

President Senghor's Speech

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[Text] Peking, May 6, 1974 (HSINHUA)--Following is the full text of the speech by Leopold Sedar Senghor, president of the Republic of Senegal, at the banquet given in his honour by Premier Chou En-lai here this evening:

Mr Premier,

Allow me, first of all, in the name of my wife and the delegation which accompanies me as well as in my own name, to thank you for such a cordial reception accorded us by the Chinese Government and the people of Peking. I would like also to express to you our joy at finding ourselves in China. For me personally, I have since my youth taken a great interest in everything that came from China because in my secondary school days I boarded with Wissine Ben-hoane, a Chinese from Canton who married my cousin. For the Senegalese delegation in particular, we have a lot of things to learn from China. In fact, your revolution, which proceeds before our eyes, has already given and continues to give us great lessons, which we would like to study more closely in order to draw abundant benefits from them.

This is the occasion for me to salute the father of this revolution, which, after the bourgeois revolution of July 14, 1789 and the proletarian revolution of October 24, 1917, shook the world and the Third World in particular. I therefore salute Chairman Mao Tsetung, the thinker of this revolution. And, after him, you yourself, Mr Premier, who are his most faithful comrade-in-arms and who, should your modesty allow me to say so, at the head of the Chinese Government since 1949, have carried out the thought of Mao Tsetung in a dynamic manner.

The first lesson that we have drawn from his thought is that the primary condition for the development of a country, particularly an underdeveloped country, is the existence of a national sentiment, and, better still, a national idea. If I have understood Chairman Mao rightly, populations cannot develop into a nation if they have not, first of all, inherited all their past, with its features which are particular and irreplaceable, and, consequently, original.

It was not without emotion that I read, for the first time, the admirable first chapter of his work of 1939 entitled "The Chinese Revolution and the Chinese Communist Party". In this chapter on "Chinese society", Chairman Mao the patriot tells us about the ancient past, the genius and, consequently, the grandeur of the Chinese people, and above all of the Chinese civilization, which is already five thousand years old.

And he rightly shows us the usefulness, for the formation of a nation, of an ethnic majority--in this case, the Han people--but at the same time of a multiplicity of nationalities, since a nation is essentially a common will to live together, to think together, but above all to act together. To act together means, in the present case, to build a new nation: through the revolution.

That leads us to the second lesson, which is a lesson of socialism.

Along with the work of which I have spoken, the works of Chairman Mao that impressed me most strongly are the fundamental essays entitled "On Contradiction" and "On Practice".

I have often recommended these essays to young people who wish to assimilate the essentials of scientific socialism and, I would say, the universal truths that, in Marxist thought, are valid for all times and places.

These essays are all the more assimilable to us people of the Third World, as they are more typically Chinese, with their rhapsodic rhythm and their vivid examples taken from Chinese life. The people of the Third World, rooted in their ethno-national culture, will understand these essays all the more quickly as they will be put on guard against the dichotomy of classical occidental thought, which is the most efficacious tool of intellectual conservatism.

If Chairman Mao was so well able to assimilate the thought of the founders of scientific socialism--Marx, Engels and Lenin--it was precisely because he read them as a Chinese and for the Chinese. In his work of 1938 entitled "The Role of the Chinese Communist Party in the National War", he wrote: "Being Marxists, communists are internationalists, but we can put Marxism into practice only when it is integrated with the specific characteristics of our country and acquires a definite national form." He had, previously, emphasized that "we should regard it (the Marxist theory) not as a dogma, but as a guide to action."

This leads us to the third lesson of Chairman Mao and the Chinese people. It concerns practice. I could summarize it thus: It is good to theorize, that is to say, to analyse the problems confronting us as a nation and elaborate an ideal solution for each of them, but it is better still to act to resolve them concretely. For the most effective solutions can only be found in the course of action.

Furthermore, Marx could only teach us a method to search and find. Living in the mid-19th century and in Western Europe, he "could not", as Chairman Mao clearly points out, "know concretely...beforehand" certain facts peculiar to the Third World and certain laws peculiar to the 20th century.

We of the Third World should all the more adhere to practice as it is in our tradition and as, following Marx, the contemporary savants have returned to the tradition of the Greek philosophers who implanted rational knowledge in the humid humus of sentiment knowledge.

As we know, Chairman Mao, for all that, does not reject theory. In fact, it is through the integration of theory and practice that he, for the first time in China in four thousand years, accepted the great challenge of history: to feed, teach and govern, in order and in joy, the Chinese people, who are traditionally rebellious and who represent a quarter of humanity.

As for us Senegalese, we do not pretend to be Marxist-Leninists or communists, or even "Maoists", for those who give themselves the last name have often betrayed the thought of Mao Tsetung. My party, the Senegal Progressive Union, which has governed Senegal since independence, wants to be a national, socialist and democratic party. But we are, in reality, what you call a "new democracy" or an "advanced democracy", which is the first stage towards socialism.

If we have started by reading the founders of scientific socialism, and also the French--from Saint-Simon to Jaures--, we have given no less special attention to Mao Tsetung, because China belongs to the Third World and the traditional Chinese thinking--with Yin and Yang as well as Tao for fertilizing their contradictions--is near to Negro-African thinking.

We have indeed read all of them, and particularly Chairman Mao, with the eyes of Negro-Africans and for the Negro-Africans, in this case the Senegalese. In fact, we had, previously, gone back to the sources of the Negro-African civilization, on whose basis we have elaborated the theory of Negritude, which is none other than the sum total of the values of the Negro-African civilization, of which the first virtue is to reject dichotomy.

Just as you Chinese have animated your revolution by the revolutionary tradition of the Chinese people, we Senegalese, we Negro-Africans, have animated our revolution by the Negro-African tradition. It is not accidental that in Latin America--and Cuba is the latest example--the blacks, who are descendants of imported African slaves, together with the Indians, form the proletariat of the sub-continent and are always workers for revolution. But there is no need to go so far afield. In black Africa itself today, as you know, the combatants of resistance are fighting with arms in hand in Angola, Mozambique, Rhodesia, South Africa and, across the frontiers of Senegal, in Guinea Bissau.

The effort that we have made, following China, to implant Marxism in our national and ethnic tradition is legitimate, and I wish to corroborate this by citing these lines from "Capital": "It is always the direct relationship of the owners of the conditions of production to the direct producers...which reveals the innermost secret, the hidden basis of the entire social structure.... This does not prevent the same economic basis--the same from the standpoint of its main conditions--due to innumerable different empirical circumstances, natural environment, racial relations, external historical influences, etc., from showing infinite variations and gradations in appearance, which can be ascertained only by analysis of the empirically given circumstances." I stress: "Natural environment, racial relations, external historical influences." That justifies Negritude as well as Sinitude.

That is the main reason which both explains and justifies the cooperation between China and Senegal.

Shortly after our independence, in 1961 to be exact, we recognized the People's Republic of China, but already on November 23, 1960 we had accorded her minimum tariffs. Unfortunately, owing to a misunderstanding resulting from our inexperience in foreign policy, we failed to initiate our cooperation more concretely until 1971.

Nevertheless, we did not wait for that day to give a new impetus to our commercial exchanges. If Senegal's exports to China are still insignificant, the volume of our imports from China, on the contrary, is relatively great, since these imports have exceeded those from more than one country of the European Economic Community. It is our wish to develop to the maximum the commercial exchanges between China and Senegal, but we want above all to put them in the framework of an all-round cooperation which we intend to strengthen. That is the reason why we have recently signed with your country an agreement on economic and technical cooperation.

If we intend to strengthen cooperation between China and Senegal, there is another reason in addition to the reasons given above, that is, China as a developing country of the Third World like us, has based her economic and technical aid on eight principles, of which I would only cite the most remarkable ones:

The principle of equality and mutual benefit,

Long-term loans without interest or at a low interest,

Chinese aid is to help the recipient country take the road of development "in self-reliance",

Austerity of Chinese experts, who live at the level of the people.

We know from experience that Chinese aid is not only inexpensive, but particularly effective. In Senegal, the Chinese mission specializes in training peasants and popularizing farming techniques, which are effective but within the reach of poor peasants who constitute 70 percent of the population and who maintain the virtues of our people, which are most humane and, consequently, most solid. It is our wish that the Chinese mission expand its actions.

However, as Marx said, if the satisfaction of "animal needs" is the condition sine qua non of all economic growth, the all-round development of man should be our final objective, which is elaborated from the satisfaction of those needs. The first text that I read of Chairman Mao, together with his poems--the beauty of which I sensed in spite of the translation--dealt precisely with culture. The great Chinese thinker defended in it the thesis according to which the spreading of culture among the people should not lead to its abasement, but the contrary. We have always supported the same thesis. That is why in the course of our visit in China we shall complete the agreement on economic and technical cooperation with an agreement on scientific and cultural cooperation.

Mr Premier,

I repeat that we are only an "advanced democracy." in a small developing country. That is why we meditate on your lessons in endeavouring, not to take People's China as a model, but to inspire ourselves with your example in order to elaborate a Negro-African, a Senegalese model which will enable us to attain more easily and better the second stage of our long march toward socialism. By this word I mean the all-round development of man, thanks to the progress of science and culture as well as to that of political democracy and social justice, but thanks above all to the Senegalese man's own efforts to accomplish himself as men.

Mr Premier,

Ladies and gentlemen,

I invite you to raise your glasses to drink

To the health of Chairman and Madame Mao Tsetung,

To the health of Acting Chairman and Madame Tung Pi-wu,

To the health of Premier and Madame Chou En-lai;

To the health of the members of the diplomatic corps and their wives, and

To the prosperity and happiness of the friendly Chinese people, and

To Sino-Senegalese cooperation.