

The Use, Inheritance and Development of the Tibetan Language in Tibet

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The Tibetan language was created in 7th century AD. As an important vehicle of the Tibetan culture and an important part of the fine tradition of Tibet, it has played an irrevocable role in promoting Tibet's cultural development and social progress. But under the feudal serfdom system in the past, Tibet did not have a single school in a modern sense. The illiteracy rate was as high as 95%. Only a very limited portion of the population--the lay and monk serf-owners and their offspring can learn to use the language, the study, utilization and development of which were thus vitally hindered. The fundamental changes in the fate of this language began when the vast number of the liberated serfs and their children gained the right to learn and use the Tibetan language following the peaceful liberation of the region particularly after the democratic reform and the abolition of the feudal serfdom system in Tibet. Today, under the strong protection of the state laws and regulations, the study and use of the Tibetan language are high on the agenda of various levels of government, making possible an unprecedented prevalence of the language in the society.

In 1987, the Fifth Session of the Fourth Regional People's Congress of Tibet Autonomous Region deliberated and adopted *Several Rules Guiding the Study, Use and Development of the Tibetan Language in Tibet Autonomous Region (Tentative)* (amended and adopted as *Rules Guiding the Study, Use and Development of the Tibetan Language in Tibet Autonomous Region* in 2002), stipulating the legal status of the Tibetan language as the universal language and writing system of the Tibet Autonomous Region. To date, this language has been extensively applied in all sectors of social life in the Autonomous Region. All resolutions, regional laws, documents and public notices adopted or applied in Tibet are written in both Tibetan language and Chinese. In judicial litigation, any party of Tibetan ethnicity is entitled to adjudication in the Tibetan language and relevant legal documents should be in the Tibetan writing system. In any city or county a person visits in Tibet, characters on billboards appear in the Tibetan writing system. With the inception of the satellite channel of Tibet TV, programmes in the Tibetan language can be viewed in the Region as well as in other places of Chinese mainland. Now in Tibet, there are altogether 10 newspapers and 14 magazines in this language. Every year, nearly 100 types of books are published in Tibetan. The number of radio, film and TV programmes and websites in Tibetan language is on the rise. Performances in Tibetan directed by professional art and performance companies from Tibet are highly

appreciated by the vast number of local farmers and herdsmen.

In all parts of Tibet including the cities, counties as well as villages and pastoral zones, middle school and primary school children read aloud their textbook in Tibetan language. The language is now widely applied and vigorously developed in the modern education system in Tibet which has a dual language education format with the Tibetan as the major teaching language. A whole set of teaching and reference materials in Tibetan language have been compiled to meet the demand from primary school up to high school. A growingly comprehensive institution for the work on the language is formed, the contingent for the education, study and translation of the language continues to expand, remarkable achievements have been made in rescuing, compiling and publishing ancient literature in Tibetan, and there is a more developed IT processing technology for the treatment of text in this language. Some overseas Tibetans expressed their admiration for the systematic education in Tibetan language and the cohesiveness of the compilation of the teaching materials, recognizing that only in China can the language of Tibet be well protected and enormously developed.

With the ever expanding external exchanges of Tibet, new words and terms keep occurring. The language and its writing system have been

given the feature of our times, and also reflect the new life of the people and the new demand of the society in development. The language has ceased to be a reclusive, dead or dwindling one. As an open language facing a modern world, the Tibetan language constantly injects new vigour into the inheritance, development, progress and prosperity of the Tibetan culture. Meanwhile, the standardization in the use of the new words and terms as well as in the translation of the language has become a top issue. It is a crucial task in promoting the exchanges in and in the development of the language to promptly standardize Tibetan, and unify the criteria for the translation of new words and terms. We hope that the Central Government can call upon relevant institutions and gather experts to conduct study on the standardization of the new Tibetan words and terms and thus create conditions for the extensive study and application of the Tibetan language.