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Forward

China is a united multi-ethnic country. The Han-Chinese population makes up more than 90 percent of the total population. The populations of the other 55 ethnic groups, including the Tibetan people, are relatively small, and such ethnic groups are customarily called ethnic minorities.

In order to protect the equal and autonomous rights of ethnic minorities, the Chinese Government, in view of the reality that ethnic-minority people live together over vast areas while some live in individual concentrated communities in small areas, regards exercise of regional ethnic autonomy in areas where ethnic minorities live in compact communities as a basic policy for solving the ethnic issue and a fundamental political system for implementation of the people's democracy. Regional ethnic autonomy means, under the unified leadership of the state, regional autonomy is exercised and organs of self-government are established in areas where various ethnic minorities live in compact communities, so that the people of ethnic minorities are their own masters exercising the right of self-government to administer local affairs and the internal affairs of their own ethnic groups.

The Tibet Autonomous Region is one of the five autonomous areas in China at the provincial level where regional ethnic autonomy is exercised, as well as an ethnic autonomous area with Tibetans as the main local inhabitants. In the Tibet Autonomous Region there are a dozen other ethnic groups besides the Tibetans Han, Hui, Moinba, Lhoba, Naxi, Nu, Drung and others. They have lived in the region for generations, and Moinba, Lhoba and Naxi ethnic townships have been established there.

Since regional ethnic autonomy was implemented in 1965 in Tibet, the Tibetan people, in the capacity of masters of the nation and under the leadership of the Central Government, have actively participated in administration of the state and local affairs, fully exercised the rights of self-government bestowed by the Constitution and law, engaged in Tibet's modernization drive, enabled Tibetan society to develop by leaps and bounds, profoundly changed the old situation of poverty and backwardness in Tibet, and greatly enhanced the level of their own material, cultural and political life.

To recall the four glorious decades of regional ethnic autonomy in Tibet, and to give an overview of the Tibetan people's dramatic endeavors to exercise their rights as their own masters and create a better life under regional ethnic autonomy is beneficial not only to summing up experiences and creating a new situation for regional ethnic autonomy in Tibet, but also to clarifying rights and wrongs, and increasing understanding of China's ethnic policy and the truth about Tibet among the international community.

I. The Establishment and Development of Regional Ethnic Autonomy in Tibet

Tibet, situated on the Qinghai-Tibet Plateau, is one of the border areas where ethnic minorities live in compact communities. In view of the then transport and communications conditions and realities of Tibet and other border areas where ethnic minorities live, Chinese central governments throughout history have adopted administrative methods different from those exercised in the heartland of the country. After Tibet became part of the territory of China in the 13th century, the central governments of the Yuan, Ming and Qing dynasties and the Republic of China, while assuming the responsibility of approving the local administrative organs, and deciding and directly handling important affairs concerning Tibet, maintained, by and large, the region's original local social setup and ruling body, widely appointed upper-strata ecclesiastic and secular members to manage local affairs, and gave the Tibetan local government and officials extensive decision-making power. This played a historically positive role in safeguarding the unification of the country, but as the feudal autocratic rulers in various periods exercised an ethnic policy marked by ethnic discrimination and oppression, keeping the original social system and maintaining the power of the local ruling class for their administration of Tibet, they did not solve, nor could they possibly solve, the issue of ethnic equality and that of enabling the local people to become masters of their own affairs.

Even in the first half of the 20th century, Tibet remained a society of feudal serfdom under theocracy, one even darker and more backward than medieval Europe. The ecclesiastical and secular serf owners, though accounting for less than five percent of the population of Tibet, controlled the personal freedom of the serfs and slaves who made up more than 95 percent of the population of Tibet, as well as the overwhelming majority of the means of production. By resorting to the rigidly stratified 13-Article Code and 16-Article Code, and extremely savage punishments, including gouging out eyes, cutting off ears, tongues, hands and feet, pulling out tendons, throwing people into rivers or off cliffs, they practiced cruel economic exploitation, political oppression and mental control of the serfs and slaves. The right to subsistence of the broad masses of serfs and slaves was not protected, let alone political rights.

After the Opium War of 1840, China was reduced to a semi-colonial, semi-feudal country. Tibet, like other parts of China, suffered from the aggression of imperialist powers, which grabbed all kinds of special privileges by means of unequal treaties, subjected Tibet to colonial control and exploitation, and, at the same time, groomed separatists among the upper ruling strata of Tibet, in an attempt to sever Tibet from China. Therefore, the removal of the fetters of imperialism and feudal serfdom became a historically paramount task for safeguarding the unification of the country and realizing the development of Tibet.

The founding of the People's Republic of China in 1949 ended the dark history of the semi-colonial, semi-feudal China, realized unification of the country, unity of ethnic groups and people's democracy, and brought hope to the Tibetan people that they could control their own destiny in the large family of the motherland. It was expressly stipulated in the Common Program of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC), which had the status of the provisional Constitution, that "All ethnic groups within the territory of the People's Republic of China are equal, unity and mutual assistance shall be practiced, discrimination against and oppression of ethnic groups, and acts undermining the unity of the ethnic groups shall be prohibited; the people of all ethnic minorities shall have the freedom to use and develop their own spoken and written languages, and to preserve or reform their own ways and customs and religious beliefs; and regional ethnic autonomy shall be practiced in areas where ethnic minorities live in compact communities." In the first Constitution of the People's Republic of China, promulgated in 1954, the principles of equality, unity and mutual assistance among all ethnic groups, and the system of regional ethnic autonomy were officially included in the fundamental law of the state. Proceeding from the fundamental interests of the Tibetan people, the Central People's Government has profoundly changed the destiny of Tibet and realized and developed the rights of the Tibetan people as masters of their own affairs through great strategic decisions and measures such as peaceful liberation of Tibet, promotion of democratic reforms, establishment of the autonomous region, carrying out socialist construction, reform and opening-up.

-- Peaceful liberation laid the foundation for regional ethnic autonomy in Tibet. On May 23, 1951, the "Agreement of the Central People's Government and the Local Government of Tibet on Measures for the Peaceful Liberation of Tibet" ("17-Article Agreement" for short) was signed, and Tibet was peacefully liberated. The peaceful liberation put an end to imperialist aggression against Tibet, enabled the Tibetan people to shake off political and economic fetters, safeguarded the unification of state sovereignty and territorial integrity, realized equality and unity between the Tibetan ethnic group and all other ethnic groups throughout the country as well as the internal unity of Tibet, and laid the foundation for regional ethnic autonomy in Tibet.

The "17-Article Agreement" provides that "According to the ethnic policy in the Common Program of the CPPCC, under the unified leadership of the Central People's Government, the Tibetan people shall have the right to exercise regional ethnic autonomy." According to the provisions of the "17-Article Agreement," the Preparatory Group of the Preparatory Committee for the Tibet Autonomous Region was established in November 1954, and began preparations for the establishment of the Preparatory Committee for the Tibet Autonomous Region. In March 1955, the State Council held a special meeting to deliberate and adopt the "Decision of the State Council on Establishment of the Preparatory Committee for the Tibet Autonomous Region," which expressly stipulates that "The Preparatory Committee for the Tibet Autonomous Region shall be responsible for preparatory work for the establishment of the Tibet Autonomous Region, and an organ with the nature of a political power and accountable to the State Council, its principal task being to prepare for the exercise of regional ethnic autonomy in accordance with the provisions of the Constitution, the '17-Article Agreement' and the actual situation of Tibet." In April 1956, the Preparatory Committee for the Tibet Autonomous Region was established in Lhasa, with the 14th Dalai Lama as the chairman, the 10th Panchen Lama the first vice-chairman and Ngapoi Ngawang Jigme the secretary-general. The establishment of the Preparatory Committee enabled Tibet to have a consultative work organ with the nature of a political power, and vigorously promoted the realization of regional ethnic autonomy in Tibet.

-- The Democratic Reform cleared the way for regional ethnic autonomy in Tibet. When Tibet was peacefully liberated, in consideration of the reality of Tibet, the "17-Article Agreement," while confirming the necessity for reform of the Tibetan social system, provided that "The Central Government will not use coercion to implement such a reform, and it is to be carried out by the Tibetan local government on its own; when the people demand reform, the matter should be settled by way of consultation with the leading personnel of Tibet." But in face of the ever-growing demand of the people for democratic reform, some people in the upper ruling strata of Tibet, in order to preserve feudal serfdom, and supported by imperialist forces, staged an armed rebellion all along the line on March 10, 1959, in an attempt to separate Tibet from China. On March 28 of the same year, the State Council announced the dismissal of the original local government of Tibet, and empowered the Preparatory Committee for the Tibet Autonomous Region to exercise the functions and powers of the local government of Tibet, with the 10th Panchen Lama as its acting chairman. The Central People's Government and the Preparatory Committee for the Tibet Autonomous Region led the Tibetan people in quickly quelling the rebellion, implemented the Democratic Reform, overthrew the feudal serfdom under theocracy, and abolished the feudal hierarchic system, the relations of personal dependence, and all savage punishments. As a result, a million serfs and slaves were emancipated, and became masters of the country as well as of the region of

Tibet, acquired the citizens' rights and freedom specified in the Constitution and law, and swept away the obstacles, in respect of social system, to the exercise of regional ethnic autonomy.

-- The establishment of the Tibet Autonomous Region marked the full implementation of the regional ethnic autonomy in Tibet. After the Democratic Reform, the Tibetan people enjoyed all the political rights enjoyed by people of all other ethnic groups throughout China. In 1961, a general election, the first of its kind in Tibetan history, was held all over Tibet. For the first time, the former serfs and slaves were able to enjoy democratic rights as their own masters, and participated in the election of organs of state power at all levels in the region. In September 1965, the First Session of the First People's Congress of the Tibet Autonomous Region was convened, at which the organ of self-government of the Tibet Autonomous Region and its leaders were elected, and the founding of the Tibet Autonomous Region was officially proclaimed. Ngapoi Ngawang Jigme was elected chairman of the People's Council of the Tibet Autonomous Region. Many emancipated serfs took up leading posts in state organs at various levels in the region. The establishment of the Tibet Autonomous Region marked the establishment of the people's democratic power in Tibet and the commencement of exercise of regional ethnic autonomy in an all-round way. >From then on, the Tibetan people were entitled to enjoy the right to administer their own affairs in the region and, together with the people throughout the country, embarked on a socialist development road. (More)

-- The reform and opening-up has opened a vast horizon for the Tibetan people to fully exercise the right of regional ethnic autonomy. After China adopted the policy of reform and opening to the outside world, Deng Xiaoping said expressly that the key to the exercise of regional ethnic autonomy lay with development of the ethnic-minority areas. In Tibet, he pointed out, "the key is how to benefit the Tibetan people, how to accelerate the development of Tibet so that it steps into the van of China's four modernizations drive." This affirmed the guiding principle for an all-round exercise of regional ethnic autonomy in Tibet in the new era.

In 1984, the state promulgated and implemented the "Law of the People's Republic of China on Regional Ethnic Autonomy," making regional ethnic autonomy a basic political system of the state, setting out comprehensive provisions regarding the rights of self-government of the ethnic autonomous areas in political, economic, cultural and other spheres, and their relations with the Central Government. It has thus provided a powerful legal safeguard for the full exercise by the Tibetan people of the right of self-government. From 1984 to 2001, in light of the reality of the Tibet Autonomous Region, the Central Government convened four Forums on Work in Tibet; set the guiding principles, major tasks and development plans for work in Tibet timely in the new era; made the important decision to devote special attention to Tibet and get all the other parts of China to aid Tibet; formulated a number of special favorable policies and measures for speeding up the development of Tibet; formed a mechanism for all-round aid for the modernization of Tibet, by which the state would directly invest in construction projects in the region, the Central Government would provide financial subsidies, and the other parts of the country would provide counterpart aid. All this powerfully propelled economic development and social progress in Tibet, greatly enhanced the living standards of the Tibetan people, and guaranteed the realization of equality and the right of self-government of the Tibetan people.

II. The Tibetan People Enjoy Full Political Right of Autonomy

The Tibetan people enjoy, according to law, the equal right of participation in the administration of state affairs as well as the right of self-government to manage affairs of their own region and ethnic group.

The Tibetan people enjoy the democratic right to be masters according to law. The Chinese Constitution provides that all citizens of China who have reached the age of 18 have the right to vote and stand for election, regardless of ethnic status, race, sex, occupation, family background, religious belief, education, or length of residence. Since the establishment of the Tibet Autonomous Region, the Tibetan people have actively exercised the right to vote and stand for election bestowed by the Constitution and law, participated in the election of the deputies to the National People's Congress (NPC) as well as the people's congresses at all levels in the Tibet Autonomous Region, and participated, through deputies to the people's congresses, in administration of state and local affairs. In 2002, when re-election at the regional, prefectural (city), county and township (town) levels took place in Tibet, 93.09 percent of electors in the autonomous region turned out to directly take part in the election at the county level. In certain places, the participation rate of local electors reached 100 percent. Among the elected people's deputies, the proportion of deputies of the Tibetan and other minority ethnic groups was more than 80 percent at both regional and city (prefectural) levels, and more than 90 percent at both county and township (town) levels.

The Tibetan and other ethnic-minority cadres make up the bulk of the cadres of the Tibet Autonomous Region, and fully exercise their right as the masters of society. The Constitution stipulates that among the chairman and vice-chairmen of the standing committee of the people's congress of an ethnic autonomous area there shall be one or more citizens of the ethnic group or ethnic groups exercising regional autonomy in the area concerned; the chairman of an autonomous region, the prefect of an autonomous prefecture or the head of an autonomous county shall be a citizen of the ethnic group exercising regional autonomy in the area concerned. Since the establishment of the Tibet Autonomous Region, six terms (including the current one) of the Standing Committee of the Regional People's

Congress and seven terms (including the current one) of the Regional People's Government have had Tibetans as the chairman. Since the establishment of the Tibet Committee of the CPPCC in 1959, five terms of the Regional Committee of the CPPCC have had Tibetans as the chairman. According to statistics, at present, of the chairman and vice-chairmen of the Standing Committee of the People's Congress of the Tibet Autonomous Region, Tibetans and people of other ethnic minorities make up 87.5 percent; of the members of the Standing Committee of the Regional People's Congress, 69.23 percent; of the chairman and vice-chairmen of the Tibet Autonomous Region, 57 percent; and of the Standing Committee members and members of the CPPCC Tibet Committee, 90.42 percent and 89.4 percent, respectively. Of the functionaries of the state organs at the regional, prefectural (city) and county levels, Tibetans and citizens of other ethnic minorities make up 77.97 percent; of the people's courts and people's procuratorates at the regional, prefectural (city) and county levels, they make up 69.82 percent and 82.25 percent, respectively.

In addition, a number of Tibetan and other ethnic-minority citizens in Tibet directly participate in the administration of state affairs, and some serve in leading positions in state organs at the central level. Of the deputies to the National People's Congress, 19 are from Tibet, of whom, 12 are Tibetans. In the Standing Committee of the NPC of all previous terms, Tibetans such as the 14th Dalai Lama, the 10th Panchen Lama, Ngapoi Ngawang Jigme, Pagbalha Geleg Namgyai, and Raidi once served, or are serving, as vice-chairmen. At present, 29 Tibetans and persons of other ethnic-minority groups from Tibet serve as members of the CPPCC National Committee or members of its Standing Committee. Ngapoi Ngawang Jigme and Pagbalha Geleg Namgyai serve as vice-chairmen of the CPPCC National Committee.

The local organ of self-government in Tibet fully exercises the power of autonomy bestowed by the Constitution and law. According to the provisions of the Constitution, the organ of self-government of the Tibet Autonomous Region exercises the functions and powers of the local organ of state at the provincial level according to law as well as the power of autonomy according to law; and implements the laws and policies of the state in light of the existing local situation. The People's Congress of the Tibet Autonomous Region has the power to enact local regulations enjoyed by an ordinary administrative region at the provincial level and the power to enact regulations on the exercise of autonomy as well as separate regulations in light of the political, economic and cultural characteristics of the ethnic group or ethnic groups in the region. According to statistics, since 1965, the People's Congress of the Tibet Autonomous Region and its Standing Committee have enacted 220 local or separate regulations, covering political, economic, cultural, educational and other aspects, including the "Regulations of the Tibet Autonomous Region on the Protection and Management of Cultural Relics," "Regulations of the Tibet Autonomous Region on Environmental Protection," "Regulations of the Tibet Autonomous Region on the Administration of Mountain Climbing in Tibet by Foreigners," "Regulations of the Tibet Autonomous Region on Correspondence and Visitation," "Resolutions on the Study, Use and Development of the Tibetan Language in the Tibet Autonomous Region," "Resolutions on Safeguarding Unification of the Motherland, Strengthening Ethnic Unity and Combating Separatist Activities," and "Decision on Severely Cracking Down on Illegal Imposition of Fines for Lost Lives." The enactment and implementation of these local regulations have provided an important legal safeguard for protecting the special rights and interests of the Tibetan people and promoting the development of various undertakings in Tibet.

According to the "Law on Regional Ethnic Autonomy," if a resolution, decision, order or directive of a state organ at the higher level is not suitable for the actual situation of the region, the Tibet Autonomous Region has the right to flexibly implement or not to implement such a resolution, decision, order or directive of the state organ at the higher level, upon approval by the higher authorities. For instance, the organ of self-government in Tibet has designated the Tibetan New Year, the Shoton (Yogurt) Festival and other traditional Tibetan festivals as official holidays in the region, apart from the official national holidays. In addition, out of consideration for the special natural and geographical factors of Tibet, the Tibet Autonomous Region has fixed the work week at 35 hours, five hours fewer than the national statutory work week. Besides, subject to authorization, the legislative body of the Tibet Autonomous Region may also enact and implement flexible regulations and supplementary provisions with regard to relevant state laws based on the actual local situation. For instance, in 1981, in consideration of the historical customs and other actual conditions in marriage of the ethnic minorities in Tibet, the Standing Committee of the People's Congress of the Tibet Autonomous Region adopted the "Accommodation Rules for the Implementation of the Marriage Law of the People's Republic of China," which lowers by two years the statutory marriage ages for men and women provided in the "Marriage Law," and stipulates that polyandrous and polygamous marriages formed before the promulgation of the "Accommodation Rules" shall be valid if none of the persons involved takes initiative to terminate the marriage. The implementation of the state laws and policies in a flexible manner as prescribed by law has effectively protected the special interests of the Tibetan people.

III. The Tibetan People Have Full Decision-making Power in Economic and Social Development

The key to regional ethnic autonomy is to speed up social and economic development in ethnic autonomous areas and guarantee minority people's equal rights to development. Over the past 40 years, the Tibet Autonomous Region, under

the correct direction and wholehearted support of the state, has fully exercised the decision-making right guaranteed to it by law in economic and social development, and formulated a series of policies and measures suitable for the actual situation in Tibet. This has greatly promoted the modernization drive in Tibet and improved its people's living standards.

According to the Constitution and the "Law on Regional Ethnic Autonomy," the Tibet Autonomous Region has the power, within the framework of the Constitution and law, to adopt special policies and flexible measures according to the local conditions to speed up its economic and cultural development; under the direction of the state plan and in accordance with its local features and needs, to map out its principles, policies and plans for economic development, and decide and manage independently its economic and social development undertakings; to administer, protect and be the first to utilize its natural resources; to administer its own finances and independently arrange the use of its fiscal revenue; to independently develop its educational and cultural undertakings and manage its educational, scientific, cultural, health and physical education undertakings; and to enjoy the state's preferential policies in the aspects of finance, banking and taxation. In the past 40 years, the Tibet Autonomous Region has fully exercised autonomy in economic and social development in accordance with the law, and formulated and implemented 10 Five-Year Plans for Economic and Social Development in light of Tibet's reality. With the leapfrogging of stages of development as the target of economic and social development and the improvement of the infrastructure and the people's living standard as the key, it has independently arranged its economic and social development projects, and has thus guaranteed the rapid and healthy progress of Tibet's modernization drive and the development of Tibet's society and economy in line with the basic interests of the Tibetan people.

In accordance with Tibet's special features and needs, the state has spared no effort to help promote Tibet's economic and social development. The ordinary people in Tibet are the direct beneficiaries of all these support, aid and policies. Considering present-day Tibet being born from the backward feudal serfdom, its weak economic and social foundation and its high altitude, for many years the state has given Tibet special support and help in terms of finance, banking and taxation, as well as materials, technologies and personnel according to the stipulations in the Constitution and the "Law on Regional Ethnic Autonomy." Since the early 1980s, the Central Government has convened four Forums on Work in Tibet according to the needs and requirements of the Region, and worked out a series of special preferential policies and measures concerning the major problems in Tibet's economic and social development. For instance, since 1984 the policies of "long-term household land use and independent management" and "long-term private ownership of livestock and independent management" have been adopted in the agricultural and pastoral areas of Tibet, which have greatly raised farmers' and herdsman's enthusiasm for production, and brought about sustained improvement in both production and the people's living conditions in the agricultural and pastoral areas. Another example is that Tibet is the only place in China to enjoy a preferential taxation policy at a rate three percentage points lower than in any other part of China, and where farmers and herdsman are exempt from taxes and administrative charges. In banking, Tibet has all along enjoyed a preferential interest rate on loans two percentage points lower than in any other place in China, as well as a low rate on insurance premiums. Also, farmers and herdsman receive free medical care, and their children go to school with board and lodging free of charge.

Meanwhile, the state gives special support for Tibet's development in terms of capital, technology and personnel. From 1984 to 1994, a total of 43 projects were undertaken, with a total investment of 480 million yuan from the state and nine provinces and municipalities. Between 1994 and 2001, the Central Government again financed 62 projects, involving an additional 4.86 billion yuan in direct investment; and 716 projects have been financed and constructed with free aid from 15 provinces and central ministries and commissions, involving a total investment of 3.16 billion yuan. At the Fourth Forum on Work in Tibet, held by the central authorities in 2001, it was decided to further strengthen the support for Tibet's development by investing 31.2 billion yuan in 117 projects during the 10th Five-Year Plan period (2001-2005) with funds from the Central Government, coupled with 37.9 billion yuan in financial subsidy. Meanwhile, Tibet will receive aid from other regions throughout the country in the construction of 71 projects, involving a total investment of 1.062 billion yuan. According to statistics, in close to 40 years since the Tibet Autonomous Region was founded, of Tibet's 87.586 billion yuan of financial expenditure, 94.9 percent came from Central Government subsidies. In the last decade, well over 2,000 cadres at various levels have been selected and sent to help with work in Tibet, together with 10.166 billion yuan in financial help in the form of capital and materials (not including the capital involved in the 117 Central Government's aid projects in the same period). The support from the Central Government and other parts of the country has greatly improved the production and living conditions in Tibet and promoted its economic and social development.

In the last four decades, Tibet has progressed by leaps and bounds in the system, structure and total volume of its economy, ending the closed, manorial-system-based natural economy for good and moving forward to a modern market economy. From 1965 to 2003, the GNP of Tibet increased from 327 million yuan to 18.459 billion yuan, and the GDP per capita rose from 241 yuan to 6,874 yuan. A modern industrial system comprising more than 20 categories and with distinctive Tibetan characteristics has come into existence from nothing. Burgeoning industries and trades such as modern commerce, tourism, posts and telecommunications, catering services, entertainment and IT that used to be unheard of in Tibet, are now developing with great momentum. There was no highway in Tibet in the old days,

but today a road transportation network has taken shape with national highways and 14 provincial highways as the trunk lines, with more than 41,300 kilometers open to traffic. Construction of the Qinghai-Tibet Railway began in 2001; when it is completed and opened to traffic, in 2005, the days when Tibet is not accessible by rail will go beyond recall. In 2003, Tibet received 928,600 visits of tourists from both home and abroad, and the total income from tourism made up 5.6 percent of the GDP in Tibet. By the end of 2003, there were 22 telephones for every 100 people in Tibet, with the total number of fixed and mobile phone users reaching 601,700.

The modernization drive has been developing in harmony with the protection of the environment. Tibet adheres to the strategy of comprehensive, coordinated and sustainable development, integrating environmental protection with modernization efforts by planning and developing them simultaneously, and forming an efficient supervision and control system for environmental protection and pollution control. Attention has been given to ecological improvement, and 18 state- and provincial-level nature reserves have been built, covering 33.9 percent of the region's total land area, effectively protecting Tibet's fragile plateau ecology and the living environment in the urban and rural areas. At present, the ecology in Tibet basically maintains its pristine state, and it is the place where the environment is best protected in China.

The people's material and cultural well-beings have improved by a large margin. Now, most of the farmers and herdsmen in Tibet have basically solved the food and clothing problem, and some people are now fairly well off. The old Tibet had no school of the modern type, and the attendance rate of school-age children was less than two percent, with 95 percent of young and middle-aged people being illiterate. By the end of 2003, Tibet had 1,011 schools of various types and levels and 2,020 teaching centers, with a total of 453,400 students, the enrollment proportion of primary schools rising to 91.8 percent and the illiteracy rate dropping to less than 30 percent. Since 1985, the Central Government has established Tibetan classes/schools in 21 provinces and municipalities, training up to 10,000 college and secondary technical school graduates.

Medical and health-care conditions have improved markedly. Now, there are 1,305 medical and health institutions in Tibet, with 6,216 beds and 8,287 medical personnel, the number of beds and medical personnel per 1,000 people being higher than the national average. The people are now much better assured of their health than before. Infant mortality rate has dropped from 43 percent before 1959 to 3.1 percent, and the average life span of the Tibetan people has increased from 35.5 years to the present 67 years. Tibet's population has grown from 1.1409 million before 1951 to the present 2.7017 million, of whom the number of Tibetans rose from 1.2087 million in 1964 to 2.5072 million in 2003, making up over 92 percent of the region's population.

IV. The Tibetan People Have the Freedom to Inherit and Develop Their Traditional Culture and to Practice Their Religious Belief

Over the past 40 years, the Tibet Autonomous Region has fully exercised the right to autonomy guaranteed to it by the Constitution and the "Law on Regional Ethnic Autonomy," administered and developed local cultural undertakings on their own, protected and sifted the Tibetan cultural heritage, developed and promoted Tibetan culture, and protected Tibetan people's freedom of inheriting and developing their traditional culture and practicing their religious belief.

Tibetan language is widely studied, used and promoted. The regional government promulgated and implemented the "Stipulations of the Tibet Autonomous Region on the Learning, Use and Promotion of the Tibetan Spoken and Written Language (Interim)" and its "Rules of Implementation" in 1987 and 1988, respectively, and revised the first as the "Stipulations of the Tibet Autonomous Region on the Learning, Use and Promotion of the Tibetan Spoken and Written Language" in 2002. These stipulations and rules make clear that equal attention be given to Tibetan and Han-Chinese languages in the Tibet Autonomous Region, with the Tibetan language as the major one, thus putting the work of using and promoting Tibetan spoken and written language on a legal basis.

Both Tibetan and Chinese languages are used in all schools in Tibet, with the Tibetan as the major one, and the textbooks and teaching reference books from primary to high school have been edited, translated into and published in Tibetan language. All the resolutions and regulations of the people's congresses at various levels in Tibet, and formal documents and public announcements of the governments at all levels and all governmental departments in the Tibet Autonomous Region are printed in both Tibetan and Chinese languages. In judicial lawsuits, Tibetan language is used when Tibetans are involved and in the writing of legal documents. The official seals, certificates, forms, envelopes, letter paper, standardized writing paper and emblems of all units, and the signs and logos of all government agencies, factories, mines, schools, bus and train stations, airports, shops, hotels, restaurants, theaters, tourist destinations, stadiums and libraries, and all the road and traffic signs and street names are all written in both Tibetan and Chinese languages.

At present, both radio and TV stations in Tibet have special Tibetan-language channels. There are 14 magazines and 10 newspapers published in Tibetan in the autonomous region. The Tibetan edition of the Tibet Daily is published every day, using advanced Tibetan-language computer editing and typesetting systems. In recent years, more than

100 titles of books have been published in Tibetan every year, with a circulation of several hundred thousand. The standardization of specialized terms and information technology in Tibetan has made great progress. The encoded Tibetan language has reached the state as well as international standard, making Tibetan the first ethnic-minority language in China to have attained international standardization.

The fine aspects of traditional Tibetan culture are being carried on, protected and promoted. Specialized institutions for salvaging, editing and researching Tibetan cultural heritage have been established by governments at all levels in the region. These institutions have collected, edited and published the Records of Chinese Dramas "Tibetan Volume," Collection of Chinese Folk Ballads "Tibetan Volume," and other collections of folk dances, proverbs, quyi ballads, folk songs and folk tales, effectively salvaging and protecting the excellent parts of traditional Tibetan culture. Life of King Gesar has been called the "king of world epics," as it is the longest of its kind in the world. The Tibetan people created it, and it has been transmitted orally for centuries. A special institution was founded in 1979 by the regional government to carry out all-round salvaging and editing of Life of King Gesar. The state has put it on the list of major scientific research projects, and organized the relevant research and publication work. After some 20 years of effort, more than 3,000 audio tapes have been recorded, almost 300 hand-copied and block-printed editions of the epic have been collected, and 62 volumes of the epic in Tibetan have been edited and published, with a distribution in excess of three million copies. Meanwhile, over 20 volumes of its Chinese edition have been published so far, and some of them have been translated into and published in English, Japanese and French.

Since the founding of the Tibet Autonomous Region, a number of regulations on the protection of cultural relics have been promulgated and implemented. Altogether, some 300 million yuan has been used to renovate and open over 1,400 monasteries and to give timely repair to a large group of cultural relics. From 1989 to 1994 especially, the Central People's Government allocated 55 million yuan and a large quantity of gold and silver for the first-phase maintenance project of the Potala Palace. From 2001, the state has also earmarked 330 million yuan for the second-phase maintenance project of the Potala Palace and the maintenance of the two other great cultural sites of Norbulingka and Sakya Monastery.

Traditional Tibetan customs and habits are respected and protected. Tibetans and all the other minority ethnic groups in China enjoy the right and freedom to keep their traditional lifestyles and to engage in social activities according to their own customs and habits. While maintaining their traditional styles of costume, diet, and housing, they have also absorbed some modern and new healthy customs in clothing, food, housing and transportation as well as weddings and funerals. Traditional festivals such as the Tibetan New Year, Sakadawa (Anniversary of Buddha's Birth, Enlightenment and Death) Festival, Ongkor (Bumper Harvest) Festival, and Shoton (Yogurt) Festival, and many religious celebrations in monasteries are observed, while accepting different kinds of national and international festivals that have been introduced in recent years.

Tibetans fully enjoy the freedom of religious belief. Most of the people of the Tibetan, Moinba, Lhoba and Naxi ethnic groups believe in Tibetan Buddhism, while others believe in Islam and Catholicism. At present, there are over 1,700 venues for Tibetan Buddhist activities, with some 46,000 resident monks and nuns; four mosques and about 3,000 Muslims; and one Catholic church and over 700 believers in the region. Religious activities of various kinds are held normally, with people's religious needs fully satisfied and their freedom of religious belief fully respected.

The transmission lineage system of reincarnation of a great lama after his death is unique to Tibetan Buddhism, and this has been respected by the state and governments at all levels in Tibet. In 1992, the State Bureau of Religious Affairs of the State Council approved the succession of the Living Buddha of the 17th Karmapa. In 1995, according to religious rituals and historical conventions, the Tibet Autonomous Region completed the whole process of the search for and confirmation of the reincarnation of the 10th Panchen Lama through drawing lots from a gold urn and the honoring and enthronement of the 11th Panchen Lama, and reported it to the State Council for approval. Since Tibet's Democratic Reform, altogether 30 Living Buddhas have been approved by the state and the government of the Tibet Autonomous Region. Tibetan clergy has also carried out a reform of the sutra learning system among the monks, which has greatly stimulated sutra-learning enthusiasm among the monks, and played an active role in inheriting and developing Buddhist doctrines.

The stupendous work of collecting, editing, publishing and researching religious classics has progressed continuously. Sutras and Buddhist classics preserved in the Potala Palace, Norbulingka and Sakya Monastery have been well protected. Ancient documents and books, such as the Catalogue of the Classics in the Potala Palace, Snowland Library, The Origins of Religions in Tewu, etc., have been rescued, edited and published. Since 1990, the Chinese Tripitaka: Tengyur (collated edition) and the General Catalogue of the Tibetan Tripitaka in the Tibetan and Chinese Languages have been published. Of the Tripitaka, 1,490 sections of the Tengyur have been published, in addition to offprints of Tibetan Buddhist classics of rituals, biographies and treatises for monasteries to satisfy the needs of monks, nuns and lay followers. The Chinese Buddhist Association Tibet Branch publishes its Tibetan Buddhism journal in the Tibetan language. It also runs a Tibetan Buddhist college and a Tibetan-language sutra printery. The state has also set up the China Tibetan-Language Senior Buddhist College in Beijing specially to foster senior personnel of Tibetan Buddhism.

V. Regional Ethnic Autonomy Is the Fundamental Guarantee for Tibetan People As Masters of Their Own Affairs

It should be recognized that regional ethnic autonomy has only been instituted in Tibet for a short time, and it needs to be improved and developed in the course of implementation. Since Tibet had very little to start with in terms of social development, and because of its high-altitude oxygen deficiency and other harsh natural conditions, the level of modernization in Tibet still lags far behind the coastal areas in southeast China. Tibet remains thus far an underdeveloped area in China. However, the basic fact is that in the nearly 40 years since Tibet adopted regional ethnic autonomy, it has turned from an extremely backward feudal serfdom into a modern socialist people's democracy, and during this process it has recorded rapid economic growth and all-round social progress and steadily narrowed the gap between it and other regions of China. As a member of the big family of the Chinese nation, Tibetans have won the right to jointly manage state affairs on an equal footing with other ethnic groups, and the right to autonomy as arbiters of their own destiny and masters of their own affairs. They have become the creators and beneficiaries of the material and cultural wealth of Tibetan society. The ethnic characteristics and traditional culture of Tibet are not only fully respected and protected, but also publicized and carried forward. Their contents are also being enriched along with the progress of modernization to make it more representative of the times. It is undeniable that the development and changes Tibet has undergone are visible to everyone and have attracted worldwide attention.

Historical facts indicate that the institution of regional ethnic autonomy in Tibet was the natural result of social progress in Tibet, and that it accords with the fundamental interests of the Tibetan people and the inexorable law of development of human society. To advance from a feudal, autocratic medieval society to a modern, democratic society is the inevitable law of development of human society from ignorance and backwardness to civilization and progress. It is the irresistible historical trend of modernization of all the countries and regions in modern times. As late as the first half of the 20th century, Tibet was still a feudal serfdom under a theocracy. This, plus the policy of ethnic oppression practiced by domestic reactionary ruling classes over long years in various historical periods as well as invasion and instigation by modern imperialist forces, reduced Tibetan society as a whole to constant unrest. But, after the founding of the People's Republic of China, the Central Government realized the peaceful liberation of Tibet, and instituted the Democratic Reform and regional ethnic autonomy there, completing the task of the anti-imperialist and anti-feudal national-democratic revolution. As a result, Tibet broke away from the control of imperialism, leapfrogged several forms of society, and entered socialist society. Tibet saw the completion of the greatest and most profound social transformation in its history, and in its social development achieved a historic leap never before seen. This is inline with the law of development of human society and the progressive trend of the times. It also reflects the requirements of social progress in Tibet and the fundamental wish of the Tibetan people.

To institute regional ethnic autonomy in Tibet is the natural requirement for safeguarding national unification and national solidarity, and for the equal development and common prosperity of the Tibetan people and people of other ethnic groups in China. Over the long course of historical development, the Tibetan people together with people of other ethnic groups in China have created a unified, multi-national country, and formed the big family of the Chinese nation, in which all the ethnic groups share weal and woe, and are inseparable from each other. As an integral part of Chinese territory, Tibet has for centuries gone through thick and thin together with the motherland for common development. In modern times, China was reduced to a semi-colonial and semi-feudal society; Chinese territory, including Tibet, was subject to invasion and devastation by the big powers of the West, and China was confronted with the deplorable fate of being carved up and dismembered. After the founding of the People's Republic of China, under the unified leadership of the state and with generous support from other ethnic groups, the Tibetan people, through peaceful liberation and Democratic Reform, have come into their own and instituted regional ethnic autonomy. They have displayed unprecedented initiative, zeal and creativity, and brought Tibet onto the track of development in step with the other parts of the country. Historical facts indicate that without the unification and prosperity of the country and without the unity and mutual aid of different ethnic groups in China, there would have been no new lease of life and no rapid development for Tibet. By the same token, without the prosperity and development of Tibet, the complete modernization of China and the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation cannot be achieved. The institution of regional ethnic autonomy in Tibet has integrated the unification of state sovereignty, the role of the people as masters of the country and the local autonomy of Tibet as an organic whole. This has provided a powerful guarantee for the Tibetan people to realize equal development and common prosperity together with other ethnic groups in China.

The institution of regional ethnic autonomy in Tibet is the logical outcome of the Tibetan people's adherence to development along the road of Chinese-style socialism under the leadership of the Communist Party of China, and also the basic institutional guarantee for Tibetans to be true masters of their own affairs. Regional ethnic autonomy is a basic policy of the Communist Party of China for solving ethnic problems. It embodies the essential requirement of Chinese-style socialism for equality, unity, mutual aid and common prosperity among all ethnic groups. It is a basic political system whereby the state guarantees that ethnic minorities are masters of their own affairs. Practice has proved that this system is commensurate with China's national conditions and the reality of the Tibet region, and is

therefore full of vitality. Over the past 40 years, under the leadership of the Communist Party of China, the institution of regional ethnic autonomy in Tibet has effectively guaranteed the equal rights of the Tibetans in the big family of the Chinese nation and their right to autonomy in Tibet. The Tibetan people are entitled, without any discrimination, to the same equal rights as enjoyed by people of other ethnic groups in China in political, economic, cultural and social fields. They also enjoy the right of self-government to manage all affairs concerning their own region and ethnic group, as well as the right to special help and protection from the state, as prescribed by law. It can well be said that the regional ethnic autonomy instituted in Tibet not only comprehensively embodies the principles of equality, freedom from discrimination and special protection as stipulated in the United Nations' "Declaration of the Rights of People Who Are Minorities in Terms of Nationality, Race, Religion or Language" and other international documents on the protection of rights of minorities, but also fully embodies the advantages of Chinese-style socialism. Practice has proved that only by adhering to the leadership of the Communist Party, the socialist road and the system of regional ethnic autonomy can it be possible to truly make the Tibetan people masters of their own affairs and guarantee them this status. Only then can it be possible to safeguard and develop the fundamental interests of the Tibetan people, and guarantee the long-term stability and rapid development of Tibet.

It is thought-provoking that the Dalai clique, disregarding the fact that the Tibetan people have become masters of their own affairs and enjoyed full democratic rights and extensive economic, social and cultural rights, has constantly attacked Tibet's regional ethnic autonomy, in the international arena, as being "devoid of essential contents," and proposed the institution of "one country, two systems" and "a high degree of autonomy" in Tibet, after the model of Hong Kong and Macao. This argument is totally untenable. The regional ethnic autonomy in Tibet the Dalai clique attacks is the very regional ethnic autonomy for Tibet which the 14th Dalai supported and whose preparation he was involved in. While preparing for the establishment of the Tibet Autonomous Region, the Central Government conducted full consultation with the Dalai and Panchen and other members of the upper strata in Tibet. In 1956, the Preparatory Committee for the Tibet Autonomous Region was established, with the Dalai as the chairman. In his opening speech at the inaugural meeting, he said, "The establishment of the Preparatory Committee for the Tibet Autonomous Region indicates that the work in the Tibet region has entered upon a brand-new stage." In his report at the inaugural meeting he again declared that "The establishment of the Preparatory Committee for the Tibet Autonomous Region is not only timely but also necessary" and that "we wholeheartedly support the policies of regional ethnic autonomy, ethnic equality and unity and protection for the freedom of religious belief implemented by the Communist Party of China and the Central People's Government." The Dalai's attack against the regional ethnic autonomy in Tibet runs counter not only to the reality of present-day Tibet but also to the words he once uttered in all seriousness.

The situation in Tibet is entirely different from that in Hong Kong and Macao. The Hong Kong and Macao issue was a product of imperialist aggression against China; it was an issue of China's resumption of exercise of its sovereignty. Since ancient times Tibet has been an inseparable part of Chinese territory, where the Central Government has always exercised effective sovereign jurisdiction over the region. So the issue of resuming exercise of sovereignty does not exist. With the peaceful liberation of Tibet in 1951, Tibet had fundamentally extricated itself from the fetters of imperialism. Later, through the Democratic Reform, the abolition of the feudal serfdom under theocracy and the establishment of the Tibet Autonomous Region, the socialist system has been steadily consolidated there and the various rights of the people have been truly realized and constantly developed. So the possibility of implementing another social system does not exist either. Regional ethnic autonomy is a basic political system of China, which, together with the National People's Congress system and the system of multi-party cooperation and political consultation led by the Communist Party of China, forms the basic framework of China's political system. The establishment of the Tibet Autonomous Region and the scope of its area are based on the provisions of the Constitution, and the "Law(s) on Regional Ethnic Autonomy" and decided by the conditions past and present. Any act aimed at undermining and changing the regional ethnic autonomy in Tibet is in violation of the Constitution and law, and it is unacceptable to the entire Chinese people, including the broad masses of the Tibetan people.

It must be pointed out that the local government of Tibet headed by the Dalai representing feudal serfdom under theocracy has long since been replaced by the democratic administration established by the Tibetan people themselves. The destiny and future of Tibet can no longer be decided by the Dalai Lama and his clique. Rather, it can only be decided by the whole Chinese nation, including the Tibetan people. This is an objective political fact in Tibet that cannot be denied or shaken. The Central Government's policy as regards the Dalai Lama is consistent and clear. It is hoped that the Dalai Lama will look reality in the face, make a correct judgment of the situation, truly relinquish his stand for "Tibet independence," and do something beneficial to the progress of China and the region of Tibet in his remaining years.