



Hearing on  
Preserving Tibet: Combatting Cultural Erasure, Forced Assimilation and Transnational  
Repression

Tuesday, March 28, 2022 – 10:00 a.m.

Statement for the Record

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Commissioner, Congressional-Executive Commission on China

Good morning. I join Chair Smith and Co-Chair Merkley in welcoming those attending today's Congressional-Executive Commission on China hearing on Tibet, whose people are near to my heart. As someone who has long advocated for the human rights of all Tibetans, I regret that I am unable to attend in person due to a scheduling conflict.

The grave, well-documented violations of the human rights of Tibetans that are the subject of this hearing have been going on for a long time. They are insidious because the long-term goal is to undermine the very existence of the Tibetan people.

On paper, the constitution and laws of the People's Republic of China (PRC) affirm the rights of ethnic minorities to "use and develop" their languages. But in practice, Chinese authorities are taking every opportunity to promote Mandarin at the expense of Tibetan (and other minority languages) in educational settings.

If Mandarin is essentially the only available language of instruction, any formal right to safeguard a mother tongue is moot. If criticizing the PRC's language policies is criminalized and language rights advocates are imprisoned, then clearly the right to "use and develop" minority languages is not respected.

If thousands of children, including children of preschool age, are coerced into attending boarding schools where the instructional language is mostly Mandarin, while also being prevented from studying Tibetan language, history and culture in other settings, then Tibetans' supposed right to "use and develop" their language does not exist, regardless of what Chinese authorities say.

Those same authorities constantly interfere with the practice of Tibetan Buddhism. The policy of “Sinicization” of religion – shaping religious identity and practice to adhere to ideological and cultural standards set by the PRC – is at work when Chinese officials claim legal authority to control the Dalai Lama’s reincarnation. Or when they continue to hide the real [Panchen Lama](#) from the world. Or when they demolish historic Buddhist institutes and forcibly evict entire monastic communities, as [happened](#) at Larung Gar and Yachen Gar in 2016.

There are credible reports that PRC authorities are implementing pervasive surveillance programs in Tibetan areas of China – programs that involve the collection of DNA and the scanning of irises at a massive level. Some of the “data collection” efforts have been focused on temples, monasteries and schools, including primary schools – the very institutions at the heart of Tibetan communities that are essential for preserving and renewing Tibetan culture.

Today’s witnesses will provide the painful details of these PRC policies and their devastating consequences. Taken together, these policies are designed to leave Tibetans no choice but to assimilate into the majority Han Chinese culture and eventually disappear. This is cultural erasure. Tibetans in China cannot change these policies because they lack any effective say in how they are governed.

What can we do about this?

My answer to that question is [H.R. 533](#), the Promoting a Resolution to the Tibet-China Conflict Act that I introduced in January with House Foreign Affairs Committee Chairman Michael McCaul.

This bipartisan bill provides that it is U.S. policy to recognize that the Tibetan people have the right to self-determination under international law. But that right is precluded by current PRC policies – including all the policies that will be discussed today that aim to undermine the pillars of Tibetan existence – their language, religion and culture.

By reminding the world of the basic truth that Tibetans have a legal right to self-determination as a people, the bill strengthens the long-standing, bipartisan U.S. policy of promoting dialogue between representatives of the Tibetan people and the PRC. The goal of dialogue, suspended since 2010, is to ensure genuine, meaningful autonomy for the Tibetan people. Achieving that goal would necessarily end the unjust and destructive PRC policies that we are examining today. Genuine autonomy would end cultural erasure.

The Tibetan people are resilient and they have been patient. But no one should expect that they will be patient forever. The U.S. must state loudly and clearly that the Tibetan people have a right to their language, their culture and to determine how they are governed – they have a right to self-determination and that right must be at the center of United States policy.