



Hearing on
The Preservation of Memory:
Combatting the CCP's Historical Revisionism and Erasure of Culture

Thursday, December 5, 2024 – 10:30 a.m. – 12:30 p.m.

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As prepared for delivery

Good morning. I join Chairman Smith in welcoming everyone to today's China Commission hearing on preserving the memory of ethnic peoples facing systematic discrimination and erasure in the People's Republic of China.

I am glad this Commission is taking up the role of preservation of memory as a human rights issue.

Memory, both individual and collective, is essential to identity, and to the realization of the right to culture for all peoples.

The stories we tell, the songs we sing, our writing, our music – all of these are expressions of ourselves. They are also ways that we record our shared history and pass on our knowledge and understanding of the world to those who follow us.

Without memory and the narratives it informs, it is much harder to locate ourselves in this world.

The essential role that memory plays in our lives is the reason that international humanitarian law prohibits attacks against buildings dedicated to religion, education, art, science or charitable purposes, and historic monuments.

It is the reason that Article 7 of the Rome Statute defines “crime against humanity” to include the persecution of an identifiable group or collectivity on cultural grounds.

It is the reason that preserving memory is at the heart of transitional justice processes. Without memory, the rights of victims to truth, justice, reparation and the guarantee of non-recurrence cannot be realized.

The existential importance of memory is the reason it is so contested, as we will hear today.

Any government or state that seeks to repress the language of minority ethnic peoples, or rename their symbolic places, or prohibit their traditional practices, or forcibly assimilate them, is violating their basic human rights.

The People's Republic of China is not the only state engaged in these practices. In the Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission, which I co-chair, we recently examined cultural erasure in Ukraine at the hands of the Russian Federation.

But the PRC's "Sinicization" policies are explicitly designed to erode the history and identities of several minority ethnic communities, in favor of Han Chinese culture and "core socialist" values.

As one of our witnesses will say today, Chinese officials promote "patriotic education" in an attempt to encourage "all ethnic groups to accept the great mother country, Chinese nationality, Chinese culture, [and the] Chinese Communist Party."

Tibetans, Uyghurs, ethnic Mongolians – all are at risk.

Congress has taken some steps to counter this erasure. With strong bipartisan support, it has authorized and funded programs for Tibetan and Uyghur cultural and linguistic preservation. The recently introduced *Southern Mongolian Human Rights Policy Act* would extend similar programming to southern Mongolians.

The Smithsonian Institution, also with congressional support, is doing ground-breaking work to promote cultural diversity and preserve endangered languages.

The Library of Congress, which has an excellent collection of Tibetan-language works, has just received a donation of the 223-volume Monlam Grand Tibetan Dictionary – an impressive initiative that we will hear more about in the testimony today.

The Resolved Tibet Act, which became law last summer, takes a complementary approach. It empowers the State Department to counter disinformation about Tibetan history and institutions put forth by the People's Republic of China and the Chinese Communist Party, including disinformation about the Dalai Lama.

Ensuring that the U.S. government is insisting on the truth about the history of ethnic peoples inside of China is critically important.

The question for us today is what more we can do to build on these existing initiatives, especially working hand-in-hand with diaspora communities. And so I look forward to the witnesses' recommendations.

Thank you and I yield back.