

## **Growing Repressions in Tibet: A CECC Report Confirms**

-Tenzin Tsultrim

On May 10, 2024, the Congressional-Executive Commission on China (CECC) released its annual report, simply titled Annual Report 2023. However, on its website, it is also called the Commission's 2023 Annual Report on Human Rights Conditions and Rule of Law Developments in the People's Republic of China (PRC). The CECC was created back in 2000 by the Congress to monitor human rights and the development of the rule of law in China. The commission consisted of nine senators, nine members of the House of Representatives, and five senior administration officials appointed by the President of the United States of America. The current report consists of 13 sections and 20 chapters. Out of these 20 chapters, two chapters deal exclusively with Tibet and East Turkestan (Xinjiang). However, from 2022 onwards, the chapter on Tibet is placed before East Turkestan. The chapter dealing with Tibet opens with the status of negotiations between the Chinese government and the Dalai Lama or his representatives. It says:

*"During the Commission's 2023 reporting year, the Commission did not observe any interest on the part of the People's Republic of China (PRC) officials in resuming formal negotiations with the Dalai Lama or his representatives."*

On 24, April 2024, in an exclusive interview with news media outlet Wion, the President of the Tibetan government-in-exile, or Central Tibetan Administration (CTA), officially confirmed the existence of back-channel talks with the Chinese government. He further added, "It has been over a year since the back-channel talks started." A few days later, during the regular press conference on April 26, 2024, Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Wang Wenbin countered the statement made by Tibetan President Penpa Tsering and said that the Chinese government will have contacts and talk only with the Dalai Lama or a handful of people close to him, not with the Tibetan government-in-exile or CTA. He further added that if the Dalai Lama decided to follow their conditions, "only then can future contact and talks be considered."

### **Intensification of Religious Persecution in Tibet**

Since Xi Jinping came to power in 2013, the severity of religious persecution and restrictions across Tibet has intensified. With the promulgation of new Administrative Measures For Internet Religious Information Services by the State Administration for Religious Affairs, the National Internet Information Office, the Ministry of Industry and Information Technology, the Ministry of Public Security, and the Ministry of National Security on December 20, 2021, which forbid many online religious activities. For instance, article 17 of the new regulations states that one "must not organize the carrying out of religious activities online, and must not broadcast religious rites such as worshipping Buddha, burning incense, ordinations, services, mass, or baptisms, through means such as text, images, audio, or video, either live or in recordings." Hence, persecution of religions is happening in every space available to the Tibetan people. This could be the impact of COVID-19, where most of the work was done online. The commission reported the growing number of ideological sessions targeted at Tibetan Buddhist monks and nuns to adapt and practice Tibetan Buddhism in line with socialist society. The report says:

These propaganda efforts included the study of the Chinese Communist Party's ethnic and religious



policy initiatives and priorities, such as the “Sinicization” of Tibetan Buddhism and managing the practice of Tibetan Buddhism “to adapt to socialist society.”

In the 14th Five-Year Plan(2021-2025) of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), released on March 12, 2021, the party-state has declared, “We will implement the Party’s basic guiding principles on religious work, adhere to the direction of the Sinicization of China’s religions, and actively guide the mutual adaptation of religions and socialist society.” Hence, it appears that the party-state is implementing what it has stated clearly in the Five-Year Plan.

### **Mass Biometric Surveillance in Tibet**

The Commission’s report also highlights the growing intensity of mass biometric surveillance in Tibetan-inhabited areas. As early as 2016, the CCP started collecting the DNA samples of Tibetan people. According to the Chinese authorities, all these collections of DNA were for the protection and research of unique human resources for people on the plateau and the prevention and treatment of different highland diseases. The Commission’s report has cited the Citizen Lab’s findings and found that between 2016 and 2022, Chinese public security officials collected between 919,000 and 1.2 million DNA samples in the “TAR.” It was also reported that even monks from the Tibetan Buddhist monasteries and resident monks were not spared. The collection of the biometric data will further strengthen the surveillance capabilities of the CCP in Tibet.

### **Continued onslaught of Tibetan language in all forms**

The Commission’s Report concluded that PRC ethnic policy ignores linguistic communities, including in Tibetan areas, and individuals or communities with languages that lack official recognition are deprived of access to official support in education and other government services. However, despite the existence of provisions in China’s constitution that affirm the freedom of ethnic minorities to use and develop their languages, the CCP, under the command of Xi Jinping, has already decided to completely ignore linguistic rights. For instance, in the 14th Five-Year Plan of the CCP, Article XLIII says:

“We will improve the assurance mechanisms for inclusive preschool education, special education, and professional education and increase the gross enrolment rate in preschool education to over 90%. We will raise the quality and level of education in ethnic minority regions and intensify efforts to popularize the national common language and writing system.”

From the above statements in the 14th Five-Year Plan, it is very clear that the party-state has already planned and decided to “intensify efforts to popularize the national common language and writing system” in the form of discouraging and forbidding the learning of the languages of the suppressed groups. Hence, one cannot expect the CCP to respect the U.N. Convention on the Rights of the Child, to which China is a party.

### **Transnational Repression: CCP’s Long Arm of Subjugation**

The CCP’s repressive measures are not limited to Tibet; they have extended beyond the mountains of the Himalayas. Through its overseas agents, family intimidation, and the establishment of over 102 overseas police service stations in 53 countries, it has infiltrated the land of democracies. For the past year, the Congressional-Executive Commission on China has started giving importance to the new threat of intimidation and harassment by the People’s Republic of China (PRC) in the form of transnational repression. According to Freedom House, transnational repression refers to governments reaching across borders to silence dissent among diasporas and exiles, including



through assassinations, illegal deportations, abductions, digital threats, Interpol abuse, and family intimidation. Most of the time, it involved authoritarian countries. The main objectives behind the transnational repression are to stifle criticism and enhance control over the emigrant and diaspora communities of Uyghurs, Hong Kongers, and others. It was because of the reporting by Safeguard Defenders, *110 Overseas: Chinese Transnational Policing Gone Wild*, that it started getting attention from around the world. Because of the seriousness of transnational repression, in its recommendations, the Commission even encouraged members of the U.S. Congress and administration officials to advocate for the appointment of a U.N. Special Rapporteur on transnational repression. According to the report released by the Tibetan Centre for Human Rights and Democracy (TCHRD), *Chinese Transnational Repression of Tibetan Diaspora Communities 2024*, Tibetan people too became the victims of the transnational repression. TCHRD has interviewed and collected first-hand testimonies from 84 exiled Tibetans from India and abroad. There were 12 Tibetans in the United States of America who experienced transnational repression at the hands of the CCP's agents.

## Conclusion

The main objectives behind the Sinicization of Tibetan Buddhism are its popularity among the Chinese people and the appropriation of Tibetan Buddhism for future control of the Tibetan people. With the implementation of different regulations, the CCP is further tightening its grip on the Tibetan people and limiting the space to practice their religion. This year, the Commission's report has a dedicated chapter called *Technology-Enhanced Authoritarianism*. The Tibet chapter, too, has covered the biometric surveillance implemented by the CCP. The collection of around 1.2 million DNA samples between 2016 and 2022 has strengthened the surveillance capabilities of the CCP in Tibet. To eradicate the identity of the Tibetan people, the CCP target is now young Tibetan children. According to the Tibet Action Institute's report, around one million Tibetan children aged six to eighteen were separated from their families and communities and were forced to live in Chinese government-run colonial boarding schools and preschools. According to the report, the main aim is to assimilate them into Han Chinese culture and society by cutting off their ties to their families, culture, language, and religion, and replacing Tibetan educational content with political indoctrination. The Commission's report also highlights these institutional linguistic crackdowns inside Tibet. This year, the Commission has given special emphasis to transnational repression. The main objectives behind the CCP's transnational repression are to counter the growing amount of Tibetan activism against the CCP and to block the Tibetan narrative. For instance, TCRD's report confirms that around 84 Tibetans from India and abroad have become the victims of the CCP's transnational repression. Therefore, since Xi Jinping took the reins of the CCP, the repressions across China have intensified, and they are more severe in Tibet, East Turkestan, and southern Mongolia. With the CCP's transnational repression, it has now crossed beyond China's borders and the China-controlled borders of Tibet, East Turkestan, and southern Mongolia, and thus it threatens the democratic values of democratic countries around the world.

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## Short Bio

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