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SUMMARY OF BASIC EXPERIENCES IN PROMOTING REGIONAL
AUTONOMY AMONG MINORITIES*

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During the past three years, much experience has been gained in promoting the work of regional autonomy among minorities. These are the most basic experiences:

(1) Full account must be taken of every aspect of work concerning the special traits and concrete conditions of the different nationalities. The minorities differ from the Chinese people in politics, economics, culture, religious convictions and customs. Differences exist, too, between the various minorities, and even between the tribes and religious sections within a minority and between the agricultural and nomadic areas. Therefore, work among the various minorities must start from their concrete conditions. The special characteristics of each minority must be fully considered and the concrete conditions of every tribe must be given special attention when the policy of regional autonomy is put into practice. The method and experience used and gained in the Chinese areas must not be mechanically applied to the minority areas. This we must bear in mind when work is contemplated in areas where autonomy is to be introduced or where it has already been introduced. Article 31 of the General Program for the Implementation of Regional Autonomy of the Central People's Government stipulates: "Governments of higher levels shall make adequate appraisals of the special characteristics and

* Jenmin Jihpao, September 9, 1953; translated in U. S. Consulate-General, Hong Kong, Current Background, No. 264 (October 5, 1953), 12-23.

actual conditions in the current stage of development of the various autonomous areas, so that their directives and orders will conform both to the general line of the Common Program of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Committee and to these special characteristics and actual conditions." [Document 8] Experience from various places proves that when work is done according to the principle stipulated above, the necessary results are achieved and support is received from the minorities. For instance, when the Tibetan autonomous district in Sikang Province and that in Yüshu in Chinghai Province were established, the principle followed was that the political, economic, cultural and religious characteristics of these districts were fully considered and unity was achieved with all leaders (including those in religious circles) who maintained good relations with the people. The result was that the broad masses of people rallied round the government of the autonomous districts and social order was quickly established and the work of setting up autonomy was well accomplished.

Conversely, due to the lack of sufficient knowledge about the social characteristics of the minorities and the erroneous application of the measures adopted for land reform in the Chinese areas, dissatisfaction was caused among certain minorities, resulting in confusion for a while and damage to the work of regional autonomy.

At present conditions show that disregard for the special characteristics and concrete conditions of the minorities and the mechanical application of the experience and methods gained and employed in the Chinese areas is a sign not just limited to a few minority districts but is rather widespread. Certain higher-level governments, irrespective of the local conditions existing in various places, have issued directives and orders common to all, thus damaging the work of regional autonomy. This state of affairs merits the attention of the localities concerned and steps

should be taken to prevent and rectify it.

On the other hand, it must be pointed out that the mechanical application of the experiences of the advanced nationalities and areas which disregard the actual and historical conditions is, of course, incorrect and must be opposed. But we have no objection if such experience is appropriately applied as local and historical conditions permit. As Article 34 of the General Program for the Implementation of Regional Autonomy stipulates: "Governments of higher levels shall take appropriate measures to acquaint people of the autonomous areas with the advanced experiences and conditions about political, economic and cultural development."

[See Document 8.] Experience shows that to learn and apply properly, as local and historical conditions require, advanced experience is necessary for the smooth progress and development of the various autonomous areas. The idea and method of rejecting the advanced experiences and thus restricting one's own progress is harmful to the progress and development of the minorities and the autonomous areas and must be properly corrected through persuasion.

(2) Unity must be further strengthened and consolidated both between and within the various nationalities. This is a prerequisite for regional autonomy and one of the aims of regional autonomy.

With the abolition of oppressive rule and the implementation of the policy of national equality, China's various nationalities, over the past three years, have been living in a unity unknown in the country before. In some places, the misunderstandings created by history among the various nationalities have been virtually wiped out, but in some places such misunderstandings still exist or have not yet been completely removed. The remaining influences of local nationalism must not be overlooked. The same is true of the pan-nationalism that exists among some minorities. Nationally, Chinese chauvinism poses the principal threat in present

relationships among nationalities.

The effective method of overcoming the trend towards pan-nationalism and the trend towards local nationalism is for all minorities to follow the principle of Marxism-Leninism, to strengthen education concerning patriotism and internationalism and educational policy, and to practice self-criticism. At the moment, it is most essential to educate the Chinese cadres and people and lead them to carry out self-criticisms in order to overcome Chinese chauvinism and the remaining influences of Chinese chauvinism. Chinese chauvinism, in essence, is an expression of the bourgeois thought of nationality relations. The bourgeois thought, particularly Chinese chauvinism must first be overcome in our nationalities work before equality among nationalities can be truly realized and the various minorities effectively helped to overcome all sorts of local nationalism.

In Tibetan and other minority areas, credit is due to the initiative of Chinese cadres for thoroughly discussing and re-examining, in the form of self-criticism, the thought and work style of Chinese chauvinism; the minority cadres, deeply moved, voluntarily criticized their thoughts of local nationalism and asked the Chinese cadres to help them to find the way of progress. By so doing, mutual trust took a step forward among the nationalities, and their unity increased; this led to a new development in the work of regional autonomy. Such experience is worth learning.

In the course of setting up regional autonomy, disharmony between nationalities is particularly pronounced. In certain areas, some of the minorities thought that after the realization of regional autonomy, they could live separately from the Chinese and get along without the Chinese while the Chinese feared that they would be "bullied or become a minority" and some of them even planned to leave the areas. Other minorities had misgivings that after the enforcement of regional autonomy they would be

discriminated against and would be unfairly treated and they began to worry. The leadership organs and personnel of the areas concerned must foresee these conditions. During the preparatory stage of setting up an autonomous area, they should proceed from uniting with the various nationalities, fully respecting their rights of equality, educating them in patriotism and internationalism, taking the initiative to dispel their misunderstandings and misgivings, and consulting with them so as to obtain their consent to the various important projects concerning the establishment of the autonomous areas before work actually begins. In this way, the process of preparation becomes a process of strengthening and consolidating unity among all nationalities. Facts show that this has been done in the various autonomous areas and friendly cooperation achieved, making it possible for the work to be accomplished satisfactorily and for a foundation to be laid for the further solidarity of the various nationalities. Experience also shows that where this method has not been followed, the work is adversely affected.

Experience shows that a minority exercising regional autonomy very easily neglects the interests of other nationalities in the same area. It is essential that the people of such a minority should guard against these shortcomings, pay constant attention to the interests of other minorities and of the Chinese and help the other minorities in the area to establish their own autonomous areas.

This is the only possible way to win the trust of the people of other minorities in the area, to strengthen and consolidate the unity among the various nationalities and to derive benefit from the development of its construction undertakings. Any thought or work method leading to discrimination against other nationalities or disregard for the interests of other nationalities is erroneous and must be prevented and overcome.

As the work of regional autonomy is carried out, every

effort should be made to strengthen and consolidate the internal unity of minorities. This is what should be energetically done among the various tribes, localities and religious sects of a minority, so that unity can be achieved among them, their disputes settled and their misunderstandings cleared up, before autonomous areas are established. All important questions concerning the establishment of such areas must be considered in the light of the interests of all sides as described above. They should be called upon to achieve unity through mutual respect and consultation under the guidance of an higher-level government.

Over the past several years, much has been done to settle the internal disputes arising among the various nationalities in different places and great success has been achieved in unity, resulting in the elimination and amelioration of antagonisms which had existed for a long period of time among the different nationalities. However, the further strengthening of unity in the various areas, tribes and religious sects of minorities is still a very important task in the promotion and solution of the nationalities problem and continued efforts must be made as required by different conditions existing in the various localities.

Experience shows that in order to successfully unify the different nationalities and among the tribes, districts and religious sects of minorities, attention must be given to work among those minority leaders in various fields who have close relations with the people. Since they are influential and enjoy a prestige among the people of their own nationality, this will facilitate the successful performance of the mass work providing they do this work well. Therefore, on all important questions relative to regional autonomy, they must be consulted and their agreement obtained. In the preparatory structure and in the autonomous organs and in other kinds of work, they must be given appropriate posts and helped to do their work and to seek progress. The leaders of the various minorities must respect the will of the people; the leadership of the higher-level governments must obtain the assistance of

Chinese cadres, and forge ahead with maximum effort.

With aggression as its basis, imperialism has done all in its power to sabotage the unity of the different nationalities in China. Many instances have been exposed where imperialism and its lackey, the Chiang Kai-shek remnant bandits, have incited the minorities to riot. Ample proof has been found of such criminal acts showing that almost every rebellion in the minority areas has been instigated by secret agents and counter-revolutionaries and has resulted from senior individuals of the minority having been first duped by the enemy plots. This state of affairs demands a high degree of vigilance on the part of the people as well as their leaders of the minorities. Steps must be taken to expose the enemy, to penalize the counter-revolutionaries and to strengthen the education of the people towards patriotism in order to deal with these acts of sabotage on the part of the enemy.

(3) The autonomous governments should steadily become truly national [mintsu] in character. This is the key to the consolidation of national unity and to strengthening the ties between the government and the people.

This "nationalizing" of the local government includes, according to the General Program of the People's Republic of China for the Implementation of Regional Autonomy for Nationalities drawing the majority of the personnel in the government from the predominant minority in the autonomous area, taking a suitable number of government officials from the minorities and the Chinese within the area, adopting a form of self-government analogous to the will of the majority of the people and the leaders of the area, and adopting a national language common to the whole area. In exercising its power with regard to a particular nationality in the area which does not use the official language, the government should use the language of the particular nationality instead of the official language.

Following the establishment of autonomous areas, the training and growth of minority cadres have made much headway. The various autonomous areas already have a certain number of minority cadres who participate in the various kinds of work in the autonomous organs and some of them have assumed the powers of leadership. Most of them maintain close ties with the local people, know the local conditions well, have been tempered in the course of their work, and have raised their political and cultural levels and working ability to a definite level. This success is inseparable from the solicitude of higher-level governments and the assistance of the Chinese cadres. However, achievements in this work still lag far behind the progress of construction work in the autonomous areas, and greater efforts yet must be made by higher-level governments in this respect so that a proper number of cadres and personnel may be trained and chosen from among the patriotic intellectuals of the minorities, the activists among the masses, and those leaders who keep in close touch with the masses. It is necessary, therefore, to check up and summarize experiences, and, as local conditions permit, overcome the shortcomings which exist in training minority cadres.

The establishment of autonomous areas and the development of the various construction projects in such areas depends much upon the unity and cooperation between the Chinese cadres and the minority cadres. The Chinese cadres taking part in the work of the autonomous areas most wholeheartedly serve the minorities and play an important role in training cadres for the various autonomous areas with the support of the minority cadres. They deserve our praise. However, some Chinese cadres still retain the bad working style of not respecting the functions of the minority cadres and of tending to usurp their authority. This must be overcome and corrected so as to facilitate the training and growth of minority cadres.

Concerning minority languages and styles, higher-level governments must help those minorities which as yet have no written

language of their own to create their own languages; these will serve as instruments of communication and help them to develop their own culture. Where the official language is unsuitable for administering a particular minority, the language of that particular minority should be used. Where a spoken language already characterizes a minority but has not yet been codified as a written language, assistance should be given to committing that language to writing. This is both a very urgent and complex problem and requires careful investigation and study. A practical plan should be formulated and implemented step by step, so that the language may become a means of communication and also help in the development of the culture of that minority. At the moment, assistance should be given to those who wish to learn Chinese and other minority languages, but in no case should there be any compulsion. Those minorities which already have taken Chinese as their own language should be actively helped to learn Chinese. The traditional culture and art of the different minorities should be maintained and enriched by absorbing new ideas. Our work in this respect is far from sufficient and greater attention is called for. The customs and habits of the minorities should be respected. In other things, such as naming an administrative unit within the autonomous area, the minority style should be considered. In this connection, much has been done and great success has been achieved in many autonomous areas. Apart from the Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region and the Yenpien autonomous area, the central government last year drew up plans for the development of a language for other places such as the Tibetan autonomous areas in Sikang. The various administrative organs and the finance-economic organs have all strengthened their personnel who are engaged in translations of the Tibetan language. The Chinese cadres in the area are studying the Tibetan language, and notices and propaganda materials are all prepared in both the Tibetan and Chinese languages. Beginning in February of

this year, all documents are prepared in two languages, and the Tibetan language has become the principal instrument of the area government for administrative purposes. This is gratifying. However, there are also cases where the leadership organs in certain places have not paid or have not paid enough attention to the use of minority languages and styles. In other instances, individual cadres have even forced the minorities to speak Chinese and to wear Chinese-style clothes, and even to dance in Chinese rice-planting dances instead of their own folk dances. All this is quite incorrect. The question of minority style is one which relates to the rights and the development of a minority. This is very important. Much of our work cannot penetrate deep into the masses of the minorities unless it is done in the minority styles. The various minorities have the right to preserve or change their own habits and customs as well as their own characteristics in accordance with the will of the majority of the peoples and their leaders. Compulsion is neither correct nor permissible. However, respect for minority styles does not mean the preservation of such styles or forms which will hinder the progress and development of a minority or which the people and their leaders desire to reform. This point also merits our attention.

(4) Governments should assist the autonomous areas in exercising their autonomy. Under the unified system and plan of the country, the various autonomous areas have the right to establish their own political, economic, financial, cultural and educational systems and local armed forces. The exercise of these autonomous rights will arouse the initiative of the various minorities at their different stages of progress to a great degree and therefore provide an impetus to the political, economic and cultural development of the areas. The autonomous rights in the autonomous areas are the rights of the minority peoples to manage their own affairs; they are, therefore, matters of the highest importance. The proper exercise of such rights depends not only upon the necessary respect of the higher-level governments concerned but

also upon their guidance and assistance. As things stand now, it can be seen that most higher-level governments have made good efforts in this respect, but there are others which do not show enough respect for the autonomous rights of these areas. Still others consider the autonomous organ which is equal to the administrative district organ as the highest local organ, but orders are transmitted, not through the autonomous organ, but directly to its subordinate organs. This is incorrect. It jeopardizes the work of regional autonomy and causes dissatisfaction among the people of the autonomous areas, who complain that "things remain the same even after the establishment of the autonomous area." These mistaken ways of administration on the part of the relevant higher-level governments must be checked and rectified.

We lack experience in exercising the rights of autonomy by the autonomous areas. What experience we have already gained has not yet been put together and studied. Therefore, our concrete measures must be subject to further study. Work in this connection is underway, and it is hoped that everybody will make suggestions so that definite measures may be drawn up at an early date.

(5) As conditions permit, tremendous efforts should be made by the governments to help with the political, economic and cultural work of the areas, as this is one basic way of solving the nationalities problem. The application of regional autonomy in itself will not entirely solve the nationality problem. This can only be expected when the political, economic and cultural level of the minority peoples is so developed that they can catch up with the level of the advanced nationalities. Therefore, after the autonomous areas are first set up, importance must be attached to the question of political, economic and cultural development. In the preparatory stages for the autonomous areas and in handling their natural composition and boundaries, the conditions for the development of the people of the autonomous areas must be given

special consideration.

Some minority areas which are linked with Chinese areas or in which several minorities co-exist, embraced some cities and townships and districts inhabited by Chinese when the autonomous areas were demarcated. This is due to economic, political and historical factors and is, therefore, permissible. These districts have already formed an inalienable part of the minority areas. Their inclusion in the autonomous areas is advantageous not only to the development of their own peoples but also to the Chinese people in those districts. However, this question concerns both the minority peoples and the Chinese people. It is necessary therefore to make full preparations in advance and nothing should be done in haste. On the other hand, in certain minority areas, due to limitations caused by geographical, economic, nationality and cadres factors, it is not advisable to establish, or to establish at this time, large autonomous areas. If autonomous areas are established while conditions are still not mature, it would be to the disadvantage of nationality relationships and the national development.

Higher-level governments must concern themselves with the hardships of the people of the minorities in the autonomous areas, particularly those living in the mountainous districts and those living in places where the natural conditions and production conditions are unfavorable. Since these people are already experiencing great difficulties in making a living, the governments should show them special concern and help them find their means of living and production. An attitude of indifference towards these people is extremely incorrect and must be rectified. Where possible, assistance should be given, as local conditions permit, to help them develop their economy and culture and so gradually to improve their material and cultural life. At the moment, every help possible should be given towards improving and developing their agricultural and pastoral production. As to national

defense and the future development of the various minorities, certain capital construction may be undertaken as the nation's financial conditions permit, but careful investigation and study must be carried out first to determine the necessity and possibility of such undertakings, and no general demand should be made for all places. In the field of political, economic and cultural development in the autonomous areas, the various higher-level governments have done a good deal in the way of training cadres, developing agricultural and pastoral production, developing trade, and developing medical and health work. This has received the warm support of the minorities. But in certain places, not enough has been done and greater efforts are still required. Any lack of attention to the cultural, economic and political life of the minorities is unjustifiable and must be corrected. Of course, if demands are made blindly and in disregard of concrete conditions, these would be without foundation and should not be put forward.

The economic and cultural development of the minorities is inseparable from their political and social reform. The autonomous organs in the various autonomous areas should, in accordance with the will of the people and their leaders, prudently carry out such reforms at places where conditions are already ripe; this is both permissible and necessary.

The above is a summary of the basic experience gained in the implementation of regional autonomy.