

The Historical Status of China's Tibet

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Chapter X

Tibet Institutes Regional National Autonomy and Needs No "Self-Determination"

In 1965, the Tibet Autonomous Region was founded. On the basis of the general democratic election conducted across the region, and with ratification from China's National People's Congress (NPC), it convened its first people's congress on September 1 to elect the people's committee (i.e. people's government). For the first time in Tibetan history, laboring people and patriotic persons became masters of their own affairs. The people's government, working for the interests of Tibetan people, enjoyed their warm support and was strong and vigorous.

Van Praag, however, says this action imposed a kind of political system identical to other areas of the People's Republic of China on Tibet. He also advocates "national self-determination" for Tibet, and accuses the CPC of "betraying" this principle it had put forward in earlier years.

Van Praag does not understand, and is reluctant to believe, that the policy of regional national autonomy adopted by the CPC is correct and proves effective in Tibet. The CPC has, over the past several decades, gradually accumulated rich experience in dealing with policies concerning domestic national issues that more and more conform with national conditions.

In the early days of the new democratic revolution, the CPC, in line with the Leninist principle, raised the slogan of practicing national self-determination in each ethnic group. The 14th Article of the General Outline of the Constitution for the Chinese Soviet Republic, passed at the first National Congress of the Chinese Soviet convened in Ruijing, Jiangxi Province, states clearly: "The Chinese Soviet Power recognizes the right to self-determination of all ethnic minorities within Chinese border, until each small and weak ethnic group gains the right to separate from China and establish their own independent states. All Mongolians, Hui, Tibetans, Miao, Li and Korai people living within the Chinese border enjoy full self-determination in joining or separating from the Chinese Soviet Federation, or establishing their own autonomous regions." It also states: "The Chinese Soviet Power would now make efforts to help those small and weak ethnic groups to break away from the oppression and rule of imperialists, Kuomintang,

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warlords, the nobilities, lamas and headmen, and strive for full freedom and initiatives." (Selections of CPC Central Committee Documents, Vol.7, p.467)

From these historical documents, we clearly perceive the policies of national self-determination and independence for ethnic minorities were advocated totally under the premise of weakening and overturning imperialism, the Kuomintang government and the reign of feudal power. They were put forward because national oppression was still extant and the Chinese people had not gained political power nationwide. The CPC, with their political power still confined within the Chinese Soviet Area, had not met the problem of dealing with its relationship with ethnic minorities.

When the Red Army reached the northern part of Shaanxi Province on its Long March (1934-35), and the CPC Central Committee made the decision to establish an Anti-Japanese national united front, by changing its strategies from overturning the Kuomintang power led by Chiang Kai-shek to seeking cooperation with its government in fighting the Japanese, the formulation of national issues changed correspondingly. While still recognizing the self-determination principle for ethnic minorities, the CPC Central Committee raised the slogan of national autonomy. Facing the problem of dealing with its relationship with the Hui people in northwest China, the Chinese Soviet Power came to understand national autonomy was more appropriate for China's reality. The Chinese Soviet Power's Declaration to the Hui People, delivered on May 25, 1936, says: "In line with the national self-determination principle, we advocate that Hui people have the right to solve their own matters. They could establish their own independent political power on their own land." "On the basis of national equality, the Hui people enjoy the management right over their own affairs and have the right to set up their own autonomous governments." (Selections of CPC Central Committee Documents, Vol.10, p.28)

To destroy China, the Japanese imperialists adopted a policy of sowing dissension among the Chinese nationalities and partitioning and occupying Chinese territory. They hatched plots such as "Manchurian independence" in northeast China, "Mongolian independence" in north China, and "great Hui state" in northwest China, trying to effectuate its goal of dismembering and enslaving the entire Chinese nation under the guise of "independence" and "autonomy."

The CPC, however, saw through their sinister intentions, and organized the masses in north and northwest China for the anti-Japanese struggle. It advocated both national self-determination and national autonomy in handling its relationships with ethnic groups such as the Hui and Mongolian. In the CPC's Ten Outlines for Fighting the Japanese and Saving the Country, issued on August 15, 1937, it proposed to "mobilize the Mongolian, the Hui and other ethnic peoples to join hands to fight the Japanese under the principle of national self-determination and national autonomy." (Selections of CPC Central Committee Documents, Vol.10, p.317) In Outlines on the Issue of Hui Nationality in April 1940, it said clearly: "The Hui nationality must enjoy the

equal rights with the Han nationality. They are allowed to have the independent right to manage their own affairs under the principle of fighting the Japanese hand-in-hand with other nationalities." (Selections of CPC Central Committee Documents, Vol.11, p.392). In the Outlines on the Issue of the Mongolian Nationality in the Anti-Japanese Struggle published in July 1940, it proposed to "uncover the essence of the puppet government created by the Japanese imperialists and their servile followers and Mongolian traitors, expose their plots such as "Japanese-Mongolian Cooperation? "Japanese aid in helping the Mongolian Nationality to achieve autonomy and independence' 'oppose-Communists' 'peace' and sowing hatred between the Mongolians and the Han people." It stated that the "Mongolian people should enjoy equal political rights with the Han people," and 'the Mongolian people have the right to manage their own affairs." (Selections of CPC Central Committee Documents, Vol.11, p.450)

The aforementioned guiding ideologies have played an important role in smashing the Japanese imperialists'scheme of sowing discord among Chinese nationalities, unifying different ethnic groups such as Hui and Mongolian and striving for victory in the anti-Japanese war.

Article 17 of the Administrative Program for the Shaanxi-Gansu-Ningxia Border Area published on May 1, 1941 clearly defines: "In line with the principle of national equality, the Mongolian, Hui and Han nationalities should enjoy equal political, economic and cultural rights, and the Mongolian and Hui autonomous regions should be established." (Selections of CPC Central Committee Documents, Vol.11, p.643) This was the first time the CPC openly put forward the system of establishing autonomous regions in ethnic minority regions. On October 23, 1945, the CPC Central Committee adopted its policy on Mongolian work: "The present fundamental policy for Inner Mongolia is to practice regional autonomy. By starting with each banner, we must race against time and go all out to mobilize and organize the Mongolian local autonomous campaign and establish the autonomous government." (Selections of CPC Central Committee Documents, Vol.13, p.184) The idea of regional national autonomy became clearer.

On May 1, 1947, the Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region, the first autonomous region for ethnic minorities in China, was established in the liberated area in north China. It played an active role in uniting with Mongolian people, developing production, supporting the liberation war and striving for revolutionary victory.

In September 1949, the First Plenary Session of the CPPCC approved the Common Program which includes an article declaring that "each ethnic minority-inhabited area must practice regional national autonomy." In September 1954, the First NPC adopted the Constitution of the People's Republic of China, which once again formulates this basic policy. Practising national regional autonomy in ethnic areas thus becomes an important political system of New China and the autonomous regions constitute an important part of the Chinese nation. Over the past 40 years, in line with this political system, a total of five autonomous regions, 30 autonomous prefectures, 124 autonomous counties (banners) and 1,500 ethnic minority villages have been

established in the areas inhabited by ethnic minorities across the country. The ethnic people have fully enjoyed the rights of national equality and being masters of their own affairs, and have joined hands with people of other nationalities to realize mutual development, progress and prosperity of the whole nation.

Facts have fully proved that New China's system of regional national autonomy was in complete conformity with China's national conditions, was effective and had great superiority. Due to different national and historical conditions, New China's system of regional autonomy differs, in form and many of the contents, from the federal system of the national republic of the former Soviet Union advocated by Lenin. However, the two systems enjoy identical essence in emphasizing equal rights for each ethnic group and aiming to consolidate and strengthen the power of a multinational socialist country, and withstand the alienation of imperialist and reactionary forces. In short, both benefit socialism and the broad masses, not imperialist and reactionary forces.

Like other areas inhabited by ethnic minorities, liberated Tibet lives in a big family of national equality, unity and friendship. It started preparing for the establishment of the autonomous region in 1956.



Emancipated serfs voting for deputies to the local people's congress

However, some foreign reactionary forces have kept meddling in Tibetan affairs and tried to bring Tibet into their spheres of influence or turn it into a semi-colony once again. The upper-class reactionary forces in Tibet feared extinction of the feudal slavery system and needed to sabotage the new situation of national unity. So, with support and connivance of some overseas anti-China forces, they did their utmost to obstruct the preparatory work for establishing the autonomous region and incited riots. Facts show it was impossible to found the Tibet Autonomous Region under the reign of the feudal slavery system aided by foreign reactionary forces.

Victories in putting down riots and in the Democratic Reform have buried the feudal slavery system in Tibet and liberated the Tibetan people from their oppressors. The Tibetan people wanted urgently to establish their own political power by means of a democratic approach. This laid a reliable political basis for establishing people's governments at all local levels through general election.

According to instructions from the Central Government, and in line with the Election Law of the People's Republic of China, the CPC Tibet Work Committee and the Preparatory Committee for the Founding of the Tibet Autonomous Region set out in the summer of 1964 to organize

general elections at township level in Tibet. With this smoothly carried out, the county-level election process started in the spring of 1963. By August 1965, county- and township-level elections had basically been completed. Some 1,359 townships and towns staged general elections, held people's congresses and chose their leaders. Another 567 townships and towns held deputy meetings that functioned in an acting capacity of people's congresses. The two added up to 92 percent of the total, and the people's governments at township level where emancipated serfs and slaves dominated were set up. In addition, 54 counties across the region convened their first people's congresses; 16 counties convened deputy meetings that functioned in an acting capacity of people's congresses, elected county magistrates and deputy county magistrates and set up county-level people's committees.

The emancipated serfs and slaves greatly treasured the rights of being masters of their own fate. In Gyangze County, voters called the voter's cards 'the certificate of being masters of one's own affairs' and conscientiously took part in the credential examination and the election of deputies. In Ngari area, people participating in the election made up over 93 percent of total voters. In Xiaoritong Village, Qamdo County, all eligible voters cast their ballot. Rinzin Lhamo, a 64-year-old emancipated serf from Gurong Village, Doilungdeqen County, said: "I used to be a decrepit donkey carrying heavy loads all the year round and having no rights to speak of. Now under the leadership of the CPC, I become master of my own fate." During the election days, a festive atmosphere prevailed in every polling booth, with the deafening sound of gongs and drums. The voters, clad in colorful nationality costumes and holding hadas and dyed ears of qingke barley symbolizing the bumper harvest in their hands, gathered in small groups, and sang and danced all the way to the polling stations. They presented hadas to those elected deputies who were to their liking. After that they sang and danced and put on Tibet operas.

On the basis of the completed general election, the First Session of the First People's Congress of the Tibet Autonomous Region was convened in September 1965, declaring officially the founding of the Tibet Autonomous Region.

Of the 301 deputies attending the congress, 226 were Tibetans and 16 were deputies from Moinba, Lhoba, Hui, Naxi, Nu and other ethnic groups. They comprised over 80 percent of the total deputies. The Tibetan deputies were mostly emancipated serfs and slaves, including county magistrates, heads of prefectures and townships, PLA cadres, model miners and factory workers, and model teachers. They included Purde, an enthusiast for the Democratic Reform and the construction of his hometown, and an elected head of Laxi Village in Baqen County who was born a hired herdsman and whose eyes were gouged out by rebels; Cering Lhamo, head of the mutual-aid team composed of 12 former nangzen slaves in Gyiba Village, Nedong County, which overcame difficulties and achieved bumper harvests in successive years; and Dazaxi, political instructor of the No.2 Company of the Independent Battalion of the PLA Tibetan Military Area's Xigaze Command, who was born into a serf family and had devoted himself to

work and study since he joined the PLA in 1957 and whose grandfather, parents and sisters were all tortured to death by the manorial lords. Patriotic personages from the upper-class in Tibet, making up 11 percent of the total deputies, included Ngapoi Ngawang Jigmei, Pagbalha Geleg Namgyi, Namdain Gonggya Wangqug, Ceke Toinzhol Cering, Sangding Doje Pamo, Sengqen Lobsang Gyaincain who have, for many years, maintained the national unification and national unity, firmly opposed rebellion and supported the Democratic Reform. After election by vote, the People's Committee of the Tibet Autonomous Region, consisting of 37 members, was set up, with Ngapoi Ngawang Jigmei as its chairman.

The CPC Central Committee and the State Council extended their heartfelt congratulations to the founding of the Tibet Autonomous Region. Some 30,000 people from all walks of life in Lhasa attended a gala celebration on September 9, 1965.

The Tibet Autonomous Region and the people's governments at all levels, elected through democratic vote by emancipated serfs and patriotic personages of all social strata, enjoyed the heartfelt support of the Tibetan people. It was not in the least a political system imposed on Tibet.

In accordance with the rights bestowed by the Law of the People's Republic of China Governing Regional National Autonomy, the People's Congress of the Tibet Autonomous Region has, in the past 30-odd years, formulated dozens of local rules and regulations, decrees, decisions and resolutions which conform to the reality of Tibet and maintain the interests of Tibetan people. They include the Rules of Procedures of the People's Congress of the Tibet Autonomous Region, the Procedures on Formulating Local Laws and Regulations for the Tibet Autonomous Region, the Measures for the Management Over Mining by Collective Mining Enterprises and Individuals in the Tibet Autonomous Region, the Regulations of the Tibet Autonomous Region on the Protection and Management of Cultural Relics, and the Accommodation Rules for the Implementation of the Marriage Law of the People's Republic of China. The formulation and implementation of these local rules and regulations have furnished an important legal guarantee to the realization of democratic rights for the Tibetan people and to the development of local social, economic and cultural undertakings.

The growth of local cadres represents an important aspect of regional national autonomy. By 1992, cadres of Tibetan nationality in the Tibet Autonomous Region had reached 37,000, or 66.6 percent of the total. All the leading posts in the standing committees of the people's congresses, governments and people's political consultative conferences at various levels were filled by Tibetans. Cadres of Tibetan nationality accounted for 71.1 percent at regional level and 74.8 percent at county level. By exercising their functions and powers, they led the Tibetan people to exert themselves for the establishment of a new Tibet with Chinese socialist distinctiveness, scoring remarkable achievements.

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In judicial activities, in addition to enjoying equal legal rights with the people in other parts of the country, the Tibetan people have also been granted special rights stipulated in the Law of the People's Republic of China Governing Regional National Autonomy. The People's Congress of the Tibet Autonomous Region stipulates: "People's courts and procuratorates at various levels must guarantee the right of the Tibetan citizens to use their own national language to enter a lawsuit. In cases involving Tibetans, the Tibetan language should be used in doing procuratorial work and hearing cases, and legal documents should be written in the Tibetan language." At present, the main officials of the procuratorates and courts at all levels in Tibet are Tibetan citizens.

Now, living in a big family of an independent and united multinational country and enjoying to the greatest extent more than 30 years of regional national autonomy, the Tibetan people really do not need "self-determination" or "independence."

It is clear that Van Praag, by advocating "national self-determination for Tibet," intends to let the reactionary serf owners in exile return to control Tibet's destiny and rebuild the Gaxag government's rule on the backs of the Tibetan laboring people. To this, the Chinese people, Tibetans in particular, will certainly not consent.