



Meng Shao-nong (center) and other Chinese Automotive Industry Delegation members inspect an American automobile.

Editor's note: Meng Shao-nong graduated from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology in 1943. Following graduation, Meng worked at Ford Motor Company's Rouge Plant until the end of World War II. He returned to China when the Peoples Republic was created, following the Chinese civil war.

Meng Shao-nong is Vice President of the Chinese Automotive Engineers Society, and its Chief Engineer. He was also part of a delegation of Chinese automotive officials that recently toured the United States at the invitation of General Motors.

Meng Shao-nong looks a little like character actor Key Luke. He smiles a lot, wears western-style suits, and speaks English fluently.

Car Biz talked with Meng, and Chen Ren-huang, interpreter for the Chinese Automotive Industry Delegation, in the lobby of a Detroit-area hotel.

Car Biz: Why are you visiting the United States at this time?

Meng Shao-nong: We are re-paying a visit to your country at the invitation of G.M. We had invited officials of G.M. to tour China, and they invited us to tour your country.

C.B.: What are your impressions of our country, especially since you haven't seen it for 35 years?

M.S.: People are living much better than when I was last here. Your technology is vastly improved, your production, as far as I have seen is, is greatly modernized.

C.B.: How many are there in your party, how many came on this visit?

M.S.: 22.

C.B.: Do they represent various automotive interests in China, such as engineering, research, design,

manufacturing?

M.S.: Yes. Some are management figures, some are engineers, some come from the factories, plants, others from the administrative offices.

C.B.: Have you learned anything of interest on your trip here?

M.S.: Ha, ha, yes. We have very wide interest. We have seen a great deal that is interesting to us, and we think it will be very beneficial to us after we go back.

C.B.: What have you studied on your trip here?

M.S.: Well, mostly visiting plants, and sightseeing a little bit.

C.B.: What is the future of the automotive industry in the People's Republic of China?

M.S.: Well, all industry is not quite up to the requirements of our economy. We can't meet all the demands of trucks and cars from the people; we are trying to expand.

C.B.: There have been some questions from observers of the People's Republic of China's economy that your country is not in a position at this time to develop an automotive industry. Will you comment on that?

M.S.: Ha, ha, well, personally, I can tell you my experience. In 1950, that is just after the formation of our new government in China, we started preparations to build an auto plant, and we started construction in 1953, completed it in 1956. We produced automobiles there ever since. We have a capacity of about 150-thousand a year, at present. It's too small for us, but the majority of what we produce there is trucks, but we have two assembly lines that produce cars; we are producing a small amount of cars there.

C.B.: Is the political and economic development of your country at a point where you can divert monetary and population resources to the development of a heavy industrial base?

M.S.: Yes, we have resources and we have the capital accumulated from our interior sources to build this heavy industry. Of course, we won't devote all of our efforts to that aim. I think present policy is to put the welfare of the people first so that the agriculture and the light industry will be developed faster than before.

C.B.: You mentioned "internal resources" to help develop an industrial base, are you speaking of natural resources?

M.S.: Of course, you see we don't have very heavy taxes in China. Our revenue comes mostly from the industry and agricultural segments. That's how the government gets its income, and that is used to put back for investments.

C.B.: How do you view the future of trade between our country and your country?

M.S.: I think there is a great chance of trade development. Our country needs a diverse technology, and needs management experience, also if possible we welcome foreign investment; that's a change from the policies of before, ha, ha. I think your country after the normalization of relationship is in a position to improve vastly in this respect.

C.B.: Will your country develop its own automotive industry, or will it work in conjunction with the United States and other countries in joint ventures, assembly-only operations, or anything else of that nature?

M.S.: We have been developing our own industry, by our selves. We welcome outside assistance, both in capital and technology, experience and so forth. I think we will be glad to go into some joint ventures with U.S. concerns.

C.B.: When do you think that will happen?

M.S.: I can't predict that, ha, ha; it depends on many conditions.

C.B.: Can you say what some of those conditions are?

M.S.: Well, you see, of course foreign investors would like to see political stability and economic needs that are profitable for them to invest. On our side, we want to get acquainted with all the possible sources of capital, so that we can get the best deal, ha, ha.

C.B.: Is there anything you want to add to your remarks for those readers of our magazine that are in the automotive business?

M.S.: Well, I can say this, in China, American automobiles were the best known and lasted the longest. We were acquainted with them since I was a boy. I think in this respect, American industry is very well prepared to go on in cooperation with us. ■