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Speeches/Documents

Title: The question of minority nationalities in the southwest

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On the question of minority nationalities, I am still a pupil. You comrades have done more research on this question than I have and you are specialized in this field of work. Today I shall speak mainly on the issue of minority nationalities in connection with the situation in the southwest.

The question of minority nationalities is very important in the southwest. In China most of the minority nationalities live in the northwest and southwest. Perhaps a greater number of them live here in the southwest than in the northwest, and the situation here is also quite complicated. The southwestern boundary line is several thousand kilometres long, extending from Tibet to Yunnan and Guangxi, along which the overwhelming majority of inhabitants are minority nationalities. So, if the issue of minority nationalities is not handled well, the matter of national defence cannot be handled well. Therefore, in view of the importance of the southwest to national defence alone, we should give high priority to our work among the minority nationalities.

At present we are not certain about the exact number of minority nationalities in the southwest. According to the latest reports from Yunnan, there are [more than 70 names of nationalities](#) in that province. It is said that the Miao nationality in Guizhou has over one hundred branches. In fact, some of them do not belong to the Miao nationality. For instance, the Dong people used to be believed to belong to the Miao nationality, when in fact, the two have different languages and histories and they themselves hate to be lumped together. From this we can see that we do not know the first thing about the subject of minority nationalities, let alone a good working knowledge. Of course, after two or three years of work we may gain a clearer understanding of each individual nationality and we may be able to clarify questions that have long remained a mystery.

Historically, China's minority nationalities have been estranged to a high degree from the Han nationality. As a result of our work done in the past and particularly over the past six months, this state of affairs has been changing gradually, but we still cannot say that we have cleared up this estrangement. Only after a long time through examining the facts will we be able to put an end to the historical estrangement between the minority nationalities and the Han nationality caused by Han chauvinism. We will have to make efforts for a long period of time before we can eliminate this estrangement. We should convince the various minority nationality people that, politically, all nationalities within China's boundaries are truly equal, that their living standards can be improved and that their cultural level can be raised. By culture we mean mainly culture of each nationality. Unless we succeed in these three aspects of work, it will be impossible to iron out this historical estrangement or rift. The People's Republic of China is a multi-national country and only by ending this national estrangement and enlisting the concerted efforts of the various nationalities can we form a truly great, happy family of the Chinese nation. The conditions are present for eliminating this estrangement. The policy of Han chauvinism adopted by the reactionary regimes of the past deepened the

national estrangement, but the nationality policy stipulated in the Common Programme, adopted at the Political Consultative Conference, will certainly end this estrangement and bring about a great unity of the various nationalities.

I should like to make a few remarks on the [Tibetan nationality in Xikang](#). In the past the Tibetan and Han nationalities were very estranged. However, after our army entered the southwest, and especially after we proclaimed the policy concerning the liberation of Tibet and put forth the [ten terms](#), great changes have taken place. How did they fare in the past? In the old days the reactionary regimes in Xikang caused the local Tibetans to suffer a great deal. After we entered Xikang, the first thing we did was announce the nationality policy stipulated in the Common Programme. At the same time our troops' fine conduct found expression in some concrete matters; for instance, through observing the Three Main Rules of Discipline and the Eight Points for Attention, respecting the Tibetan people's customs, habits and religious beliefs, quartering in no lamaseries, etc., they won the trust of our Tibetan compatriots. The Tibetan people said that our troops were so good that even in a heavy rain they would neither enter nor live in their houses unless invited. This is the result of carrying out correct policies. Didn't rulers of the past proclaim good policies? The problem is they never put their policies into effect. For us, once we have formulated policies, we mean to have them carried out. As regards the ten terms we put forth, some representative figures in Tibet find them a bit too magnanimous. That is how we mean them to be. We are not deceiving anybody. Therefore, these policies have made a powerful impression on them that should not be underestimated, because they are in accord with their requirements and the requirements for the unity of all nationalities.

In minority nationality areas in the southwest our Party did some work in the past that produced good results. During the [Long March](#), the Red Army scattered the seeds of revolution in all the areas it passed through, including Yunnan and Guizhou. Even in Xikang some revolutionary influence was felt. When the Red Army troops marched northward, they did some things in violation of the rules of discipline for the sake of their survival. They were starving and had no choice. Now we should express our gratitude to the people, explaining to them that in those days they had to shoulder the burden of the nationwide revolution and that they had done everything in their power to preserve the Red Army. At the same time, we should apologize to them for anything we did wrong. When we went to Tibet, some Tibetans told us quite frankly that they were displeased when we ate all their grain. Now they understand this and are delighted with their own liberation.

With our past work plus our current work we are quite capable of solving the several-thousand-year-old problem of estrangement from the minority nationalities and uniting all our nationalities. Marxism-Leninism can help solve the problem of nationalities throughout the world. In China, Mao Zedong Thought -- the integration of the theory of Marxism-Leninism with the practice of the Chinese revolution -- can also help solve this problem. So long as we truly act in accordance with the Common Programme and so long as we sincerely assist the minority nationalities in political, economic and cultural fields, we can solve the problem satisfactorily. If we throw off Han chauvinism, the minority nationalities will forsake their narrow nationalism in return. We should not ask the minority nationalities to abolish their nationalism before we honestly abolish Han chauvinism. Once these two isms are abolished, unity will result.

Since our entry into the southwest, we have arrived at a general understanding: the question of minority nationalities in the southwest is complicated and it must be solved properly. This

involves work in various fields, yet we know very little about things here, so we must adopt a careful attitude and from the outset work to harmonize relations with the nationalities. We should try hard to dispel the misgivings of the various minority nationalities concerning the People's Liberation Army and eliminate the estrangement between different nationalities. In handling the affairs relating to minority nationalities, we should not act blindly and go there rashly to carry out reform, raise proposals and propagate the nationality policy. In practical work we should strictly observe rules of discipline and not encroach upon their interests in the slightest. In collecting public grain we should also take their practical difficulties into account, ensuring above all that the amount never exceeds the burden imposed on them in the past, instead keeping it below this level. We have decided that because of the past deep estrangement between the minority nationalities and the Han nationality and the complicated nature of the situation, no force from the outside shall be used to wage or create a so-called class struggle within the minority nationalities or attempt to carry out reform of any sort. All reforms within the minority nationalities should be carried out through internal forces. Reform is necessary, however, for without it the minority nationalities cannot eliminate poverty, which will make it impossible for them to do away with backwardness, but reform must not be carried out until conditions within the minority nationalities are ripe for it.

At present, our central task concerning the nationalities is to work for unity and end estrangement. Where no trouble crops up and estrangement begins to disappear and unity begins to grow, there the work can be considered well done and good results achieved. If we become impetuous, trying to get quick results in procuring grain and organizing the masses, as we have been doing in the Han nationality areas, troubles are bound to crop up. In the past, people in other areas experienced troubles. An important cause was their impetuosity. Many of our comrades have learned that they must not be impetuous and that it does not matter if they proceed a bit slowly. Slowness does not give rise to errors; impetuosity does. In handling other matters we should be neither impetuous nor proceed slowly, but in handling this matter, we should not be afraid of going slowly. Of course, we still need to work; we cannot go to sleep for fear of becoming impetuous. We should work on a sound basis and advance after acquiring a clear understanding of the situation. As the basis for unity becomes stronger, our work will move forward. Some of our comrades have good intentions, but unfortunately they are impetuous in their work. Therefore, leaders should always guard against impetuosity. At present an important principle for working in minority nationality areas is to brook no trouble or failure. Even if ninety-nine out of a hundred cadres do well and only one cadre makes a mistake, he can still spoil our efforts. With this in mind, we should only dispatch a few selected cadres to minority nationality areas. They should thoroughly understand the nationality policy and ardently wish to make a success in their activities among the minority nationalities. No one can be permitted to make mistakes. This is a must. The reason no trouble has come up so far in the southwest with regard to the question of minority nationalities is that we have been working on a sound basis, which is in itself an accomplishment.

Have we done enough work so far, then? A number of new problems have now cropped up, requiring us to do more work to avoid trouble. For instance, the Common Programme stipulates that regional national autonomy be introduced in areas where different minority nationalities live together. When the Common Programme was proclaimed, the minority nationalities rejoiced and asked us when and how autonomy was to be introduced. They want it to be materialized. If we fail to do so in six months or even in twelve months, they will lose faith in our policies. We must solve this politically significant problem. Our Party encountered such a problem before. For instance, we have had [such an experience](#) in Inner Mongolia and in the northern part of the Shaanxi-Gansu-Ningxia Border Region. However,

we have no experience in the vast new liberated areas, and it is a new problem for many of our cadres. We must now set about solving this problem, because the demands from the minority nationalities are pressing. In Xikang some representative figures are even thinking of using the name "Bod government" when regional national autonomy is implemented. We have not yet reached an agreement on this matter, but we are determined to adopt a name they like better. In Xikang the names of many places have been given by Han people. Even though we are used to these names, that does not mean the people there are. This is only a problem of names, other problems are more complicated. For instance, eastern Xikang used to be divided into counties, some of which have been in existence for ten to twenty years. When regional national autonomy is introduced, should we keep these counties? From a long-term point of view, it would be good to retain the counties; moreover, we are accustomed to them. But will the local people agree? Our principle is: if they do not agree, the original division should be abolished and a new division made. Furthermore, how do we solve the problems among the minority nationalities when adopting regional national autonomy? In the past some minority nationalities entangled themselves in bitter feud, with one nationality attacking another, followed by retaliating attacks. This was instigated primarily by the reactionary ruling class, which pursued Han chauvinism; it was used by chauvinists from large nationalities to dominate small and weak nationalities. However, the minority nationalities themselves also had many problems involving their gain and loss. We should study these problems soberly and persuade them to unite and stop fighting each other. Should we dispatch cadres to help exercise regional national autonomy? Sending them there is a must, but we should send only a few selected ones who can truly help them. We should consult with the local people to determine in what capacity these cadres should be dispatched. This will be a difficult assignment for our comrades, so we should see that those who are sent have first straightened out their thinking, and we should only dispatch comrades who are willing to work there. All these problems have to do with our policies relating to the exercise of regional national autonomy.

To introduce regional national autonomy in the southwest, we should begin in eastern Xikang, for conditions there are ripe for this. First, compatriots of the Tibetan nationality are concentrated there; second, we had some experience there in this regard; third, after our troops arrived there, they established good relations with the compatriots of the Tibetan nationality; and fourth, there is a progressive organization called the Dongzang Democratic Youth League, with more than one hundred members. With these conditions present, we can start work there at once. This is a major project. If it is made a success, it may lend a direct impetus to Tibet. In other places we should work to create the necessary conditions for introducing regional national autonomy and we cannot just pay lip service to it. [In some localities a democratic](#) coalition government of the local nationalities may be established first. For instance, regional national autonomy should be exercised in the Daliang and Xiaoliang mountain areas where people of the Yi nationality live together, but conditions there are not yet ripe, so for the time being it is more suitable to establish a democratic coalition government of the local nationality in these areas. This will be good to them. The same can be applied in Yunnan and Guizhou provinces. Under a coalition government we can also introduce national autonomy in a small area by establishing a township where people of one minority nationality live together, for instance. The minority nationalities have the political right to be masters of their own affairs.

For the benefit of economic development, we have to get started right now. In Xikang, for instance, a number of problems have cropped up in this field. We first face the problem of grain supplies. At present we have only 3,000 to 4,000 people working there and we have

borrowed 350 tons of grain. Some progressive people from the upper strata have given us much help. They are not only lending grain to us but have also set a fair price. However, this cannot go on for a long time, because the masses of the minority nationalities cannot bear such a heavy burden. We are also confronted with other economic problems in the areas of the market, trade, banking and so on. If these problems are not solved, the political foundation will be shaken. Regional national autonomy will be only nominal if we fail to manage economic affairs well. The minority nationalities want to benefit from regional autonomy, so if the economic problems are not solved, trouble will ensue. Chairman Mao has laid down two principles concerning Tibet: first, introducing regional national autonomy; and second, after entering Tibet, not depending on local people for grain supplies. If we follow these two principles, we can solve the Tibetan issue and become united with the Tibetan people to consolidate national defence. These principles are applicable to all minority nationality areas. Politics is based on the economy. Can we do without a solid economic base? No, we cannot if we just give the minority nationalities a nominal regional national autonomy while consuming all their grain. We have established this principle to be applied in the minority nationality areas, that is, policies enforced in Han nationality areas in different fields of endeavour, including economic policies, cannot be applied mechanically to minority nationality areas. We must distinguish among those that can be applied, those that must first be revised, and those that cannot be applied. We should formulate a different set of policies for minority nationality areas if we want to serve the minority nationalities wholeheartedly. For instance, if we can help solve the problem of salt for the minority nationality people in Guizhou, most of whom live in the mountains, we are sure to win their support. Also, Xikang has no highways at present, so we should make proper arrangements for the following: facilitating the minority nationalities' economic exchange with the interior, determining the kind of goods that should be brought in, the way of moving their products out and the prices of the products, and making sure that they have some profits to gain. When doing business with them, we shall follow the principle of exchange at equal value, occasionally, however, letting them profit at our expense. In our effort to help the minority nationalities develop their economies, a very important link is trade, and our economic work there should be based on trade. We should assist the minority nationalities in organizing their own business activities, which we cannot monopolize. In doing business, we should see to it that they are not subjected to exploitation by middlemen at any stage. In this way their economies will be enlivened and their living standards will improve. Right now the key is first to enable them to profit from business activities and then help them develop their agriculture, industry, animal husbandry, commerce and so on.

In the realm of culture, too, we have much work to do. We should try to help raise the cultural level of the minority nationalities as quickly as possible. We should promote educational undertakings in minority nationality areas, encouraging people to set up schools there. For now we should hold some training courses, focusing on explaining the nationality policy. The main obstacle to operating schools is the lack of teachers, not of funds or anything else. To remedy the shortage of talented people in the southwest, we have to establish a nationalities institute without delay in order to enrol some young people for advanced studies. Related to culture and education is the question of public health. Work in this field is also very important in minority nationality areas, where medicine is badly needed. At present, cultural work should centre primarily on public health work, which has a significant role to play.

We should embark on all these political, economic and cultural undertakings right away. In doing so we should adhere to one principle, namely, to consult with the minority nationality people. If they agree, we go ahead; if they agree with only a part, we do only a part; if they

agree with the major portion, we do the major portion; if they agree with everything, we do everything. We definitely need their consent; we need the consent of most of them, particularly of people from the upper strata; if the upper strata do not consent to our plan, we should give it up, for only their consent counts. Why? Because, owing to historical, political and economic peculiarities, the upper strata hold the chief sway in minority nationality areas. Progressive forces are weak there and exert little influence. In future, however, when the progressive forces expand, they will exert a very great influence, although they do not have a decisive bearing at present. For now we should do everything through the upper strata. We should do more to persuade them, consult them frequently and unite with them, guiding and helping them to progress step by step. If we fail in our work among the upper strata, all our efforts will come to nothing. Some of our comrades are wont to take radical measures, thinking they can do better without the help of people from the upper strata. As a matter of fact, they will not be able to do a better job but a worse job; they will not be able to do things more rapidly but more slowly, for they will meet with obstinate resistance. If our work among the upper strata is done well, so that they keep making progress and fully co-operating with us, then with their help we can do our work more smoothly. Some comrades are worried that if they do it this way, they might lose their class stand, not understanding that class stand is manifested differently there. What is the correct class stand? It is at present not launching class struggle, instead achieving unity among the nationalities. That is the correct class stand. Of course, we are not depending completely on the upper strata; we are seeking their help in order gradually to promote our work in all fields.

By the way, some special problems should be solved in the light of actual conditions. For example, we decided not to carry out rent reduction and [agrarian reform](#) in minority nationality areas, but the Miao people in Guizhou have demanded rent reduction and agrarian reform and their need is more urgent than that of the Han people. Why? We find it quite natural since there are only a few landlords among the Miao nationality in Guizhou. Most of the Miao people till land owned by Han people; moreover, it is located on mountain slopes. Their demand is reasonable. If we do not allow rent reduction and agrarian reform, it will be a manifestation of Han chauvinism and it will mean we have not taken into account their immediate interests. On the other hand, it is not likely that the few landlords from the upper strata of the Miao nationality will consent to their demand. Therefore, we have made a specific stipulation that rent reduction and agrarian reform can be conducted where the land tilled by Miao people belongs to Han landlords, but not where the land belongs to Miao landlords, and in this case the matter should be settled by the Miao people themselves step by step through consultation. That is to say, rent reduction and agrarian reform are not to be totally ruled out in minority nationality areas; in some areas we should still implement them, but on one condition: the demand must come from the great majority and not just from a few people, and the matter is not decided by people from the outside, but by the native people themselves. Also, we should consider ways and means for instituting regional national autonomy and establishing a coalition government in minority nationality areas. We could hold different types of conferences of representatives, since this has yielded substantial results in the interior. Through conferences of representatives we could solicit opinions and discuss and study problems, so as to avoid making decisions subjectively. Sometimes we may proceed from good intentions but reach incorrect decisions. Even if the decisions are correct, we may still meet opposition if we do not have the consent of the people concerned. Conversely, we will have their support even if some decisions are imperfect, because we have won their consent.

Lastly, I should like to discuss the question of our attitude towards work. Our working method should be as I have just mentioned, that is, to consult with the people concerning all matters and to solve problems through conferences of representatives. Our attitude towards work is to seek truth from facts and to be honest. Recently we came to realize that we should also be honest in respecting the customs and habits of the minority nationalities. We should take the initiative to explain clearly to them that because our customs and habits are different from theirs, we are likely to create misunderstandings and violate taboos, offending them without our realizing it. We do want to learn about some of their customs and habits, but we cannot do it overnight, because this is not something to be imposed on people, and so we have to ask them to forgive us for any faux-pas. This is also being honest. In this way we can easily win their sympathy. In all our political, economic and cultural work we should adopt this attitude.

The [delegation sent by the Central Government](#) to visit the southwest will surely be of enormous help to us. You have studied and learned much more about the minority nationalities than we have. Especially when you go down there and come into contact with concrete matters, you will discover many problems. We sincerely hope that you comrades will examine all kinds of problems and make suggestions. Even a one-sided view is better than none. At present, we are in urgent need of suggestions. I hope you comrades will not hesitate to let local comrades know whatever strikes you. It is quite likely that some comrades at the lower levels are subjective, so you may be rebuffed, or local comrades may pay no attention to the problems you point out or hold differing views on these problems, and it is more likely that their views are wrong. When this happens, take no offence. You can write to us or to comrades working in the provincial governments. The matter can be solved reasonably in the end. If some of your opinions happen to be incorrect, we shall also let you know. In this way, with your help, I am sure we can solve the most complicated and most important issue in the southwest -- establishing unity among nationalities, or at least laying a very good foundation for this goal.