Fifty Years of Democratic Reform in Tibet

BEIJING, March 2 (Xinhua) -- The Information Office of the State Council, or China's cabinet, published a white paper titled "Fifty Years of Democratic Reform in Tibet" here on Monday. Following is the full text:

Fifty Years of Democratic Reform in Tibet
Information Office of the State Council of the People's Republic of China

Contents
Foreword
I. Old Tibet -- A Society of Feudal Serfdom under Theocracy
II. Momentous Democratic Reform in Tibet
III. Tremendous Historic Changes over the Past Half-century
Conclusion

Foreword
Tibet has been an inseparable part of China since ancient times. The peaceful liberation of Tibet, the driving out of the imperialist aggressor forces from Tibet, the democratic reform and abolition of theocratic feudal serfdom in Tibet were significant parts of the Chinese people's national democratic revolution against imperialism and feudalism in modern history, as well as major historical tasks facing the Chinese government after the founding of the People's Republic of China in 1949.

Prior to 1959, Tibet had long been a society of feudal serfdom under theocratic rule, a society which was even darker than medieval society in Europe. The 14th Dalai Lama, as a leader of the Gelug Sect of Tibetan Buddhism and also head of the Tibetan local government, monopolized both political and religious power, and was the chief representative of the feudal serf owners, who, accounting for less than five percent of the total population of Tibet, possessed the overwhelming part of the means of production, and monopolized the material and cultural resources of Tibet. The serfs and slaves, making up over 95 percent of the total population, suffered destitution, cruel oppression and exploitation, and possessed no means of production or personal freedom whatsoever, not to mention other basic human rights. The long centuries of theocratic rule and feudal serfdom stifled the vitality of Tibetan society, and brought about its decline and decay.

In 1951, the Agreement of the Central People's Government and the Local Government of Tibet on Measures for the Peaceful Liberation of Tibet (hereinafter the "17-Article Agreement") was signed. The Agreement enabled Tibet to repel the imperialist forces and realize peaceful liberation, and provided basic conditions for Tibet to join the other parts of the country in the drive for common progress and development.

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The "17-Article Agreement" acknowledged the necessity of reforming the social system of Tibet, and stressed that "the local government of Tibet should carry out reform voluntarily." However, in consideration of the special circumstances of Tibet, the Central People's Government adopted a circumspect attitude toward the reform. With great patience, tolerance and sincerity, it made efforts to persuade and waited for the local upper ruling strata of Tibet to carry out reform voluntarily. Instigated and supported by imperialist forces, however, some people in the upper ruling strata, despite the ever-
growing demand of the people for democratic reform, were totally opposed to reform and proclaimed their determination never to carry it out. In an attempt to perpetuate feudal serfdom under theocracy, these people publicly abandoned the "17-Article Agreement" and brazenly staged an all-out armed rebellion on March 10, 1959. In order to safeguard the unity of the nation and the basic interests of the Tibetan people, the Central People's Government and the Tibetan people took decisive measures to quell the rebellion. Meanwhile, a vigorous democratic reform were carried out on a massive scale in Tibet to overthrow Tibet's feudal serfdom system under theocracy and liberate about one million serfs and slaves, ushering in a new era with the people becoming their own masters. The democratic reform was the most extensive, deepest and greatest social reform in the history of Tibet, and signified an epoch-making event in Tibet's history of social development and the progress of its human rights, as well as a significant advance in the history of human civilization and the world's human rights development.

Over the past half century, thanks to the care of the Central People's Government and aid from across the nation, the liberated people of all ethnic groups in Tibet have, in the capacity of masters of the nation, enthusiastically participated in the grand course of constructing a new society and creating their new lives, and worked miracles that had never happened in the Tibetan history. The social system of Tibet has developed by leaps and bounds; its modernization has advanced rapidly; Tibetan society has undergone earth-shaking historic changes; and remarkable progress has been made in the cause of human rights, which has attracted worldwide attention.

The year 2009 marks the 50th anniversary of the democratic reform in Tibet. It is conducive to telling the right from wrong in history and helps the world better understand a real Tibet in progress for us to review the overwhelming democratic reform and the profound historical changes that have taken place in Tibet over the past 50 years, to shed light on the laws governing the social development of Tibet, and expose through facts the various lies and rumors spread by the 14th Dalai Lama and his hard-core supporters over the so-called "Tibet issue," as well as the true colors of the 14th Dalai Lama himself.

I. Old Tibet -- A Society of Feudal Serfdom under Theocracy

Before the democratic reform in 1959, Tibet had been a society of feudal serfdom under theocracy, a society characterized by a combination of political and religious powers, and ruthless political oppression and economic exploitation of serfs and slaves by the serf-owner class, including three major estate-holders -- local administrative officials, aristocrats and upper-ranking lamas in the monasteries. For centuries, the Tibetan people had been living in dire misery and suffering from the harshness of life, and their society had sunk into a grave state of poverty, backwardness, isolation and decline, verging on total collapse.

-- Medieval theocratic society. British military journalist Edmund Candler, who visited Lhasa in 1904, recorded the details of the old Tibetan society in his book "The Unveiling of Lhasa": "...at present, the people are medieval, not only in their system of government and their religion, their inquisition, their witchcraft, their incarnations, their ordeals by fire and boiling oil, but in every aspect of their daily life." (The Unveiling of Lhasa, Edmund Candler. London: Pentagon, 2007) The most distinctive feature of the social system of old Tibet was theocracy, a system which ensured that the upper religious strata and the monasteries were together the political power holders as well as the biggest serf owners, possessing all kinds of political and economic privileges, and manipulating the material and cultural lives of the Tibetan people at their own advantage. Candler wrote in the book: "The country is governed on the feudal system. The monks are the overlords, the peasantry their serfs." "Powerful lamas controlled everything in Tibet, where even the Buddha himself couldn't do anything without the support of the lamas," he added. (The Unveiling of Lhasa, Edmund Candler. London:
Statistics show that before the democratic reform in 1959, Tibet had 2,676 monasteries and 114,925 monks, including 500 senior and junior Living Buddhas and other upper-ranking lamas, and over 4,000 lamas holding substantial economic resources. About one quarter of Tibetan men were monks. The three major monasteries -- Drepung, Sera and Ganden -- housed a total of more than 16,000 monks, and possessed 321 manors, 147,000 mu (15 mu equal one hectare, it is locally called ke in Tibet -- ed.) of land, 450 pastures, 110,000 head of livestock, and over 60,000 serfs. The vicious expansion of religious power under theocracy depleted massive human resources and most material resources, shackled people's thinking and impeded the development of productivity. Charles Bell, who lived in Lhasa as a British trade representative in the 1920s, described in his book "Portrait of A Dalai Lama: The Life and Times of the Great Thirteenth" that the theocratic position of the Dalai Lama enabled him to administer rewards and punishments as he wished, because he held absolute power over both this life and the next of the serfs, and coerced them with such power. (Portrait of A Dalai Lama: The Life and Times of the Great Thirteenth, Charles Bell, London: Collins, 1946)

American Tibetologist Melvyn C. Goldstein incisively pointed out that Tibetan society and government were built upon a value system dominated by religious goals and behavior. Religious power and privileges, and the leading monasteries "played a major role in thwarting progress" in Tibet. Religion and the monasteries "were heavy fetters upon Tibet's social progress". "This commitment... to the universality of religion as the core metaphor of Tibetan national identity will be seen... to be a major factor underlying Tibet's inability to adapt to changing circumstances." (A History of Modern Tibet, 1913-1951: The Demise of the Lamaist State, Melvyn C. Goldstein. California: University of California, 1991)

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Means of production mostly monopolized by the three major estate-holders. The three major estate-holders, that is, local administrative officials, aristocrats and upper-ranking lamas in the monasteries, and their agents, accounted for less than five percent of Tibet's population, but owned all of Tibet's farmland, pastures, forests, mountains, rivers and beaches, as well as most livestock. About 90 percent of old Tibet's population was made up of serfs, called "tralpa" in Tibetan (namely, people who tilled plots of land assigned to them and had to provide corvee labor for the serf owners) and "duiqoin" (small households with chimneys emitting smoke). They had no means of production or personal freedom, and the survival of each of them depended on tilling plots for the estate-holders. In addition, "nangzan," who comprised five percent of the population, were hereditary slaves, known as "speaking tools." Statistics released in the early years of the Qing Dynasty in the 17th century indicate that Tibet then had more than three million mu of farmland, of which 30.9 percent was owned by the local feudal government, 29.6 percent by aristocrats, and 39.5 percent by monasteries and upper-ranking lamas. The three major estate-holders' monopoly of the means of production remained unchanged until the democratic reform in 1959. Before 1959, the family of the 14th Dalai Lama possessed 27 manors, 30 pastures and over 6,000 serfs, and annually squeezed about 33,000 ke (one ke equals 14 kilograms -- ed.) of qingke (highland barley), 2,500 ke of butter, two million liang (15 liang of silver equal one silver dollar of the time) of Tibetan silver, 300 head of cattle, and 175 rolls of pulu (woolen fabric made in Tibet) out of its serfs. In 1959, the Dalai Lama alone owned 160,000 liang of gold, 95 million liang of silver, over 20,000 pieces of jewelry and jade ware, and more than 10,000 pieces of silk and satin fabric and rare fur clothing, including over 100 robes inlaid with pearls and gems, each worth tens of thousands of yuan.

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Serfs owned by the three major estate-holders. The local government of old Tibet prescribed that serfs must stay on the land within the manors of their owners, and were not allowed to leave without permission, and were strictly prohibited from fleeing the manors. They were serfs from generation to generation, confined to the land of their owners. All serfs and their livestock with labor ability had to till the plots of land assigned to them and provide corvee labor. Once the serfs lost their ability to labor, they were deprived of livestock, farm tools and land, and degraded to the status of slaves. The serf-
owners literally possessed their serfs as private properties, they could trade and transfer them, present them as gifts, make them gambling stakes or mortgages for debt and exchange them. According to historical records, in 1943 the aristocrat Trimon Norbu Wan-gyal sold 100 serfs to a monk official at Kadron Gangsa, in the Drigung area, each serf for 60 liang of silver. He also sent 400 serfs to the Kunde Ling Monastery as a payment for a debt of 3,000 pin of silver (one pin equals 50 liang of silver). The serf-owners had a firm grip on the birth, death and marriage of serfs. A Tibetan ballad of the time goes, "Our lives were given to us by our parents, but our bodies are owned by our lords. We are not masters of our own lives or bodies, or of our own destiny." All serfs had to ask their owners for permission to marry, and male and female serfs not belonging to the same owner had to pay "redemption fees" before they could marry. After marriage, serfs were also taxed for their newborn children. Children of serfs were registered the moment they were born, sealing their life-long fate as serfs.

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Rigid hierarchy. The "13-Article Code" and "16-Article Code," which were enforced for several hundred years in old Tibet, divided people into three classes and nine ranks, enshrining inequality between the different ranks in law. The Code stipulated that people were divided into three classes according to their family background and social positions, each class was further divided into three ranks. The upper class consisted of a small number of aristocrats from big families, high-rank Living Buddhas and senior officials; the middle class was composed of lower-ranking ecclesiastical and secular officials, military officers, and the agents of the three major kinds of estate-holders. Serfs and slaves constituted the lower class, accounting for 95 percent of Tibet's total population. The provision concerning the penalty for murder in the Code provided, "As people are divided into different classes and ranks, the value of a life also differs." The bodies of people of the highest rank of the upper class, such as a prince or Living Buddha, were literally worth their weight in gold. The lives of people of the lowest rank of the lower class, such as women, butchers, hunters and craftsmen, were only worth a straw rope. The "Report on the Prohibition against Taking in Descendants of Blacksmiths" kept in the Archives of the Tibet Autonomous Region showed that in 1953, when the 14th Dalai Lama found out that one of his servants was a blacksmith's descendant, he immediately expelled the servant, and announced that descendents of gold, silver and iron smiths, and butchers belonged to the lowest rank of the lower class, and were forbidden to serve in the government or marry people from other ranks or classes. Tibetologist Tom Grunfeld of the State University of New York, USA, noted in his book The Making of Modern Tibet that equality among mankind, though incorporated in the doctrines of Buddhism, unfortunately failed to prevent the Tibetan rulers from setting up their own rigid hierarchical system.

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Cruel political oppression and corporal punishments. As stipulated in the Tibet's local code, when serfs "infringe upon" the interests of the three estate-holders, the estate-holders can "have their eyes gouged out, legs hamstrung, tongues cut out, or hands severed, or have them hurled from a cliff; drowned or otherwise killed; such punishments are warning to others not to follow their example." Any serf "who voices grievances at the palace, behaving disgracefully, should be arrested and whipped; anyone who disobeys a master shall be arrested; anyone who spy on a master shall be arrested; a commoner who offends an official shall be arrested." When people of different classes and ranks violated the same criminal law, the criteria for imposing penalties and the means of punishment were quite different in old Tibet. As stipulated in the Code, a servant who fought and severely injured his master could have his hands or feet chopped off; but a master who injured a servant only need to give the servant medical treatment; and a servant who injured a Living Buddha was deemed to have committed a felony and would have his eyes gouged out, a limb amputated, or even put to death.

A Russian traveler in Lhasa in the early 20th century, wrote in his book "A Buddhist Pilgrim to the Holy Place of Tibet": "The offenders are mostly poverty-stricken Tibetans punished either by having
their fingers or noses cut off, or, in most cases, by being blinded in both eyes. Such disfigured and blind people are seen begging in the streets of Lhasa every day. Exile is another type of punishment. Offenders are shackled and chained, and have to wear a large round wooden collar around their necks all their life. They are sent to remote regions for hard labor or work as serfs for feudal aristocrats and patriarchal chiefs. The most severe punishment of all is, of course, the death penalty, with the victims drowned in rivers (as in Lhasa) or thrown over rocky cliffs (as in Xigaze)." (A Buddhist Pilgrim to the Holy Place of Tibet, Gombojab Tsebekovitch Tsybikoff)

David MacDonald, a Briton, wrote in his book "The Land of the Lama": "Capital punishment is deemed the heaviest category of punishment in Tibet, to which the most inhuman practice of dismemberment is added based on the hypothesis proposed by Tibetan lamas that after dismemberment the human soul cannot be reincarnated. The most common practice is to throw the condemned prisoner into a river in a leather wrapper, which will sink in about five minutes. If he remains alive after this time, he will be tossed into the water again until he dies. Afterwards, the body will be dismembered, and hurled into the river to drift downward with the current... Even more appalling is the practice of gouging out a prisoner's eyes. A piece of heated, U-shaped iron is inserted into the eye sockets, or boiling water or oil is poured in, and the eyeballs are prized out with an iron hook." (The Land of the Lama, David MacDonald)

There were penitentiaries or private jails in monasteries and aristocrats' residences, where instruments of torture were kept and clandestine tribunals held to punish serfs and slaves. In the Ganden Monastery there were many handcuffs, fetters, cudgels, and instruments of torture used for eye gouging and hamstringing. The private monastery administrative office set up by Trijang Rinpoche, junior tutor of the present 14th Dalai Lama, killed and injured more than 500 serfs and poor monks, in Dechen Dzong (present-day Dagze County) jailed 121 people, sent 89 into exile, forced 538 into slavery, forced 1,025 commoners into exile, forced 72 divorces, and 484 women were raped there.

In the Archives of the Tibet Autonomous Region there is a letter from a department of the Tibet local government to Rabden in the early 1950s, saying that, to celebrate the Dalai Lama's birthday, all the staff of Gyume would chant the sutra. To successfully complete this ceremony, some special food would be thrown to the animals. Thus, a corpus of wet intestine, two skulls, many kinds of blood and a full human skin were urgently needed, all of which must be promptly delivered. A religious ceremony for the Dalai Lama used human blood, skulls and skin, showing how cruel and bloody the feudal serfdom system under theocracy was in old Tibet.

-- Heavy taxes and larvee. Serf owners exploited serfs by imposing corvee labor, taxes and levies, and rents for land and livestock. There were over 200 kinds of taxes levied by the former local government of Tibet alone. Serfs had to contribute more than 50 percent or even 70 to 80 percent of their labor, unpaid, to the government and manor owners. At feudal manors, serf owners divided the land into two parts: Most fertile land was kept as manor demesne while infertile and remote lots were rented to serfs on stringent conditions. To use the lots, serfs had to work on the demesne with their own farm implements and provide their own food. Only after they had finished work on the demesne could they work on the lots assigned to them. In the busy farming season or when serf owners needed laborers, serfs had to contribute man and animal power gratis. In addition, serfs had to do unpaid work for the local government of Tibet and its subordinate organizations, among which the heaviest was transport corvee, because Tibet is large but sparsely populated and all kinds of things had to be transported by man or animal power.

According to a survey conducted prior to the democratic reform of Tibet, the Daronggang Manor owned by Gyaltsap Tajtra had a total of 1,445 mu of land, and 81 able-bodied and semi-able-bodied serfs. They were assigned a total of 21,266 corvee days per year, the equivalent of an entire year's labor by 67.3 people, 83 percent of the total. The Khe-sum Manor, located by the Yarlung River in present-
day Nedong County, was one of the manors owned by aristocrat Surkhang Wang-chen Gelek. Before
the democratic reform, the manor had 59 serf households totaling 302 persons and 1,200 mu of land.
Every year, Surkhang and his agents levied 18 taxes and assigned 14 kinds of corvee, making up
26,800 working days; the local government of Tibet levied nine kinds of taxes and assigned 10 kinds
of corvee, making up more than 2,700 working days; and Riwo Choling Monastery levied seven kinds
of taxes and assigned three kinds of corvee, making up more than 900 working days; on average, every
laborer had to do over 210 days of unpaid work for the three estate-holders, and contribute over 800
kilograms of grain and 100 liang of silver.

-- Exploitation through usury. Each Dalai Lama had two money-lending agencies. Some money
coming from "tribute" to the Dalai Lama was lent at an exorbitant rate of interest. According to re-
cords in the account books of the two agencies, in 1950 they lent 3,038,581 liang of silver as principal,
and collected 303,858 liang in interest. Governments at different levels in Tibet also had many such
agencies, and lending money and collecting interest became one of the officials' duties. A survey done
in 1959 showed that the three major monasteries, namely Drepung, Sera and Ganden, in Lhasa lent
22,725,822 kilograms of grain and collected 399,364 kilograms in interest, and lent 57,105,895 liang of
silver and collected 1,402,380 liang in interest. Revenue from usury made up 25 to 30 percent of the
total revenue of the three monasteries. Most aristocrats were also engaged in usury, with the interest
accounting for 15 to 20 percent of their family revenues. Serfs had to borrow money to survive, and
more than 90 percent of serf households were in debt. French traveler Alexandre David-Neel wrote in
his book Le Vieux Tibet Face a la Chine Nouvelle (Old Tibet faces New China), "All the farmers in
Tibet are serfs saddled with lifelong debts, and it is almost impossible to find any of them who have
paid off their debts." Serfs were burdened with new debts, debts passed down from previous
generations, debts resulting from joint liability, and debts apportioned among all the serfs. The debts
that were passed down from previous generations and could never be re-paid even by succeeding
generations accounted for one third of the total debts. The grandfather of a serf named Tsering Gonpo
in Maizho-kunggar County once borrowed 50 ke of grain from the Sera Monastery. In 77 years the
three generations of the family had paid more than 3,000 ke of grain in interest, but the serf owner still
claimed that Tsering Gonpo owed him 100,000 ke of grain. There was another serf named Tenzin in
Dongkar County who borrowed one ke of qingke from his master in 1941. In 1951 he was ordered to
pay back 600 ke. Tenzin could not pay off the debt, and had to flee. His wife committed suicide, and
his seven-year-old son was taken away to repay the debt.

-- A stagnant society on the edge of collapse. Ruthless oppression and exploitation under the feudal
serfdom of theocracy stifled the vitality of Tibetan society and reduced Tibet to a state of chronic
stagnation for centuries. Even by the middle of the 20th century, Tibet was still in a state of extreme
isolation and backwardness, almost without a trace of modern industry, commerce, science and
technology, education, culture or health care. Primitive farming methods were still being used, and
herdsmen had to travel from place to place to find pasture for their livestock.

There were few strains and breeds of grains and animals, some of which had even degenerated. Farm
tools were primitive. The level of both the productive forces and social development was very low.
Deaths from hunger and cold, poverty and disease were commonplace among the serfs, and the streets
of Lhasa, Xigaze, Qamdo and Nagqu were crowded with male and female beggars of all ages.
American Tibetologist A. Tom Grunfeld pointed out that, although some people claimed before 1959,
ordinary Tibetan people could enjoy milk tea as they wished and a great deal of meat and vegetables, a
survey conducted in eastern Tibet in 1940 showed that 38 percent of Tibetan families never had tea to
drink, 51 percent could not afford butter, and 75 percent sometimes had to eat weeds boiled with ox
bones and oat or bean flour. "There is no evidence to support the picture of Tibet as a Utopian
Shangrila."
Plenty of evidence demonstrated that by the middle of the 20th century the feudal serfdom of theocracy was beset with numerous contradictions and plagued by crises. Serfs petitioned their masters for relief from their burdens, fled their lands, resisted paying rent and corvee labor, and even waged armed struggle. Ngapoi Ngawang Jigme, once a Galoin (cabinet minister) of the former local government of Ti-bet, pointed out that "all believe that if Tibet goes on like this the serfs will all die in near future, and the aristocrats will not be able to live either. The whole Tibet will be destroyed." (The highest school of the Gelug Sect in Tibet. - ed.)

II. Momentous Democratic Reform in Tibet

Carrying out democratic reform and abolishing the feudal serfdom of theocracy was an inevitable requirement for social progress. It was a major task of the people's democratic revolution led by the Communist Party of China, and was the only solution for social development in Tibet. Moreover, it reflected the yearning of the overwhelming majority of the Tibetan people. In 1959, the Central People's Government carried out a great historical reform in Tibetan history, and profoundly changed the fate of the Tibetan people by launching the democratic reform and abolishing serfdom, a grim and backward feudal system.

The People's Republic of China was founded in 1949, when the Chinese People's Liberation Army (PLA) won decisive victories over the Kuomintang troops. Beiping (now Beijing) and provinces like Hunan, Yunnan, Xinjiang and the former Xikang were all liberated peacefully from the rule of the former Kuomintang government. In light of the actual situation in Tibet, the Central People's Government also decided to use peaceful means to liberate Tibet. In January 1950, the Central People's Government formally notified the local authorities of Tibet to "send delegates to Beijing to negotiate the peaceful liberation of Tibet." In February 1951, the 14th Dalai Lama sent Ngapoi Ngawang Jigme as his chief plenipotentiary, and Kemai Soinam Wangdui, Tubdain Daindar, Tubdain Legmoin and Sampo Dainzin Toinzhub as delegates to Beijing to handle with full power the negotiations with the Central People's Government. On May 23, 1951, the "17-Article Agreement" was signed in Beijing and Tibet was thus liberated peacefully. The peaceful liberation enabled Tibet to shake off the trammels imposed by imperialist aggressors, brought to an end to the long-term isolation of Tibet and stagnancy of its social development, thus creating favorable conditions for democratic reform and social progress in Tibet.

The "17-Article Agreement" gained the approval and support of people of all ethnic groups in Tibet. In September 26-29th, 1951, the local Tibetan government held a meeting to discuss the Agreement, joined by all ecclesiastical and secular officials and representatives from the three prominent monasteries. The participants concurred that the Agreement "is of great and incomparable benefit to the grand cause of the Dalai Lama, Buddhism, politics, economy and other aspects of life in Tibet. Naturally, it should be carried out." The 14th Dalai Lama sent a telegram to Chairman Mao Zedong on October 24, 1951, stating that "On the basis of friendship, the delegates of the two sides signed on May 23, 1951 the Agreement on Measures for the Peaceful Liberation of Tibet. The local Tibetan government as well as ecclesiastical and secular people unanimously support this Agreement, and, under the leadership of Chairman Mao and the Central People's Government, will actively assist the PLA troops entering Tibet in consolidating national defense, ousting imperialist forces from Tibet and safeguarding the unification of the territory and the sovereignty of the motherland." In 1954, the 14th Dalai Lama and the 10th Panchen Lama participated in the First National People's Congress (NPC) in Beijing, with the former elected vice-chairman of the NPC Standing Committee and the latter a member of the same committee. The 14th Dalai Lama addressed the meeting, fully endorsing the achievements made since the implementation of the "17-Article Agreement" three years ago, and expressing his warm support for the principles and rules regarding the regional autonomy of ethnic
minorities. On April 22, 1956, he became chairman of the Tibet Autonomous Region Preparatory Committee. In a speech at the founding of the committee, he reaffirmed that the Agreement "had enabled the Tibetan people to fully enjoy all rights of ethnic equality and to embark on a bright road of freedom and happiness."

The reform of the social system in Tibet is clearly defined in the "17-Article Agreement." Article 11 states explicitly: "In matters related to various reforms in Tibet, there will be no compulsion on the part of the Central Authorities. The local government of Tibet shall carry out reforms voluntarily, and when people raise demands for reform, they shall be settled by means of consultation with the leading personnel of Tibet." Following the peaceful liberation, amidst the ever-growing demand of the Tibetan people for democratic reform, many enlightened people of the upper and middle classes also realized that, if the old system were not reformed, the Tibetan people would never attain prosperity. In light of Tibetan history and the region's special situation, the Central People's Government adopted a circumspect attitude toward the reform of the social system in Tibet, patiently persuading and waiting for the ruling strata to carry out the reform, and giving them adequate time for the reform. In 1956, the Central People's Government made a decision that no reform should be carried out in Tibet within six years, still awaiting a change in the attitude of the upper ruling class about the reform. During his visit to India in January 1957, Premier of the State Council Zhou Enlai handed a letter from Chair-man Mao Zedong to the Dalai Lama and Panchen Lama, and the accompanying senior local Tibetan government officials. The letter informed them of the central government's decision that reform would not be conducted within six years; whether reform should be carried out after six years would still be decided by Tibet according to its own situation and conditions then. On February 27, 1957, Mao Zedong further pointed out clearly in On the Correct Handling of Contradictions Among the People, "According to the 17-Article Agreement reached between the Central People's Government and the local government of Tibet, the reform of the social system must be carried out, but the timing can only be decided by the great majority of the people of Tibet and their leading figures when they consider it practicable, and one should not be impatient. It has now been decided not to proceed with democratic reforms in Tibet during the period of the Second Five-Year Plan (1958-1962 -- ed.). Whether they will be proceeded within the period of the Third Five-Year Plan (1963-1967 -- ed.) can only be decided in the light of the situation at that time." It is obvious that the Central People's Government showed utmost patience and made the greatest concessions.

However, some members of the Tibetan ruling class were hostile to reform, and wanted to preserve serfdom forever so as to maintain their own vested interests and privileges. They deliberately violated and undermined the "17-Article Agreement," and intensified their efforts to split the motherland, and finally they staged armed rebellions. In March and April 1952, acting Silon (chief minister -- ed.) Sicab Lukangwa and Losang Zhaxi of the local Tibetan government gave secret support to an illicit organization known as the "People's Conference" to oppose the "17-Article Agreement" and create disturbances in Lhasa, demanding that the PLA "pull out of Tibet." In May 1955, as the 14th Dalai Lama returned to Tibet via Sichuan Province, two accompanying local Tibetan government officials -- Galoin Surkang and the Junior Tutor Trigyang -- took two different routes on the pretext of participating in Buddhist activities. The former took the northern route through Garze and Derge, while the latter followed the southern route via Chatreng and Lithang. On their way, they met with local headmen and abbots of various monasteries, plotting an armed rebellion against democratic reform. The leader of the "People's Conference," Gyale Choze, and four others, on the pretext of welcoming the return of the Dalai Lama, made a special trip to Ya-nga and Kangding. They helped Trigyang organize an armed rebellion in collaboration with reactionary headmen, the abbot of Litang Monastery and some Kuomintang secret agents long-hidden at the monastery. They pledged by mixing their blood to stage the armed rebellion. In 1957, Losang Samten (third elder brother of the Dalai Lama) incited Chimed Gonpo, the headman of Jomda Dzong in Qamdo to act upon "the Dalai Lama's orders" and gather
rebels to launch a local armed uprising. In May 1957, with the support of galoins Neuxar Tubdain Tarba and Xainga Gyurme Doje, a rebel organization named "Four Rivers and Six Ranges" (namely, the four main rivers and six mountain ranges in Tibet and the Tibetan-inhabited areas of Sichuan Province in southwestern China -- ed.), and later rebel armed forces named "religious guardians" were founded. They raised the slogan of "Independence of Tibet" and "Oppose Re-form," and further intensified their rebellious activities. The armed rebels harassed Qamdo, Dengqen, Heihe and Shannan. They disrupted communication lines, attacked institutions and troops stationed there by the Central Authorities. They looted, cruelly killed officials, persecuted people, and raped women.

In view of the situation, the Central People's Government repeatedly urged the local government of Tibet to punish the rebels and maintain public order. However, the reactionary clique of the upper social strata in Tibet took the extreme forbearance of the central government as a sign of weakness. They declared, "For nine years, the Hans have not dared to touch our most glorious and sacrosanct system. When we attacked them, they could only parry our blows without being able to strike back. So long as we transfer a large number of troops to Lhasa from outside, the Hans will surely flee at the first blow. If they don't run away, we will carry His Holiness the Dalai Lama to Shannan, and gather our strength there to launch a counter-attack and seize back Lhasa. If all these efforts fail, we can go to India."

With the support of foreign anti-China forces, the reactionary clique of Tibet's upper class elaborately plotted and instigated a full-scale armed rebellion in Lhasa on March 10, 1959. On February 7, the Dalai Lama took the initiative, and said to Deng Shaodong, deputy commander of the Tibet Military Area Command, and other officers: "I was told that after its return from studies in the hinterland, the Song and Dance Ensemble under the Tibet Military Area Command has a very good repertoire. I would like to see its show. Please arrange it for me." Deng and the other officers expressed immediate readiness, and asked the Dalai Lama to fix the time and place for the performance. They also conveyed the Dalai Lama's wish to Surkang and other galoins of the local Tibetan government and Paglha Tubdain Weidain, adjutant general of the Dalai Lama. On March 8, the Dalai Lama said he would go to the performance in the Tibet Military Area Command Auditorium at 3 p.m. on March 10. The Tibet Military Area Command made careful preparations for the occasion. But on the evening of March 9, the Miboin (official in charge of public security of old downtown, equivalent of the present chief of the Public Security Bu-reau of Chengguan District of Lhasa) of Lhasa instigated the citizens of Lhasa by saying, "Tomorrow, the Dalai Lama will go to the Military Area Command for a banquet and a performance. The Hans have prepared a plane to kidnap the Dalai Lama, and take him to Beijing. Every household should send people to Norbulingka (the residence of the Dalai Lama -- ed.) to urge him not to attend the performance in the Military Area Command." The next morning, the rebels coerced more than 2,000 people to mass at Norbulingka, spreading the rumor that "the Military Area Command is planning to poison the Dalai Lama," and shouting slogans such as "Independence of Tibet" and "Away with the Hans." The rebels injured Sampo Cewang Rinzin, a former galoin of the local Tibetan government and at that time a deputy commander of the Tibet Military Area Command. They stoned to death Kainqoin Pagbalha Soinam Gyamco, a progressive patriot and member of the Preparatory Committee for the Tibet Autonomous Region. His body was tied to the tail of a horse and dragged through the downtown area. Subsequently, the rebel leaders convened a so-called "people's congress" and a "people's conference of the independent state of Tibet," intensifying their efforts to organize and expand armed rebellion. They brazenly tore up the "17-Article Agreement", declared "the independence of Tibet," and launched a full-scale armed rebellion against the motherland.

Although Norbulingka was controlled by the rebels, and it was hard to make contact with the Dalai Lama, Tan Guansan, the acting representative of the central government, managed to send three letters
to the Dalai Lama on March 10, 11 and 15, respectively, through patriots. In the letters, Tan expressed his understanding of the Dalai Lama's situation as well as his concern for the latter's safety. He pointed out that the rebels were making reckless military provocations, and demanded that the local Tibet government immediately take measures to stop them. The Dalai Lama wrote three letters in reply to Tan on March 11, 12 and 16, respectively. In his letters, the Dalai Lama wrote, "Reactionary, evil elements are carrying out activities endangering me on the pretext of ensuring my safety. I am taking steps to calm things down." "The unlawful activities of the reactionary clique cause me endless worry and sorrow.... As to the incidents of yesterday and the day before, which were brought about on the pretext of ensuring my safety and have seriously estranged relations between the Central People's Government and the local government, I am making every possible effort to deal with them." In his letter of March 16, he said that he had "educated" and "severely criticized" officials of the local Tibet government. He also said he might go to the Military Area Command a few days later. However, on the evening of March 17, the Dalai Lama, together with galoins Surkang, Neuxar, Xaisur and other rebel leaders, fled from Lhasa to Shannan, the "base" of the armed rebel forces. When the armed rebellion failed, they fled to India.

After the Dalai Lama left Lhasa, about 7,000 rebels gathered to wage a full-scale attack on the Party, government and military institutions early in the morning on March 20, 1959. The PLA, driven beyond forbearance, launched, under orders, a counterattack at 10 a.m. the same day. With the support of all ethnic groups in Tibet, the 1,000-odd PLA troops completely put down the armed rebellion in Lhasa within two days. Before long, the PLA rapidly quelled the armed rebellion in other places in Tibet.

Just as Chairman Mao Zedong pointed out, "The Dalai Lama's plotting to launch a rebellion started just after his return from Beijing in 1955. He prepared this rebellion for two years -- from early 1957, when he returned from India, to 1958." After he fled from China in 1959, the 14th Dalai Lama and his clique went further and further down the road to splitting the motherland. They established the so-called "Tibetan government-in-exile," publicly declared "Tibetan in-dependence," reorganized rebel forces to carry out military harassment along the Chinese border for many years, engaged in long-term international anti-China activities, and instigated many riots in Tibet and other Tibetan-inhabited areas.

The armed rebellion in Tibet was supported from the very beginning by foreign anti-China forces. According to a Western media report on January 26, 1971, a certain country's intelligence agency trained members of the "Four Rivers and Six Ranges" in February 1957 on a certain Pacific island. From 1956 to 1957, the above-mentioned intelligence agency handpicked some 170 rebels, and sent them to the "Kamba guerrilla training base" in that country. Several hundred trained "Kamba guerrillas" were air-dropped into Tibet, carrying sub-machine guns, and small gold boxes containing the portrait of Dalai Lama. This intelligence agency trained 2,000 Tibetan guerrillas in total. From July 1958 to February 1959, it launched two weapon air-drops to rebellious armed forces, including 403 rifles, 20 sub-machine guns, 60 boxes of hand-grenades, and several bags of Indian rupees. In November 1958, it transported 226 loads of weapons to the Shannan rebel army via the Indian-occupied area to the south of the "McMahon Line." In January the following year, it transported 40 loads of goods to Shannan rebel army via Nepal and Shekar. It launched more than 30 air-drops to the Kham rebel army, and dropped over 250 tons of goods, including approximately 10,000 M1 Garand Rifles, assault rifles, 57 mm recoilless guns, and antiaircraft machine guns. According to another Western media report on August 16, 1999, a certain Western country air-dropped more than 400 tons of goods to Tibetan guerrillas from 1957 to 1960. This country "spent 1.7 million U.S. dollars on such operations in Tibet annually."

While the Dalai Lama was fleeing, the above-mentioned intelligence agency re-equipped a plane and
air-dropped goods for him and his companions on the way, keeping contact with the rebel army and nearby intelligence stations via radio, and recording the whole course of the flight. Based on a Hong Kong media report on February 11, 1974, according to participants in the operation, the Dalai Lama's flight from Lhasa was planned by the Western intelligence agency. The country's spy planes sneaked hundreds of miles into Tibet, providing protection for the Dalai Lama clique from air, air-dropping food, maps, radios and money, as well as strafing Chinese installations and taking photos of the operation.

Since the reactionary Tibetan ruling class had taken the road of betraying their country, on March 28, 1959, Premier Zhou Enlai promulgated a State Council Decree dissolving the local Tibetan government. The Preparatory Committee of the Tibet Autonomous Region took over local government power, and the 10th Panchen Lama acted as its chairman. At the same time, the Central People's Government implemented a policy of "quelling the rebellion while conducting the reform," and led the Tibetan people to start the surging tide of democratic reform, wrecked the feudal serfdom of theocracy, and helped a million serfs and slaves realize their lifelong wish of being their own masters.

-- Abolishing the oppression and exploitation of feudal serfdom system, liberating a million serfs and slaves. After the quelling of the armed rebellion in 1959, the Central People's Government immediately dissolved the Kasha regime and its armed forces, courts and prisons, which had oppressed the Tibetan people for hundreds of years. At the same time, it repealed the old Tibetan Code and barbarous punishments. This was followed by a planned and step-by-step campaign in the rural areas against rebellion, corvee labor and slavery, and for reduction of rent for land and of interest on loans; a campaign launched in the pastoral areas against rebellion, corvee labor and slavery, and helping hired herdsmen and herd owners; a campaign launched in the monasteries against rebellion, feudal privileges and exploitation, and to square accounts with political persecution, hierarchical oppression and economic exploitation; a campaign launched in the urban areas against rebellion, the feudal system, exploitation and privileges, and on reduction of rent for land and of interest on loans. In addition, the democratic reform was conducted in the border areas by stages, abolishing the bondage of the serfs and slaves to their feudal masters, as well as the feudal system, exploitation and privileges, and corvee labor and high-interest loans.

The one million serfs and slaves in Tibet were emancipated. They became the masters of their country, as well as Tibet. Their lives and personal freedom are now protected and safeguarded by the Chinese Constitution and law. They no longer suffer from the serf-owners' political oppression, forced labor and inhuman treatment, as well as heavy corvee taxes and usurious exploitation. Nyima Tsering, who was elected the first chairman of the Farmers' Association during the democratic reform, used to be a serf of Surkhang Wangchen Gelek, a galoin of the Tibet local government. Wangchen Gelek once said, "Nyima Tsering is my property. I will do whatever I like to him. If I like, I can roll him into a ball and put him in my pocket, or stretch him into a belt and tie it around my waist." After the democratic reform, Nyima Tsering said, "Now my personal freedom is protected by the law. I am no longer another's private property. How wonderful this is!" Tsering Lhamo had been a serf for more than 30 years. After the democratic reform, she organized the first Nangsan Mutual Aid Team at Kyerpa Township, in Nedong County, Shannan Prefecture. Later, she held the post of vice chairman of the Standing Committee of People's Congress of the Tibet Autonomous Region.

-- Implementing land reform, abolishing the feudal land ownership, making serfs and slaves masters of the land. On September 21, 1959, the Preparatory Committee of the Tibet Autonomous Region passed the "Decision on Abolishing Feudal Land Ownership System and Implementing Farmers' Land Ownership," stipulating that farm-land and other means of production originally occupied by those serf-owners involved in the armed rebellion were to be confiscated and distributed to landless serfs and slaves, and the land and other means of production of serf-owners who had not participated in the
rebellion were to be redeemed by the state and then distributed to the serfs and slaves. According to statistics, in the democratic reform the central government spent 45 million yuan on the redemption of 900,000 mu of land and over 820,000 heads of livestock from more than 1,300 house-holds of serf-owners and agents who had not participated in the rebel-lion. Over 2.8 million mu of land was confiscated or redeemed from serf-owners, and distributed to 800,000 former serfs or slaves of 200,000 households. Each of the former serfs and slaves got about 3.5 mu of land. The laboring Tibetan people who had been enslaved generation after generation stood on their own land, celebrating all night. They cried, "The sun of the Dalai Lama shone on the nobility, while the sun of Chairman Mao is shining on our poor people. Now the Dalai Lama's sun is set, and our sun is rising."

Tibet's one million serfs and slaves became masters of the land and other means of production for the first time. Their unprecedented enthusiasm for production and life gave rise to a rapid change in Tibet's social situation and their living conditions. When the land reform was basically completed in 1960, the total grain output for Tibet was 12.6 percent higher than that in 1959 and 17.5 percent higher than in 1958, the year before the land reform. Moreover, the total number of livestock was 10 percent more than in 1959. During the democratic reform, Tibet's first supply and marketing cooperative, first rural credit cooperative, first private primary school, first night school, first literacy class, first film projection team and first modern medical organization were established in its history. By the end of 1959, 28 neighborhood committees had been set up in Lhasa, offering jobs to over 8,700 vagrants and beggars, providing relief to more than 8,500 poor people, and taking in over 120 childless, aged, sick and disabled people. In 1960, Ngachen Hydroelectric Station was completed and put into use, bringing electric lighting for the first time to the citizens of Lhasa. In 1959 and 1960, dozens of small-scale modern factories were set up in Tibet, employing over 20,000 Tibetan workers. Tibet's roads built in those two years totaled 12,500 km, and reached over 90 percent of the counties in the region.

-- Abolishing theocracy, separating religion from state, and protecting religious freedom. During the democratic reform, means of production, including land and livestock, originally owned by monasteries involved in the armed rebellion were all confiscated, while a policy of redemption was introduced with regard to the means of production of monasteries which had not participated in the rebellion. During the democratic reform, on the one hand, citizens' freedom of religious belief, and patriotic and law-abiding monasteries were protected by the law. Citizens have the freedom to become a monk or nun and monks and nuns can choose to resume secular life, regular religious activities as well as historical monasteries and cultural relics were all protected. On the other hand, a policy of "political unity, freedom of religious belief and separation of politics and religion" was adopted, abolishing monasteries' feudal privileges in economy and politics, re-peeling monasteries' feudal occupation and exploitation, and personal slavery, as well as feudal management and hierarchy inside the monasteries, and ensuring that all religious beliefs were politically equal. Public funds and properties inside the monasteries were managed democratically, serving as production funds and for supporting monks and nuns as well as regular religious activities; the monasteries' management committees uniformly administered the land distributed to monks and nuns in accordance with their labor ability, and managed production. When the income of a monastery was unable to cover its regular expenses, the government would grant a subsidy. Through the democratic reform, all the monasteries in Tibet elected their own management committees, and conducted democratic management. The democratic reform enabled the true features of religion to emerge, effectively safeguarded the Tibetan people's freedom of religious belief, and laid a foundation for the introduction of the political system of people's democracy in Tibet.

-- Establishing the people's democratic state power, ensuring that the people enjoy rights as their own masters. Overthrowing the system of feudal serfdom, the emancipated people of various ethnic groups in Tibet established people's democratic organs of state power. By the end of 1960, Tibet had established 1,009 organs of state power at township level, and 283 at district level, 78 at county level
(including county-level districts) and eight at prefecture (city) level. The number of cadres of Tibetan and other ethnic groups totaled over 10,000 in Tibet. Among them, township-level ones were all Tibetans, more than 90 percent of leaders at the district-level were Tibetans, and over 300 Tibetan cadres held leading posts at or above the county level. More than 4,400 liberated serfs and slaves were trained as cadres at the grass-roots level. In 1961, a general election was held in Tibet. For the first time, the former serfs and slaves were able to enjoy rights as their own masters. Tens of thousands of liberated serfs and slaves, dressed in splendid attire, holding hada (white symbolic scarves) in both hands, actively participated in the election of power organs and governments at all levels in the region, exercising their democratic rights with great political enthusiasm and a deep sense of responsibility. In August 1965, the election at the level of township and county was completed in Tibet. One thousand three hundred and fifty-nine townships and towns conducted elections at the basic level, and 567 townships and towns held their people's congresses. The people's democratic organs of state power at county level were established in 92 percent of the region, with the majority of participants being liberated serfs and slaves. In addition, 54 counties held their first people's congresses to elect the county magistrates and deputy magistrates, and established people's committees. In September 1965, the First People's Congress of Tibet was convened, at which the founding of the Tibet Autonomous Region was officially proclaimed. Over 80 percent of the 301 deputies were Tibetans or other ethnic minorities. More than 11 percent were patriots from the upper strata and religious figures in Tibet. Most deputies of the Tibetan ethnic group to the congress were liberated serfs and slaves. The founding of the people's democratic organs of state power politically guaranteed the Tibetan people's rights as their own masters.

The surging tide of democratic reform took only a few years to overthrow the feudal serfdom system which had been practiced in Tibet for centuries. The reform liberated Tibet's one million serfs and slaves politically, economically and socially, brought an entirely new look to Tibet's society, and ushered in a new era for Tibet's development. It was an epoch-making reform in Tibet's history of social advancement and development of human rights, marking the beginning of rapid social development in Tibet.

### III. Tremendous Historic Changes over the Past Half-century

Over the past five decades since the democratic reform, and with the care of the Central People's Government and the support of the people of the entire country, the people of all ethnic groups in Tibet, as masters of their own destiny, have displayed great enthusiasm in building a new happy life, promoting development of local economy and society in a frog-leaping manner and scoring historic achievements in various undertakings, which captured world attention.

-- Tibet has experienced historic changes in its social system, which provides an institutional guarantee of the people's right to be master of their own.

In 1965, the Tibet Autonomous Region was founded, marking the establishment of the regional autonomy system for ethnic minorities in Tibet and a historic leap from feudal serfdom under theocracy to socialism featured with people's democracy. From then on, Tibet entered a new era, with the people becoming master of their own destiny. The former serfs and slaves have since enjoyed political right to equally participate in the administration of state affairs and to deal with local and ethnic affairs on their own. The people of Tibet, as other ethnic groups in China, enjoy all rights guaranteed by the Chinese Constitution and other laws. They can directly elect, in accordance with the law, deputies to the people's congresses at county, district, township and town levels, who in turn elect deputies to the people's congresses at the national, autonomous regional and municipal levels. Through the people's congresses at various levels, the people of Tibet exercise their rights, in accordance with the law, to participate in the administration of state and local affairs.
In the elections for the people's congresses at the autonomous regional, prefectural (municipal), county and township (town) levels in 2007, 96.4 percent of residents with voting right participated in the electoral process. In some places the voting rate was 100 percent. Of more than 34,000 deputies, directly or indirectly elected, to the people's congresses at the aforementioned four levels, more than 94 percent were members of the Tibetans or other ethnic minorities. Of the deputies to the current National People's Congress, 20 are from Tibet, including 12 Tibetans, one Monba and one Lhoba.

Tibetans' right to independently administrate local and ethnic affairs is guaranteed. Since 1965, the posts of chairman of the Standing Committee of the People's Congress and chairman of the People's Government of the Tibet Autonomous Region have all been held by Tibetans, and the chief leaders of the standing committees of people's congresses and the people's governments at various levels in the autonomous region are also Tibetans. So are the chief heads of local courts and procuratorates at all levels. Tibetans and other ethnic-minority people compose 77.97 percent of the staff of current state organs at the autonomous regional, prefectural (municipal) and county levels.

The Tibet Autonomous Region not only has the right to formulate local regulations as a provincial-level state organ, it can also decide on local affairs, and formulate autonomy statutes and separate regulations in line with local political, economic and cultural conditions. When resolutions, decisions, orders and instructions made by higher-level state organs do not suit to situations in Tibet, the autonomous organs can request adjustment or suspension of the relevant documents.

Statistics show that since 1965 the Standing Committee of the People's Congress of the Tibet Autonomous Region has enacted 250 local regulations, resolutions and decisions with regulatory nature, which cover political power buildup, economic development, culture and education, spoken and written languages, justice, relics protection, protection of wild animals and plants, and protection of natural resources. They protect the special rights and interests of the Tibetan people in the areas of politics, economy and social life, and promote the development of various local undertakings.

-- Immense social changes have taken place as the economy leaps forward with each passing day.

To boost local economic and social growth, the central government has adopted a series of preferential policies toward Tibet over the past half century, and given it strong support in terms of finance, materials and manpower.

From 1951 to 2008, state investment in infrastructure in Tibet exceeded 100 billion yuan. In the period from 1959 to 2008, a total of 201.9 billion yuan from the central budget went to Tibet, growing nearly 12 percent annually on average. Among the investment, 154.1 billion yuan was allocated in the 2001-2008 period. Since 1994, the central authorities has assigned more than 60 state departments, 18 provincial and municipal governments, and 17 state-owned enterprises to assist Tibet's economic development through projects. By the end of 2008, a total of 11.128 billion yuan of assistance funds had been put in place, with 6,056 assistance projects launched, and 3,747 cadres from across the country dispatched to work in Tibet.

Thanks to the care of the central authorities and the support of the whole nation, Tibet has witnessed remarkable progress in economic and social development. From 1959 to 2008, the local GDP soared from 174 million yuan to 39.591 billion yuan, a 65-fold increase or an average annual growth of 8.9 percent at comparable prices. Since 1994 the local GDP has grown at an annual rate of 12.8 percent on average, higher than the national average for the same period. Also, from 1959 to 2008 the per-capita GDP soared from 142 yuan to 13,861 yuan, an increase of 13,719 yuan.

In the old days, there was not a single highway in Tibet. Today, a convenient transportation network has taken shape, with highway transportation as the backbone and air, rail and pipeline transportation as supplement, stretching from Lhasa to all directions. In 2008, nearly all counties in Tibet became
accessible by highways. The total length reached 51,300 km, 44,000 km more than that in 1959. The volume of passenger transport in 2008 was almost 107 times that in 1959, with an 11-fold increase of cargo transport volume in the same period.

An extensive energy system has been formed, with hydropower as the mainstay, backed up by geothermal, wind and solar energy sources. From 1959 to 2008, electricity production in Tibet increased by 16.8 percent annually on average. Nearly 2.1 million residents, or 73 percent of Tibet's population, now have access to electrical power. Because of the promotion of clean energy in rural areas, methane has been adopted at 43,000 households. Thanks to the rapid expansion of telecommunications, optical cables have reached all counties, with telephone cables to all townships. The number of subscribers to fixed-line telephones and cell phones reached 1.562 million, which means 55 phones are available for every 100 people.

In the old days, Tibet's agriculture and animal husbandry were completely at the mercy of the weather or elements. Nowadays, modern facilities have been widely introduced, and the capacity to prevent and alleviate damage from natural disasters has been notably improved, with 36 percent of the contribution coming from science and technology. Grain output rose from 182,900 tonnes in 1959 to 950,000 tonnes in 2008. Meanwhile the grain output per mu rose from 91 kg to nearly 370 kg, with the amount of livestock rising from 9.56 million at the end of 1958 to 24 million at the end of 2008.

There was no modern industry in old Tibet. Now, a modern industrial system with Tibetan characteristics has formed, with mining, building materials, folk handicrafts and Tibetan medicine as pillar industries, and power, farming and animal product processing and foodstuffs as supplement. The industrial added value skyrocketed from 15 million yuan in 1959 to 2.968 billion yuan in 2008. Modern commerce, tourism, catering, entertainment and other industries that had never been heard of in old Tibet are now booming as primary industries in the region.

-- People's living standards have been greatly enhanced, with their subsistence and development conditions much improved.

Before the democratic reform in 1959, Tibetan peasants and herdsmen had barely any means of production. Debt-ridden almost for the whole life, they hardly expected any net income. But since 1978, the per capita net income of Tibetan peasants and herdsmen kept increasing at an average rate of 10.1 percent per year, reaching 3,176 yuan in 2008. The annual growth rate in the 2003-2008 period was 13.1 percent. The per capita disposable income of urban dwellers in Tibet stood at 12,482 yuan in 2008, which was 21 times that of the 565 yuan in 1978.

Before the democratic reform, more than 90 percent of Tibet's residents had no private housing, the peasants and herdsmen had very poor living conditions, and the per-capita housing of urban dwellers was less than three sq m. At that time, Lhasa had a population of 20,000 only, and nearly 1,000 were poverty-stricken or beggar households huddling in tattered shelters on the outskirts. Today, with the construction of a new countryside and the comfortable housing project underway, 200,000 households, comprising nearly one million peasants and herdsmen, have moved into modern houses. By 2008, the per-capita housing area was 22.83 sq m in rural areas and 33.00 sq m in urban areas.

A social security system has been basically put in place to cover both cities and countryside in Tibet. In 2008, the allowances for each family of the infirm elderly without children, which is guaranteed food, clothing, medical care, housing and burial expenses, was raised to 1,600 yuan. In 2006, Tibet led other farming and pastoral areas in China with a system of basic subsistence allowances which covered all peasants and herdsmen with an income below 800 yuan.

Before the peaceful liberation, there was no medical institution in the modern sense in Tibet, except for three small, shabby government-run organizations of Tibetan medicine and a small number of
private clinics, with fewer than 100 medical workers altogether. If the nearly 300 Tibetan medical practitioners in the farming and pastoral areas were included, the total number of medical workers would still have fallen below 400 - less than four medical workers for every 10,000 residents. Smallpox, cholera, venereal diseases, typhoid fever, scarlet fever, tetanus and other epidemics were prevalent.

After the peaceful liberation, and especially after the democratic reform in Tibet, the Chinese government adopted various measures to prevent diseases, and soon got some diseases that seriously harmed people's health under control. Since the 1960s, smallpox has been eliminated in Tibet, and the incidence of infectious and endemic diseases has declined by a big margin. Today, Tibet leads other places in introducing the medical insurance system for urban residents, and is building a medical system in the farming and pastoral areas based on free medical service, which now grants each farmer and herdsman an annual 140 yuan of medical allowance. By 2008, there were 1,339 medical organizations in Tibet, 1,277 more than in 1959; 7,127 hospital beds, 6,647 more than in 1959; and 9,098 medical workers, 8,307 more than in 1959. The number of hospital beds and medical workers for every 1,000 residents were 2.50 and 3.05, respectively, or 2.11 and 2.41 more than in 1959.

Thanks to the improvement of medical services, the average life expectancy in Tibet has increased from 35.5 years in 1959 to 67 years at present. According to the fifth national census, carried out in 2000, Tibet had 13,581 senior residents aged 80-99, and 62 people aged over 100 years. Tibet is one of a few Chinese provinces and autonomous regions having a high ratio of centenarians among total population. The total population in Tibet increased from 1.228 million in 1959 to 2.8708 million in 2008, of which more than 95 percent were Tibetans and members of other ethnic minorities. The past 50 years have seen the fastest population expansion in Tibet for centuries.

-- Traditional ethnic culture is protected and developed, and freedom of religious belief is respected.

The Chinese government has made huge efforts to promote the learning, use and development of the Tibetan language. In Tibet, importance is given to both the Tibetan and Han Chinese languages, with priority given to Tibetan. At present, both languages are used in teaching in all schools of the farming and pastoral areas, as well as some urban areas, with the major courses being taught in Tibetan. Teaching is also conducted in the two languages in high schools. Moreover, the Tibetan language courses have been available at Tibetan high schools in the hinterland areas of China. In the matriculation examinations for institutions of higher learning and secondary vocational schools, Tibetan is a subject of examination, and the score is included in the total score. Since the establishment of the Tibet Autonomous Region, both Tibetan and Han Chinese have been used for resolutions and regulations adopted by the people's congresses at all levels, and official documents and public announcements of people's governments at all levels as well as their subordinate departments. During judicial proceedings, Tibetan is used in hearing any case involving Tibetan people, and the written Tibetan language is used for legal papers. Both Tibetan and Han Chinese are used for official seals, credentials and signs of all entities; logos of government departments, factories and mines, schools, bus and train stations, airports, shops, hotels, restaurants, theaters, scenic spots, sports venues and libraries; and street and traffic signs. Since its establishment in 1959, Tibetan People's Radio (TPR), with focus on Tibetan-language broadcasting, has developed 42 programs in Tibetan and the Khampa dialect, including 21 hours and 15 minutes of news broadcasting in Tibetan and 17 hours and 50 minutes of broadcasting in the Khampa dialect every day. The Tibet Television Station formally opened a Tibetan satellite TV channel, which has been broadcasting 24 hours a day since October 1, 2007. At present, there are 14 Tibetan-language periodicals and 10 Tibetan-language newspapers in Tibet. Computer information processing of the Tibetan script was realized in 1984, and a Tibetan-script operating system compatible with Chinese and English versions was developed. In 1997, an international-standard Tibetan character code was approved, making the Tibetan script the first ethnic-minority script
The Tibetan cultural heritage is being effectively protected, inherited and developed. The completion of the Tibetan volumes in a 10-tome folk culture series, including Annals of Chinese Operas, A Collection of Chinese Folk Ballads, A Collection of Folk Dances of China's Ethnic Groups, A Collection of Proverbs, A Collection of Folk Performing Art Genres, A Collection of Folk Songs of China's Ethnic Groups, A Collection of Traditional Operas and Music, and A Collection of Folk Tales, has enabled a large number of major items of the Tibetan cultural heritage to be saved and protected in an effective way. The state has also earmarked special funds for the collection, collation and publishing of the text of the lengthy oral epic Life of King Gesar. This is listed as one of the major scientific research projects. So far, over 300 volumes of the masterpiece have been collected, with the publication of 62 volumes in the Tibetan language and over 20 volumes translated into the Han Chinese, and many volumes have been translated into English, Japanese and French. The Potala Palace, Jokhang Temple, and the Drepung, Sera, Ganden, Tashilhunpo, Sakya and many other monasteries have been placed under the protection of the state since the democratic reform in Tibet. Moreover, since the early 1980s more than 700 million yuan has been channeled from central and local coffers for repairing a number of venues of cultural relics under state protection and major monasteries of various sects of Tibetan Buddhism, and helping them open to the public. From 1989 to 1994 the central government allocated 55 million yuan and a great amount of gold, silver and other precious materials for the renovation of the Potala Palace. In 2001, a special fund of 330 million yuan was apportioned to maintain and repair the Potala Palace, the Norbulingka and Sakya monasteries. In 2007, the central government allocated another 570 million yuan for the overall repair and protection of 22 key cultural relics sites in Tibet during the 11th Five-Year Plan period (2006-2010). Such an investment was unprecedented in China's history of cultural relics protection.

The freedom of religious belief and normal religious activities of the Tibetan people are protected. Today, there are more than 1,700 religious venues in Tibet, with more than 46,000 resident monks and nuns, which can fully meet the needs of religious believers in Tibet. Various traditional Buddhist activities are carried out in the normal way - from sutra studies and debates to abhisheka (consecration) and other Buddhist practices, as well as the system of academic degrees and ordination through examinations. According to incomplete statistics, there are now more than 60 classes for sutra studies in Tibet, with 6,000 novice monks. As a unique way of passing on Tibetan Buddhism, the Living Buddha reincarnation system receives respect from the state. In Tibet, religious activities are rich in content and diverse in form, with religious festivals celebrated frequently. Since the early 1980s, more than 40 religious festivals have been successively resumed. Monks and laymen organize and take part in the Sakadawa Festival, Shoton (Yogurt) Festival and other religious and traditional activities every year.

Modern education and the media are developed in an all-round way; the educational level of the people is constantly improving.

In old Tibet there was not a single school in the modern sense. The enrollment rate for school-age children was less than two percent, while the illiteracy rate was as high as 95 percent. During the past 50 years, the central government has invested a huge amount of funds in education in Tibet, making Tibet the first place in China to enjoy free compulsory education in both urban and rural areas. Since 1985, the state has set up boarding primary and high schools in farming and pastoral areas, and covered all tuition as well as food and lodging expenses for students at the stage of compulsory education from Tibet's farming and pastoral families. In 2008, all 73 counties (cities and districts) in Tibet realized six-year compulsory education and basically wiped out illiteracy. In 70 counties, nine-year compulsory education is being practiced, and the illiteracy rate has fallen to 2.4 percent overall. The enrollment rate for primary school-age children has reached 98.5 percent, that for junior high school 92.2 percent, and
that for senior high school 51.2 percent. There are 884 primary schools, 117 high schools and 1,237 teaching venues now in Tibet. The average educational level of people in Tibet reached 6.3 years in 2008. There are six institutions of higher learning, with about 30,000 students and an enrollment rate of 19.7 percent, and 10 secondary vocational schools, with the number of students totaling 21,000. Over the past 20 years, in 20 hinterland provinces and municipalities of China, 28 junior and senior high schools have classes specially for Tibetan students, 53 key senior high schools and over 90 institutions of higher learning have accumulatively enrolled 36,727 junior high school students, 30,370 senior high school students (including secondary vocational school students), and 12,000 university and college students. With these efforts, more than 18,000 professionals have been trained for the development of Tibet. At present, the number of Tibetan students in these schools has reached 18,640. Modern science and technology in Tibet has developed rapidly, and the number of related personnel keeps increasing. There were 46,508 professionals of various kinds in 2007; among them 31,487 are of ethnic minorities, with Tibetans as the majority. Large numbers of highly educated Tibetans, including some with PhD and MA, as well as scientists and engineers, have become a major force in promoting Tibet's development.

The modern press and publishing industry in Tibet started from scratch, and has developed rapidly. Now, Tibet has two publishing houses for books, and two for audio-visual products, 35 printing houses of various types, 23 openly distributed newspapers and 34 periodicals. Each of Tibet's seven prefectures and (prefecture-level) cities has newspapers in Tibetan and Han Chinese. Tibet has nine radio and TV stations, 39 medium-wave transmitting and relay stations, 76 FM radio transmitting and relay stations above the county level, 80 TV transmitting stations above the county (including port city) level, 76 cable TV transmitting stations and 9,111 radio and TV stations at the township and village levels. From 1978 to 2008, the radio and TV coverage rates in Tibet have risen from 18 percent and two percent to 88.8 percent and 89.9 percent, respectively, achieving the target of extending radio and TV coverage to each town and administrative village of the region. In addition, there are 564 movie-projection agencies, 82 movie-projection management agencies, 478 projection teams and 7,697 projection locations in Tibet's farming and pastoral areas, covering 98 percent of the region's administrative villages, with each farmer or herder watching 1.6 movies per month. Besides, there are 257 public art and cultural centers at all levels, 10 professional art performance troupes, 18 folk art performance troupes, and 660 amateur performance teams. The development of the media and cultural services provide convenience for the people in Tibet to acquire the latest news, get access to knowledge and information, and entertain themselves in their spare time, enriching their cultural life.

**Conclusion**

Over the past 50 years, tremendous changes have taken place in Tibet, as it has experienced a process from darkness to brightness, from poverty to prosperity, from autocratic rule to democracy, and from self-seclusion to opening up. At present, Tibet is in its best period of historical development with rapid economic and social progress, cultural prosperity, improved living conditions, national unity, good government and harmonious people.

History has convincingly proved that instituting the democratic reform in this 1.2-million-sq-km land and abolishing the centuries-old feudal serfdom of theocracy to emancipate one million serfs and slaves is of great significance not only in the history of China's human rights development, but also in the world's anti-slavery history. This is a great page in the progress of human civilization that will shine throughout the ages. Without the democratic reform, there would have been no emancipation of the laborers constituting 95 percent of the Tibetan population, no frog-leaping social progress and human rights development in Tibet, and no happy life for all ethnic groups in Tibet today.

History has convincingly proved that the 14th Dalai Lama and his political clique are the chief
representatives of old Tibet's theocratic feudal serfdom and a small number of serf-owners who monopolized with vested interests old Tibet's political, economic and cultural resources. There are fundamental conflicts of interests between them and the Tibetan laboring people who constitute the overwhelming majority of the Tibetan population, and there are irreconcilable and profound contradictions between them and the need for social progress in Tibet as well as the rules for the development of human society. This means that the Dalai clique is destined to remain anti-democratic reform, that they will not quit the stage of history and give up their privileges by themselves, and that they will not concede defeat. Fifty years ago, the Dalai clique staged an armed rebellion, aiming to separate Tibet from the motherland so as to maintain the theocratic feudal serfdom and to preserve their privileges forever. Since fleeing overseas 50 years ago, they have never stopped trying to restore the system of theocratic feudal serfdom. With the support of anti-China forces, they set up and maintained a so-called "Tibetan government-in-exile" with the 14th Dalai Lama as the theocratic leader, and have never ceased their separatist activities to sabotage the steady development of Tibet. They have turned black into white in an attempt to mislead the international community, pretending to be speaking on behalf of the "Tibetan people." They whitewash the old Tibetan society of feudal serfdom under theocracy as some sort of Shangri-la, denigrating the implementation of the democratic reform to promote social progress as "destruction of culture and religion" and "infringement of human rights." This shows how they hate to see the abolition of the theocratic feudal serfdom, to see the loss of the serf-owners' privileges, how they hate to see the Tibetans and people of other ethnic groups becoming their own masters under the socialist democratic system, and leading a happy and peaceful life; and how they long to restore the feudal serfdom of theocracy that has been swept into the dustbin of history so as to regain the "paradise" under the rule of the feudal serf-owners. This also shows that our essential difference from and fight with the Dalai clique are not merely over the question of autonomy. This is a struggle between progress and retrogression, and between unity and separation.

History has convincingly proved that abolition of serfdom, the liberation of serfs and slaves, and keeping national unity safe against separation are a progressive and just cause for the protection of human rights and maintenance of national sovereignty. Looking back upon history, the American government once started a four-year-long civil war against the secessionist South to abolish slavery, at a cost of over 15 billion U.S. dollars, more than 1.1 million casualties and other incalculable losses. President Abraham Lincoln was crowned with eternal glory for leading the war, and is still extolled by the American people today, as well as by other people all around the globe. When the Dalai clique staged the large-scale armed rebellion to retain the theocratic feudal serfdom and to split the country, the Chinese government took actions to quell the rebellion for the sake of defending national unity and emancipating the serfs and slaves of Tibet. The historical significance of this righteous action is entirely comparable to the emancipation of the slaves in the American civil war. Yet the anti-China forces in the West simply ignore the historical facts and confuse right and wrong by exalting the 14th Dalai Lama -- chief representative of the theocratic feudal serfdom and the Tibetan serf-owners -- as a "guardian of human rights," "peace envoy," and "spiritual leader," and accusing the Chinese government that abolished feudal serfdom and emancipated the serfs and slaves of "trespassing on human rights." This is totally absurd, and provokes deep thought. In fact, the so-called "Tibet issue" was the outcome of the imperialist attempts to partition China in modern times, as a part of the big powers' conspiracy to turn China into a colony or semi-colony. The armed rebellion staged by the Dalai clique to split the country in 1959 was supported and instigated by imperialist forces. Ever since the Dalai clique went into exile, Western anti-China forces have never ceased their instigation and training of the Dalai clique to support their split and sabotage activities. It is thus clear that the so-called "Tibet issue" is by no means an ethnic, religious and human rights issue; rather, it is the Western anti-China forces' attempt to restrain, split, and demonize China.

History has also convincingly proved that there is no way to restore the old order, and there is no
prospect for the success of any separatist attempt. Time goes by, and social progress is inevitable; this is a historical trend that no one can resist. The will of the people of all ethnic groups in China, including the Tibetans, shall never be shaken from safeguarding national unity and sovereignty, from following the socialist road with Chinese characteristics under the leadership of the Communist Party of China, from holding on to the system of regional autonomy, from promoting the realization of modernization in Tibet, and from building a new, united and democratic Tibet with a prosperous, civilized and harmonious society. There is no way for the Dalai clique to uphold "Tibetan independence," neither will it succeed in its attempt to seek semi-independence or covert independence under the banner of "a high degree of autonomy." Whatever pretexts the Dalai clique uses to try to turn back the wheel of history and to restore the rule of feudal serfdom, the Tibetan people and people of other ethnic groups who personally experienced the misery under the serfdom system and the happy life in Tibet today will never allow it. The Dalai clique's attempts are doomed to failure. The only way out for the 14th Dalai Lama is to give up advocating "Tibetan independence" and any attempt to restore the old system, to admit that Tibet is an inalienable part of Chinese territory, to disband the so-called "Tibetan government-in-exile" and stop all his activities aimed at splitting the country. The 14th Dalai Lama must thoroughly reflect upon and correct his political position and behavior. The central government has opened and will always keep its door open for the 14th Dalai Lama to return to a patriotic stand.