

Senator Jeff Merkley
CECC Opening Statement for Hearing on:
“The Preservation of Memory: Combatting the CCP’s
Historical Revisionism and Erasure of Culture”
December 5, 2024

As prepared

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for convening this hearing.

This is the last hearing of this Commission in the 118th Congress, and it is a fitting topic.

It is important to remind ourselves that our work must be grounded in the lived experience of those we are trying to help.

Preservation of memory is an innate human impulse, essential to people’s ability to maintain their culture and identity.

Our yearning to connect with each other today draws on our shared connections with the past.

George Orwell’s famous quote, "Who controls the past controls the future: who controls the present controls the past" is lamentably apt.

We see this in our own country, such as when some minimize the impact of slavery in order to curtail civil rights legislation.

In China, the ruling Communist Party engages in efforts to erase and revise history to suit its interests.

No student in China is ever taught about the Tiananmen Square Massacre.

It is wiped from the country’s consciousness, other than from those who were there.

Despite this, people in China still possess this innate impulse to remember.

They strive to safeguard memories in their own spaces.

It is essential to their ability to claim their rights and their dignity.

I look forward to hearing more from our witnesses about measures taken by the government of China to control history and how people in China are responding.

Those who have gone into exile take on the extra burden of preserving their culture and heritage as it is being eroded or co-opted in their homeland.

I am sure their experience is similar to diaspora communities from around the world.

But they may also be subject to acts of transnational repression by Chinese authorities for daring to speak out.

Several of our witnesses have their own diaspora stories to tell.

I hope to learn about ways we can help.

As an example, my Southern Mongolian Human Rights Policy Act, introduced with Senator Dan Sullivan, has a section encouraging the Smithsonian Institution and the Institute of Museum and Library Sciences to explore ways to support the efforts by Southern Mongolians, Tibetans, Uyghurs, and Hong Kongers to preserve their cultural heritage.

On a personal note, this is my last hearing in four years as chair and co-chair of this Commission.

I extend my gratitude to my House partners, Representatives Jim McGovern and Chris Smith, in this endeavor.

We have, together, Republicans and Democrats, House and Senate Members, done valuable work:

We passed landmark human rights statute, the Uyghur Forced Labor Prevention Act, as well as my Promoting a Resolution to the Tibet-China Dispute Act.

We held corporations' feet to the fire, from the companies sponsoring the Beijing Olympics amidst a genocide, to those selling biometric and surveillance technology to Chinese police forces.

We amplified the voices of Hong Kongers telling the story of their city suffering under the repressive dictates of the Chinese Communist Party.

As well as the voices of Chinese human rights defenders, Uyghurs, Tibetans, and Southern Mongolians.

And we focused attention on the Chinese government's practice of transnational repression as they seek to extinguish the right of the Chinese diaspora on American soil to speak freely about the Chinese government's abuses of human rights.

This Commission does important non-partisan, standards-based work that helps Congress and the Executive Branch craft fact-based policies.

Thank you, and I look forward to our witnesses' testimonies.

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