

Yunnan's Minority Peoples on the Socialist Road

by HUANG CHANG-LU

THE Chinese nation includes more than 50 national minorities besides the Hans, the majority nationality. Members of 21 minorities live in Yunnan — more than in any other province. These include the Yis, Tais, Miaos, Huis, Pais, Tibetans, Was, Lahus, Lisus, Hanis and Tulungs. Six million people, a third of this southwestern border province's total population, are minority peoples; the rest are Hans.

With Yunnan's liberation in 1950, historic changes took place in the life of every nationality in the province. Centuries-old systems of national oppression and of class oppression and exploitation within each nationality itself, were abolished. New relations of equality, unity and mutual co-operation were established between the nationalities. The people took their destinies into their own hands. They have achieved remarkable successes in socialist revolution and socialist construction. Like the other nationalities in China, they are advancing rapidly on the socialist road of prosperity and happiness.

Bitter Past

For centuries before the liberation, the reactionary rulers carried out policies of national oppression and of "divide and rule" in Yunnan. In the past hundred years in particular, they submitted to aggression by U.S., British, French and Japanese imperialism, while themselves intensifying their cruel oppression of the minority peoples. The Kuomintang reactionaries even denied that there were national minorities in China. They declared that the various non-Han nationalities were merely separate "clans" of the Han nationality or peoples with different religious beliefs. They stopped at nothing to perpetuate their criminal rule and intensify their exploitation of the people of the various nationalities. KMT officials levied arbitrary taxes on the peoples, and together with their lawless troops extorted, plundered and raped. Bloody repression followed attempts to resist them. Members of the present Sunglin People's Commune of Hsuanwei County in eastern Yunnan, where Huis, Miaos, Yis and Hans live together, remember 11 raids by troops of the KMT reactionaries before liberation. One raid in 1949 took over 100 lives.

In addition to oppression and exploitation by imperialism and the reactionary rulers of the country, the

working people of the national minorities suffered brutal oppression and exploitation at the hands of the ruling classes of their own nationalities — landlords, serf-owners, slave-owners and headmen.

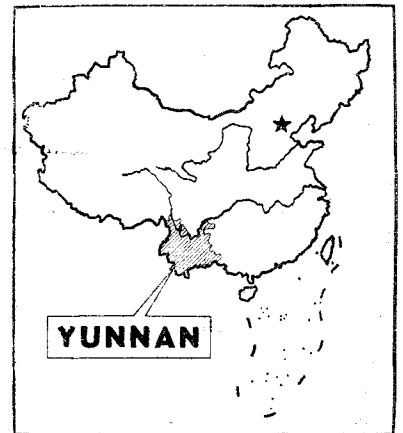
Those minorities with small populations and extremely backward economies were often oppressed too by the ruling classes of neighbouring minorities. The Pulangs, Hanis, Lahus and Yaos of the Hsi-shuangpanna region, for instance, were also oppressed by the feudal serf-owners

of the Tai nationality. Like the Tai serfs, they had to rent land from the Tai serf-owners, pay taxes, submit to their usury, and work three months of every year for them without compensation.

Under such conditions, social change came slowly to most of Yunnan's minorities; productivity was very low and their life was hard. At the time of liberation, peasants of such peoples as the Chingpos did not even know how to plough land with oxen; the Was and Nus were still planting seed, not in ploughed furrows, but in holes dug with wooden sticks. Some minorities were living in caves in the wildernesses, subsisting for more than half the year on wild fruits and vegetables or game. The Penglungs, Tulungs and other minorities with populations of only a few thousand each were driven to make their homes in mountain fastnesses or primeval forests, leading primitive lives. On the eve of liberation, they were on the verge of extinction.

New Life

The founding of the People's Republic of China in 1949 ended the system of national oppression and opened a new epoch of equality, unity and common progress for all China's nationalities. The People's Liberation Army entered Yunnan Province and in



close collaboration with the minorities' working people, wiped out the remaining bands of KMT soldiers entrenched there and drove out the imperialist elements. The P.L.A. men observed strict discipline; they correctly implemented the Party's policy on the question of nationalities. They took not a needle or a thread from the people, helped them to carry water, sweep their yards, and do the farmwork. The minority peoples were amazed and deeply moved. "There never before was such an army," they said.

In 1950, the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party and Chairman Mao sent a delegation to visit these peoples and to publicize among them the Party's national policies. Following this, many work-teams sent out by Yunnan provincial Party and government departments visited the different minority areas, made friends with and helped the local people in a hundred and one ways. They gave them guidance in new ways of farming, distributed relief supplies and state loans, helped them solve difficulties in their everyday life and productive activities, and settled long-standing feuds between the nationalities. Some minorities living in the remote border areas of Yunnan had suffered most severely from national and class oppression in the past, and had very few contacts with other peoples. The work-teams which went there had to be particularly painstaking and patient in their work. These activities played a major role in improving relations between the nationalities, solving misunderstandings between them and strengthening national unity. The minority peoples soon realized what a vast difference there was between the Communist Party and the People's Government and the reactionary governments of the past.

National Regional Autonomy

To enable the national minorities in Yunnan to enjoy full national equality and the right to manage their own affairs, the Party and Government instituted national regional autonomy in areas where the minority peoples live in compact communities. Beginning in 1953, eight autonomous *chou*, 14 autonomous counties and over 300 autonomous *hsiang* were set up.

The institution of national regional autonomy is a basic policy of the Chinese Communist Party for solving the national problem under Chinese conditions. It is a creative development of Marxist-Leninist principles on the national question. All national autonomous areas are integral parts of the People's Republic of China and the system of national regional autonomy is a part of China's system of the people's democratic dictatorship, in which democracy is exercised within the ranks of the people, and the working class unites all people with the rights of citizens — first of all, the peasants — to exercise dictatorship over the reactionary classes, the reactionaries and all elements who oppose the socialist revolution and socialist construction.

Like organs of self-government elsewhere in the country, those of the autonomous *chou* and autonomous

counties in Yunnan, besides having the same powers and functions as all local organs of state as laid down in the Constitution, have the right to administer the autonomous areas' finances, organize local public security forces, and lay down regulations on the exercise of autonomy as well as other regulations. Government work is carried on in the spoken and written language or languages commonly in use in the area. Each organ of self-government takes the form which the majority of the people in that particular autonomous area wish.

Large numbers of revolutionary cadres have been trained from among the various national minorities in Yunnan. One of Yunnan's deputy provincial heads hails from one of the minorities; the heads of all the autonomous *chou* and counties are minority people. The Tulungs numbering only 2,500 also have a deputy *chou* head and a county head of their own. This greatly facilitates the exercise of national regional autonomy in the province.

Implementation of national regional autonomy has strengthened unity and mutual understanding between the nationalities. The Chingpos and Tais of the Tehlung area were set against each other by the ruling classes in the past and used to feud constantly. The Chingpos, living in the mountains, dared not come down to the plains where the Tais lived. When the Tehlung Autonomous *Chou* of the Tai and Chingpo Peoples was founded, the Tais invited the Chingpos to open up land on the plain and helped them in many ways to get their farms started.

On Socialist Road

With liberation from national oppression gained and national equality established, the next most urgent demand of the minority peoples was to end class oppression and exploitation within their own nationalities. They quickly learnt that full emancipation and true prosperity could only be achieved when the old, backward social systems and production relations were completely transformed and an advanced, socialist system and production relations established. To satisfy this demand, the Party led them in carrying out democratic reforms and the socialist transformation of their societies.

In Yunnan as in other areas, this advance was carried out step by step in an active and prudent way in accordance with the concrete conditions and specific features of each nationality.

The four million Pais, Chuangs, Huis, Nahsis, Miaos, Yaos, Pumis, Mongolians and the greater part of the Yis, who inhabit the hinterlands of Yunnan, live in mixed communities with the Hans. Before liberation, social-economic conditions in most of this area were in general similar to those of the Han-inhabited areas. Landlords held the greater part of the land and exploited the masses of the working people through rent, usury or hired labour. From 1951 to 1953, the

Party led the minority peoples here in carrying out democratic reforms in conjunction with the Hans. The landlords' land and other means of production were confiscated and distributed to landless or land-poor peasants, though the landlords too received a share of land; usury and hired labour were prohibited. The peasants, after receiving land and other means of production, not long afterwards formed mutual-aid teams and agricultural producers' co-operatives. In 1958, they formed people's communes.

Up to the time of the liberation systems of slavery and serfdom were still prevalent among the 1.6 million Tais, Hanis, Lahus, Achangs, Tibetans and the Yis of the Lesser Liangshan Mountains, who live on the outer borders of the province. Slave- and serf-owners owned all or most of the land and other means of production, the slaves did not even own their own persons, and generation after generation worked for their owners like cattle. The serfs were obliged to hand over more than a half of their yearly produce to the serf-owners, as well as work for them without compensation and pay various taxes.

After liberation, U.S. and Chiang Kai-shek special agents and bandits were entrenched just outside the borders of these areas and the struggle between the people and their enemies was still extremely sharp. The Party and Government therefore adopted a policy of prudent but sure and steady advance. A number of steps were taken first of all to publicize the Party's policy of national unity, to foster production and raise the level of revolutionary consciousness of the masses. By 1955, land reform was completed in the hinterland of Yunnan and the socialist transformation got under way. Under the influence of this revolutionary situation, the national minority peoples on the border lands urgently demanded democratic reforms. The Party and Government, therefore, mobilized the masses and resolutely carried these democratic reforms through, abolishing the centuries-old slave and serf systems. During the reforms, every former slave or serf received on an average 1.5 to 3 *mu* of land, every three households got an ox. As far as possible their needs in land and other means of production were thus basically satisfied. The peasants then immediately organized themselves and took the road to socialism. More than half of all peasant households in these areas have now joined farming co-operatives of a semi-socialist nature.

The approximately 600,000 people of the Lisu, Chingpo, Wa, Nu, Tulung, Penglung and Pulang nationalities living near the boundaries had already entered class society before liberation, but vestiges of primitive communal society still remained. Their economy had a very low level of productivity and the people's life was harsh. Here, the People's Government gave energetic help to the working people, especially the poor, to develop production. Relying on the poorest strata of peasants, it mobilized the masses to carry out democratic reforms step by step and abolished all systems of

exploitation. After this victory, the mutual-aid and co-operative movement in agriculture was unfolded, and the people were led onto the socialist road. Now large numbers of mutual-aid teams and agricultural producers' co-operatives have been organized in the areas where these minorities live and deep-going changes are taking place in their political, economic and cultural life.

In a word, the minority peoples in Yunnan have already embarked on the socialist road. As with the fraternal nationalities in the rest of the country, every step they have taken forward was made in the course of a sharp class struggle. Each step has been a revolution within their own nationalities, a revolution realized not by issuing government orders or through the "charity" of the ruling class but through the efforts of the masses of the minority working people, by mobilizing them to shatter the yoke of exploitation with their own hands. Yunnan's case proves once again that the reactionary ruling classes of the oppressor people or peoples must be overthrown by the oppressed people. It proves that the oppressed people must also overthrow the reactionary ruling classes among their own peoples, otherwise complete emancipation is impossible.

Socialist revolution and socialist construction are still in the preliminary stages among Yunnan's national minorities; it will take a very long time and great efforts before they can be thoroughly completed.

Self-Reliance and State Help

Freed from national and class oppression and having become masters of their own fates, the minority peoples of Yunnan show boundless political enthusiasm and initiative in productive work. United and respecting each other, they learn from each other new ways of farming and other production techniques. They have changed the face of mountains and rivers, built roads and bridges, and founded schools and hospitals, building a happy new life with their own hands.

They are building that life in a spirit of self-reliance, but the state has also given them powerful aid. In the early days after liberation, large sums in relief were allocated to them to help the poor and needy overcome difficulties due to lack of foodgrains, seeds and farm implements. Since 1957, the Government also allocated large sums in subsidies to the minority areas, helping them to build 10,000 small water conservancy projects, 600 electric power and other power stations, 40 new bridges and 30 mountain pack trails. Besides this, the state bought them 5,000 oxen, 3,000 tons of chemical fertilizers and insecticides and 20,000 small farm implements. When they left their refuges in the primeval forests ten years ago, some minorities did so with little more than their bare hands. The state provided them with oxen, farm implements, seeds, foodstuffs, clothing, cotton quilts, cooking utensils, and

much else. They were enabled to end centuries of a wandering life and settle down for the first time.

Since liberation, tens of thousands of cadres, technical personnel, workers, teachers, doctors and scientific workers were sent out by Yunnan provincial Party and Government departments to the various national autonomous *chou* and counties to help develop industry and agriculture, communications, trade, culture, education and health work. The majority of these men and women were of the Han nationality.

All-Round Progress

In the past 15 years, Yunnan's minority peoples, by diligent work and with state help, have made big achievements in the fields of agriculture, industry, culture and education. Here are a few examples.

The Hsishuangpanna Autonomous *Chou* of the Tai People, since it was founded in 1953, increased grain production by 70 per cent. In the ten years since the western Nuchiang Autonomous *Chou* of the Lisu People was founded, four out of its five counties enlarged their paddyrice area by one and a half times, and practically trebled grain output. The Tulungs living in the Tulung River valley in the northwestern part of Yunnan did not raise a single *mu* of paddyrice before liberation. Now there is an average of one *mu* per head, and everybody is getting twice the amount of grain they used to get. The 440 households of Chingpos, Penglungns and Lisus who live on Santai Mountain in Luhsi County used to average only 100 *jin* of grain per person per year before liberation. Last year, each got 1,028 *jin*, over 6 times what they got in the early period after liberation.

Most of the minority areas in Yunnan had no industry before liberation. Now factories and plants for generating electricity, making paper, refining sugar, making farm implements and machinery and processing agricultural and subsidiary products have been set up. In 1963, total industrial output value was 25 times what it was in 1952.

One of the major reasons for the economic and cultural backwardness in Yunnan's minority areas in the past was the fact that it is criss-crossed by mountains and hills and communications were extremely poor. Before liberation, there was only one highway in the province that led to the national minority areas. From the borders to the hinterland, goods had to be transported on people's backs and by pack horse or pulled across rivers on ropes. Now highways link the provincial capital Kunming with every autonomous *chou*, and most of the 28 county seats in the border regions are also linked by highways.

Swift progress has also been made in culture and education. Fifteen years ago, most of the 21 minorities here had no written languages of their own. Some had very incomplete ones. Among others, there was not a single person who could read or write any language. Not a few of them made nicks on wooden boards



A Tai doctor on her round

or tied knots in strings to keep simple records. After liberation, with the help of the Nationalities Research Institute of the Chinese Academy of Sciences, six of these peoples now have new or improved written languages. Some are already publishing newspapers and books in their own languages.

By 1963, four times as many minority youngsters were studying in primary and middle schools as compared with 1949; 40 times as many students were getting a higher education.

For generations, Yunnan's border areas were described as "lands of malaria." This and other infectious diseases were rampant, and population growth was seriously hampered. After liberation, medical and health organizations were set up to serve all these areas, and many medical and health workers were sent to staff them. There are now 41 times as many medical and health organizations there as in 1950, 42 times as many hospital beds and 39 times as many health and medical workers. Some of the infectious diseases which were widespread in the past have been wiped out, while others have been brought under control. In places which had a high incidence of malaria, the rate has now dropped to only a few in a thousand or even ten thousand. Due to the general improvement in standards of living and health, the populations of many national minorities have increased.