

Hu Yaobang's Visit to Tibet, May 22-31, 1980
An Important Development
in the Chinese Government's Tibet Policy

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During the week from May 22 to May 31, 1980, Hu Yaobang led a Working Group of the Party Central Committee (PCC) to visit and inspect Tibet. This event was watched with great interest by those, both at home and abroad, who were concerned with Tibetan society, and it can be said that this event marked the beginning of a new era for the PCC's Tibet policy. In the ten years that followed that visit history marched on with its strong steps, leaving behind impressive footprints: amongst them, indisputably, the open door, a revitalised economy, changes in the social structure and an improvement in people's lives. As for Hu Yaobang himself, he experienced his ups and downs with officialdom and left the world with his ambitions unfulfilled on April 15, 1989. The great honours that were paid to him at his funeral could not make up for the regrets during his life. But the past has passed. According to Chinese custom, final judgment can only be passed on Hu when the lid is placed on his coffin, and this note is a reflection on the historical significance of Hu's visit to Tibet, as a mark of respect to him and as a way of cherishing the memory of a great man.

The Composition and Timing of the Working Group The importance of the Central Committee's Working Group can be judged from Wan Li's description of it: "This is the first working group to be formed since Comrade Hu Yaobang became the General Secretary after the new secretariat was formed at the Fifth Plenary Session of the Eleventh Central Committee." The Working Group was composed principally of five people:

Hu Yaobang, the General Secretary of the Central Committee and a member of the Standing Committee of the Politburo of the Central Committee; Wan Li, member of the Central Committee and Vice-Premier of the State Council; Ahpeiahwangjinmei [Ngapo Ngawang Jigme], the Vice-Chairman of the National People's Congress; Yang Jingren, member of the Central Committee and the Head of the State Commission of Nationalities Affairs, and Zhao Zhengqing, Vice-Minister of the Organisation Department of the PCC. There were several other staff members, amongst whom I was the only one who was not a government official. Edgar Snow, as an old friend of the Party leadership who knew their working style quite well, once said, 'Nothing carried out in public by the leaders of the Central Committee is ever casual or without significance.' This was true of the date chosen for the visit, and there were at least three reasons which led the Working Group to select May 22 as the date when it should arrive in Lhasa. First, the date indicated that the Central Government's policy on Tibet was based on the 'Seventeen-Point Agreement'. This was the agreement (entitled in full, 'Seventeen Points for the Peaceful Liberation of Tibet') signed in the Qinzheng Hall in Zhongnanhai, Beijing, on May 23, 1951, after a long period of discussion and consultation, by the delegation of the Central People's Government, headed by its plenipotentiary Li Weihan, and the delegation of the Tibetan Regional Government, headed by plenipotentiary Ahpeiahwangjinmei. That agreement marked the first time since its victory in the domestic revolution that the Chinese Communist Party had found a point of convergence with the Tibetan regional government; it was also the first agreement, based on compromise and harmony, which was acceptable to all the political forces in Tibet. It thus became the governing principle in Tibetan work and policy for a long period. Secondly, the choice of date pointed out that the Central Government was willing to settle matters through consultation with the local people. Thirdly, it aimed to show the

Central Government's wish to restore the harmonious atmosphere of cooperation which had prevailed in the early 1950s. The Working Group arrived at Gong Ga [Gongkar] airport near Lhasa at 10 a.m. on May 22, and two hours later had reached Lhasa and begun its meetings with the Tibetan leaders. Hu Yaobang came straight to the point by asking Paba-la [Phagpa-la Gelek Namgyal] a question: "Comrade Paba-la, what is tomorrow?" This summed up the feelings and intentions of the Group. At the cocktail party held on May 23 to celebrate the 39th anniversary of the Seventeen-Point Agreement, Wan Li held the hands of Sangpodunzhengdunzhu (Sampho Tenzin DundHup?) and said: 'You have rendered an outstanding service to history! Thank you!' Apart from Ahpeiahwangjinmei, Sangpodunzhengdunzhu was the only surviving member of the delegation sent by the Tibetan government who had signed the Agreement. He had just been released after nearly twenty years in labour camps.

The Speech

On May 29 Hu Yaobang made a very sincere and passionate political speech at a gathering of 5,000 cadres in Lhasa. The slogan put forward in the speech was 'Strive to build a united, prosperous and civilised new Tibet' ('Wei jianshe tuanjie fuyu wenmingde, xin Xizang xiang nuli douzheng'). In the speech Hu listed six tasks facing Tibet:

1. To exercise nationality autonomy in the region fully - that is to say, to let Tibetans really be the masters of their own lives.
2. A commitment by the Central Government to relieve and reduce burdens of the people, exempting the from agricultural and animal husbandry tax over the next three to five years in order to allow the Tibetan people a chance to recover.

3. To adopt a special policy to revive the Tibetan economy, including the adoption of a system of private economy in line with Tibetan circumstances. Nationwide this initiative was developed into the economic (household) responsibility system.
4. To make great efforts to develop agriculture and animal husbandry as well as the manufacture of consumer goods, in order to promote economic prosperity and enrich people's lives.
5. To make efforts to develop Tibetan science, culture and education, and to prepare for the establishing of the University of Tibet.
6. To implement the policy on minority nationality cadres correctly, to strengthen the unity between the Han and Tibetan cadres, and to transfer a large quantity of Chinese cadres who had worked in Tibet for many years back to the interior.

Naturally, these six tasks were endorsed and supported by the Tibetan people. The atmosphere was very lively both inside and outside the meeting. Hu Yaobang was an excellent orator and his address was received with waves of warm applause, especially when he admitted very frankly: 'Our present situation is less than wonderful because the Tibetan people's lives have not been much improved. There are some improvements in some parts, but in general, Tibetans still live in relative poverty. In some areas the living standards have even gone down. We comrades in the Central Committee, Chairman Hua as well as several vice-chairmen, were very upset when we heard about this situation. We feel that our party has let the Tibetan people down. We feel very bad! The sole purpose of our Communist Party is to work for the happiness of people, to do good things for them. We have worked nearly thirty years, but the life of the Tibetan people has not been notably improved. Are we not to blame? If we don't make this

clear, people won't let us off the hook; party members won't let us get away with it!

What he said touched people's hearts. They admired him for his statesmanship and his broad-mindedness as a true Communist. It was open and honest, dared to act, dared to face reality and dared to bear responsibility. Ten years later Hu Yaobang's words still ring out forcefully. To this day, the Tibetan people still keep his likeness in their hearts, referring to him affectionately as 'sku-zhabs Hu' [Gentleman Hu].

The Two Cordial Conversations

In the first of the Two Cordial Conversations, Hu Yaobang invited three leading Tibetan cadres, Duojiecaidan [Dorje Tseten], Luosangsicheng [Lobsang Tsultrim, and Pengcuozhaxi [Phuntsog Tashi], to the hotel in which he was staying in Lhasa. Hu, in his sitting room, opened his hearts to them and said:

'You are all exemplary Tibetans. You are leaders as well as communists; the Tibetan cause relies on you. I hope that you will make further contributions towards the construction of a united, prosperous and civilised new Tibet. I did not know you before, but now we have become friends. Tibetan affairs will rely on you. You can directly come to see me if there are any problems.'

These three men were later appointed to important Positions. Duojiecaidan became Director of the TAR Department of Education, First Secretary of the Lhasa Party Committee, and Chairman of the TAR People's Government. Now he is the Director of the China Tibetology Center in Beijing.

Luosangsicheng was appointed as the Director of the TAR Party Committee's Department of Organisation, and as the vice-Chairman of the Standing Committee of the Tibetan People's Congress. Unfortunately, he died of a heart attack shortly afterwards. Pengcuozhaxi became at various times in his career the Director of Publications for the Tibetan

Administration, the vice-Chairman of the Tibetan People's Congress and the vice-Chairman of the Social Science Academy. Now he is the vice-Director of the China Tibetology Center. In the second of the Two Cordial Conversations, Hu invited two leading figures of the Old Tibet to talk with him. Xuekangtudengnima (Sholkhang Thubten Nyima) and Qiabagesangwangdui (Chapei Kelsang Wangdu) were old acquaintances of Hu, who as members of the Chinese Youth Delegation had been to visit Moscow and Bucharest with him in the 1950s. Hu did not forget his old friends although thirty years had passed. Hu held their hands and chatted delightedly. He looked back over their past friendship and hoped that they would guide the patriotic leading figures of the old Tibet to strive together to construct a new Tibet. Before long, Xuekangtudcngnima was appointed as the vice-Director of the Tibetan Cultural Department and the vice-Chairman of the People's Political Consultative Conference of the TAR, and Qiabagesangwangdui later became the Director of the People's Bank of the TAR.