

LIU SHAOQI: *HOW TO BE A GOOD COMMUNIST*

Liu Shaoqi (1900–1969), a veteran Communist who had joined the Party in 1921, the year of its founding, was one of Mao's closest coworkers and spoke with an authority second only to Mao's. When the People's Republic was established in 1949, Liu became vice-chairman of the Central People's Government, and after Mao relinquished the chairmanship in 1959, Liu succeeded to it. Subsequently, however, the two fell out, and Liu became a prime target of the Cultural Revolution.

How to Be a Good Communist was a basic text of indoctrination for party members, delivered first as a series of lectures in July 1939, at the Institute of Marxism-Leninism in Yan'an. It represents one aspect of the campaign for tightening party discipline and strengthening orthodoxy that was pressed in the late thirties and early forties in order to ensure the proper assimilation of new recruits, growing rapidly in number, and the maintenance of party unity along orthodox Leninist lines.

The original Chinese title of the work was literally translated as *The Cultivation of Communist Party Members*. Both the title and Liu's frequent reference to earlier Chinese concepts of self-cultivation suggest a link with Chinese tradition, most specifically with Neo-Confucian praxis based on the *Great Learning*, the *Mean*, and self-examination through quiet-sitting. Plainly, Liu aims to tap the moral idealism and self-discipline fostered by the preexisting tradition, but he also warns against the subjective individualism and spiritual autonomy implicit in the Neo-Confucian cultivation of sagehood. Hence his insistence that Communist self-criticism remain subject to group discipline and party authority. From this, self-criticism became an instrument of widespread repression and persecution in Chinese Communist Party ideological campaigns and the Cultural Revolution. For Liu, however, the passage ends on a note of complete faith in the perfecting of human society through the victory of Communism.

Comrades! In order to become the most faithful and best pupils of Marx, Engels, Lenin, and Stalin, we need to carry on cultivation in all aspects in the course of the long and great revolutionary struggle of the proletariat and the

masses of the people. We need to carry on cultivation in the theories of Marxism-Leninism and in applying such theories in practice; cultivation in revolutionary strategy and tactics; cultivation in studying and dealing with various problems according to the standpoint and methods of Marxism-Leninism; cultivation in ideology and moral character; cultivation in party unity, inner-party struggle, and discipline; cultivation in hard work and in the style of work; cultivation in being skillful in dealing with different kinds of people and in associating with the masses of the people; and cultivation in various kinds of scientific knowledge, and so on. We are all Communist Party members, and so we have a general cultivation in common. But there exists a wide discrepancy today among our party members. Wide discrepancy exists among us in the level of political consciousness, in work, in position, in cultural level, in experience of struggle, and in social origin. Therefore, in addition to cultivation in general, we also need special cultivation for different groups and for individual comrades.

Accordingly, there should be different kinds of methods and forms of cultivation. For example, many of our comrades keep a diary in order to have a daily check on their work and thoughts, or they write down on small posters their personal defects and what they hope to achieve and put them up where they work or live, together with the photographs of persons they look up to, and ask comrades for criticism and supervision. In ancient China, there were many methods of cultivation. There was Zengzi,¹ who said, "I reflect on myself three times a day." The *Book of Odes* has it that one should cultivate oneself "as a lapidary cuts and files, carves and polishes." Another method was "to examine oneself by self-reflection" and to "write down some mottoes on the right-hand side of one's desk" or "on one's girdle" as daily reminders of rules of personal conduct. The Chinese scholars of the Confucian school had a number of methods for the cultivation of their body and mind. Every religion has various methods and forms of cultivation of its own. The "investigation of things, the extension of knowledge, sincerity of thought, the rectification of the heart, the cultivation of the person, the regulation of the family, the ordering well of the state and the making tranquil of the whole kingdom" as set forth in the *Great Learning*² also means the same. All this shows that in achieving one's progress one must make serious and energetic efforts to carry on self-cultivation and study. However, many of these methods and forms cannot be adopted by us because most of them are idealistic, formalistic, abstract, and divorced from social practice. These scholars and religious believers exaggerate the function of subjective initiative, thinking that so long as they keep their general "good

1. A disciple of Confucius. [Note in the original.]

2. The *Great Learning* is said to be "a Book handed down by the Confucian school, which forms the gate by which beginners enter into virtue." [Note in the original.]

intentions” and are devoted to silent prayer they will be able to change the existing state of affairs, change society, and change themselves under conditions separated from social and revolutionary practice. This is, of course, absurd. We cannot cultivate ourselves in this way. We are materialists, and our cultivation cannot be separated from practice.

What is important to us is that we must not under any circumstances isolate ourselves from the revolutionary struggles of different kinds of people and in different forms at a given moment and that we must, moreover, sum up historical revolutionary experience and learn humbly from this and put it into practice. That is to say, we must undertake self-cultivation and steel ourselves in the course of our own practice, basing ourselves on the experiences of past revolutionary practice, on the present concrete situation, and on new experiences. Our self-cultivation and steeling are for no other purpose than that of revolutionary practice. That is to say, we must modestly try to understand the standpoint, the method, and the spirit of Marxism-Leninism, and understand how Marx, Engels, Lenin, and Stalin dealt with people. And having understood these, we should immediately apply them to our own practice, i.e., in our own lives, words, deeds, and work. Moreover, we should stick to them and unreservedly correct and purge everything in our ideology that runs counter to them, thereby strengthening our own proletarian and Communist ideology and qualities. . . . At the same time, we must find out in what respects specific conclusions of Marxism-Leninism need to be supplemented, enriched, and developed on the basis of well-digested new experiences. That is to say, we must combine the universal truth of Marxism-Leninism with the concrete practice of the revolution. . . .

First of all, we must oppose and resolutely eliminate one of the biggest evils bequeathed to us by the education and learning in the old society — the separation of theory from practice. . . . Despite the fact that many people read over and over again books by ancient sages, they did things the sages would have been loath to do. Despite the fact that in everything they wrote or said they preached righteousness and morality, they acted like out-and-out robbers and harlots in everything they did. Some “high-ranking officials” issued orders for the reading of the Four Books and the Five Classics,³ yet in their everyday administrative work they ruthlessly extorted exorbitant requisitions, ran amuck with corruption and killing, and did everything against righteousness and morality. Some people read the *Three People’s Principles* over and over again and could recite the *Will of Dr. Sun Yat-sen*, yet they oppressed the people, opposed the nations who treated us on an equal footing, and went so far as to compro-

3. The Four Books and the Five Classics are nine classics of philosophy of the Confucian canon as defined in Neo-Confucianism and used in the imperial examination system. [Note in the original.]

mise with or surrender to the national enemy. Once a scholar of the old school told me himself that the only maxim of Confucius that he could observe was “To him food can never be too dainty; minced meat can never be too fine,” adding that all the rest of the teachings of Confucius he could not observe and had never proposed to observe. Then why did they still want to carry on educational work and study the teachings of the sages? Apart from utilizing them for window-dressing purposes, their objects were (1) to make use of these teachings to oppress the exploited and make use of righteousness and morality for the purpose of hoodwinking and suppressing the culturally backward people; (2) to attempt thereby to secure better government jobs, make money and achieve fame, and reflect credit on their parents. Apart from these objects, their actions were not restricted by the sages’ teachings. This was the attitude of the “men of letters” and “scholars” of the old society to the sages they “worshipped.” Of course we Communist Party members cannot adopt such an attitude in studying Marxism-Leninism and the excellent and useful teachings bequeathed to us by our ancient sages. We must live up to what we say. We are honest and pure and we cannot deceive ourselves, the people, or our forefathers. This is an outstanding characteristic as well as a great merit of us Communist Party members. [pp. 15–18]

What is the most fundamental and common duty of us Communist Party members? As everybody knows, it is to establish communism, to transform the present world into a Communist world. Is a Communist world good or not? We all know that it is very good. In such a world there will be no exploiters, oppressors, landlords, capitalists, imperialists, or fascists. There will be no oppressed and exploited people, no darkness, ignorance, backwardness, and so on. In such a society, all human beings will become unselfish and intelligent Communists with a high level of culture and technique. The spirit of mutual assistance and mutual love will prevail among mankind. There will be no such irrational things as mutual deception, mutual antagonism, mutual slaughter and war, and so on. Such a society will, of course, be the best, the most beautiful, and the most advanced society in the history of mankind. . . . Here the question arises: Can Communist society be brought about? Our answer is “yes.” About this, the whole theory of Marxism-Leninism offers a scientific explanation that leaves no room for doubt. . . . The victory of socialism in the USSR has also given us factual proof. Our duty is, therefore, to bring about at an early date this Communist society, the realization of which is inevitable in the history of mankind. . . .

At all times and on all questions, a Communist Party member should take into account the interests of the party as a whole and place the party’s interests above his personal problems and interests. It is the highest principle of our party members that the Party’s interests are supreme. [p. 31]

In the following passages, quoted sayings are mostly from Confucian and Neo-Confucian sources, but by this time they survive in the collective memory only as traditional sayings

without awareness of their exact provenance. They draw heavily on the Neo-Confucian ideal of heroic moral leadership.

If a party member has only the interests and aims of the Party and communism in his ideology, if he has no personal aims and considerations independent of the Party's interests, and if he is really unbiased and unselfish, then he will be capable of the following:

1. He will be capable of possessing very good Communist ethics. Because he has a firm outlook, he "can both love and hate people." He can show loyalty to and ardent love for all his comrades, revolutionaries, and working people, help them unconditionally, treat them with equality, and never harm any one of them for the sake of his own interest. He can deal with them in a "faithful and forgiving" spirit and "put himself in the position of others." He can consider others' problems from their points of view and be considerate to them. "He will never do to others anything he would not like others to do to him." He can deal with the most vicious enemies of mankind in a most resolute manner and conduct a persistent struggle against the enemy for the purpose of defending the interests of the party, the class, and the emancipation of mankind. As the Chinese saying goes, "He will worry long before the rest of the world begins to worry, and he will rejoice only after the rest of the world has rejoiced."⁴ Both in the Party and among the people he will be the first to suffer hardship and the last to enjoy himself. He never minds whether his conditions are better or worse than others', but he does mind as to whether he has done more revolutionary work than others or whether he has fought harder. In times of adversity, he will stand out courageously and unflinchingly, and in the face of difficulties he will demonstrate the greatest sense of responsibility. Therefore, he is capable of possessing the greatest firmness and moral courage to resist corruption by riches or honors, to resist tendencies to vacillate in spite of poverty and lowly status, and to refuse to yield in spite of threats or force.

2. He will also be capable of possessing the greatest courage. Since he is free from any selfishness whatever and has never done "anything against his conscience," he can expose his mistakes and shortcomings and boldly correct them in the same way as the sun and the moon emerge bright and full following a brief eclipse. He is "courageous because his is a just cause." He is never afraid of truth. He courageously upholds truth, expounds truth to others, and fights for truth. . . .

3. He will be best capable of acquiring the theory and method of Marxism-Leninism, viewing problems, and perceiving the real nature of the situation keenly and aptly. Because he has a firm and clear-cut class standpoint, he is

4. By Fan Zhongyan. See ch. 19.

free from personal worries and personal desires that may blur or distort his observation of things and understanding of truth. . . .

4. He will also be capable of being the most sincere, most candid, and happiest of men. Since he has no selfish desires and since he has nothing to conceal from the Party, "there is nothing that he is afraid of telling others," as the Chinese saying goes. Apart from the interests of the Party and of the revolution, he has no personal losses or gains or other things to worry about. . . . His work will be found in no way incompatible with the Party's interests no matter how many years later it is reviewed. He does not fear criticism from others, and he can courageously and sincerely criticize others. That is why he can be sincere, candid, and happy.

5. He will be capable of possessing the highest self-respect and self-esteem. For the interests of the Party and of the revolution, he can also be the most lenient, most tolerant, and most ready to compromise, and he will even endure, if necessary, various forms of humiliation and injustice without feeling hurt or bearing grudges. . . . But if for the sake of certain important aims of the Party and of the revolution he is required to endure insults, shoulder heavy burdens, and do work that he is reluctant to do, he will take up the most difficult and important work without the slightest hesitation and will not pass the buck.

A Communist Party member should possess all the greatest and noblest virtues of mankind. . . . Such ethics are not built upon the backward basis of safeguarding the interests of individuals or a small number of exploiters. They are built, on the contrary, upon the progressive basis of the interest of the proletariat, of the ultimate emancipation of mankind as a whole, of saving the world from destruction and of building a happy and beautiful Communist world. [pp. 32-34]

[Liu Shaoqi, *How to Be a Good Communist*, pp. 15-34]