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On the regional characteristics of Party construction in Tibet

by Zhang Shirong and Guo Wutian

[...] It is undoubtedly correct both in theory and in practice to adopt all kinds of methods to promote the development of the forces of social production in Tibet in order to promote the huge progress of Tibetan society. What is more, this method is the basic route within such a country as ours can change its backwardness as a bordering area.

Section 2. The regional characteristics of Party construction in Tibet

While acknowledging the correctness and necessity of the Party construction in the special area of Tibet, we must also clearly see that it is precisely because there was no spread of Marxism or of the workers' movement, and because of the reality of Tibetan social history, that Party construction in Tibet will have many obvious regional characteristics. These characteristics can be summed up in two ways.

The first way of summarising these characteristics is by noting that Party construction in Tibet has its own specific advantages.

First of all, when Party construction began in Tibet, the Chinese Communist Party had already established national authority. So from the very beginning Party construction in Tibet profited from the superior leadership of the Party's central authorities and from the older generation of revolutionaries such as Chairman Mao. This enabled Party construction in Tibet to develop rapidly.

The second advantage is that not long after the establishment of the Party organisation in Tibet, it assumed an authoritative role in Tibet. The Party membership there basically did not experience the struggle and the sacrifice of revolutionary struggle as had been experienced by the Party in inland China. Party construction in Tibet from the very beginning was under the guidance of the systematic theory of Party construction and the rich experience of Party construction.

The third advantage is that the majority of Party members of the Tibetan Party organisation were serfs who experienced the cruel overlordship of the Tibetan serf owners. Because of this, the masses of Party members in Tibet had unlimited hatred for the old society and boundless love for socialism. Their feelings towards the Party are very pure, and they always keep a high level of proletarian class consciousness and have boundless devotion to the revolutionary cause. These precious qualities have seen sufficient expression in the several important political struggles that have taken place over the last 30 years.

The second way of summarising these characteristics is by noting that this kind of condition also seriously hindered the development of Party construction in Tibet.

Because of the history and reality of the backwardness of the development of Tibetan society, while the Party members have relatively high class consciousness and while they have unlimited revolutionary enthusiasm, the other aspects of their qualification as Party members are comparatively low. This has seriously hindered the construction of the Party in Tibet from developing to a higher level.

The Party members' theoretical and cultural qualifications are bad. In the beginning of the 1950s, there were only altogether 800 Party members in our region. The majority of these Party members were Chinese and there were very few Tibetan Party members. By the end of 1989, there were already 70,000 Party members, of whom minority members numbered 56,000, about 80% of the total membership.

Twenty years ago the Party membership was formed with the Tibetan comrades as its main body. Because the majority of the membership are liberated serfs who have had no opportunity to receive education, and although they received different forms of education after liberation, overall their level of education is low, the theoretical base related to this is low, and their basic knowledge about the Party is poor.

About their low educational level: among the complete Party membership in the region, the ones that have received education above high school level constitute 12% of the total. Those who have received education below primary school level constitute 81%. It has to be pointed out especially that among those below the primary school level, 23% of Party members are completely illiterate, with no ability to read or write in either Tibetan or Chinese.

About their poor theoretical base: Because of the low educational level, their theoretical base is certainly not high. In their practical work, they often see questions in a direct way

and deal with problems according to experience. When they discuss problems, they only see the thing itself and are unable to elevate the concrete things to rational things. They lack a rational and comprehensive grasp of the internal rules of things. These expressions of the weakness of their basic theories of Marxism have both limited the elevation of the self-construction of the Party's forces and have weakened the Party's functional role in the development of the regional economy and society.

There are also a lot of Party members who believe in religion. Since the Tibetan social reform came from the feudal system of serf rulership in which 'politics and religion were integrated', because of this long period of integration, the notion of religion, namely Tibetan Buddhism, extended deeply and extensively into all aspects of politics, economics, culture and education in Tibet. Because of the historical influence of the old culture and the old ideological consciousness, our Party membership, who are in the first instance all ordinary men, have had a deep religious influence since childhood. Later on, in their course of growing up, they constantly received Marxist education. However, some comrades grasped Marxist theory better, some didn't. So when the opportunity is appropriate, the old ideology quickly revives and they fall back to religion.

The Party organisation also lacks fighting force. First of all there are a lot of problems with the basic Party organisations. Quite a number of basic Party organisations are weak. Some do not function at all, and some command very low authority amongst the masses.

Secondly, Party activities take place with difficulty. With the application of the contract system of production to the enterprises and to the nomads, the leaders and the Party members of Party organisations at the basic level are all busy at production work and did not want to participate more in Party activities. These, in addition to the limitations in Tibetan geography, communications, and living conditions, have made it difficult for the Party to begin activities.

Thirdly, the Party's organisational life is abnormal, and this problem popularly exists among the Party and the administrative organisations, in the enterprises, and in the nomad and peasant areas. In some basic Party organisations there are no meetings of organisations for as long as a year. Even some local Party organisations are like this.

Fourthly, they cannot understand in a dialectical sense and then carry out the Party's principle of democratic authoritarianism [*minzu jizongzhi*]. As a result in some units it is frequently the case that decisions that have been made are not carried out.

Fifthly, some leading groups of the basic Party organisations are not ideal and lack appropriate personnel. Some units do not have a serious attitude to elections and some still do not want to do the basic work of Party business [...]

In the light of this description of the current situation of the work of Party construction, how can we go on to improve the work of Party construction in a border minority autonomous region like Tibet?

Section 3. What Party construction in Tibet must pay attention to

In the light of the characteristics of Party construction in our region, there are many aspects of the consolidation of Party construction in Tibet to which attention should be paid. However, we believe that one among them is of special importance: we must pay attention to the question of having the right attitude.

By this is meant the question of principle and the question of flexibility of the construction of a Marxist Party. By principle, we are referring to the important questions of principle: the theoretical base of Party, its guiding ideology, the Party's vanguard forces of the working class, the Party's goal and ideals, the Party's disciplinary principles and also the Party's organisational system. These important questions of principle must be strictly carried out without any compromises.

By flexibility, we mean that, whilst still not violating the questions of principles, the differences between Tibet and other fraternal provinces and regions. The special characteristics of the Tibetan region must be recognised and there must be special policies and flexible methods applied in the course of the work of Party construction.

How do we, in the course of the work of Party construction, combine principle with flexibility? We believe there are three aspects to this. The first is combining the severity and looseness in the quality of the Party [dangxing], the second is combining the severity and looseness in the work of the Party, and the third is combining severity and looseness in the life of the Party.

The first one means that while sticking to the general demands placed on the quality of the Marxist Party, we must pay attention to the Party organisation as it exists in different regions under different conditions. We must allow some kind of difference to exist. For example, on the question of Tibetan Party members being religious, if we demand that they stop being religious immediately, it would be impossible, because it would necessarily take them a long time and an enormous historical effort to make changes in each aspects of their conditions, especially to change their subjective ideology. If we force them to stop being religious immediately, we will drive the 70% of the Party members who are religious out of the door of the Party, and this will basically destroy the Party's cause, especially in the nomadic and farming areas of Tibet.

The second aspect of this is the combination of severity and looseness in Party members' work. The Party's charter provided that Party members must self-consciously struggle even until death for the realisation of the Party's tasks and for the supreme ideals of the Party. If Party members have a relatively high level of ideological acknowledgement and maintain self-consciousness in their actions, that would be perfect. However, quite a number of Party members do not have such a high level of consciousness but have done a lot of work and have not done anything 'naughty' in their actions., Generally, their work promotes the realisation of the Party's whole programme, and such Party members therefore are basically alright.

The third aspect is the questions of combining severity with looseness in the life of the Party. Party members are the models for the masses and are the advanced elements of the working class. It is correct to place higher and stricter demands on Party members in all aspects. However, they are also human beings and will also demand everything that an ordinary human being demands. The call to sacrifice oneself selflessly for the sake of the masses, society, the collective and the state must be continually preached. But those things to which Party members are entitled should be given to them. Party members must be a living element amongst the masses, so that they will naturally reveal their relatively high level of moral quality whilst part of the masses. Note must be taken of the need not to take demands which are placed on Party members in economically and culturally advanced areas and impose them by force on Party members of those border and minority areas. The Party members in these areas must adapt to their surroundings and have their own national characteristics and their own customs and interests. In a word they must be like fish in water in order for them to function well as Party members. If we push them beyond their limit the effect will be the opposite.

The following points should be noted in the course of Party construction:

First of all, the stress on severity and on looseness is in order to combine better the theory and the reality of Marxist Party construction. It is also for the better realisation of the Party's historical task. It must be frequently remembered that severity and looseness are closely linked together.

The second point is that the looseness and the severity depends on the reality of Party construction. As far as Tibet is concerned, the Party and administrative offices can not be considered the same as the nomadic and farming areas, Lhasa can not be considered the same as the remote counties, the 1950s should not be seen as the same as the 1980s, and so on.

The third point is that one must never let the phenomena of backwardness remain in a permanently natural state. The Party's members must be educated to adopt methods which will create conditions to enable the phenomena of backwardness to change.

The fourth point is to constantly and strictly transmit Marxism to the forces of the Party and to enable the masses membership of the Party to firmly establish the Marxist position, viewpoint and methods so that Party construction achieve its basic aims.