in armed struggles against the Dutch and the Japanese. All the Indonesian parties, now in the middle of their political campaigns, depend on the Overseas Chinese for support. Many Chinese government officials at the ministerial level and above had gotten support from the Overseas Chinese.

Here is one example. Indonesian President Sukarno was a clerk in a store owned by an Overseas Chinese during the anti-Japanese struggle. Can he say that he has not

been helped by the Overseas Chinese? Would he dare that? If he does, his old boss still lives in Beijing and could confront him. He took the money of overseas Chinese and even gave them a receipt. Now that the Indonesian Communist Party has become the largest political party in Indonesia with a membership of one million and several hundred thousand members, the Indonesian capitalist class is very afraid.

The Indonesian government is not willing work with us to solve this problem in a conventional manner. When Indonesian Foreign Minister Subandrio met me on October 7th, 8th and 9th, I told him (as I had spoken with Indonesian Ambassador Sujiazu many times in the past), that China is very fair, this group of people are entirely yours, why don't you want them? Why are you anti-Chinese? He had no answer; he just said he 'welcomes' them. You see, he welcomes them and is anti-Chinese at the same time. This is a psychological reaction. Of course I didn't say so, but they are afraid that now the Overseas Chinese will transfer their support to the Indonesian Communist Party.

The Indonesian government and the big capitalists want to use anti-Chinese feeling to oppose the Indonesia Communist Party by cutting it off at the roots. They have confiscate overseas Chinese property. That is national chauvinism. I asked them again, if you don't want over two million people, we want them. We will negotiate with you on their return to our country. He did not dare accept. He said that Overseas Chinese are still welcome to stay in Indonesia. We exchanged several letters with him. He has been entirely negative about returning the Overseas Chinese to China. Many Overseas Chinese work in places like mines, oil fields, tin mines, and workers on rubber plantations. In the cities, they do dental work and are drivers, drivers, hairdressers, blacksmiths, and mechanics. If they were to leave, Indonesia's economic life would be paralyzed. They dare not let them go. They want the Overseas Chinese to stay and serve them but do not want to treat them fairly. Naturally, the Overseas Chinese need protection. As a result, they blame the Chinese diplomatic personnel in Jakarta, claiming that they direct Chinese resistance and protests from behind the scenes. Can we accept this kind of protest from them? Of course we can't.

Some people thought the proposal we put forward to bring the Overseas Chinese back to China was just our government striking a pose to put more pressure on Indonesia. I told [Indonesian ambassador to China] Sujiazu that we were definitely interested in evacuating the Overseas Chinese. This is true. They can't stop it. Hainan Island alone could accommodate at least 3 million people. We have a particularly serious shortage of rubber plantation workers. We can also accommodate millions of people in Yunnan where they could grow rubber, grow coffee, cocoa and so on. During my most recent trip to Sichuan and Guizhou, people there told me that they would welcome the Overseas Chinese home. We also invited all the Overseas Chinese in live in other countries to return home. If they live in someone else's home but are not welcome there, they can certainly relocate back to China. There is no need for them to cause disputes over there. Bringing back the Overseas Chinese would not only eliminate a pretext the imperialists and reactionaries us to oppose China, it could eliminate the fear that Southeast Asia nationalists have for China.

Another issue in Indonesia is that some in the Indonesian army and in the reactionary Indonesian reactionary political parties try to use anti-Chinese feeling to stir up nationalism, overthrow the Sukarno cabinet in order to force Indonesia to abandon neutrality and turn to the West. US imperialism directs this from behind the scenes. We wrote a letter in response to theirs. We pointed out that we had immediately exchanged instruments of ratification for the dual-nationality treaty with Indonesia and had established a joint committee to implement the treaty. The legitimate interests of the Overseas Chinese who remain should be protected; if they do not want to stay, they will return to China. This is mainly aimed at the anti-China conspiracy of the reactionaries in the United States and Indonesia. We have made allowances for Sukarno and his cabinet. We have not called them out by name. We support them in their refusal to abandon their stance in favor of peace and neutrality.

The final step, the evacuation of the Overseas Chinese, would deprive them of all their excuses. We suppose that, if the Overseas Chinese were to be relocated back to China, they will come back to China with nothing. They would come with just the shirts on their backs. That is not something we can do anything about so we don't worry about it. The return of the Overseas Chinese to China will be good for us. When the Overseas Chinese return, they will be useful. The reactionaries, however, will face world opinion and they won't look good to the great masses of the Indonesian people. That wouldn't be our problem.

I want to tell all the comrades here that many Overseas Chinese now live in misery. Hundreds of Overseas Chinese have been compelled by armed force to move to concentration camps where they live in very poor conditions. They must pay to use the toilets not matter whether it is for urination or for defecation. They can't support themselves and they are not allowed to bring their possessions with them. Prison sentences or fines have been given to hundreds on the grounds that they violated government orders. Some were injured. Some sickened. Others killed themselves. Even Sukarno and the Indonesian Foreign Minister have said that the implementation of the order has gone too far. They admit that China has legitimate concerns for the interests of the Overseas Chinese. We will definitely not make concession on the legitimate interests of the Overseas Chinese. We will certainly protest the inhuman treatment of the Overseas Chinese, protect their interests and demand compensation.

There are a very few bad elements among the Overseas Chinese. When they engage in speculation, profiteering and spying, the Indonesian government does nothing about it because those bad people collude with government officials. So how could government officials do anything about them? They also do nothing about the Overseas Chinese aligned with the Chiang Kai-shek gang. Over the past decade, the Chiang gang's newspapers have been attacking China in a big way. But the government does nothing about it. Obviously, the anti-Chinese issue is really just a pretext for their treatment of the progressive forces within Indonesia, their efforts to weaken the influence of the socialist countries among the Indonesian people, and an attempt to placate the imperialists and pivot to the right. The Indonesian government and the big capitalists thought if only they could confiscate the property of the Overseas Chinese, economic chaos would end and the Indonesian economy could get the right track towards healthy development. What they are intent on destroying is very important for Indonesia.

The Overseas Chinese are an indispensable part of the daily economic life of the country that cannot be replaced in a day. Sukarno visited China in 1956. This time, Subandrio came to China. We talked all about it with him and with Ambassador Sujiazao as well. We told him that economic problems can only be solved step-by-step. This problem can't be solved by crude military and administrative methods. That just won't work. If they really do this, it will be as if they lifted a big rock just to crush their own feet. This is not the end of the road for the Overseas Chinese. They still have the option of returning to the land of their ancestors.

The biggest loser in the end will be the Indonesian government itself. Ambassador Sujiazao has also recognized this danger. Currently, some reactionary forces in Indonesia want to continue their anti-Chinese activities. They may also launch a larger anti-Chinese campaign, continue to confiscate the property of the Overseas Chinese, bundle them up and send them to concentration camps. The left opposes this and the moderates are wavering. The leftists see very clearly that the imperialists are directing the anti-Chinese campaign from behind the scenes and that harming friendship with China will be bad for Indonesia. We gave Indonesia US\$ 20 million worth of military assistance to the Indonesian government to help it suppress an armed rebellion and US\$ 11 million in cotton, cloth and machinery. The Americans and Chiang Kai-shek support the rebels and we support their efforts to put down the rebellion. Now if they still want us to keep giving them cloth, we are ready to do so.

In general, we aim to calm down tense situations and ask the other side to stop using arms to do forced removals. We aren't interested in engaging with them in endless debate about issues such as whether the Overseas Chinese are monopoly capitalists and whether Indonesia is advancing towards socialism. We call for immediate talks on the evacuation of the Overseas Chinese and the comprehensive resolution of the Overseas Chinese issue. We suppose that things could get better. There may also be anti-Chinese outbreaks in other Southeast Asian countries. We will not change our firm position. We won't start arguments. We will try to make issues as small and as easy to handle as possible. We can make concessions under certain conditions but we cannot make unconditional concessions. We will respond as needed. After all the nationalist countries are also capitalist countries. Our policy with them is to work together with them on nationalism and struggle with them on the issue of capitalism. Only by making ripostes as necessary can we in the end achieve a unity of views. Unity cannot be achieved through compromise alone.

According to Ambassador Huang Zhen's report, many Indonesian parties directly or indirectly indicated that they did not approve of the anti-Chinese movement. They want to blame Abdul Haris Nasution for this. This is mostly because they see the damage that the Anti-Chinese Movement has done to the Indonesian economy. Our policy is to strive for peace, maintain our friendship, and to strike a necessary blow against the reactionary forces. In particular, our desire to evacuate all the Overseas Chinese removes their every pretext. Some sacrifices will have to be made for the sake of this. There is no reason to blame China for this. The accusations against us are wrong. We are not to blame. They have been persecuting thousands of overseas Chinese by armed forces. They are ungrateful. How can the Chinese government not speak out? India bullied us and now Indonesia has come to bully us. This is because, unlike you, China is weak. They fear offending the United States and fear offending you as well. China is a child so it is easily bullied and slapped around. We can't accept just being beaten up, we have to get in a few blows ourselves.

They are even preparing to have Prince Sihanouk to come and attack us. He attacks us even while he asks for our help. Nasser also attacks us. Now a newspaper in Iraq has begun to oppose China. There is nothing we can do about that. That's just the way it is. At present we cannot sever diplomatic relations with them (that isn't necessary yet). They are far away so we can't send soldiers to fight them. So we just have to put up with it. Comrade Mao Zedong said: "Toughen up and stand up to them. Let them oppose us if they will." We need forbearance. We need to speak the truth at the appropriate moment and make some political counterattacks. The situation is very complicated, but we will not change our correct policy because of them. Our policy is to strive for solidarity with Asian countries and strive for a fair and reasonable solution to the Overseas Chinese issue. We'll just put up with their unfriendly activities and reactionary propaganda. They have opposed us for three months, so we will have to oppose them for three days. The most important point is to educate the people, the Chinese people, so that they will understand what imperialism in this world is like and what capitalism in the Southeast Asian countries is like. Those people are totally opposed to the socialist countries. At the same time, we need to educate the Indonesian people and the people of Asia and Africa.

China's letter in reply will be broadcast tonight. I gave the letter to the Indonesian ambassador yesterday afternoon. Tomorrow, the letter from Subandrio and my reply will be read together. We will not change one word of his letter. The most reactionary things never change.

Our problems with Indonesia have nothing to do with the Overseas Chinese. The Overseas Chinese have done nothing to harm them in any significant way. Indonesia has been independent for more than a decade but their people's lives have not improved. The country has not started down the road towards normal development. The Dutch have not completely withdrawn and now the British, Americans, and Japanese have all come back. Now I want to tell you my personal view, and not

anyone else's, that a revolution in Indonesia is inevitable. A real people's democratic revolution and a real national revolution are inevitable. The measures that the Indonesian reactionaries are taking on the Overseas Chinese issue are doing nothing less than adding fuel to the Indonesian revolution. Why? The situation in China before liberation is a very good example. When Japan surrendered, Chiang Kai-shek was one of five leaders of great powers. If he had cooperated with the Communist Party and engaged in construction then, Chairman Jiang might still be sitting in Nanjing, and the Chinese Communist Party may not have made its revolution. But Chiang colluded with the Americans and launched a civil war. As a result, it was all over for him in three years.

The problem in Indonesia today is very obvious. For them, the question is how to get the assistance of the socialist countries how to cooperate with the Indonesian Communist Party for the purpose of national construction (of course, they can also get help from the United States and Japan. There is nothing wrong with that). They should suppress the rebel army. But they didn't do that. Instead, they reversed direction and purged the entire Overseas Chinese and the entire Communist Party of Indonesia. In this way, they are bringing down a revolution upon themselves. The revolution will occur that much sooner. When we evacuate the Overseas Chinese, we end their involvement in that. People will not be able to say that the Indonesian revolution has anything to do with the Overseas Chinese. This also sets a precedent. If other countries want the Overseas Chinese to return to China, we will take them all. No matter what difficulties China has and how poor it is, we are willing to spend the money to do this.

This is all I have to say today. If you have any questions, please ask.

Charge Antonov: The Indonesian issue is very clear, thank you very much. I also want to clarify one point: just now you said that this policy of the Overseas Chinese issue also applies to Overseas Chinese in other countries. Now, have you started doing this for overseas Chinese in other countries, or are you prepared to do so?

Vice Premier Chen: Some countries have no diplomatic relations with us at all and so we cannot do it there. With respect to some Southeast Asian countries, we are not prepared to take the initiative in raising this issue.

Charge Antonov: I understand, that is to say, the same policy will be adopted when this same problem is encountered in the future.

Vice Premier Chen: Yes, it a matter of acting in accordance with the three principles of our party and government that we discussed earlier.

[GDR] Ambassador Wang Dai'er [sic]: You just said that you appealed to the Overseas Chinese to return to China. Does this apply mostly to the Indonesian Overseas Chinese or have you already appealed to Overseas Chinese in other countries as well?

Vice Premier Chen: We are appealing mainly to the Overseas Chinese of Indonesia. Our letter has already been published. Naturally Overseas Chinese in other countries will also see it. In the future, we will prevent Chinese from going overseas to become Overseas Chinese.

Vice Minister Zhang: Now nobody wants to leave.

Vice Premier Chen: Good. So Indonesia has helped us on this issue.

Charge Antonov: You just said that China is still weak. What does this mean?

Ambassador Wang Dai'er: We don't think China is weak.

Charge Antonov: In international affairs, we never think of China as a country but as a member of the socialist camp. Therefore, in dealing with Indonesia, China's is more than powerful enough. Comrade Mao Zedong told me that in the struggle against imperialism, we must have a division of labor. The Chinese side has carried out this division of labor very well. I do not agree with what you mean by "weakness."
Comrade Chen Yi may want to amend his statement (laughter).

Vice Premier Chen: I have to clarify one point. Over the past ten years, China has certainly developed a lot. This kind of development is inseparable from the help of the fraternal countries led by the Soviet Union. The Western imperialists deliberately describe China as an enormous country in order to frighten the Southeast Asian countries. They say that China has a large population, a large territory and abundant resources. They say that China will necessarily become a powerful country and its first victims will be the Southeast Asian countries. This is not true. China has made some progress. However, as I see it, facing the problem seriously, China has problems in industry and agriculture that will take thirty years to solve. Solving our water conservancy problems and greening China will take at least fifty years. It will take until 1999 or perhaps the next year, the year 2000. For China to become like the Soviet Union and the fraternal countries of Eastern Europe where in the countryside you see forests everywhere will take 50 years since it will take time for the trees to grow. I think it is too early for them to worry about us coming. The China of thirty to fifty years hence will be a socialist country. There will be nothing to be afraid of. China is in fact weak and backward. We will change this. We can't do anything about their being happy or afraid. This is a contradiction. We can allay some of their fears, but there is no way that we can eliminate them all.

Charge Antonov: I understand now. I understand what you mean by "weak". As far as how long it will take, that is a topic for another discussion! (Laughter).

Vice Premier Chen: The time can be shortened. Currently, the average wage of urban workers in China is only 40-50 yuan per month. After collectivization in the people's communes, after subtracting out costs for food, housing, and the education of children, which are borne by society, per capita average income of rural people comes to just 70 RMB per year. To raise this income level will take 20 - 30 years. For rural incomes to reach approximately the urban level of 300 RMB per month will take several decades. In other words, it will take decades for us to get to the point where rural people can wear the same clothes that we do -- wool in winter and silk fabric in the summer -- and all urban and rural houses be made of steel and concrete and wired with electric lights and telephones. We will try to achieve this ahead of schedule.

In short, we want the Southeast Asian countries to relax. Don't be afraid of us. Our letter replying to theirs won't seek quarrels just for that reason.

Charge Antonov: This is quite right. Former Myanmar Ambassador U Hla Maung also revealed this kind of thinking. He said that no matter what, China will always be a bit scary.

Vice Premier Chen: You can also tell the comrades that if today's China were still Chiang Kai-shek's China, then they would be afraid of the Soviet Union. When the Indonesian Communist Party comes to power, it will not be afraid of us. We should eliminate as much of this fear as we can but it cannot be completely eliminated.

Charge Antonov: I will pass everything you said to my government and Party Central Committee.

Vice Premier Chen: Comrade Li Fuchun will in a few days summarize for you China's achievements in industry and agriculture over the past few years.

The envoys said that they will welcome the report of Vice Premier Li Fuchun.

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