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# Modern History Sourcebook: Lu Ting-yi: Let Flowers of Many Kinds Blossom, Diverse Schools of Thought Contend!, 1956

*Speech Delivered by Lu Ting-yi, Director of the Propaganda Department of the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party, on the Party's Policy on Art, Literature, and Science, May 26, 1956*

Mr. Kuo Mo-jo, President of the Chinese Academy of Sciences and Chairman of the All-China Federation of Literary and Art Circles, has asked me to speak on the policy of the Chinese Communist Party on the work of artists, writers and scientists.

To artists and writers, we say, "Let flowers of many kinds blossom." To scientists we say, "Let diverse schools of thought contend." This is the policy of the Chinese Communist Party. It was announced by Chairman Mao Tse-tung at the Supreme State Conference. . . .

If we want our country to be prosperous and strong, we must, besides consolidating the people's state power, developing our economy and education and strengthening our national defence, have a flourishing art, literature and science. That is essential.

If we want art, literature and science to flourish, we must apply a policy of letting flowers of many kinds blossom, letting diverse schools of thought contend. . . .

"Letting flowers of many kinds blossom, diverse schools of thought contend" means that we stand for freedom of independent thinking, of debate, of creative work; freedom to criticize and freedom to express, maintain and reserve one's opinions on questions of art, literature or scientific research.

The freedom we uphold is not the same as that based on the type of democracy advocated by the bourgeoisie. The freedom advocated by the bourgeoisie really means freedom for only a minority, with little or no freedom for the working people. The bourgeoisie exercises a dictatorship over the working people. Jingos in the United States bellow about the "free world" - a free world in which jingos and reactionaries have all the freedom and every freedom, while the Rosenbergs are put to death because they stand for peace. We, on the contrary, hold that there must be democratic liberties among the people, but that no freedom should be extended to counter-revolutionaries: for them we have only dictatorship. This is a question of drawing a political demarcation line. A clear political line must be drawn between friend and foe.

"Let flowers of many kinds blossom, diverse schools of thought contend": that means freedom among the people. And we urge that, as the people's political power becomes progressively consolidated, such freedom should be given ever fuller scope.

Among the people there are points of agreement and points of difference. Our country

has a constitution and it is a public duty to abide by it-this is an agreement among the people. That is to say, the people agree among themselves that they should love their country and support socialism. But there are other matters on which they do not agree with one another. In ideology there is the difference between materialism and idealism. . .

Members of the Communist Party are dialectical materialists. We Communists of course stand for materialism and against idealism-nothing can change that. But, precisely because we are dialectical materialists and understand the laws governing the development of society, we hold that a strict distinction must be made between the battle of ideas among the people and the struggle against counter-revolutionaries. Among the people themselves there is freedom not only, to spread materialism but also to propagate idealism. Provided he is not a counter-revolutionary, everyone is free to expound materialism or idealism. There is also freedom of debate between the two. This is a struggle between conflicting ideas among the people, but that is quite different from the struggle against counter-revolutionaries. We must suppress and put an end to the activities of counter-revolutionaries. We also have to wage a struggle against backward, idealist ways of thinking among the people. The latter struggle can be quite sharp, too; but we embark on it with the intention of strengthening unity, ending backwardness and creating an ever closer unity among the people. When it comes to questions of ideas, administrative measures will get us nowhere. Only, through open debate can materialism gradually conquer idealism.

There will be diverse opinions, too, on matters of a purely, artistic, academic or technological nature. This is, of course, quite all right. In matters of this sort, there is freedom to voice different opinions, to criticize, counter-criticize and debate.

In short, we hold that while it is necessary to draw a clear political line between friend and foe, we must have freedom among the people. . . .

Let flowers of many, kinds blossom, diverse schools of thought contend: that is a policy. to mobilize all the positive elements. It is also, therefore, a policy that will in the end strengthen unity.

On what basis are we to unite? On the basis of patriotism and socialism.

What do we unite for? To build a new, socialist China and combat our enemies both at home and abroad.

There are two kinds of unity: one is built on mechanical obedience and the other on our own conscious, free will. What we want is the latter.

Are those engaged in art, literature and science united? Yes, they are. Compare the situation in the days when the Chinese People's Republic was just founded with what we have now and you find we now have a far closer unity among artists, writers and scientists. This has come about as a result of our work for social reforms and changes in our ways of thought. It would be wrong to deny or ignore this. But even so, we cannot say that our unity is all it should be: there is still room for improvement.

In what respect? Well, first and foremost, some Communist Party members have forgotten Comrade Mao Tse-tung's warning about the evils of sectarianism. Success turns some people's heads and they get swelled-headed and sectarian. . . .

As everyone knows, in the past few years we have fought a series of battles in the Party

against sectarianism in artistic, literary and scientific circles. We have waged this struggle in organizations dealing with public health and research in the natural sciences, in literature and art, and in the social sciences. We shall go on waging this struggle and we call on all Party members working in these fields to make an end of this sectarianism. . . .

Finish with sectarianism and unite with all who are ready to co-operate, all who possibly can co-operate with us. Put aside the desire to monopolize things. Get rid of unreasonable rules and commandments, and apply the policy of letting flowers of many kinds blossom, letting diverse schools of thought contend. Do not think only of the interests of your own department; try to give more help to others and to other departments. Don't be self-conceited and cocksure. Be modest and discreet and respect others. That is how to rid themselves of the shortcomings which have marred our work in building up unity; that is how to strengthen our unity to the utmost. . . .

In regard to criticism, our policy of letting flowers of many kinds blossom, diverse schools of thought contend means freedom to criticize and freedom to counter-criticize. . . .

There are two kinds of criticism. One is criticism directed against the enemy - what people call criticism that "kills at a blow," criticism with no holds barred. The other is criticism directed against the honestly mistaken - well-meant, comradely criticism, made in the cause of unity, intended to achieve unity through struggle. In making this kind of criticism, one must always bear the whole situation in mind. The critic should rely on reasoning, and his aim should be to help others. . . .

It is quite common for people to make mistakes in all innocence. There is no such person as a man who never makes mistakes. We must make a sharp distinction between mistakes like this and statements consciously directed against the revolution. Criticism of such mistakes must only be made for the good of others; it must be cool-headed criticism, well reasoned. In making it, we must bear the whole situation in mind and act in a spirit of unity, with the intention of achieving unity. We must do all we can to help those who have made mistakes correct them, and those criticized should have no apprehensions about being criticized.

It is easy to make mistakes. But mistakes should be rectified immediately, the sooner the better. It is sticking to one's mistakes that does the harm. As far as being criticized is concerned, one should stick to what is right, and dissent if others are wrong in their criticism. But if the other party is right you must rectify your mistakes and humbly accept others' criticism. To admit a mistake frankly, to root out the causes of it, to analyse the situation in which it was made and thoroughly discuss how to correct it is, as far as a political party is concerned, the hallmark of a mature party. As far as the individual is concerned, it is the hallmark of a realist. To accept criticism when one has made a mistake is to accept the help of others. Besides helping the person concerned, that also helps the progress of science, art and literature in our country; and there is certainly nothing wrong with that!

As regards study in general, we must continue to see to it that the study of Marxism-Leninism is organized on a voluntary basis. At the same time, we must acquire a broad range of general knowledge; we must critically study things both past and present, things at home and from abroad, and critically learn from both friends and foes.

Marxism-Leninism is being enthusiastically studied by most of our intellectuals. That is a good thing. The scientific theories of Marx and Lenin are the cream of human

knowledge, truth that is everywhere applicable. Once there were people who thought that Marxism-Leninism was not applicable in China; but such ideas have been proved sheer nonsense. Without scientific Marxist-Leninist theory to guide us, it is unthinkable that the revolution could have been victorious in China. It is also unthinkable that we could have achieved the tremendous successes and made the rapid progress that we have in construction and in scientific and cultural work. . . .

As they conic from the people things are often not systematically developed or are crude or lack theoretical explanation. Some of them have more than a bit of the "quack" about them, or a taint of the superstitious. There is nothing surprising about that. It is the duty of our scientists, artists and writers not to despise these things but to make a careful study of them, to select, cherish and foster the good in them, and, where necessary, put them on a scientific basis.

We must have our national pride, but we must not become national nihilists. We oppose that misguided attitude known as "wholesale Westernization." But that does not mean that we can afford to be arrogant and refuse to learn good things from abroad. Our country is still a very backward one; we can make it prosperous and strong only by doing our best to learn all we can from foreign countries. Under no circumstances is national arrogance justified.

We must learn from the Soviet Union, from the People's Democracies, and from the peoples of all lands.

To learn from the Soviet Union-that is a correct watchword. We have already learnt a little, but much remains to be learnt. The Soviet Union is the world's first socialist state, the leader of the world camp of peace and democracy. It has the highest rate of industrial development. It has a rich experience in socialist construction. In not a few important branches of science it has caught up with and surpassed the most advanced capitalist countries. It stands to reason that it is worth our while to learn from such a country and such a people. It is utterly wrong not to learn from the Soviet Union.

Nevertheless, in learning from the Soviet Union we must not mechanically copy everything in the Soviet Union in a doctrinaire way. We must make what we have learnt fit our actual conditions. That is a point we must pay attention to. Otherwise, we shall run into trouble. . . .

Apart from learning from our friends, we must see what we can learn from our enemies-not to learn what is reactionary in their systems but to study what is good in their methods of management or in their scientific techniques. Our aim in this is to speed the progress of our socialist construction, so as to build up our strength to ward off aggression and safeguard peace in Asia and throughout the world. . . .

Now that this policy - let flowers of many kinds blossom, diverse schools of thought contend"-has been put forward, many problems will crop up one after the other and demand solutions. I hope all of you will do some hard thinking on such questions. Today I have only touched upon some matters of principle, and anything I say is open to correction.

**Source:**

from Lu Ting-yi, *Let Flowers of Many Kinds Blossom, Diverse Schools of Thought*

## The One Hundred Flowers Campaign 1957

After the founding of the PRC in 1949, what would later be known as the Hundred Flowers Movement was first a small campaign aimed solely at local bureaucracies for non-communist-affiliated officials to speak out about the policies and the existing problems within the central bureaucracy? Premier Zhou Enlai was initially the head of this first campaign.

Despite continuous efforts put henceforth by Zhou Enlai and other prominent central bureaucratic officials, this minimal zed campaign was a failure. No one spoke out openly at all.

During a Communist Politburo Conference in 1956, Zhou Enlai emphasized the need for a bigger campaign, aimed this time at the whole sea of intellectuals within the country, for these individuals to criticize the central government. Mao initially had supported the idea. "The government needs criticism from its people," Zhou said in one of his 1956 speeches, "Without this criticism the government will not be able to function as the 'People's Democratic Dictatorship'. Thus the basis of a healthy government lost... We must learn from old mistakes, take all forms of healthy criticism, and do what we can to answer these criticisms."

### 2 Hundred Flowers

In the summer of 1956, Mao had found the idea an interesting one, and had started to take central control over that of Zhou Enlai's in the actual campaign. The initial idea was to have intellectuals discuss the country's problems in order to promote new forms of arts and new cultural institutions. Mao, however, saw this as the chance to promote socialism. Mao believed that socialism is the only "true" form of thought, and that after discussions it would be apparent that socialism is the dominant ideology over capitalism, even amongst non-communist Chinese. In a later speech made by Mao titled On the Correct Handling of the Contradictions Among the People, Mao had openly and wholeheartedly supported the campaign, saying "Our society cannot back down, it could only progress... criticism of the bureaucracy is pushing the government towards the better."

Thus began the ill-fated Hundred Flower's Movement.

The name of the movement had originated from a poem: 百花齊放, 百家爭鳴 "Let a hundred flowers bloom: let a hundred schools of thought contend." Mao had used this to signal what he had wanted from the intellectuals of the country.

The campaign publicly started in late 1956. In the starting stages of the Movement the Central Government was still not receiving any forms of criticism, although there was a significant rise in letters of conservative advice. Premier Zhou received some of these letters, and once again realized that this widely publicized campaign was not progressing. Zhou

later spoke to Mao about the situation, stating that even more euphoria is needed from the central bureaucracy to lead the intellectuals into further criticism.

By the spring of 1957, Mao had announced that criticism was needed and had started to criticize those who failed to turn in healthy criticism to the Central Government. Many intellectuals, already estimating that this was a plot of some sort, finally gave in to their fiery thoughts. In the period from June 1 to July 17, 1957, millions of letters were pouring in to the Premier's Office and other authorities.

Many of these letters, as stated by Mao in early 1957, had violated the Healthy Criticism level and had reached a harmful and uncontrollable level, which indeed was true. These letters had advised the government to "govern democratically" and "open up." Premier Zhou Enlai at first had explored and listened to many of these criticisms, but Mao refused to do this himself. Mao began or simply continued an old apprehension: those who criticize harmfully mean an end to his leadership. By early February 1957 the euphoria was simply too hard to control, many absurd letters were turned in. Statements by intellectuals (or others who sent in letters) got to the point where they suggested "the CCP should give up power," "intellectuals are virtually being tortured to live in a communist society," "there is absolutely no human rights and freedom if the CCP is to continue on ruling the country," "the country should separate with each Political Party controlling a zone of its own" and "Each political party in China should rule in transitional governments, each with a 4 year term."

The Hundred Flowers Movement had turned into nothing it projected. No new forms of cultural institutions or arts were being suggested (or for that matter all of those letters containing such proposals were all ignored, being that attention was focused elsewhere anyhow), instead just "unhealthy" political criticism.

Mao had simply grown sick of continual bashing of the CCP. In July, 1957, Mao ordered the halt of this campaign, and Zhou had no powers to stop him. Mao's earlier speech, On the Correct Handling of the Contradictions Among the People, which was never published, was meaningfully changed and appeared later on as an anti-rightist piece itself. Some concluded that Mao knew the outcome before the campaign had even started.



## The Hundred Flowers Campaign (1956)<sup>7</sup>

By 1956 the Chinese people were becoming disillusioned with what the communists had to offer. The standard of living in China wasn't improving as was expected. Over-crowding in cities, soaring inflation, floods and food shortages led the people to see the flaws in Maoism. Thus the people had been tightly controlled and brainwashed to follow Mao's leadership, anyone who had criticized the state would be imprisoned or executed. Recently in communist Hungary there had been a people's revolt where, as Mao put it: "*Tens of thousands of people took to the street to oppose the People's Government.*" (Hsu)

Thus Mao decided to let the people feel they have a voice and adopted a policy where people could openly criticize the government if they saw the need to. He cleverly used the traditional Chinese saying: "**let one hundred flowers bloom and one hundred schools of thought contend.**" (March 1957) Li felt that this "*was a gamble, based on a calculation that genuine counterrevolutionaries were few, that rebels like Hu Feng had been permanently intimidated into silence, and that other intellectuals would follow Mao's lead, speaking out only against the people and practices Mao himself most wanted to subject to reform.*" Mao urged leaders of the "democratic parties" to overcome their hesitations and speak out against him. Newspaper articles repeated his theme and party leaders in local work units throughout the country took up the gauntlet. The more one loved the party, the saying went, the more one would speak out in criticism of it. However the severely harsh criticism surpassed the government's expectation. Not only were individual leaders and the party itself, as an institution attacked but Mao himself.

The criticism went too far too quickly and things got out of hand for the Communist Party's hierarchy. Their position was threatened and in June 1957, Mao suddenly cracked down on all criticism. However, the period of openness had shown up who his main critics were and many were arrested and sent to prison to learn "thought reform". His critics were put to use by doing manual labour while at the same time were attempted to be reformed. Those who didn't reform were killed. The press once again became censored and freedom of speech was ended.

**Historical Debate:** Whether or not Mao was sincere in wanting to improve the party and make the people happy, or if he simply wanted to expose his enemies.

### **Jack Gray:**

*"He believed that in Hungary and elsewhere in the communist world the discontent which flared up in 1956 was justified by the repressive policies of the preceding years. At the same time, he believed the enemies hostile to socialism had taken advantage of the situation."*

*"The main point was not to secure the suppression of those who were hostile, but to secure a renewed and strengthened consensus."*

### **Li Zhi-Sui:**

Was told by Mao: "*We want to coax the snakes out of their holes. Then we will strike. My strategy is to let the poisonous weeds grow first and then destroy them one by one. Let them become fertilizer.*"

### **Immanuel Hsu:**

Mao started the Hundred flowers campaign "*Partly to afford the people a chance to let off steam – lest there be a Hungarian-type revolt in China – and partly to ferret out the real critics.*"

