

Interview H0106: with Luo Ming and Ren Jinglong, (China, 17 November 1995) : Part No. 1 of 1

Ren Jinglong was a Vice Party Secretary in Ganzi Province at the time of the implementation of democratic reforms. He discusses the reason for starting the reforms in 1955-56 and the mistakes that were made that led to the revolt. Luo Ming served as the director of the united front work department in Ganzi at the time of the reforms and the revolt. He discusses the deep conflicts that existed within the Chinese officials at that time, and how they are still not resolved. He also discusses his firsthand experiences in dealing with the suppression of the revolt in Litang.

After the liberation of Tibet, in the Ganzi area of Kham, from 1950 to the end of 1955, during these more than 6 years, because of our work, the masses generally requested us to start the reforms. And also many cadres from local areas made this request. According to this situation, we thought that it was the proper time to start the reforms. So in November, 1955, in Sichuan province, the meeting of provincial People's Congress (ch. sheng renmin daibiao dahui) was held. Many representatives or leaders of the Tibetan areas of Sichuan, including those of the area of Aba, came to attend this meeting. So we had a discussion [of this] during the meeting. After the discussion we drew the conclusion that since the masses wanted to start the reforms, we should do it. We also discussed how to do the reforms and agreed that, in general, we should start the reforms according to the principle of peaceful negotiation (ch. heping xieshang), and via a gradual, rather than a radical way. At that moment, a radical way of doing the reforms had been applied in the Han Chinese area. Yet since these areas in Sichuan were areas of minorities rather than Han Chinese people, the radical way should not be applied. So to observe the principle of peaceful negotiation, we had discussions with the representatives of many fields, including some feudal people (ch. fengjian renwu) such as land owners. We decided to carry out a more flexible policy, and so confiscated only the parts of the lands owned by feudal people which exceeded the quota [needed for themselves]. We also confiscated only the parts of their houses and farm tools which exceeded the quotas. As for their other private property, we didn't touch them at all. And concerning the grains, we bought them from the owners.

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With regard to the feudal people or serf owners, if they had already received positions within CCP organizations, their positions would remain. For those who had not received our positions, as long as they didn't oppose our reforms, they would be given positions as well.

Q

Mr Ren, I have a question. At that moment, roughly during the same time when the meeting of provincial People's Congress was held, many upper-class people were invited to come to Chengdu to attend a meeting to discuss the issue of the democratic reforms. So I would like to know when was it held?

This meeting was held during the same time as the meeting of the Provincial People's Congress was held.

Q

Was it in December, 1955?

Yes. First we negotiated with these leading people, and then many representatives attended the discussions as well. At that moment, our policy was very flexible. And also, we decided that, with regard to the feudal lords, the serf owners, the land owners, as well as some Han Chinese land owners, they could still keep their right to vote (ch. xuanju quan), which is different from the policy implemented in Han Chinese areas during the same time. At that moment in Han Chinese areas, during the three to five years of democratic reforms, those people were deprived of their right to vote. Yet in the Tibetan areas, during the democratic reforms, those people could keep their right to vote. This was our policy then.

Next I want to talk about our reform of the monasteries of Tibetan Buddhism. Because the work of reforms in this aspect was related to religious issues and to the masses' religious beliefs, we took a more prudent attitude. So at that time, according to the opinions of the representatives, we decided that the land directly owned by the monasteries would not be confiscated by us. At that time, in order to take care of some monks and nuns who had families, we gave some lands to the monks' and nuns' family members.

Also, at that time some monasteries practiced usury taking exorbitant rates of interest which sometimes made the people unable to repay the monasteries. In order to solve this problem, we had negotiations with both the monasteries and the people lending out

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the money, and decided that we, the government or state, would repay the monasteries both to free the masses of their debts and because sometimes the monasteries did need the money since there were many old monks living there. However, the government only repaid the monasteries for the principal while it abolished the corresponding interest. These are the main policies at that time that I know. We discussed these policies with the upper-class people, and they all agreed. Yet at that moment the specific details/specifics of the policies hadn't been made. Later on, after the meeting, we drafted many documents and submitted them to the governments at higher levels and even to Central Committee for approval. And also, at that moment, we decided that in the area of Ganzi, the reforms would first be started in Kangding and Danbang and then the reform would be further spread to the other areas.

Q

Is that to say that the reform would be started first in the agricultural areas?

Yes. As for the areas of Southern Kham, we decided that the work of reforms there should be postponed to the future when the reforms in other areas were finished. Then the meeting of People's Congress ended. However, in my opinion, we committed a mistake in our work at that moment. Many people in the local areas didn't know clearly what we would do. It is right that we should first have heard opinions from the people. In order to do the democratic reforms, we should have heard opinions from the Party committees of every level and the CCP organizations at the local level. We should have let them all know the reform so as to facilitate them persuading the masses to do the reforms. Yet at that moment, not all the people knew clearly about the reform. Though we had discussed this with the upper-class people, we had not finished drafting the documents. As a result, after the meeting of the representatives, in February of 1956, first in Batang, a rebellion occurred.

The rebellion started from the monastery. The rebels proclaimed that they wanted to drive all the Han Chinese out of there, and so on. They tried to take advantage of some nationalist slogans. At that moment, we didn't have adequate preparation to quell the rebellion. Neither the CCP cadres in the local areas nor the [PLA](#) had made the war preparations, because at that moment we all thought that we were still discussing how to do the reform and hadn't really started the reforms. Yet the rebellion had already started. We had planned that at first we should discuss thoroughly with the people to decide how to do the reforms and how to draft the documents, and then should submit the

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documents to the governments of higher levels for approval, and then we should finish all the preparatory work, and then, only after finishing doing all of these, we could officially start the reforms. Yet even before we formally started the reforms, a rebellion had already started. As a result, because of the rebellion, we had to start the reforms even ahead of what we planned.

Q

So the rebellion first started in Batang. After that, which areas were also involved into the rebellion?

The rebellion started in Batang, and then it spread into the areas of Northern Kham, and then into the areas of Ganzi. I can't remember the details clearly now. So we had to start to quell the rebellion and at the same time start the reforms. That was the situation then. Anyway, there were some reactionaries who opposed our reforms all the time and they attempted to take advantage of this opportunity to maintain the rule of the feudal serf owners. This is the root cause of the rebellion. However, on the other hand, I think we didn't make sufficient considerations and didn't make enough preparations, so this is also one of the factors that led to the rebellion. At that moment, after the rebellion started, Chairman Mao convened a meeting in Beijing.

Q

Was it the meeting of the secretariat (ch. shujichu huiyi) that took place in 1956 or in 1957?

It was in 1956, during the summer of that year. Tianbao also attended this meeting. Liao Zhigao also attended.

Q

What about Li Jingquan?

Li Jingquan didn't attend. Liao Zhigao was the party secretary and was in charge of the work in ethnic minority areas (ch. minzu diqu), so he attended. Tianbao also attended because he was Tibetan and therefore belonged to the ethnic minorities. At that meeting, Chairman Mao mentioned this issue and he said, the reforms were necessary; the conditions for starting the reform were generally ripe; starting the reform was right. However, there were several problems within the work of starting the reforms. These problems included that the preparatory work was not adequate, and the negotiation work

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was not adequate, and concessions were not made adequately, and so forth. Therefore, later on, we made our policies even more flexible. At that time, the pastoral areas hadn't [started]...(note: the tape is not clear)... Later on, we decided that in the pastoral areas our work of reforms should be carried similar to what we implemented in Inner Mongolia. In the past in Inner Mongolia, There, Ulanhu (ch. wu lan fu) and others decided that they would not classify the people into different classes; they would not distinguish different kinds of lands (ch. bu [fen](#) bu dong); rather, they would launch the reforms via the way of cooperating (ch. hezuo hua). So we basically kept the old situation in the pastoral areas intact and didn't change it. These are the things that I know. At that time, the representatives of the people attending the discussion with us included, Xiakedaodeng, Aowujiuzuo, and many others. There were many famous people attending the discussion and I knew them all.

Q

How many people were attending the meeting to discuss this, including both the upper-class people and the representatives of the commoners?

I can't remember it clearly. It should be dozens of people.

Q

In the meeting of secretariat in 1957, what polices were made? Do you know it?

In 1957, it was decided that the reforms for the monasteries should be stopped... I can't remember it clearly, because I didn't go to Beijing to attend the meeting in 1957. It was also Liao Zhigao and Tianbao and some others who attended that meeting.

Q

Mr Ren, at that moment, who was in charge of the general work in Sichuan? Was it comrade Li Jingquan?

Yes. Li was the 1st Party secretary.

Q

The person in charge of the affairs of the ethnic minorities was Liao Zhigao, right?

Yes. At that moment, Liao also served as the Party secretary of the Committee for Ethnic and Religious Affairs (ch. min zong wei shuji). I was responsible for implementing the specific policies while Liao Zhigao was responsible for the general policies. At first, before

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merging the provinces (ch. hesheng), it was Yan Hongyan who was in charge of the general work and served as the party secretary of the Committee for Ethnic and Religious Affairs. At that time I served as one of the vice secretaries, and Tianbao also served as one of the vice secretaries. Later on, after the two provinces were merged, namely after Xikang province was merged into Sichuan province, Liao Zhigao came. At that moment Liao started to be in charge of the work of agriculture and the work of the areas of ethnic minorities. So Liao Zhigao served as the secretary of the Committee for Ethnic and Religious Affairs. At that time, there was another comrade called Miao Fengshu. This are what I can remember now. If you want to know the details, you should look for the relevant documents.

Q

Mr Ren, I would like to know if you have any relevant documents now? Or your memoirs?

I don't have them now. Since the documents were composed at that time, you can find them in Committee for Ethnic and Religious Affairs. There should be documents about the plans, the policies, and the regulations for reform there. I don't have these documents here. According to my memory now, this are what I know.

Q

Do you mean that in February of 1956, a meeting was held.

Yes. at that moment a rebellion occurred in Batang. So, when it happened we didn't have time to do the preparatory work to deal with it. So Chairman Mao's comment that we failed to do enough preparatory work then is exactly correct. We should have made the cadres of all levels within our organization know clearly what we were about to do and why we would do so. At that moment, even some of our cadres, didn't agree that we should do the reform through a peaceful way, though most of our cadres agreed that we should be in a peaceful way. Lots of cadres of local level didn't know clearly how the reform was about to be implemented. As a result, incited by some reactionaries, even many masses also joined in the rebellion. So, the problem of the rebellion in the areas of ethnic minorities, was always involved with the ethnic issues. The masses didn't know clearly what was going on at that moment. And also, the problem of the rebellion was involved with the religious issues. Yet actually, in that time, we didn't intervene into the religious matters very much. At that moment, the routine religious activities were still done. We only abolished the parts related to feudalism and feudal exploitation. As for the work toward the serf owners, we

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also did it similarly: we only abolished the parts related to feudal exploitation. In other fields, we still implemented a very flexible policy.

However, at that moment, the masses didn't know or understand clearly about it. In addition, in that time, we should have also made some military preparations in case of a possible rebellion. Yet we didn't make these preparations, so Chairman Mao criticized us about it. In addition, we did not do adequate work negotiating with the people. Although at that time we had already accepted many of their opinions, there were still some of their opinions which we didn't accept. For example, at that moment they put forward that we should do nothing at all to change the old situation of the monasteries. We accepted this only partly, but we didn't accept it entirely. For these issues, we should have made further negotiation work with each other to solve the disagreements. At that moment, many people held a rigid attitude. Thus, I think that though we had done lots of work, we still hadn't done enough. However, there were also some decisions we made which I do think was right. For example, at that time, some monasteries and some feudal serf owners owned many weapons such as guns. They put forward the view that we should not confiscate their guns, but we thought that leaving the guns with them was too dangerous (so in the end we confiscated the guns).

Q

Mr. Ren, do you remember that at that time the Central Committee dispatched Wang Feng to come to Xikang to do investigation about the work of the democratic reforms?

No. It wasn't Wang Feng. It was Liu Geping. Liu Geping came to do the investigation, the details of which I can't remember clearly now. During that period, he went to Ganzi to do the investigation. At that time he argued that we shouldn't confiscate the monasteries' and the serf owners' guns. And he asked us to return some of the guns which we had confiscated earlier, which sharply contradicted the opinion of the Party Committee of Sichuan province. We all thought that this opinion of Liu Geping was wrong, and we regarded this his views as being right-leaning (ch. youqing)...haha. So in the end we didn't accept his opinion. As for the situation then, in my opinion, since the rebellion had already happened [doesn't finish] If there was no rebellion then, certainly we could have considered stopping the confiscation of the guns. However, since the rebellion had occurred, and since at that time there were a large number of guns owned by the people of Tibetan areas [doesn't finish]. So we confiscated the guns because, on the one hand, we had to quell the rebellion, and on the other hand, lots of our cadres at the local level

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were killed by the rebels. Many activists in the movement of the democratic reform, as well as many poor peasants and young slaves, were [also] killed by the rebels. That was the situation then. At that time we invited them to use persuasion. We tried to persuade the rebels to stop doing rebellious activities and to leave the mountain areas. On this issues they gave lots of suggestions to us.

As for the matters concerning the high-ranking, leading officials, I don't know very clearly about them. During quelling of the rebellion at that time, doing the military activities against the rebels, including the upper-class rebels, was not a difficult task. Most of the troubles lay in the conflicts within ourselves. The relationships between many people within us were very complicated.

Q

I know it. In that period many cadres held different opinions that were contradictory.

A

Yes. So the situation was very complicated. If you want to know more about these matters, you can go to interview comrade Fan Zhizhong. At that time, he served as the commander of the Sub-military District (ch. jun [fen](#) qu), and was the Party secretary of the party committee of Ganzi. At first, it was he who was in charge of the general work in Ganzi. Later on, Tianbao served as the 1st secretary. Yet for the specific and actual work, Fan Zhizhong was still in charge. So with regard to matters concerning the rebellion and the orders given by the Party committee of Sichuan and the Central Military Committee at that time, comrade Fan Zhizhong should know more.

Q

Where is the old comrade living now?

A

He is living...

Q

Is he the 86-years-old comrade?

A

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Yes. He is more than 80 years old.

Q

Yesterday some people told me that, even today, comrade Fan Zhizhong still holds strong dislike toward the policies implemented then in the pastoral areas.

A

Yes, he strongly disliked the policies.

Q

Yes. So we didn't go to interview him.

A

Yes. He should know more clearly about the details of these matter. But I am afraid that some of his opinions and ideas may be a little too extreme. Yet, regarding the details, he should know more. And even now, he has a clear mind. He can talk with other people for one or two hours without stop. At that time, he disagreed with Ulanhu (ch. wulanfu), as well as with Liao Zhigao and Tianbao of Party committee of Sichuan province. Later on, in 1959, Fan Zhizhong was dispatched back and given a new job, but actually he was given a demotion. And the truth is... I don't know if it is proper for me to say so or not... Actually, all the mistakes and wrongdoings that happening during the quelling of the rebellion in Ganzi were attributed to Fan Zhizhong and Miao Fengshu unfairly. It is really a problem. So even now, he feels that he was not treated fairly. His unhappiness is related to this problem. At first it was... (not clear)... Yet later on, some comrades from the Central Committee, especially Liu Geping...

Q

Yes. Liu Geping came two times.

A

At first, the Party committee of Sichuan province tried to resist the instructions given by the people such as Liu Geping. However, in the end, the members of the Party committee of Sichuan found they were not able to resist. As a result, in the end, the Party committee of Sichuan attributed all the problems to the Party committee of Ganzi, namely, to Miao

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Fengshu and Fan Zhizhong, in order to absolve the Party committee of Sichuan of all its responsibilities. Consequently, many people think that Miao Fengshu and Fan Zhizhong were made the scapegoats. Yet the leaders don't think so. Therefore, even now, with regard to the problems that occurred during the quelling of the rebellion in Ganzi, the Party committee of Sichuan has not given a reasonable explanation for them, and the Central Committee hasn't given an explanation either. Fan Zhizhong talked with me many times and complained that during that period these actions in Ganzi were not done as a result of Miao Fengshu's and Fan Zhizhong's decisions. At first, Li Jingquan and others all supported these actions. Yet in the end, all the problems were attributed solely to those two. That is the problem. Now it is difficult to make a fair judgment, because we don't have enough materials. During that period, there were lots of communications in the form of telegrams between them. If we wanted to examine these materials carefully, we could find them in the headquarters of the Chengdu Military Region and in the headquarters of Kangding Sub-military District. And also, according to Fan Zhizhong, during the quelling of the rebellion, the final guidelines for mobilizing the masses, doing the political persuasion (ch. zhengzhi zhengqu), and doing the military attacks, were in the end approved by comrade Deng Xiaoping. Also, at that time the Central Committee dispatched Su Yu or someone else, to come to Chengdu to approve the guidelines. This is what Fan Zhizhong told me. At that time, I served as the director of the united front work department. So since I worked only in a department, I knew very little about what really happened in the Party committee. So Fan Zhizhong should know more details than me. He can remember detailed information clearly.

Q

That is to say, his mind is still very clear?

A

Yes. Since now he is very old, he has some difficulties in walking, yet his mind is still very clear. So my suggestion is that, you go to visit him and do an interview. Though he has some complaints, you can record what he says, and then in the future, you can do some objective analysis about what he says. He can offer lots of clues. In my opinion, at first we didn't have any experience. At that time, when we held the meeting in Chengdu, the rebellion started in Ganzi and Liangshan and we didn't have adequate preparations made when the rebellion happened. So it was really difficult for us to deal with the situation. At

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that time, the Party committee of Ganzi and the Party committee of Sichuan launched some resolute measures, and did lots of work to try to persuade many upper-class people to side with us. I know only some general information. For example, in early 1956, not very long after the meeting ended here, in Litang county [not finished]. After the liberation [the reforms], I served as the Party secretary of Litang and the representative of [PLA](#) in Litang. The monks of the monastery in Litang launched the rebellion and then the rebels besieged the building of our county government. At that moment, the headquarters of a regiment of [PLA](#) was stationed there but we had only the troops of one battalion. Our people there were all besieged by the rebels... (one sentence spoken not clearly)...

After finishing the meeting in Chengdu, we returned to Kangding and we also held a meeting in Kangding. In the end, we organized some upper-class people, including some lamas from the monastery of Litang, and some officers of the government of the Kangding Autonomous Prefecture (ch. Kangding zizhi [qu](#))... There were more than ten people... Accompanying them, we went to Litang to do the work of political persuasion (ch. zhengqu gongzuo). After arriving in Litang, we tried to contact the people of the monastery. At that moment, the headquarters of Sub-military District also dispatched some people... The commander of the Sub-military District then, was Hu Gujun. Hu Gujun was also a very old comrade. He has been retired for a long time. Now he is living in the cadre's sanatorium (ch. gan xiu suo) in Leshan. At that moment he was in Litang as well. After I arrived in Litang together with the upper-class people, we discussed with each other about how to persuade the rebels to surrender. At that moment, the reinforcements of [PLA](#) arrived at Litang as well, so our troops besieged the monastery. Under this situation, leading the upper-class people, I went to Litang to do the work of political persuasion (ch. zhengqu gongzuo). We tried to ask the rebels to come out of the monastery and do negotiation with us, and we tried to persuade them to surrender. We tried to avoid taking military action against them.

At that time, many rebels such as Moya Tusi were within the monastery. The rebels purposely delayed and they asked us to enter the monastery to negotiate with them. And especially, the rebels asked me to be the representative to enter the monastery. After our discussion, commander Hu Gujun thought it was not good for me to enter the monastery. He said I shouldn't enter, because if the rebels took me as a hostage it would be very difficult to deal with the situation. Then the monastery sent some people out to meet with us many times and we also sent some lamas to enter the monastery to communicate with them. At last, we decided that we would send the lama who had

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accompanied me to Litang and who was also from the monastery before and had served as the vice chairman of Political Consultative Conference (ch. zhengxie fuzhuxi) of Ganzi prefecture ... His name is Shuoren Kezhong. So we dispatched him to enter the monastery to negotiate with the rebels, telling them that we wished they would surrender, and that if they surrendered, we would treat them with a lenient policy. However, after he had entered the monastery, for one or two days after that we still didn't get any response from the rebels within the monastery. So we understood that these rebels were carrying out the policy of stalling. With regard to the specific details, I don't know very clearly. At last, the Central Military Committee dispatched airplanes to come to Litang and to attack the monastery. The airplanes dropped a bomb near the monastery. This bomb didn't land inside the monastery. Rather, it was dropped on a valley near the monastery. The airplanes dropped the bomb, and attacked the monastery by means of machine guns, which left some holes into the roofs of the buildings of the monastery. And then, just during the night of that day or on the next day, the rebels in the monastery broke out of our encirclement. Initially we dispatched troops to encircle the monastery carefully, but later on, in some locations, perhaps because our soldiers were so exhausted, some of them fell asleep. As a result, the rebels broke out of the encirclement and escaped. So the main force of the rebels, led by Dengyunacheng, who was the commander of the rebels then, rushed out of the monastery and escaped. About one thousand enemies escaped from our encirclement. So on the second day, we found out that many of the rebels had escaped, so we ordered our troops to start to attack the monastery. In that battle, we killed Moya Tusi. When Moya Tusi attempted to rush out from a place in the west, our soldiers shot him dead. At last, we occupied the monastery and captured hundreds of guns. So we finally quelled the rebellion there. What is the main point that I want to say? I mean that under the situation then when the rebellion had happened, we had to quell the rebellion by means of military action. If we had only relied on the work of persuasion, or only relied on the upper-class people, we would not have solved the problem. As for the upper-class people, although in public they sided with us and didn't join in the rebellion, they had complicated relationship with the rebels all the time. And also, because our Han Chinese comrades couldn't understand the Tibetan language then, we didn't find out that the upper-class people's had close personal relationships or class relationships (ch. jieji guanxi) with the rebels. Therefore, I think that in 1956, after comrade Liu Geping came there... Liu Geping attempted to solve the problem of the rebellion and to start the reforms solely by means of relying on the upper-class people and on the work of political persuasion...

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I don't think Liu's measures could be effective. To be sure, in our work of quelling the rebellion and doing the reforms, we had committed some left-leaning mistakes. However, mainly, our conflict with the rebels was a class-struggle (ch. jieji douzheng). Thus, only by means of military action and our resolute attack against the enemies, could we win most of the people to side with us. This is my argument.

Q

When did Liu Geping arrive there? In which month in 1956? Did he go there after the rebellion in Batang happened? Some people said he arrived just several days after the rebellion, yet some others said not.

A

As for the exact time when he arrived... I think it should be around the period of April, May, or June in that year. I can't remember the details now. At that moment, Miao Fengshu had left Kangding, and was dispatched to go to work in the Party committee of Xikang province (ch. xikang shengwei). In 1954, he had already been dispatched to work in the Party committee of Xikang province. Later on, after the merging of Xikang into Sichuan, he served as one of the members of the Party standing committee of Sichuan province, and he was in charge of the work of ethnic affairs, including quelling the rebellion in Kham. In Kangding, Fan Zhizhong was in charge of the work there. After Liu Geping came, Tianbao was appointed the 1st Party secretary and replaced Fan Zhizhong. Fan Zhizhong served as his assistant. Yet, Tianbao didn't stay in Kangding all the time. He he lived in Chengdu and would only go to Kangding every so often, so actually Fan Zhizhong was still in charge of the work there... (one sentence unclear)... Later on, all the mistakes were attributed to Fan Zhizhong. Today what I have said is only my own opinion.