

September 27, 1972

Excerpt of Mao Zedong's Conversation with Japanese Prime Minister Kakuei Tanaka

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Summary:

Mao claims that, as a result of Tanaka's visit to China, "the whole world is trembling in fear." In addition to discussing international politics, Mao and Tanaka also delve into ancient Chinese history and Buddhist philosophy.

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Chairman Mao: With your [the Japanese] visit to Beijing, the whole world is trembling in fear, mainly one Soviet Union and one United States, the two big powers. They are fairly uneasy, and wondering what you [the Japanese] are up to.

Tanaka: The United States has declared its support for our visit to China.

Chairman Mao: The United States is slightly better, but they are also feeling a little uncomfortable. [They] said that they didn't manage to establish diplomatic relations during their visit in February this year and that you [the Japanese] had run ahead of them. Well, they are just feeling a little unhappy about it somehow.

Tanaka: On the surface, the Americans are still very friendly to us.

Chairman Mao: Yes, Kissinger had also informed us: Don't set barriers.

Chairman Mao: What's your view of the world?

Tanaka: I feel that in the world at present, since the Second World War, the practice by some big powers of using realpolitik for invasion has reached its limits. Hence, the world is now entering a new period of seeking peace and resolving problems through negotiations. Now, the financial power of the United States is also reaching a certain limit. It seems that while the Soviet Union is the mightiest and it is also developing, Europe is in fact also gradually showing signs of fighting for liberation.

Chairman Mao: Right.

Tanaka: This time round, I also went to the United States and spoke with President Nixon. The United States also acknowledges that Japan's visit to China is in line with inevitable developments in world trends.

Chairman Mao: Yes, he was here first.

Tanaka: Yes, even though the Americans were here first, there are still all sorts of problems. Thus, not only does the United States not oppose Japan and China improving their relations, they actually welcome it. Therefore, it isn't political posturing that the United States supports the improvement of the Japan-China relationship, but rather [they] hope that amity between Japan and China will boost America's relations with China. This is the fundamental position of the United States.

Chairman Mao: That is quite right. It too has no choice.

Tanaka: The United States is also gradually changing.

Chairman Mao: Yes, he himself had also said the world had now changed and spoke about the five forces in the world at present.

Premier Zhou: I discussed this issue with him yesterday and said that we weren't a latent force and won't be a superpower

Chairman Mao: In reality, it isn't feasible as well. China is cited as one of the five

forces, [but] you see....

Chairman Mao [turning to Premier Zhou]: When are we issuing the declaration?

Premier Zhou: Could be tomorrow, [we] still have to look at it and finalize it tonight. We have to produce the Chinese and Japanese texts as well as the English one.

Chairman Mao: When [are they] leaving Beijing?

Premier Zhou: The day after tomorrow.

Chairman Mao: Ah, the day after tomorrow. You [the Japanese] are very quick.

Tanaka: [I'm] very grateful that we can issue a joint declaration so quickly.

Chairman Mao: [We] can go without an agreement for decades and centuries and yet resolve the issue in a matter of days.

Tanaka: Yes, it can be resolved so long as the timing is right.

Chairman Mao: Indeed.

Tanaka: So long as both sides don't play diplomatic games and conduct negotiations with sincerity, [we] can definitely achieve a satisfactory outcome.

Chairman Mao: Both sides have the need [to do so] now. This was also what President Nixon said to me. He asked if both sides had the need. I said yes. I said, now that I'm collaborating with the rightists, my reputation isn't good. I said, in your [the Americans'] country there are two parties and it's been said that the Democrats are more enlightened. As for the Republicans, they lean more to the right. I said there is nothing great about the Democrats. I neither admire nor am interested in them. I said, when you [note: referring to Nixon] were running for President, I gave you my vote. You are still not aware of that.

This time round, we also gave you our vote [referring to Tanaka]. It's exactly like you said. If the main player, which is the Liberal Democratic Party, doesn't come here, how can we resolve the issue?

Tanaka: Yes, I've also discussed this point with His Excellency Premier Zhou.

Chairman: Indeed. So some people are chiding us for collaborating with the rightists. I said, that communist party of yours in Japan, I'm not interested in them. Other opposition parties are better but [they] can't resolve the issue.

Tanaka: Yes, [they are] unable to resolve the issue.

Chairman Mao: It still depends on the Liberal Democratic Party government to resolve the issue.

Tanaka: In the Tang period, Japan had a very famous monk named Kūkai, also known as the Kōbō-Daishi. During the Tang dynasty, he went to China to study Buddhism and he founded what is known as the Shingon school of Buddhism in Japan. I am a believer of this school, but am not too well versed in his teachings.

Chairman Mao: Were you a believer from young?

Tanaka: [I'm] not exactly a believer, but when I was young and a child, my paternal grandmother believed in it and I followed suit.

Chairman Mao: I too had been a believer.

Tanaka: My paternal grandmother chanted sutras nightly and so I followed her example.

Chairman Mao: Exactly.

Tanaka: I actually don't understand those doctrines very well.

Chairman Mao: The acceptance of traditional culture. Until the age of twelve, I went to a temple on Mount Heng [in Hunan] to offer incense on my mother's behalf and [I had to] fall prostrate in prayer with each step. Later on, I believed in Confucius and feudalism. I read all the Four Books and the Five Classics with the exception of the Spring and Autumn Annals and the Book of Changes.

Tanaka: The Four Books and the Five Classics are also being taught in Japan.

Chairman Mao: There was no use whatsoever to read them. It only came in useful once when I had a fight with my father. He always said that I wasn't filial, and he yelled [at me]. I then said, it says in the book, I'll show [you] the book. It says in the book that: "The son is dutiful when the father is affectionate." I say that you have to be affectionate before your son is filial. You are abusing [me] everyday and beating [me]! [Everyone laughs]

Tanaka: So you turned the Four Books and the Five Classics on its head.

Chairman Mao: Yes. He hadn't read them. [He was] illiterate. Thus I bullied him. How can there be no struggle?! Our family was engaged in a struggle. There were five of us. My mother, Mao Zemin, and myself, the three of us formed a united front to deal with my father. As for Mao Zetan, [we] ignored him. He was on Father's side. He was young, the youngest brother.

Premier Zhou: Two factions.

Tanaka: It was the same in our family. Our family also fought. Sometimes we talked back to our teachers. Whenever the teacher used the Four Books and the Five Classics to criticize me, I would say, I haven't read the Four Books and the Five Classics, thus I don't know these principles that you are preaching.

Chairman Mao: I also used three sayings of Song dynasty [statesman] Wang Anshi to rebut my teacher. He said: "There is no need to fear astronomical events [omens]. One should not stubbornly cling on to the rules of ancestors. There is no need to worry about the opinions of others." There were plenty of people criticizing him at the time.

Premier Zhou: That is Wang Anshi [he is referring to].

Chairman Mao: He said to ignore them. My teacher got angry and said it seemed like I

was trying to rebel against him. I said: you have hit the nail on the head. I am precisely rebelling against you! Thereafter, he tried to make peace with me once more.