

Tibet Movement Could Backfire on America

Voice of a Mongolian Chinese American

By Alice Ewing

One of the best books on Tibet history is “The Making of Modern Tibet”, by A. Tom Grunfeld, professor of history at the Empire State College of the State University of New York. The author wrote, “I choose to call this book disinterested and dispassionate history”, to present views and facts “from contending points of view”. I found his work a fulfillment of his goal. Anyone interested in the Tibet issue should read this book to learn about both the Communist China’s and the Dalai Lama’s position on Tibet. Certainly, many events are illustrated by words from both sides of the debate.

Grunfeld stated in the preface of his book: The Tibet movement is “a campaign based on emotional moralism rather than on historical realities”. Any time we fabricate moralism at the expense of realities, we risk catastrophic failure. It is time America takes a better look at some realities of the Tibet situation, and realizes how our popular support for the Tibet movement can end up backfiring on us.

I’m a Mongolian Chinese American born and raised in Taiwan. The Tibet movement first drew my interest because I knew from firsthand experience growing up in Taiwan about the true situation of Chinese multiple-ethnicity. It astounds me that—in an issue such as Tibet that is closely related to the Chinese American heritage—our mainstream presses have not actively sought real minority Chinese American input.



I emigrated to the U.S. from Taiwan in 1966 at age 15. My husband is a European American with Cherokee blood, and we have raised our sons to become Eagle Scouts to honor the American values of truth, freedom, and justice. I cried the day Robert Kennedy died in 1968—I was in a high school in Hawaii. I watched the Partridge Family and the Man From U.N.C.L.E. as a teenager.

I listen to Metallica and Pearl Jam now. I became a Democrat the moment I could vote, and have been a Democrat for 28 years. Yet when I tried to tell people what I thought of the Tibet situation, I was labeled a communist agent by some “free Tibet” people. This, when I have never even visited mainland China.

My personal plight is in trying to maintain my Mongolian heritage in its proper light. The Tibet movement has caused so much distortion of the multiple-ethnic nature of the Chinese people that no one here seems to understand the real minority heritages among the Chinese Americans. We are treated as a single mass of identical mono-ethnic entity.

In reality, minorities are all over China. China is a multiple-ethnic country. The Tibetans and the Mongols have migrated into central China since the Yuan Dynasty. Due to the poorer lands out in the border regions, most of the minorities in China have migrated into central China in the last centuries.

This is one reason why there are 1.3 billion people in China, but only around 6 million in the Tibetan region. Compton's Encyclopedia put the population in Tibet itself as 1.5 million, and 4.5 million in the provinces immediately adjacent to Tibet. How many millions are further out in China?

The Dalai Lama and his groups are trying to convince us that the Tibetans from an icy mountainous Tibet migrated to the point in the adjacent provinces that there are 4.5 million. Then they all chose to stop their migration right there, when the land further east was more fertile, and Tibet was an autonomous region of China, and these Tibetans could easily travel at will into central China over the last 700 years.

Let us think about how many Mexican immigrants have arrived in the U.S. in the last decades for a better life. Had Mexico been an autonomous region of the U.S., can we imagine the floodgate opened? Can we count the migration of population from our eastern states into our western states to seek a better climate in the last 250 years?

Reality of the Chinese population

The Chinese census, which claims 92% of the population are Han, is very misleading even to the Chinese people. The Chinese tradition involves a patriarch system that wipes female nodes off their family tree, in addition to a residence system in which many minorities change their registration to reflect their new place of residence once they have lived in another province for several generations. The census is a tally of "registrations", not a real survey on ethnic heritage.

Please draw a family tree that might progress for 700 years, and evaluate for yourself if every daughter's descendants are dropped, how many people are no longer counted in that family tree. But these daughters remember their own ethnicity, and their sons, grandsons are aware their own mom or grandma is Tibetan. Also try dropping off every male node in that family after 3 to 5 generations, because they've moved to a

new province. But these people keep track of their ethnicity through family activities.

Look at our own census, and how difficult it is now to judge our races. Be very careful about misjudging the multiple-ethnic blood in the Chinese population. That is a country of people who love their ancestry, and millions of them keep track of their ancestry through family associations. Our misjudgment in this area can backfire on us.

My family had been registered as "Cantonese" for the last three generations before we migrated to Taiwan, but not once did I hear my father introduce himself as "a Cantonese". His conversation would often begin with, "We Mongols..." And my grandmother went to a family association in Taiwan to obtain a family tree book which listed 52 generation names chosen by our first generation ancestor back in 1295 A.D. in the Yuan Dynasty.

I'm the 26th generation, and once, when I ran into another Mongolian Chinese American here in the Bay area, all we had to do was exchange generation names and we knew her family was two generations apart from mine. This was a stranger I had never met in my life until our kids both attend the same elementary school here in the Bay area.

Imagine what it is like in China! Many of the minorities in China are not counted in the census, but the Chinese people constantly run into people who tell each other what ethnicity they are.

One thing that bothers me about the Tibet movement is: It is seeking a nation for a single ethnicity, and for a single religion. We have a case like that here—it is called the Aryan Nation. And we are dealing with a country like China, which has gone through 700 years of integration and mixed blood. All we are doing is offending their sense of their multiple-ethnic country.

The legal status of Tibet

A common misconception is: "Tibet is a country occupied by China". The historical facts

are: “No nation has ever publicly accepted Tibet as an independent state”. (“The Making of Modern Tibet”, A. Tom Grunfeld, page 258.) Furthermore: “Not a single nation, including India, has extended recognition to the ‘government in exile’ of the Dalai Lama in the more than two decades of its existence”. (ibid., p. 259.)

Grunfeld pointed out that America’s policy toward Tibet is one of self-contradiction: “While officially recognizing Tibet as part of China, the U.S. Congress and White House unofficially encourage the campaign for independence.” (“Time to Reassess Tibet Policy”, Foreign Policy in Focus)

In line with this contradiction of choosing to ignore official world status—including our own official stand—our mainstream presses continually falsely report Tibet as “an occupied country”. Our Congress continually funds the pro-Tibet-independence organizations.

This kind of irresponsible action can be dangerous for us. As Foreign Policy In Focus had pointed out: “From Taiwan to Tibet, U.S. perception of China dangerously out of touch”.

Let’s take a look at the possible consequences:

Ethnic purity is not democracy

I have been studying organizations such as “Students for a Free Tibet” and the “International Campaign for Tibet” for the last three years. So far the Dalai Lama and these groups have never acknowledged the fact that 56 ethnic groups, including Tibetans, are all over China. Instead, they continually portray Tibet as “an independent nation” that was “invaded by China.”

For minorities like me, this is appalling. After 700 years of integration in China, the Dalai Lama and his group unilaterally declared independence upon a civil war in China that had left the country in chaos. Then the Dalai Lama proceeded to claim Tibet was “invaded”, based

on his own unilateral declaration of independence, which was never acknowledged by any nation in the world. In doing so, he willfully chose to ignore the makeup of the Chinese people.

Dalai Lama knows full well there is a Mongolian-Tibetan Association in China. (His staff communicates with and works with this association.) He knows full well that the Tibetans are everywhere in China. Yet he chooses to tell the world: Tibetans are a race distinct from the Chinese. Furthermore, he makes the rest of the minorities who had migrated throughout China into nothing but “the Chinese”, from whom “the Tibetans are a distinct race.”

Their attempt at making themselves a distinct race means they have erased the minority ethnic identity for people like me. My family has managed to keep our Mongolian heritage for over 700 years. Now we are made out to be “the Chinese who invaded Tibet in 1959”. For many people out here, “the Chinese” means “the Han”, a generic term to call most, if not all, people in central China.

This is actually detrimental to the minorities in central China. In order to preserve our ethnic identity, we need to make a strong differentiation between “Chinese” and “Han”. In reality the Chinese consist of 56 ethnic groups. And members of these 56 groups are all over China.

I am anti-Communist. But anytime I see words such as China “occupied”, “colonized”, “controlled” Tibet, I am incensed. This is not only far from the truth; it means my Mongol ethnic heritage is being buried. I am in a desperate attempt to maintain my family heritage. My grandmother made a special trip to hand me our family tree record book. I can not be the one to let our family of 700 years lose our ethnic identity through my hands.

I cannot believe how the Dalai Lama is ignoring his own fellow Tibetans across China, including Taiwan. He and his group are

promoting ethnic purity and ethnic segregation. Their claim of an “invasion”, “colonization”, “occupation”, do not hold water at all if one were to study the real population in central China.

Many reports have shown that the American involvement in Tibet movement began when the CIA tried to “contain Communism” in China. I am totally against using ethnic segregation as a tool to deter communism.

Ethnic purity is not democracy.

How the Tibet movement helps Beijing

There is a danger for America in this Tibet movement. We run the risk of offending 1.3 billion Chinese people, who all delight in their own family heritage.

Herein lies the main problem with our supporting the Tibet movement: We are inadvertently helping the monopoly of the Communist Party in Beijing.

Right after Tiananmen Square, anti Beijing feelings ran high among the Chinese people. They wanted to listen to Voice of America on their radios. They applauded at the Statue of Liberty erected by the students. Yet, when they began to hear about how Tibet is “occupied by the Chinese”, it ruffled their basic sense of the Chinese as a multiple-ethnic people. They began to change their minds about the West. To them now, they felt the West was lying.

Many of them have now turned back to support Beijing. As one overseas Chinese put it: “It’s a joke to talk about human rights when you don’t have a country.” They now see the United States as having a strong motive in splitting China along her ethnic lines. Instead of winning any battle against communism, we are making 1.3 billion Chinese people feel we are liars who “use the Tibet movement to split China.”

More than a decade after the Tiananmen Square incident, the support for Beijing among Chinese people is now at an all time high. One might wonder why. Unfortunately, a chief answer is we have continually made the Chinese people

feel the integrity of their multiple-ethnic nation is under attack. Our blind support for the Tibet movement has helped Beijing in this achievement.

Our Congress is planning to give \$2.75 million of our tax money to various Tibetan groups. The more we fund Tibetan ethnic segregation organizations, the more these organizations will work to offend the Chinese people, the stronger the Communist Party in Beijing will become.

In any war, ignoring reality is bad strategy. Propaganda is just that—words. No matter how much propaganda the Chinese government generated about the “well being” of the Chinese people during the Cultural Revolution, the “glowing success” proved to be a house of cards. No matter how much the “free Tibet” movement generate emotional moralism propaganda about how “Tibet is an occupied country”, and “Tibetans are a race distinct from the Chinese”, there are close to 1.3 billion witnesses to prove otherwise. Houses of cards will collapse on its own and cause possible damage to their owners.

Time for America to reevaluate our Tibet policy

While we had a brief golden moment after Tiananmen of rallying the Chinese people to forge toward democracy, we let that moment slip through our fingertips in promoting ethnic segregation in an ancient nation of multiple-ethnic history. We ended up giving the Communist Party room to recuperate and retain its monopoly

In order to promote world security, we need to encourage China to build a multiple-party system. We need to have the Chinese people on our side to accomplish us. We should not make further mistakes like this. Offending the Chinese people is bad strategy that will ultimately backfire on us.

Our misjudgment of this issue can end up costing American lives. Is it worth \$2.75 million

to appease the Tibetan lobby? To endanger future world peace and the lives of our next generations?

Our present dangerous course

I notice a very disturbing trend. The Tibet movement is trying very hard to reach our American youth with activities such as “Tibet Freedom Concert”, “Students for a Free Tibet”.

Here is a passage from the Brown University SFT site:

“Brown Students for a Free Tibet was chartered in the fall of 1995 after His Holiness the Dalai Lama visited Boston and met privately with 60 student leaders from around the country. Brown SFT was one of the first chapters formed under the umbrella of the National SFT headquarters in New York City which was established in 1994. There are now over 280 college and high school chapters nation-wide, making SFT the fastest growing student organization in the U.S. today.”

Inquiring minds want to know: Who flew these 60 student leaders across country?

No one seems to notice how eager the “free Tibet” movement is to influence our youth. We were shipping our students in buses to the Dalai Lama during his recent visit in Portland. Despite protest by some that our public school funds should not be used to pay for these buses, an unidentified private source then paid for the transportation, and our students were sent to “His Holiness”.

Has anyone checked out Students for a Free Tibet? This is from one of its web site pages. Pay attention to how their tactic of “street theater” is exactly what the Communists in China did during the period immediately prior to the communist takeover in China. Back then, many enthusiastic young, attractive communists went around villages all over China, and performed in exactly this fashion. They acted out against evil landlords and innocent farm girls being pushed down by the landlords. The peasants in China were incited into revolts. Their members said,

“Once again, the landlords have oppressed the farmers.”

Are we Americans going to accept the same tactics used in our country without any alert to what is going on? Are we going to accept foreign causes passing “educational” material to our school children without any attempt at counter education? Apparently yes.

The following is what SFT is trying to tell our youth:

From Student for a Free Tibet:
<http://www.tibet.org/sft/action.htm>

Street theater

Have a “demonstration” broken up by other members of your group dressed as People’s Liberation Army soldiers. The soldiers attack the demonstrators, destroy or confiscate their signs, and drag off the demonstrators. The soldiers then loudly announce to passersby “Once again, China has successfully crushed the Tibetan resistance”. Have chapter members in SFT shirts distribute information following the action. Consider holding one of the abductees prisoner until you reach a target number of signatures on petitions, reinforcing the notion that signatures do help free political prisoners. Stage the action in a central location with a large audience.

Organize outreach to local schools

Tibet Education Network has developed some excellent curricular materials about Tibet for grades K-12.

Contact them at: Tibet Education Network
P.O. Box 30094 Seattle WA 98103

These people intend to influence our school system from K-12.

I foresee a collision course coming between the future leaders of China, who will have grown up listening to their parents talking about “We Mongols...”, and the American youth, who heard about how “the Tibetans are a race distinct from the Chinese”. Our youth are taught

a myth, when in reality Tibetans are all over China, and all 1.3 billion Chinese people know it.

The myth of a compassionate Dalai Lama

Is the Dalai Lama really serving his people? In the case of the World Bank, the Dalai Lama led an international effort for “environmental protection” and to “preserve the nomad life style” of the “indigenous Tibetans and Mongols” in a region in China, and forced a cancellation of a loan to China. I followed the development of this case, and saw articles such as this one: [July 11, 1999, Sunday Week in Review Desk, New York Times, By DAVID E. SANGER”]

<<Mr. Wolfensohn [World Bank president] tried to travel to the region himself, then sent a team to reconfirm that the resettlement of the farmers would be voluntary, and that children would attend schools reflecting their ethnic backgrounds. “This is the first time most of these children will get a school,” he said.>>

More report revealed that the nomads there had to walk two miles to obtain water. I had lived in Taiwan where we had to walk a block with a bucket to hand-pump water, carry it back to the house, and boil it for drinking. It was an arduous task. Imagine having to walk two miles with buckets of water.

The Dalai Lama just honored “50 unsung heroes” here in the Bay area to demonstrate he is kin to the ordinary people. He joked that what he is doing is “lip service”, and gained laughs from the crowd for his good sense of humor.

I agree, he is doing ample lip service. We should have a law to audit foreign political figures who wish to conduct movements here in the U.S. An audit of the Dalai Lama’s funds can reveal some truth.

The myth of an “invasion” of Tibet

How many of us have paid attention to reports about ethnic Tibetan officials in Tibet? Here is one from Foreign Policy in Focus: “There are thousands of Tibetan officials, CCP members, and military recruits in Tibet. Indeed, many of the

most ardently anti-Dalai Lama officials are Tibetan.”

Many of us think of Tibet as “invaded” by China, that the Dalai Lama is trying to get Tibet back for the Tibetans. How many of us have read work by American Tibetan scholar Melvyn Goldstein that details the view of an ex-Tibetan serf? In the “*Struggle for Modern Tibet—An Autobiography of Tashi Tsering*”, a true eye witness account is available through the eyes of a serf. [pp 40-41]

“The first troops had appeared in the city in September, 1951.” The soldiers fished in the rivers for food. Tsering was fascinated. “They would not even take a needle from the people.” Soon after arriving, they opened the first primary school, and a hospital. Tsering observed that they had done things that would “directly benefit the common people.” “It was more change for the good in a shorter period of time than I had seen in my life.”

Too many people believe in the “free Tibet” movement’s version of “invasion” without doing any research through even our own leading American scholars on Tibet’s works. It’s time for America does some serious reading instead of following Beastie Boys in “Tibet Freedom Concert”.

“Pet rock” of spiritualism

Our nation needs to wake up from the current Tibetanmania. Why are we supporting a feudal theocracy? We are too fascinated with an eastern religion to see that there also Jim Bakker-like monks in the East. No other Buddhist branch in the world has a god-king system that yields control to a Dalai Lama.

Sophie Sizer, a former board member at a Dharma center who used to admire the Dalai Lama told me that she had observed many unpleasant corruption in her involvement with the local Tibetan Buddhism; and she lamented to me that the Tibetan Buddhism is now “the pet rock of Buddhism”.

Many people here are using it as a spiritual shortcut. There are much better Buddhism branches in the world. We need to open our eyes wide and look at the bigger pictures of the world. Or our children's generation will find "reality bites". They will find "reality bites" from some of the Tibetans in China that are ardently against the Dalai Lama. They will find "reality bites" from all the people with minority blood in China.

Who will they have to blame? Those of us today who do not work at stopping the Tibet-movement propaganda. We are the ones who allowed them to live in an illusion. The Dalai Lama's image in the West right now reminds me of Santa Claus. He is peaceful; he is kind. He is saintly, beyond approach. He is, in a way, a Santa Claus for many adults who can no longer cling to Santa. But the Dalai Lama is not a Santa Claus. When the illusion about him dies, unlike that of Santa, there is real price to pay. If we need spiritual comfort, it's far better we stick to the real, mythical Santa Claus.

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Alice Ewing is editor of Chinese American Media Watch. She is an American of Mongolian Chinese heritage who knows firsthand the multi-ethnic nature of Chinese people, and has done extensive research on the Tibet issue. She has been married almost thirty years to a European American with Cherokee blood, and is the mother of two sons who were both Eagle Scouts.

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