

Undermining Tibet's Moral Claims

Immigration to the U.S. tends to support China's occupation rationale

by Joseph Fallon

The cause of Tibetan nationalism and independence enjoys highly public and popular American support. But Tibetan activists in the U.S. — and members of Congress who have acceded to their lobbying pressure — are undermining Tibet's moral claim by circum-venting the refugee process and creating a growing flow of Tibetan immigration into America.

Section 134 of the Immigration Act of 1990 — the "Transition for Displaced Tibetans," mocks not only U.S. immigration and refugee laws, but, sadly, the ongoing tragedy of Chinese-occupied Tibet as well.

Tibet, a distinct nation with a history stretching back nearly 2000 years, occupies the Himalayan Plateau in Central Asia. It physically separates China from the Indian subcontinent. Although subject to various degrees of foreign influences over the centuries — Mongol, Manchu, Nepalese, and British — the Tibetan state, which consists of the three historic provinces of Amdo, Kham, and U-Tang, never lost its legal independence.

In 1949, approximately one hundred thousand Chinese Communist troops invaded Tibet and annexed this Buddhist kingdom of barely six million people to Mao Tse-tung's People's Republic of China which numbered half a billion. Not since World War II had a country as large as Tibet, which covers over 500,000 square miles (the size of Austria, France, Germany, Italy, and Switzerland combined) been stripped of its sovereignty.

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By 1951, Tibet had been partitioned by the Chinese. Half the country, all of Amdo and much of Kham, was annexed directly to China. A rump Tibet, consisting of U-Tang and the remnant of Kham and which includes the Tibetan capital of Lhasa and the major cities of Shigatse, Gyantse, and Chamdo, became the "Tibet Autonomous Region" of the People's Republic of China.

In 1959, the Tibetans rebelled against Chinese occupation and tried to reestablish the independence of their country. The barbarity with which China crushed this national uprising forced the Dalai Lama, spiritual and political leader of the Tibetan people, and nearly 100,000 Tibetans to flee to India for safety. Accepted as refugees by the Indian government, the Dalai Lama and his followers quickly established a Tibetan government-in-exile at Dharamsala in northern India.

Since 1949, the Chinese occupation of Tibet has been directly responsible for the deaths of more than 1,200,000 Tibetans, one-sixth of that nation's population. Of this number, 433,000 died in combat, including uprisings; 343,000 died as a result of famine; 173,000 died in imprisonment; 157,000 were executed; 93,000 were tortured to death; and 9,000 were driven to suicide.

In addition to this genocide, the Chinese government has pursued ethnocide — the deliberate eradication of a people's national identity. Traditional Tibetan clothing and hairstyles were outlawed. Buddhist texts were burned. Priceless cultural artifacts were either destroyed or stolen and sold in Tokyo and Hong Kong for foreign exchange. Of the 6,254 monasteries and temples which existed in Tibet in 1949, all but eleven were razed to the ground.

Currently, the Chinese practices of genocide and ethnocide against the Tibetans are combined in China's population transfer policy which is touted by Beijing as an economic development program.

Employing an argument similar to one used by pro-immigration lobbyists in the U.S., Beijing maintains the large scale utilization of skilled and unskilled Chinese immigrant labor in Tibet is essential to the growth and prosperity of the Tibetan economy. Espousing a viewpoint identical to one advanced by multiculturalists in the U.S., Beijing asserts such Chinese immigration has the added social benefit of enriching Tibetan culture by creating cultural diversity. In reality, Beijing's "economic development program" — which actually promotes

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increased unemployment among Tibetans as native-born Tibetans are fired so that Chinese immigrants can be hired — is a pogrom involving the colonization of Tibet by millions of Chinese.

To facilitate this colonization, Beijing offers extensive economic, educational, and social benefits to the Chinese who emigrate to Tibet — a policy similar to the wide range of benefits from affirmative action to welfare that Washington offers those from the Third World who immigrate, legally or illegally, to the U.S.

As a result, within the historic borders of Tibet — the Tibet Autonomous Region and the former Tibetan provinces of Amdo and Kham — there are, in addition to six million Tibetans, approximately eight million Chinese. Most Chinese colonists have settled in Amdo and Kham. While few Chinese lived in these two Tibetan provinces before 1950, Chinese now outnumber Tibetans in Amdo by at least three to one, and comprise nearly half the population of Kham. These figures are conservative. They refer only to Chinese settlers and do not include Chinese military personnel or the

Chinese prison population.

A further two million Chinese colonists have emigrated to the Tibet Autonomous Region. Lhasa, the Tibetan capital, has 200,000 residents. More than half the population and an overwhelming majority of the merchants are now Chinese. Both Lhasa and Shigatse, the second largest Tibetan city with a population of 50,000, are becoming, architecturally and demographically, indistinguishable from Beijing. Just as in the U.S., Los Angeles is becoming indistinguishable from Mexico City, and Miami more and more resembles Batista's Havana.

After their annexation of Tibet, the Chinese Communists condemned as divisive the idea that Tibetans were a distinct nation just as multiculturalists in the U.S. deny that the U.S. is a distinct nation and condemn the very idea as divisive, if not racist. Since the Tibetan language is a living symbol of the Tibetan nation, Beijing has suppressed Tibetan as the language of the government of Tibet through the promotion of official bilingualism. In purpose and method, this policy resembles the attack launched by the bilingual lobby in the U.S. on English as the language of the government of the U.S. Tibetans have labeled the Chinese policy of official bilingualism in Tibet as "linguicide".

As part of the ongoing attack on Tibetan national identity, the state school system operated by Beijing in Tibet is conducted in the Chinese language and geared exclusively toward Chinese immigrants. It promotes Chinese culture, Chinese history, and Chinese values. Tibetan culture, history, and values, are taught, if at all, as being inferior to the Chinese and destined to be replaced by the latter so that Tibet can be "competitive" in the world economy. A parallel exists with the U.S. public school system where the national identity of the U.S. is attacked by denigrating its language, history, culture, and values, and promoting those of Third World immigrants.

For nearly forty years, the Tibetan government-in-exile of the Dalai Lama residing in Dharamsala, India has been documenting the ongoing tragedy in Tibet. There in northern India the Dalai Lama's government has preserved Tibet's national identity, cultural heritage, and Buddhist beliefs.

But it has also introduced many social and political reforms directly affecting the lives of Tibetan refugees including a medical institute, a

department of health which operates sixty-six primary health care centers, a mass education system based upon the British version used in India, a draft constitution, and an elected parliament. The government possesses no police or military forces. Its operating income is derived solely from an annual voluntary tax, business revenue, and donations. Independent publications in Tibetan, Chinese, and English and an independent opposition political party, the National Democratic Party of Tibet, attest to the existence of freedom of the press and freedom of speech.

There are an estimated 130,000 Tibetan refugees worldwide with 98 percent living in the three countries on Tibet's southern border: India (77 percent), Nepal (19 percent), and Bhutan (2 percent). While a few Tibetan exiles possess foreign passports, most hold registration certificates from India.

For nearly forty years, Tibetans fleeing Chinese persecution have sought and been granted asylum in India and Nepal. Once in those countries, assistance has been provided these refugees by the Tibetan government-in-exile.

Under those conditions, Tibetans have no legal right to be admitted to the U.S. as refugees. However, since Congress was intent on admitting them as such, Section 134 of the Immigration Act of 1990 was enacted to solve that problem.

By this law, Congress defined Tibetans living in India and Nepal as "displaced" persons, historically a synonym for refugees; classified them as "immigrants" for purposes of admissions; but treated those Tibetans as de facto refugees by granting them special admissions outside the normal quotas.

For the 1991, 1992, and 1993 fiscal years, a total of 1,000 immigration visas were made available to Tibetans living in India and Nepal. Those resettled in the U.S. can be expected to petition the Immigration and Naturalization Service to have family members admitted under "family reunification." Those family members will, in turn, petition to have their family members admitted, and so on, and so on.

The purpose of this migration was spelled out in the January-April 1992 issue of *News Tibet*, a publication of the Office of Tibet, as "the development of Tibetan identity in exile at 15 cluster sites in the United States." Clustering refers to the policy of resettling Tibetans in "sufficient geographic

concentration for maintaining social cohesion, Tibetan ethnic identity, and easy access to centrally located resettlement services." This defines the very essence of colonization.

Directed by the Tibetan U.S. Resettlement Project, a coalition of Tibetan and U.S. organizations with which the Tibetan government-in-exile works closely, initial cluster sites are being established in Boston, MA, Amherst, MA, New York, NY, Ithaca, NY, Darien, CT, Madison, WS, Minneapolis/St. Paul, MN, Chicago, IL, Salt Lake City, UT, Boise, ID, Santa Fe, NM, Missoula, MT, Portland, OR, Seattle WA, and San Francisco, CA.

According to this *News Tibet* article which is entitled "Beyond the Melting Pot," "the goal is thus to create a national network of small Tibetan

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communities, building up over time the educational, economic and technical resources needed for developing Tibetan culture in contemporary American society."

This will be achieved, the article insists, because the "melting pot idea" that immigrants assimilate and become Americans is a "largely discredited belief system" which has broken down under the impact of nearly thirty years of massive Third World immigration. The U.S., it asserts, is being transformed into a "multi-cultural mosaic".

This transformation is considered a positive development by the article because:

many generations of melting pot immigrants did not realize what they lost: the extended family, the bond of continuity between the generations, the unifying influence of religious faith and tradition, the spiritual sense of the whole interrelated fabric of life which for so

long had sustained previous generations and enabled them to stay together as a people.

Since nearly 90 percent of all the immigrants legally admitted to the U.S. between 1820 and 1967, the years of the “melting pot,” were from Europe and Canada, these words, which appear in an official publication of the Tibetan government-in-exile, a government that publicly espouses “compassion” and “understanding,” reveal not just an ignorance of the cultures, traditions, religious beliefs, family bonds, and immigration experiences of European-Americans, but a contempt for European-Americans as a people.

For European-Americans are the American nation. Prior to the 1965 Immigration Act they were approximately 90 percent of the U.S. population, and even today, after decades of an essentially “Third World only” immigration policy by the U.S. government, European-Americans still constitute nearly 75 percent of the population.

Furthermore, by pursuing Tibetan resettlement in the U.S., Tibetan activists, the Tibetan government-in-exile and their Congressional supporters

undermine the credibility and the morality of the cause of Tibetan independence.

If the transformation of the U.S. into a “multi-cultural mosaic” is as desirable as Tibetans insist, then why should European-Americans oppose the transformation of Tibet into a “multi-cultural mosaic”? If Third World immigration is good for the U.S., then Chinese immigration is good for Tibet. If official bilingualism is good for the U.S., then official bilingualism is good for Tibet. If national deconstruction and cultural relativism is good for the U.S., then national deconstruction and cultural relativism is good for Tibet.

Supporters of Tibetan independence must recognize that the U.S., like Tibet, is a distinct nation with the legal and moral right to preserve its ethnic, cultural, and religious identity. Sadly, as Section 134 of the Immigration Act of 1990 shows, among those who need to be persuaded that the United States is a historic nation, and not an ideological abstraction, are the members of the U.S. Congress.

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