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# Articulating language oppression: colonialism, coloniality and the erasure of Tibet's minority languages

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**ABSTRACT** Roche's article discusses 'language oppression' as a form of domination that is coherent with other forms of oppression along the lines of 'race', nation, colour and ethnicity. Scholars have defined language oppression as the 'enforcement of language loss by physical, mental, social and spiritual coercion'. It is part of an evolving suite of concepts from linguistics, sociolinguistics and linguistic anthropology that examines issues of language discrimination, or 'linguicism'. Roche explores one aspect of linguicism—language erasure—and how it relates to language oppression, focusing on Tibetans in the People's Republic of China (PRC). He examines how language oppression is produced through practices of erasure: the ways in which certain populations and their languages are systematically rendered discursively invisible. He argues that the erasure of certain languages in the Tibetan context is systematically reproduced by two otherwise opposed political projects: the colonial project of the PRC state; and the international Tibet movement that seeks to resist it. He refers to the contingent cooperation between these two opposed projects as 'articulated oppression'. In concluding the article he examines how the disarticulation of this oppression is a necessary condition for the emancipation of Tibet's minority languages, and discusses the broader significance of this study for understanding language oppression, and its relation to other forms of oppression.

**KEYWORDS** coloniality, colonialism, erasure, language linguicism, oppression, People's Republic of China, Tibet

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## Language oppression and erasure

'Language oppression' is a form of domination that is coherent with other forms of oppression along the lines of 'race', nation, colour and ethnicity.<sup>1</sup> Alice Taff and her colleagues define language oppression as the 'enforcement of language loss by physical, mental, social, and spiritual coercion'.<sup>2</sup> This concept is part of an evolving suite of ideas from linguistics, sociolinguistics and linguistic anthropology that focus on language discrimination, or 'linguicism'.<sup>3</sup> This interdisciplinary field of research includes discussions of accent discrimination (accentism or *glotophobia*),<sup>4</sup> investigations of the intersections of racial and linguistic oppression (raciolinguistics),<sup>5</sup> and studies of language and social justice.<sup>6</sup> While broadly coherent with these other types of linguicism as a form of language-based discrimination, language oppression is arguably the most violent type of linguicism in that it not only subjects speakers of certain languages to regimes of ascription and discrimination, but also aims to transform them forcefully through coerced language loss. This article explores one aspect of this violence—language erasure—by focusing on Tibetans in the People's Republic of China (PRC).

The concept of erasure has been explored within the context of critical Indigenous studies and adjacent disciplines such as postcolonial history. Lisa Kahaleole Hall offers a detailed discussion of erasure in her article 'Strategies of Erasure: U.S. Colonialism and Native Hawaiian Feminism',<sup>7</sup> in which she argues that the exclusion of Indigenous women from multiple mainstream discourses is coherent with the goals of US imperialism and the 'elimination

- 1 Alice Taff, Melvatha Chee, Jaeci Hall, Millie Yéi Dulitseen Hall, Kawennyóhstha Nicole Martin and Annie Johnston, 'Indigenous language use impacts wellness', in Kenneth L. Rehg and Lyle Campbell (eds), *The Oxford Handbook of Endangered Languages* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2018), 862–83.
- 2 *Ibid.*, 863.
- 3 Tove Skutnabb-Kangas, 'Linguicism', in Carol A. Chappelle (ed.), *The Encyclopedia of Applied Linguistics*, published on the *Wiley Online Library* on 19 June 2015 and available at <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1002/9781405198431.wbeal1460> (viewed 21 October 2019).
- 4 Rosina Lippi-Green, *English with an Accent: Language, Ideology, and Discrimination in the United States* (London and New York: Routledge 2012); Pierre W. Orelus, 'Accentism exposed: an anticolonial analysis of accent discrimination with some implications for minority languages', in Pierre W. Orelus (ed.), *Language, Race, and Power in Schools: A Critical Discourse Analysis* (New York and London: Routledge 2017), 127–37.
- 5 H. Samy Alim, John R. Rickford and Arnetha F. Ball (eds), *Raciolinguistics: How Language Shapes Our Ideas about Race* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press 2016).
- 6 Ingrid Piller, *Linguistic Diversity and Social Justice: An Introduction to Applied Sociolinguistics* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press 2016).
- 7 Lisa Kahaleole Hall, 'Strategies of erasure: U.S. colonialism and native Hawaiian feminism', *American Quarterly*, vol. 60, no. 2, 2008, 273–80.

of the native'.<sup>8</sup> More broadly, the concept of erasure is used in studies of imperialism and colonialism to describe how members of minorities, Indigenous and 'subaltern' peoples are silenced in the historical record,<sup>9</sup> their sovereignty legally nullified,<sup>10</sup> their contemporary presence rendered invisible,<sup>11</sup> and their existence written out of the future.<sup>12</sup> Erasure renders certain types of people discursively non-existent, leading to their institutional exclusion and material deprivation and, ultimately, to their social elimination. Rather than simply a passive project of 'overlooking' or excluding certain populations, erasure is an active and productive process that aims to create life for some while denying it to others.<sup>13</sup> William Stanner's lyrical description of the absence of Aboriginal people from Australian historical narratives as 'a view from a window which has been carefully placed to exclude a whole quadrant of the landscape', captures the deliberate nature of erasure, but fails to convey its harms.<sup>14</sup>

This broader sense of erasure also fits with a more restricted sense of the term as used in linguistic anthropology: the role of 'erasure' in the threefold semiotic process of linguistic differentiation described by Judith Irvine and Susan Gal.<sup>15</sup> Irvine and Gal see the differentiation of one language from another as an inherently ideological process, 'suffused with ... political and moral issues'. 'Erasure', they argue, is what happens when linguistic facts do not fit an ideological order. For Irvine and Gal, erasure 'does not ... necessarily mean actual eradication'.<sup>16</sup> They therefore focus primarily on the way that certain linguistic features of particular languages are either taken as representative of linguistic differentiation, or are ignored (erased) in assertions of linguistic homogeneity. However, if we take Irvine and Gal's concession that

- 8 Patrick Wolfe, 'Settler colonialism and the elimination of the native', *Journal of Genocide Research*, vol. 8, no. 4, 2006, 387–409.
- 9 Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* (Boston: Beacon Press 1995).
- 10 Aileen Moreton-Robinson, *Sovereign Subjects: Indigenous Sovereignty Matters* (Sydney: Allen and Unwin 2007); Audra Simpson, *Mohawk Interruptus: Political Life across the Borders of Settler States* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press 2014).
- 11 Coll Thrush, *Native Seattle: Histories from the Crossing-Over Place* (Seattle: University of Washington Press 2007).
- 12 Tom Lawson, *The Last Man: A British Genocide in Tasmania* (London and New York: I. B. Tauris 2014); Patrick Brantlinger, *Dark Vanishings: Discourse on the Extinction of Primitive Races, 1800–1930* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press 2013).
- 13 This interpretation draws on the concept of necropolitics from Achille Mbembé, 'Necropolitics', translated from the French by Libby Meintjes, *Public Culture*, vol. 15, no. 1, 2003, 11–40.
- 14 William E. H. Stanner, 'The Boyer Lectures: after the dreaming' [1968], in William E. H. Stanner, *The Dreaming and Other Essays* (Collingwood, VIC: Black Inc. Agenda 2009), 172–224 (189).
- 15 Judith Irvine and Susan Gal, 'Language ideology and linguistic differentiation', in Paul V. Kroskrity (ed.), *Regimes of Language: Ideologies, Politics, and Identities* (Santa Fe, NM: School of American Research Press 2000), 35–84.
- 16 *Ibid.*, 35, 38.

erasure can, in certain circumstance, mean eradication, and if we jump scale from linguistic features to entire languages, then the narrow meaning of erasure in the context of linguistic anthropology becomes concordant with its broader meaning as described earlier: erasure is about the eradication of languages that are not salient to a particular political order, through the refusal to include them in public discourse and institutions, leading to their elimination.

In order to understand the relationship between language erasure and language oppression in the case of Tibetans in the PRC, we need to understand the specificities of the PRC's colonial regime. In approaching this, it is important to resist the temptation to reason by analogy from better-known contexts.<sup>17</sup> We need to avoid reproducing what Ann Stoler and Carole McGranahan describe as an 'abiding focus' on nineteenth- and twentieth-century European colonialism as the 'default model' for studies of colonialism,<sup>18</sup> producing what Patrick Wolfe has called an 'oddly monolithic, surprisingly unexamined, notion of colonialism'.<sup>19</sup> In this article, I argue that a particularly significant feature of these analogic models that we must resist in order to understand the PRC as a colonial regime is the way in which they render relations of domination in binary terms, involving a dominant majority and dominated group or groups. Rather than bilateral relations of domination and resistance, I argue that the PRC's particular form of colonialism operates through dual logics of subordination (to Han supremacy) and erasure (of certain populations), creating a tripartite social structure of privileged Han, subordinated minorities and erased linguistic groups.

However, even taking this analogical flaw into account will still provide an incomplete picture of the mechanisms of language oppression in the Tibetan context. I argue that we also need to look at how resistance to the PRC's colonial project reproduces state-mandated erasure and leads to language oppression. To explore how this works, I draw on Anibal Quijano's concept of 'coloniality',<sup>20</sup> which examines how colonial patterns of power and inequality exceed the spatial and temporal boundaries of empire and colony.<sup>21</sup>

17 Mahmood Mamdani, *Citizen and Subject: Contemporary Africa and the Legacy of Late Colonialism* (Princeton, NJ and Oxford: Princeton University Press 1997).

18 Ann Stoler and Carole McGranahan, 'Introduction: refiguring imperial terrains', in Ann Stoler, Carole McGranahan and Peter Perdue (eds), *Imperial Formations* (Santa Fe, NM: School for Advanced Research Press 2007), 3–44 (5).

19 Patrick Wolfe, *Settler Colonialism and the Transformation of Anthropology: The Politics and Poetics of an Ethnographic Event* (London and New York: Cassell 1999), 1.

20 Anibal Quijano, 'Coloniality of power and Eurocentrism in Latin America', *International Sociology*, vol. 15, no. 2, 2000, 215–32.

21 Ana Deumert and Nkululeko Mabandla, 'Beyond colonial linguistics: the dialectic of control and resistance in the standardization of isiXhosa', in Pia Lane, James Costa and Hayley De Korne (eds), *Standardizing Minority Languages: Competing Ideologies of Authenticity and Anonymity in the Global Periphery* (Abingdon, Oxon. and New York: Routledge 2018), 200–21; Walter D. Mignolo, *The Darker Side of Western Modernity: Global Futures, Decolonial Options* (Durham, NC and London: Duke University Press 2011);

Specifically, I argue that the global Tibet movement reproduces the language erasures of the PRC colonial regime. This is an example of a much broader phenomenon I call the ‘coloniality of resistance’: the tendency of resistance projects to reproduce the ontological and moral frames of their dominator.<sup>22</sup>

I therefore argue that, in order to understand erasure and language oppression in the Tibetan context, we need to look at how both colonialism and the coloniality of resistance unintentionally reproduce identical discourses of erasure, thus leading these opposing political blocs to cooperate in a shared project of language oppression. Drawing on Stuart Hall’s concept of ‘ideological articulation’, I refer to this unintentional cooperation as ‘articulated oppression’. Hall defines articulation as ‘the form of the connection that can make a unity of two different elements, under certain conditions. It is a linkage which is not necessary, determined, absolute and essential for all time.’<sup>23</sup> Following recent usages of this concept that look at the way in which social movements emerge in complex globalized flows of information,<sup>24</sup> I argue that the coincidental reproduction of identical discursive erasure by the PRC and the global Tibet movement operate as an articulated form of language oppression: a contingent and potentially temporary formation that at present is causing language oppression.

This article illustrates erasure and articulated language oppression with a case study of Tibetans in the PRC. As is discussed throughout the article,

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Mabel Moraña, Enrique Dussel and Carlos A. Jáuregui (eds), *Coloniality at Large: Latin America and the Postcolonial Debate* (Durham, NC and London: Duke University Press 2008).

- 22 Cornell West, for example, in his discussion of black nationalism, refers to it as a ‘cantankerous reversal’ of ‘alienating Anglo-American ideals of beauty and behavior’, and draws parallels between the ways in which it thus reproduces dominant ontological and moral frames in much the same way that postcolonial states ‘deploy essentialist rhetorics about “homogeneous national communities” and “positive images” in order to repress and regiment their diverse and heterogeneous populations’: Cornell West, *Keeping Faith: Philosophy and Race in America* (New York and London: Routledge 2009), 252, 17. Jacqueline Urla *et al.*, with specific reference to language revitalization movements, refer to this as the ‘reproduction thesis’, that is, the idea that resistance movements reproduce the ‘dominant language ideology, and inadvertently, the inequalities and hierarchies these values entail’: Jacqueline Urla, Estibaliz Amorrortu, Ane Ortega and Jone Goirigolzarri, ‘Basque standardization and the new speaker: political praxis and the shifting dynamics of authority and value’, in Lane, Costa and De Korne (eds), *Standardizing Minority Languages*, 32–54 (43).
- 23 Lawrence Grossberg, ‘On postmodernism and articulation: an interview with Stuart Hall’, *Journal of Communication Inquiry*, vol. 10, no. 2, 1986, 45–60 (53).
- 24 Bret Gustafson, *New Languages of the State: Indigenous Resurgence and the Politics of Knowledge in Bolivia* (Durham, NC and London: Duke University Press 2009); Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing, *Friction: An Ethnography of Global Connection* (Princeton, NJ and Woodstock, Oxon.: Princeton University Press 2011).

Tibetans in the PRC are not linguistically homogeneous: this commonsense understanding is a misperception based on deliberate erasure.<sup>25</sup> I also ask which aspects of linguistic diversity among Tibetans are erased, by whom, how, when and why. I occasionally focus on Manegacha, one of Tibet's erased languages. This language, spoken by 8,000 Tibetans on the northeast Tibetan Plateau, is currently undergoing language shift,<sup>26</sup> meaning that children are no longer learning Manegacha—they learn Tibetan instead—thus leading to the language's eventual demise.<sup>27</sup> Although practices of language socialization and intergenerational transmission constitute the coalface of language shift, I argue that these intimate, interpersonal 'decisions' are overdetermined by a vast global network of institutional and discursive erasure.<sup>28</sup> It is in the blaring silence of this erasure, rather than the actions of individuals, that we should seek the origins of language shift as an aspect of language oppression. Therefore, although this is an anthropological study of language shift, it is more of an exercise in political economy than ethnography.<sup>29</sup>

Finally, although making reference to the specific case of Manegacha and tied to the broader context of the Tibetan predicament, the arguments outlined in this article are intended to demonstrate the relationship between erasure and language oppression at a more general level. In the conclusion, I discuss how the articulated nature of language oppression, in a context where half of the world's languages are undergoing shift, that is, facing language oppression,<sup>30</sup> presents both opportunities and challenges for emancipatory movements that seek to resist erasure and language oppression.

- 25 For reasons of space, this article overlooks a third bloc that participates in the erasure of Tibet's minority languages: Tibetan civil society in the PRC. On this topic, see Dak Lhagyal, 'Linguistic authority in state-society interaction: cultural politics of Tibetan education in China', *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education*, forthcoming (published online 29 July 2019, [doi.org/10.1080/01596306.2019.1648239](https://doi.org/10.1080/01596306.2019.1648239), viewed 21 October 2019).
- 26 Susan Gal, *Language Shift: Social Determinants of Linguistic Change in Bilingual Austria* (New York: Academic Press 1979); Anne Pauwels, *Language Maintenance and Shift* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press 2016).
- 27 Gerald Roche, 'Does ideological clarification help language maintenance? Exploring the revitalization paradox through a case study of Manegacha, a Tibetan minority language', *Anthropological Linguistics*, vol. 60, no. 4, 2018 (forthcoming).
- 28 Joshua A. Fishman, *Reversing Language Shift: Theoretical and Empirical Foundations of Assistance to Threatened Languages* (Clevedon, Somerset: Multilingual Matters 1991); Don Kulick, *Language Shift and Cultural Reproduction: Socialization, Self, and Syncretism in a Papua New Guinean Village* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1997).
- 29 Susan Gal, 'Language and political economy', *Annual Review of Anthropology*, vol. 18, 1989, 345–67; Judith T. Irvine, 'When talk isn't cheap: language and political economy', *American Ethnologist*, vol. 16, no. 2, 1989, 248–67.
- 30 Lyle Campbell and Anna Belew (eds), *Cataloguing the World's Endangered Languages* (New York and London: Routledge 2018).

## On the Procrustean ward: inside the PRC's language death machine

In classical Greek mythology, Procrustes was a murderer who dispatched his victims in an especially peculiar manner. Having lured them to his home, he provided the victim with an iron bed to sleep on and, finding them either too short or too tall, would stretch or chop until they fit the frame. This myth gives us the metaphor of the 'Procrustean bed', a rigid conceptual framework into which we squeeze reality, violently contorting and butchering it until it fits. The colonial nature of the PRC is often presented in such a Procrustean manner: the state is a Han template on to which a diverse population is being fitted; the non-Han peoples of the PRC, its 55 *shaoshu minzu*, or minority nationalities, are to be eliminated, along with their languages, histories, cultures and identities, if not their bodies.

In this section I will demonstrate that this analogous rendering of colonialism in the PRC is wrong. In doing so, I am not suggesting that Han supremacy is irrelevant. Nor am I suggesting that the PRC's colonialism somehow does not involve any violence or elimination: it does. Rather, I will demonstrate that rendering colonialism in the PRC as simply being about a bilateral relation of domination crucially underestimates the extent and nature of colonial violence and renders the majority of its victims invisible. Crucial to understanding this is an examination of two different numbers: 56 and 302.

The PRC is officially home to 56 *minzu*, a term that Frank Dikötter argues is best translated as 'Volk' but that is more often rendered as 'nationalities' or 'ethnic groups'.<sup>31</sup> It is also home to a much larger number of languages. The *Ethnologue*, an important reference work on global linguistic diversity,<sup>32</sup> currently registers 302 languages in the PRC, though reference works published in the PRC list only 130.<sup>33</sup> Regardless of whether the PRC has 302 or 130 languages, there are far more languages than *minzu*,<sup>34</sup> and the gap between the two numbers reveals the engine at the heart of the PRC's logic of colonial erasure.<sup>35</sup> Like *Volk*, *minzu* are imagined as linguistically homogeneous blocs;

31 Frank Dikötter, *The Discourse of Race in Modern China*, revd 2nd edn (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press 2015), 61.

32 David M. Eberhard, Gary F. Simons and Charles D. Fennig (eds), *Ethnologue: Languages of the World, Twenty-Second Edition* (Dallas: SIL International 2019), available online at [www.ethnologue.com](http://www.ethnologue.com) (viewed 17 September 2019).

33 Sun Hongkai, Hu Zengyi and Huang Xing (eds), *Zhōngguó de yǔyán* (The Languages of China) (Beijing: Commercial Press 2007).

34 Even the low estimate would mean that there are at least two languages for every *minzu*. Indeed, Sun Hongkai, one of the PRC's leading linguists, stated over twenty years ago that, 'of the 55 national minorities in China, 15 (27.7%) use more than two languages' (emphasis added): Sun Hongkai, 'On nationality and the recognition of Tibeto-Burman languages', *Linguistics of the Tibeto-Burman Area*, vol. 15, no. 2, 1992, 1–19 (2).

35 David Bradley notes that the larger figure (at that time 293) 'exaggerates the number somewhat': David Bradley, 'Languages and language families in China', in Rint



the actualization of this imagined homogeneity mandates the erasure of surplus diversity.

David Bradley has described how such a system, applied in Europe, would recognize a number of 'nationalities', each with a single standard language: 'There would be one Romance nationality [for French, Spanish, Italian, Portuguese etc.], one Germanic nationality [English, Swedish, Yiddish, Icelandic etc.], one Slavic nationality, and Basque, Celtic, Finnish/Estonian, Greek, Hungarian, Romani and possibly Baltic minorities ...'<sup>36</sup> Imagining Germans, Norwegians, Swedes, Danes and English-speakers all being perceived as speaking a single language will give readers who are more familiar with the European context some purchase on the PRC's project of language oppression. The following examples will illustrate how this works in practice in the context of three of the PRC's *minzu*. In each case, we see a tension between the erasure of 'surplus' diversity, and the subordination of remaining languages to the official national language, Putonghua.

The Mongols are recognized as one of the country's 56 ethnic groups. Despite the fact that they speak at least six distinct languages,<sup>37</sup> Mongols have a single designated spoken language (Chakhar Mongolian) and script.<sup>38</sup> In addition to being promoted among Mongols throughout the PRC, these standards are also taught to other ethnic groups in the Mongols' titular autonomous region, the Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region. Therefore, Standard Mongolian is currently replacing not only several languages spoken by Mongols but also those of other ethnic groups, such as the Evenki. Meanwhile, language shift is also underway among many Mongols from Standard Mongolian to Putonghua.<sup>39</sup> Standard Mongolian is therefore replacing various other languages of the Mongols and other ethnic groups, at the same time as being replaced by the national common language.

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Sybesma (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Chinese Language and Linguistics*, 5 vols (Leiden and Boston: Brill 2016). Nonetheless, he has also observed elsewhere that 'China is one of the last places on earth where there are large numbers of unreported and undescribed languages': David Bradley, 'Introduction: language policy and language endangerment in China', *International Journal of the Sociology of Language*, no. 173, 2005, 1–22 (11).

36 David Bradley and Maya Bradley, 'Language policy and language maintenance: Yi in China', in David Bradley and Maya Bradley (eds), *Language Endangerment and Language Maintenance: An Active Approach* (London: RoutledgeCurzon 2002), 77–97 (77–8).

37 Eberhard, Simons and Fennig (eds), *Ethnologue*.

38 Elena Indjieva, 'Oirat Tones and Break Indices (O-ToBI): Intonational Structure of the Oirat Language', PhD dissertation, University of Hawai'i, 2009, 56.

39 Sarala Puthuval, 'Language Maintenance and Shift across Generations in Inner Mongolia', PhD dissertation, University of Washington, 2017; Uradyn E. Bulag, 'Mongolian ethnicity and linguistic anxiety in China', *American Anthropologist*, vol. 105, no. 4, 2003, 753–63.

The Yi are another of the PRC's *minzu*. There are currently over 8 million Yi people, speaking, according to David Bradley, over sixty languages.<sup>40</sup> Among these languages, a single spoken variety has been identified as the common standard.<sup>41</sup> The disparity between linguistic diversity and its formal recognition has resulted in a situation in which, according to Bradley 'most of the many languages spoken by ... Yi ... are endangered'.<sup>42</sup> One symptom of this situation has been the rise of what is known as *tuanjiehua*, an ironic term meaning 'ethnic unity speech', and referring to Yi languages being spoken 'with a fair share of Sichuan dialect loan words and ... grammar'.<sup>43</sup> In response, prominent Yi intellectuals have formulated a 'Yi Mother Tongue Movement' which has sought to promote the same single standard language supported by the state, thus further exacerbating language endangerment and loss among the Yi.

Finally, we can look at the PRC's majority, the Han. Although 'Chinese' is often considered a single language, it is actually a group of mutually unintelligible spoken languages, which are described as differing as much as 'any two languages within the Indo-European language family',<sup>44</sup> or as being 'as far apart as Dutch and English or French and Spanish or French and Italian'.<sup>45</sup> For the Han, the only language promoted by the state, especially through education but also through other channels such as mass media, is the national common language, Putonghua. Importantly, this language represents neither any local spoken variety nor the interests of any particular Han subgroup, as it is an artificial language that, in 1949, could boast only one speaker.<sup>46</sup> In line with Joseph Errington's description of Indonesian, we could describe Putonghua as an 'unnative' language, one that belongs to no

- 40 David Bradley, 'Language policy for China's minorities: orthography development for the Yi', *Written Language and Literacy*, vol. 12, no. 2, 2009, 170–87.
- 41 David Bradley, 'Language policy for the Yi', in Stevan Harrall (ed.), *Perspectives on the Yi of Southwest China* (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press 2001), 195–213; Erik Mueggler, *The Age of Wild Ghosts: Memory, Violence, and Place in Southwest China* (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press 2001).
- 42 David Bradley, 'Sanie and language loss in China', *International Journal of the Sociology of Language*, no. 173, 2005, 159–76 (159).
- 43 Olivia Kraef, 'Building Yi (m)other tongue: virtual platforms, language maintenance and cultural awareness in a Chinese minority context', in Erich Kasten and Tjeerd de Graaf (eds), *Sustaining Indigenous Knowledge: Learning Tools and Community Initiatives to Preserve Endangered Languages and Local Cultural Heritage* (Fürstenberg/Havel: Kulturstiftung Sibirien 2013), 219–48 (225). See also Linda Tsung, 'Language and power: *tuanjie hua*, an Yi-Han mixed language', *International Journal of the Sociology of Language*, no. 215, 2012, 63–77.
- 44 Margaret Mian Yan, *Introduction to Chinese Dialectology* (Munich: Lincom Europa 2006), 2.
- 45 John DeFrancis, *The Chinese Language: Fact and Fantasy* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press 1984), 39.
- 46 Yuen Ren Chao, *Aspects of Chinese Sociolinguistics* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press 1976), 103.

one in particular.<sup>47</sup> The impact of promoting this unnative tongue among the Han, while people's actual native tongues are subordinated as dialects, can be gauged, for example, in the massive demonstrations in defence of Cantonese that rocked the southern PRC in 2010.

What we see in all these cases is, first, that the provision for state support of languages is restricted to a narrow fraction of the actual number of languages spoken: most languages are erased in state language discourses. Second, they show that, even when the state recognizes and supports a language, it is inevitably insufficient in comparison to what is provided for the common national language, Putonghua. So we see that, even as certain minority languages are replacing unrecognized languages, they are also simultaneously being subordinated, transformed and even replaced by Putonghua. The sorting of all citizens of the PRC into 56 *minzu*, when viewed against the backdrop of the country's linguistic diversity, therefore produces three categories of languages in terms of their recognition and treatment by the state: the national common language; the recognized minority languages; and the unrecognized languages that are spoken by both the Han majority and ethnic minorities. The case of Manegacha, an unrecognized language, and its relation to Tibetan, a recognized minority language, and Putonghua, the national language, will help us understand these categories.

To begin with, the national common language of the PRC, Putonghua, is universally privileged among all the country's languages. Although the constitution of the PRC mandates 'equality' of all languages, Putonghua is juridically first among equals.<sup>48</sup> It is the only language specifically named in any of the country's legal mechanisms for language.<sup>49</sup> It is also the only language that *must*, legally, be used in certain contexts in the PRC. Citizens of the PRC are ranked according to their proficiency in Putonghua, which is measured using a national standardized test. Such ranking systems regarding language proficiency operate as a crucial gatekeeper to educational and employment opportunities: 'Because linguistic practices provide access to material resources, they become resources in their own right.'<sup>50</sup> In order to realize its desired status as the 'common speech' of the PRC, the state has set targets for the number of people who should be able to use and understand Putonghua: having risen from 53 per cent of citizens in 2007, now standing at 70 per

47 J. Joseph Errington, *Shifting Languages: Interaction and Identity in Javanese Indonesia* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press 1998).

48 Claire Saillard, 'On the promotion of Putonghua in China: how a standard language becomes a vernacular', in Minglang Zhou and Sun Hongkai (eds), *Language Policy in the People's Republic of China: Theory and Practice since 1949* (Boston: Kluwer Academic Publishers 2004), 163–76; Linda Tsung, *Language Power and Hierarchy: Multilingual Education in China* (London and New York: Bloomsbury 2016).

49 John S. Rohsenow, 'Fifty years of script and written language reform in the PRC: the genesis of the language law of 2001', in Zhou and Sun (eds), *Language Policy in the People's Republic of China*, 21–44.

50 Gal, 'Language and political economy', 353.

cent, and aiming to reach 80 per cent by 2020.<sup>51</sup> No similar programme exists for any of the country's other languages. Meanwhile, Putonghua is vigorously policed in public. Media professionals, for example, are subject to intense scrutiny for their pronunciation, and regular state-sponsored campaigns are organized to rid the language of foreign loan words, thus additionally indicating the massive corpus-planning initiative that underpins the privilege of this common, unnative tongue.<sup>52</sup>

In contrast, there are no contexts in which it is mandatory to use recognized minority languages, such as Tibetan.<sup>53</sup> Nonetheless, the state does invest considerable material and symbolic capital in affirming, defining, developing and propagating Tibetan. Government white papers in 2008, 2011 and 2015 refer to 'the Tibetan language' as the language of the Tibetan people, describing it as 'an important tool of communication for the people in Tibet over thousands of years, and an important symbol and carrier of Tibetan culture', while outlining and celebrating government efforts to promote and develop this language.<sup>54</sup> Even if these claims were substantively empty, they would indicate a certain degree of recognition that a Tibetan language exists, and that it bears some relation to Tibetan identity. And yet, to fully appreciate the contradictions of language politics in the PRC, we must recognize that the state *does* act on these claims. To cite but a few activities that the state engages in, we may note: corpus development and acquisition planning through a standard Tibetan language commission in Beijing; broadcast media, including radio and television (with three major Tibetan-language television stations and a host of local broadcasters); curriculum and textbook development through a centralized agency that includes all Tibetan areas of the PRC;

51 'China sets target for 80% of citizens to speak Mandarin by 2020', *BBC News* (online), 3 April 2017, available at [www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-39484655](http://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-39484655) (viewed 17 September 2019).

52 David Moser, *A Billion Voices: China's Search for a Common Language* (Sydney: Penguin 2016).

53 Fernand de Varennes, 'Language rights and Tibetans in China: a look at international law', in Kunsang Gya, Andrea Snaveley and Elliot Sperling (eds), *Minority Language in Today's Global Society* (New York: Trace Foundation 2012), 14–61.

54 The following White Papers are issued by the State Council Information Office of the People's Republic of China: 'Protection and development of Tibetan culture', *White Paper*, 25 September 2008, available on the *Permanent Mission of the People's Republic of China to the UN* website at [www.china-un.org/eng/gyzg/xizang/t521512.htm](http://www.china-un.org/eng/gyzg/xizang/t521512.htm); 'Sixty years since peaceful liberation of Tibet', *White Paper*, July 2011, available on the *State Council of the People's Republic of China* website at [http://english.gov.cn/archive/white\\_paper/2014/09/09/content\\_281474986284633.htm](http://english.gov.cn/archive/white_paper/2014/09/09/content_281474986284633.htm); 'Tibet's path of development is driven by an irresistible historical tide', *White Paper*, April 2015, available on the *State Council of the People's Republic of China* website at [http://english.gov.cn/archive/white\\_paper/2015/04/15/content\\_281475089444218.htm](http://english.gov.cn/archive/white_paper/2015/04/15/content_281475089444218.htm); 'Successful practice of regional ethnic autonomy in Tibet', *White Paper*, 6 September 2015, available on the *State Council of the People's Republic of China* website at [http://english.gov.cn/archive/white\\_paper/2015/09/06/content\\_281475183815861.htm](http://english.gov.cn/archive/white_paper/2015/09/06/content_281475183815861.htm) (all viewed 17 September 2019).

support for authors through literary federations, and a very active state-run publishing industry; and the inclusion of Tibetan script on signage in public space, including airports, hospitals, schools, ATMs, commercial signs, road signs and so on. Whereas Putonghua is compulsory for education and employment, structures supporting the optional use of Tibetan have been sufficiently developed that it is possible—possible but extremely difficult—to study from kindergarten to PhD in Tibetan, and then graduate and work in a predominantly Tibetan-language workplace. Further indicative of the privileging of Tibetan relative to unrecognized languages, we may note that the language is currently in the process of replacing at least six of those languages, including Manegacha.<sup>55</sup>

Among the three categories within the PRC's system of defining and managing languages, unrecognized languages like Manegacha can be thought of as 'last among equals'.<sup>56</sup> As with the Han, Yi and Mongolian *minzu*, Tibetans in the PRC use numerous languages; the sixteen Tibetan varieties of Tibetan they speak would be considered 'languages' in any other context,<sup>57</sup> and a further twenty-seven, non-Tibetic languages are also used by Tibetans in the PRC,<sup>58</sup> including Tibetan Sign Language.<sup>59</sup> There are no measures for using and developing these unrecognized languages. Manegacha is banned from schools, even when its speakers constitute the majority of students. Tibetan is used instead, transitioning to Putonghua in the higher grades. There is no broadcast media in Manegacha: of the around 100 television stations available locally, approximately four are in Tibetan, the rest in Putonghua. There is no publishing industry for the language because the state has not developed a writing system for it. There are no opportunities for the language to be used for any kind of employment or commercial activity. Therefore, since Manegacha can currently only be used in the home, many of its speakers describe it as 'useless'. But it would be more accurate to say that the systematic institutional erasure of the language amounts to a refusal to allow the language utility.

Contrasting the situation of these three languages—Putonghua, Tibetan and Manegacha—we see that Putonghua is clearly dominant. It is aggressively promoted, its acquisition and use enforced, and its role in social, cultural and economic life unambiguously privileged. Meanwhile, recognized minority languages, such as Tibetan, are marginalized and subordinated relative

55 Gerald Roche, *Draft Report on Tibet's Linguistic Minorities*, 19 February 2018, available on the Center for Open Space website at <https://osf.io/xsz32> (viewed 17 September 2019).

56 Yuri Slezkine, *Arctic Mirrors: Russia and the Small Peoples of the North* (Ithaca, NY and London: Cornell University Press 1994), 292.

57 Nicolas Tournadre, 'The Tibetic languages and their classification', in Thomas Owen-Smith and Nathan W. Hill (eds), *Trans-Himalayan Linguistics: Historical and Descriptive Linguistics of the Himalayan Area* (Berlin and Boston: Walter de Gruyter 2014), 105–29.

58 Gerald Roche and Hiroyuki Suzuki, 'Tibet's minority languages: diversity and endangerment', *Modern Asian Studies*, vol. 52, no. 4, 2018, 1227–78.

59 Theresia Hofer, 'Is Lhasa Tibetan Sign Language emerging, endangered, or both?', *International Journal of the Sociology of Language*, no. 245, 2017, 113–45.

to the national common language, but are recognized, and do receive state support (though this is optional rather than compulsory, and always insufficient). Meanwhile, speakers of the PRC's non-recognized languages—which are the majority of languages in the PRC, and spoken by most of the country's citizens—are offered a false choice between the national common language, their designated ethnic language (unless they are Han) or the regionally dominant ethnic language of another group. Since the state provides no support for the use, maintenance or development of unrecognized languages, their only future role is to disappear.

We thus see in the PRC a clear hierarchy of languages and their speakers: Putonghua at the top, recognized minority languages in the middle, and non-recognized languages, of both ethnic minorities and the Han, at the bottom. Putonghua is privileged, minority languages subordinated and marginalized, and non-recognized languages are slated for elimination through a broad project of malevolent neglect, rooted in discursive erasure. What defines this classificatory schema is not so much the subordination of certain groups—the 55 minorities—as the refusal to acknowledge the vast majority of groups: the PRC's more than 200 unrecognized languages. Ann Stoler's observation is relevant here:

One fundamental dimension of political repression works through assessing measures of who and what counts, and who and what does not. ... some kinds of beings, things, and practices are made to matter, qualified as worthy of inclusion in the catchment of attention and urgencies ...<sup>60</sup>

The preponderance of these unrecognized languages and the programme of erasure directed at them reveals what I refer to as the dark ontology of the PRC's ethnic policy. I draw this phrase 'dark ontology' from the philosopher Charles W. Mills, who introduced the concept in his book *Blackness Visible* in order to discuss the racist underpinnings of Enlightenment philosophy. The reality of Enlightenment philosophy, according to Mills, can be summarized as: 'one set of rules for whites, another for nonwhites. All persons are equal, but only white males are persons.' Mills goes on to describe this erasure of non-white bodies from Enlightenment philosophy as being 'dark' in three senses. First, in that it is 'color-coded', 'consigning nonwhites to a lower rung on the ontological ladder. ... Second, it is dark in the sense of being sinister, a social ontology of domination and subordination. And finally, it is dark in the sense of being largely unacknowledged ...'<sup>61</sup> Although the 'dark ontology' of the PRC's ethnic policy is not colour-coded in the same way as Mill's example (though it is racist), it *is* dark in the sense of being 'a social ontology of domination and subordination' as well as being invisible and unacknowledged.

60 Ann Laura Stoler, 'Introduction: the dark logic of invasive others', *Social Research: An International Quarterly*, vol. 84, no. 1, 2017, 3–5 (3).

61 Charles W. Mills, *Blackness Visible: Essays on Philosophy and Race* (Ithaca, NY and London: Cornell University Press 1998), 70.

As a form of domination and subordination, the dark ontology of the PRC's ethnic policy is that it enforces a regime of 'structural violence' that canalizes the country's multilingual population, diverse localized identities and multitudinous cultural practices into a system of 56 homogeneous ethnolinguistic blocs.<sup>62</sup> This structure of 56 groups was determined in the course of an 'ethnic classification project', carried out largely in the 1950s.<sup>63</sup> To paraphrase Patrick Wolfe, ethnic classification is a structure, not an event, one that now provides the framework that gives juridical significance to the compulsory ethnic identity that every PRC citizen is ascribed, and that has consequences for the languages that they can use, refuse and claim support for.<sup>64</sup> Putonghua is universally obligatory and minority languages are everywhere optional, while claims on unrecognized languages are rendered unintelligible.

The structural violence of this classificatory system constitutes a form of what Rob Nixon has called 'slow violence': 'a violence that occurs gradually and out of sight, a violence of delayed destruction that is dispersed across time and space, an attritional violence that is typically not viewed as violence at all.'<sup>65</sup> It operates at spatial and temporal scales that make it hard to perceive, compared to the spectacular, visible violence of guns, bombs, bulldozers, fists and so on, which we are much more accustomed to hearing about in relation to the PRC: violently crushed protests; imprisoned activists; military patrols; restrictions on speech, affiliation, belief and so on. The structural violence of linguistic erasure is slow because it operates by disrupting the transmission of language from one generation to the next.<sup>66</sup> And it is violent because it invades intimate spaces—the home, the family, the child-parent bond—and renders important decisions in these contexts—like which language to transmit—un-free; it promotes assimilation not by forbidding or banning certain languages, but by making desired options impractical, and undesirable options both convenient and rewarding. The structured, slow violence evokes Foucault's reversal of Carl von Clausewitz's formula in describing politics as the continuation of war by other means.<sup>67</sup> Language oppression can thus be seen as continuous with the violent incorporation of dominated populations into the PRC, the final phase in Patrick Wolfe's model of colonial domination: confrontation; carceration; assimilation.<sup>68</sup> The impact of this violence

62 Johan Galtung, 'Violence, peace, and peace research', *Journal of Peace Research*, vol. 6, no. 3, 1969, 167–91.

63 Thomas S. Mullaney, *Coming to Terms with the Nation: Ethnic Classification in Modern China* (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press 2010), 4.

64 Wolfe, *Settler Colonialism and the Transformation of Anthropology*, 2.

65 Rob Nixon, *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor* (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press 2011), 2. See also Rob Nixon, 'Neoliberalism, slow violence, and the environmental picaresque', *Modern Fiction Studies*, vol. 55, no. 3, 2009, 443–67.

66 Fishman, *Reversing Language Shift*.

67 Michel Foucault, 'Society Must Be Defended': *Lectures at the Collège de France, 1975–1976*, trans. from the French by David Macey (New York: Picador 2003), 15.

68 Wolfe, *Settler Colonialism and the Transformation of Anthropology*, 169.

can be gleaned from a single statistic: half of the PRC's languages are undergoing shift.<sup>69</sup>

If we now return to the allegory of the Procrustean bed, we can see that rather than being a single Procrustean bed—a Han template to which a multicultural population is being fitted—the PRC can more accurately be considered a Procrustean *ward*. The population is confined to a total of 56 iron beds, one for each of the country's formally designated *minzu*. Each of these beds is the site of a unique compilation of deliberate surgical violence, of amputations, grafts, transplants, excisions and transfusions. The floor of the ward swims in the abject: the expurgated habitus and doxa of excess life-ways, languages, traditions, political structures and subjectivities that the state considers superfluous. And yet, throughout these procedures, all the patients on the Procrustean ward are sustained by a complex system of life support, their vital signs carefully monitored, each obliged to remain alive. Some of these beds are bigger and more comfortable than others, their patients better fed and supplied with anaesthetic. But none are spared the violence.

### The coloniality of resistance

The PRC's colonial apparatus dominates Tibetans through simultaneous processes of subordination and erasure, confining the diverse Tibetan population to the iron frame of a violent homogenizing project; the international response to this injustice has been to tighten the straps that bind Tibetans to this structure. In this section I examine the global Tibet movement and how the coloniality of its resistance contributes to the erasure of Tibet's minority languages. I argue that the global Tibet movement offers an alternative hegemony, which, from the perspective of Tibet's erased minority-language speakers, is discursively identical to the PRC's colonial project.<sup>70</sup> Despite their vastly different impacts (as explored below), these projects are discursively indistinguishable in how they represent linguistic diversity in Tibet. From the standpoint of those who use minority languages, the global project of Tibetan resistance is thus a systemic, rather than an anti-systemic movement, in that it seeks to take control of, rather than abolish, existing structures and systems of domination.<sup>71</sup> To demonstrate the manifold ways in which this movement reproduces

69 Xu Shixuan, 'Language endangerment', in Li Yuming and Li Wei (eds), *The Language Situation in China*, vol. 1 (Berlin and Boston: Walter de Gruyter 2013), 261–70 (269).

70 The term 'alternative hegemony', comes from Leisy Thornton Wyman, *Youth Culture, Language Endangerment and Linguistic Survivance* (Bristol, Buffalo, NY and Toronto: Multilingual Matters 2012).

71 Immanuel Wallerstein, 'New revolts against the system', *New Left Review*, no. 18, 2002, 29–39; Anna Morcom, 'Landscape, urbanization, and capitalist modernity: exploring the "great transformation" of Tibet through its songs', *Yearbook for Traditional Music*, no. 47, 2015, 161–89.



the erasure of the PRC's colonial project, I begin with a discussion of the political institutionalization of Tibetan resistance in the global Tibet movement.

Although Tibet is a stateless nation, it does have highly developed institutional apparatuses that imbue it with a high degree of 'stateness',<sup>72</sup> meaning that it can function in numerous 'state-like' ways, both in creating and implementing policies for a specific target population (the Tibetan diaspora community) and in conducting outreach and diplomacy in international forums usually reserved for states. These activities are carried out by the Central Tibetan Administration (CTA), also known as the Tibetan government-in-exile, based in India, but with significant global outreach activities. And, although the CTA does not have any explicit language policy, language issues suffuse the mission and operations of the CTA both in its domestic and international activities. The motive for the CTA's focus on language is described as follows: 'Chinese occupation of Tibet has seen the Tibetan language surpassed by that of the Chinese. The government is repressing Tibetan culture by making the language redundant in all sectors.'<sup>73</sup> This focus on language is not only strategic—aiming to bring about change in the language situation—but also meta-strategic; it is seen as a cornerstone of the CTA's mission to keep 'the Tibet issue' alive, both among Tibetans in exile, and in the international community.

The CTA pursues language management primarily through two departments: the Department of Religion and Culture (DRC) and the Department of Education (DE). The DE states that its 'heart purpose' is to provide 'quality modern education and preservation of the Tibetan language and culture at the same time',<sup>74</sup> and describes one of its primary objectives as developing 'modern scientific and technical education and skills, while preserving and promoting Tibetan language and culture'.<sup>75</sup> In addition to directly administering over seventy schools for Tibetans in India, the DE also engages in designing curricula and syllabi, teacher training and the development and production of teaching materials in written Tibetan. The mission of the DE, and the educational vision of the CTA, is outlined in the 2004 Basic Education Policy.<sup>76</sup> This policy not only asserts the importance of the Tibetan language for Tibetan people, but also its 'great value' for all of humanity. The Tibetan language is identified as the sole medium of education up until the seventh grade, and the primary content of schooling up to this point is identified as

72 Fiona McConnell, *Rehearsing the State: The Political Practices of the Tibetan Government-in-Exile* (Chichester, Sussex and Malden, MA: John Wiley and Sons 2016).

73 'Culture and religion', available on the CTA website at <http://tibet.net/important-issues/issues-facing-tibet-today/#code0slide1> (viewed 18 September 2019).

74 'Department of Education: Introduction', available on the CTA website at <http://tibet.net/department/education> (viewed 18 September 2019).

75 'Department of Education: Administration', available on the CTA website at <http://tibet.net/department/education/#code0slide0> (viewed 18 September 2019).

76 'Basic education policy for Tibetans in exile', available online at <http://sherig.org/en/wp-content/uploads/2013/01/Basic-Education-Policy.pdf> (viewed 18 September 2019).

Tibetan grammar, language and literature. The policy recommends that Tibetan students should be introduced to additional languages from the third grade, with the aim being to learn two additional languages, the first being English, and the second being selected from among Hindi, Chinese and Spanish. The policy makes no mention of the minority languages of Tibet, nor the complex relationship between the spoken and written languages.

In addition to the DE, the DRC also covers language management as part of its purview. Although primarily focusing on the management of religious institutions, the DRC also works more generally to preserve and promote Tibetan cultural heritage, including language. Its website claims that Tibetan script and grammar constitute one of Tibetan civilization's two most magnificent achievements, the other being Buddhism.<sup>77</sup> Most of the DRC's activities that could be classified as language management take place through its affiliated non-monastic institutions, which include not only the Library of Tibetan Works and Archives and the Tibetan Institute for Performing Arts, but also several training centres that provide Tibetan language instruction, such as the Central University of Tibetan Studies and the Manjushree Center of Tibetan Culture.

As mentioned earlier, the promotion of a single Tibetan language by the CTA is part of its mission to 'keep the Tibet issue alive' among Tibetans in exile. A diverse range of banal nationalist discourses and practices has largely succeeded in creating a sense of national belonging among exile Tibetans,<sup>78</sup> predicated on primordial bonds of language and culture,<sup>79</sup> even when those languages and cultures are 'preserved' in exile through processes of deliberate change.<sup>80</sup> Schooling among exile Tibetans encourages them to 'come to learn' and 'go to serve',<sup>81</sup> and this mission to serve is taken to include not only service for other exile Tibetans, but also a strong duty 'to speak and act for their silenced countrymen' inside the PRC.<sup>82</sup> Tibetanness in exile, in short, is predicated on an obligation to perpetuate Tibetanness.

77 'Department of Religion and Culture', available on the CTA website at <http://tibet.net/department/religion/#code0slide2> (viewed 18 September 2019).

78 For a discussion of how these discourses are being contested in the Tibetan diaspora, see Dawa T. Lokyitsang, 'Who is a pure Tibetan? Identity, intergenerational history, and trauma in exile', in Shelly Bhoil and Enrique Galvan-Alvarez (eds), *Tibetan Subjectivities on the Global Stage: Negotiating Dispossession* (Lanham, MD and London: Lexington Books 2018), 195–212.

79 Thomas Kauffmann, *The Agendas of Tibetan Refugees: Survival Strategies of a Government-in-Exile in a World of Transnational Organizations* (New York and Oxford: Berghahn Books 2015).

80 Geoff Childs, 'Culture change in the name of cultural preservation', *Himalaya: The Journal of the Association for Nepal and Himalayan Studies*, vol. 24, no. 1–2, 2004, 31–42 (Article 12).

81 Heidi Swank, *Rewriting Shangri-La: Tibetan Youth, Migrations and Literacies in McLeod Ganj, India* (Leiden: Brill 2014), 75–90.

82 John Whalen-Bridge, *Tibet on Fire: Buddhism, Protest, and the Rhetoric of Self-Immolation* (Basingtoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan 2015), 101.

In addition to this work of both creating and addressing the concerns of the exile Tibetan population, the CTA also carries out diplomatic activities, on the one hand by engaging PRC representatives in dialogue, and on the other by building international support for the Tibetan cause. In both instances, the CTA presents the protection and promotion of a singular Tibetan language as a key issue. In terms of engaging the PRC in dialogue, representatives of the CTA and envoys of the Dalai Lama have made visits to the PRC on several occasions since the death of Mao and the ensuing liberalization during the late 1970s and early 1980s.<sup>83</sup> When language issues have arisen in these negotiations, it has been in terms of a singular Tibetan language. So, for example, the 'Memorandum on Genuine Autonomy for the Tibetan People', released in 2008 by the CTA as part of its attempts to engage Beijing in dialogue, states that 'there is no dispute about the fact that Tibetans share the same language', and refers to this language as 'the most important attribute of the Tibetan people's identity'.<sup>84</sup>

Meanwhile, the CTA maintains an international network of organizations with varying levels of affiliation that assist in promoting and pursuing its mission, including its language management initiatives. These organizations include its 11 international offices that operate like embassies or consulates,<sup>85</sup> and 258 Tibet Support Groups in 55 countries that provide direct support to Tibetans in the diaspora community.<sup>86</sup> All of the international offices and support groups coordinate with the Department of Information and International Relations (DIIR) of the CTA in pursuing strategic goals for the Tibetan cause. The linguistic ideologies and language management activities of these organizations therefore parallel those of the CTA. For example, the website of the Office of Tibet (in Washington D.C.) states that Tibetans 'Share a common language' (without clarifying what that is),<sup>87</sup> the Tibet Information Office in Australia claims on its 'Information at a glance' page that the language of Tibet is 'Tibetan',<sup>88</sup> while the Tibet Bureau in Geneva claims that

83 Warren W. Smith Jr, *Tibet's Last Stand? The Tibetan Uprising of 2008 and China's Response* (Lanham, MD and Plymouth, Devon: Rowman & Littlefield 2009).

84 'Memorandum on general autonomy for the Tibetan people', available on the *International Campaign for Tibet* (ICT) website at <https://savetibet.org/advocacy/memorandum-on-genuine-autonomy-for-the-tibetan-people> (viewed 30 September 2019).

85 Trine Brox, *Tibetan Democracy: Governance, Leadership and Conflict in Exile* (London and New York: I. B. Tauris 2016), 68, 77 lists the international offices and the year in which they opened as follows: New York City (1960 but later moved to Washington, D.C.), Geneva (1960), Delhi (1964), Kathmandu (1964), Tokyo (1975), London (1983), Canberra (1992), Moscow (1993), Pretoria (1997), Taipei (1997) and Brussels (2001).

86 'Tibet Support Groups (TSGs)', available on the CTA website at <http://tibet.net/about-tibet/worldwide-tibet-movement/#code0slide1> (viewed 18 September 2019).

87 Robert Thurman, 'Overview of Tibetan culture', available on the *Office for Tibet* website at <http://tibetoffice.org/tibet-info/tibetan-culture> (viewed 18 September 2019).

88 'Information at a glance', available on the *Tibet Information Office, Australia* website at <http://tibetoffice.com.au/about-tibet/tibet-at-a-glance> (viewed 18 September 2019).

one of its primary roles is to 'Support the preservation and promotion of Tibetan culture, religion and language' (again without naming the language).<sup>89</sup> In addition to the international Tibet offices, the work of support groups is coordinated through the International Tibet Network, which, in addition to identifying Tibet's languages as 'Tibetan',<sup>90</sup> also organizes information campaigns specifically focusing on 'language resistance' that portray Tibet as linguistically homogeneous.<sup>91</sup>

Also working in coordination with the DIIR is the Tibet Policy Institute (TPI), a think tank that aims to promote, collate and disseminate research on the Tibet issue. Research publications issued by the TPI, such as its 2017 report on 'Cultural Genocide in Tibet', consistently refer to Tibetan as the single language of the Tibetan people.<sup>92</sup> This report contains a background section on Tibet's language and literature, which starts by situating 'the Tibetan language' within the 'Tibeto-Burman language group', and then goes on to discuss the invention of the written script and the breadth and depth of Tibetan literature, without making any mention of the variety of spoken and signed languages in Tibet. The second part of the report, on 'Tibetocide', contains a section on 'Damage and Distortion in Tibetan Education and Language', which, despite canvassing a variety of issues related to language and education over the course of some twelve pages, makes no mention of any language other than a singular Tibetan language.

Another group closely affiliated with the CTA which also helps perpetuate this erasure is the Tibetan representation to the Unrepresented People's Organization (UNPO). The UNPO describes its members as 'indigenous peoples, minorities, unrecognised States and occupied territories that have joined together to defend their political, social and cultural rights, to preserve their environments and to promote their right to self-determination'.<sup>93</sup> Although the Tibetan profile on the UNPO website lists a number of ethnic groups as living within Tibet,<sup>94</sup> the subheading 'language' refers only to a

89 'The Tibet Bureau-Geneva', available on the *Tibet Bureau-Geneva* website at [www.tibetoffice.ch/das-buro](http://www.tibetoffice.ch/das-buro) (viewed 18 September 2019).

90 'Tibet at a glance', available on the *International Tibet Network* website at <https://tibetnetwork.org/about-tibet/tibet-at-a-glance> (viewed 18 September 2019).

91 A document collating resources on 'Language resistance in Tibet' is available online at [www.dropbox.com/s/rr9vwk6fjeww8y1/Language%20Resistance%20in%20Tibet.docx](http://www.dropbox.com/s/rr9vwk6fjeww8y1/Language%20Resistance%20in%20Tibet.docx). This information is provided as part of the International Tibet Network's focus on 'cultural resistance': see the *International Tibet Network* website at <https://tibetnetwork.org/portfolio-items/cultural-resistance> (viewed 18 September 2019).

92 'Cultural genocide in Tibet: a report', 2017, available on the *Tibet Policy Institute* website at <https://tibetpolicy.net/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/Tibetocide.pdf> (viewed 18 September 2019).

93 'About UNPO', available on the *UNPO* website at <http://unpo.org/section/2> (viewed 19 September 2019).

94 'Tibet', 23 May 2018, available on the *UNPO* website at <http://unpo.org/members/7879> (viewed 19 September 2019). The following ethnic groups are listed: Se, Mu, Dong, Tong, Dru, Ra, Bai people, Blang, Bonan, Dongxiang, Han, Hui Chinese, Lhoba,

singular Tibetan language, thus once again reproducing the erasure of other languages.

Organizations like the Tibetan representation to UNPO, TPI and the eleven Tibet offices that have an unambiguous relationship to the CTA are joined by a broader network of global civil society organizations that work in various ways to support the Tibetan cause, including the promotion of monoglot nationalism. These organizations form the global Tibet movement, which John Whalen-Bridge defines as 'a set of organizational structures and individual writers who produce speeches, op-ed columns, position papers, informational web pages, public protest and fundraising events, and various other utterances. These speakers do not all have exactly the same goals, but they all want, at the very least, *cultural* autonomy for Tibetans.'<sup>95</sup>

Many of the organizations involved in this movement are specifically Tibet-focused. Most prominent among these is the International Campaign for Tibet (ICT), a largely North American-based organization that does not recognize Tibet's linguistic diversity, despite having run several campaigns on the issue of language in Tibet, and despite centring language in its description of the uniqueness of Tibetan culture, the coherence of the Tibetan nation and the threats faced by the Tibetan people. For example, the organization's current website, updated since April 2019, states that the language of Tibet is 'Tibetan (of the Tibeto-Burmese family)', and goes on to describe how 'since China's occupation, the official language has been Chinese'.<sup>96</sup> This monoglot vision, rooted in Sinophobic alterity, is reproduced in all the ICT campaigns, both strategic and promotional, their work thereby contributing to the erasure of Tibet's minority languages.

Much the same can be said for all other organizations dedicated to the Tibetan cause: even when they adopt vastly different strategies and pursue sometimes conflicting agendas, all perpetuate the same monoglot vision and non-recognition of diversity. A few of the more prominent groups are Students for a Free Tibet,<sup>97</sup> the Tibetan Centre for Human Rights and Democracy

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Lisu people, Miao, Mongols, Monguor (Tu people), Menba (Monpa), Mosuo, Nakhi, Qiang, Nu people, Pumi, Salar and Yi people.

95 Whalen-Bridge, *Tibet on Fire*, 2.

96 'Fast Facts', available on the ICT website at <https://savetibet.org/why-tibet/fast-facts/> (viewed 1 October 2019). In an article dealing specifically with threats to 'the Tibetan language' in the PRC, the author, Zorgyi, offers no acknowledgement of the linguistic diversity among Tibetans: available on the ICT website at [www.savetibet.org/publications/the-struggle-for-the-survival-of-the-tibetan-language](http://www.savetibet.org/publications/the-struggle-for-the-survival-of-the-tibetan-language) (viewed 19 September 2019).

97 A document entitled 'About Tibet' states 'Language: Tibetan', available on the *Students for a Free Tibet* website at <https://studentsforafreetibet.org/about/about-tibet> (viewed 19 September 2019).

(TCHRD),<sup>98</sup> and the Tibetan Youth Congress: all participate in the erasure of Tibet's linguistic minorities, while also drawing attention to language as a key issue in the Tibetan cause.

Meanwhile, a number of other international organizations, though conducting advocacy that extends far beyond the goals of the global Tibet movement, also take Tibet as an important case study in supporting their various agendas. Such organizations include Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International. Human Rights Watch, for example, has, since 2000, released six detailed reports on the situation of Tibetans in the PRC.<sup>99</sup> All of these reports mention the Tibetan language at least in passing; none of them use the plural. Amnesty International, meanwhile, produces an annual report on the PRC, which includes a special section on the 'Tibetan Autonomous Region and Tibetan-populated areas in other provinces'. Although this section frequently makes reference to issues related to language, none of Amnesty International's reports has ever mentioned any of Tibet's minority languages.

Both the CTA and the international non-governmental organizations (NGOs) lobby state governments to pay attention to and act on the Tibetan issue, including language issues. One venue where this is done is the World

98 For example, two annual reports (2016 and 2013) available on the TCHRD website at <http://tchrd.org/category/annual-reports>, as well as two reports focusing on education (*State of Education in Tibet*, 2003, available at <http://tchrd.org/education-tibet-2003>, and *Special Report on Bilingual Education Policy in Tibet*, 2017, available at <http://tchrd.org/special-report-on-bilingual-education-policy-in-tibet>) refer to Article 27 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, which relates to the right of ethnic minorities to use their language. Nonetheless, none of these reports, or other materials available from TCHRD, mention Tibet's linguistic minorities. Instead we read statements such as this, from the 2017 report on bilingual education: 'One language at risk of extinction is Tibetan, the language spoken by more than 8 million people living on the Tibetan Plateau and in the Himalayas' (2–3). All TCHRD webpages viewed 19 September 2019.

99 Human Rights Watch, *Tibet since 1950s: Silence, Prison, or Exile* (2000), available at [www.hrw.org/report/2000/05/01/tibet-1950/silence-prison-or-exile](http://www.hrw.org/report/2000/05/01/tibet-1950/silence-prison-or-exile); Human Rights Watch, *Trials of a Tibetan Monk: The Case of Tenzin Delek* (2004), available at [www.hrw.org/report/2004/02/08/trials-tibetan-monk/case-tenzin-delek](http://www.hrw.org/report/2004/02/08/trials-tibetan-monk/case-tenzin-delek); Human Rights Watch, *'No One Has the Liberty to Refuse': Tibetan Herders Forcibly Relocated in Gansu, Qinghai, Sichuan, and the Tibet Autonomous Region* (2007), available at [www.hrw.org/report/2007/06/10/no-one-has-liberty-refuse/tibetan-herders-forcibly-relocated-gansu-qinghai-sichuan](http://www.hrw.org/report/2007/06/10/no-one-has-liberty-refuse/tibetan-herders-forcibly-relocated-gansu-qinghai-sichuan); Human Rights Watch, *'They Say We Should Be Grateful': Mass Rehousing and Relocation Programs in Tibetan Areas of China* (2013), available at [www.hrw.org/report/2013/06/27/they-say-we-should-be-grateful/mass-rehousing-and-relocation-programs-tibetan](http://www.hrw.org/report/2013/06/27/they-say-we-should-be-grateful/mass-rehousing-and-relocation-programs-tibetan); Human Rights Watch, *One Passport, Two Systems: China's Restrictions on Foreign Travel by Tibetans and Others* (2015), available at [www.hrw.org/report/2015/07/13/one-passport-two-systems/chinas-restrictions-foreign-travel-tibetans-and-others](http://www.hrw.org/report/2015/07/13/one-passport-two-systems/chinas-restrictions-foreign-travel-tibetans-and-others); and Human Rights Watch, *Relentless: Detention and Prosecution of Tibetans under China's 'Stability Maintenance' Campaign* (2016), available at [www.hrw.org/report/2016/05/22/relentless/detention-and-prosecution-tibetans-under-chinas-stability-maintenance](http://www.hrw.org/report/2016/05/22/relentless/detention-and-prosecution-tibetans-under-chinas-stability-maintenance). All Human Rights Watch webpages viewed 19 September 2019.

Parliamentarians' Convention on Tibet (organized by the DIIR).<sup>100</sup> The Sixth World Parliamentarians' Convention on Tibet, held in Ottawa in 2012, for example, released a statement declaring 'the great value to humanity' of the Tibetan language, acknowledging this language's role as part of a distinct Tibetan identity, and drawing attention to its suppression by the Chinese government.<sup>101</sup> Organizations conducting outreach directly to democratically elected governments also exist, including, for example, the Tibet groups that report to the French Senate,<sup>102</sup> and the Scottish<sup>103</sup> and Japanese<sup>104</sup> parliaments. For countries that do not have such groups, or whose parliamentarians do not participate in the conventions, there is also international Tibet Lobby Day, held every year in early March or late February since 2008, when Tibetans and their supporters are encouraged to directly contact representatives of their governments to raise the Tibet issue.

Of all the state actors involved in the international Tibet movement, the most significant role is played by the United States. US support for Tibet goes back to their funding, equipping and training of Tibetan anti-Communist guerrillas, as well as financial support for members of the exile elite, including the Dalai Lama, between 1958 and 1974.<sup>105</sup> The US government has also

100 Six such conventions have been held: see 'World Parliamentarians' Conventions on Tibet', available on the CTA website at <http://tibet.net/about-tibet/worldwide-tibet-movement/world-parliamentarians-conventions-on-tibet-wpct> (viewed 19 September 2019).

101 'Ottawa declaration on Tibet', 30 April 2012, available on the CTA website at <https://tibet.net/ottawa-declaration-on-tibet>. The Fourth Convention drew attention to the 'marginalization of the Tibetan language' ('The Edinburgh declaration', 19 November 2005, available at <http://tibet.net/about-tibet/worldwide-tibet-movement/world-parliamentarians-conventions-on-tibet-wpct/fourth-world-parliamentarians-convention-on-tibet-wpct-edinburgh-18-19-november-2005-2>), as did the Third Convention ('The Washington statement on Tibet', 24 April 1997, available at <http://tibet.net/about-tibet/worldwide-tibet-movement/world-parliamentarians-conventions-on-tibet-wpct/third-world-parliamentarians-convention-on-tibet-wpct>). The statement released following the Second Convention, meanwhile, highlighted discrimination faced by Tibetans 'wanting to study their own language and culture' ('Resolution', Vilnius, 26–8 May 1995, available at <http://tibet.net/about-tibet/worldwide-tibet-movement/world-parliamentarians-conventions-on-tibet-wpct/second-world-parliamentarians-convention-on-tibet>). All CTA webpages viewed 19 September 2019.

102 'First meeting of the year of Tibet group in French Senate', 1 February 2017, available on the CTA website at <https://tibet.net/first-meeting-of-the-year-of-tibet-group-in-french-senate> (viewed 19 September 2019).

103 See the 'Tibet' page on the *Scottish Parliament* website at [www.parliament.scot/msps/tibet.aspx](http://www.parliament.scot/msps/tibet.aspx); and also 'Cross-Party Group on Tibet in the Scottish Parliament', available at <https://scotlandtibet.wordpress.com> (both webpages viewed 19 September 2019).

104 'All Party Japanese Parliamentary Group for Tibet formed', 14 December 2016, available on the CTA website at <https://tibet.net/all-party-japanese-parliamentary-group-for-tibet-formed> (viewed 19 September 2019).

105 Carole McGranahan, *Arrested Histories: Tibet, the CIA, and Memories of a Forgotten War* (Durham, NC and London: Duke University Press 2010); Lezlee Brown Halper and Stefan Halper, *Tibet: An Unfinished Story* (London: C. Hurst 2014); John Kenneth

funded various Tibetan studies programmes in the United States as part of a knowledge-production project focusing on this geostrategically important region, and this has, significantly, included the teaching of 'the' Tibetan language. Meanwhile, 'USAID and the State Department have directly funded or administered programs in China and Tibet since 2000'.<sup>106</sup> Some US\$62 million were provided between 2002 and 2014 for programmes that include 'Tibetan language instruction',<sup>107</sup> with the annual amount rising from US\$10 million in 2002 to US\$23 million in 2006.<sup>108</sup> This funding is a continuation of 'regular congressional provisions ... for US assistance to Tibet' since 1990.<sup>109</sup> In 2014, USAID released US\$25 million for a programme entitled 'Support to Ethnic Tibetans in China' to run until 2019.<sup>110</sup> In addition to this funding, the National Endowment for Democracy supports projects by and for Tibetans both in and outside of the PRC, with funding rising from US \$200,000 in 2005 to nearly US\$1 million in 2016.<sup>111</sup> Separate funding is also provided to the Central Tibetan Administration, most recently with a US\$23 million grant being made available for the five-year period 2016–21.<sup>112</sup>

Institutionally, US support for Tibet is organized through the Special Coordinator on Tibet, whose role, created by the Tibet Policy Act of 2002, includes promoting the protection of 'Tibet's distinct religious, cultural, linguistic, and national identity'.<sup>113</sup> The Congressional-Executive Commission on China

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Knaus, *Beyond Shangri-La: America and Tibet's Move into the Twenty-First Century* (Durham, NC and London: Duke University Press 2012).

106 Thomas Lum, 'U.S.-funded assistance programs in China', *CRS Report for Congress*, 18 May 2007, 1, available on the USAID website at [http://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf\\_docs/PCAAB589.pdf](http://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf_docs/PCAAB589.pdf) (viewed 19 September 2019).

107 Thomas Lum, 'U.S. assistance programs in China', *CRS Report*, 2 December 2014, 9, available on the *Federation of American Scientists* website at <https://fas.org/sgp/crs/row/RS22663.pdf> (viewed 19 September 2019).

108 Lum, 'U.S.-funded assistance programs in China'.

109 'In 1990, in considering foreign relations authorization legislation that contained the Tiananmen sanctions, the 101st Congress began a process of regular congressional provisions in various pieces of legislation for U.S. assistance to Tibet': Kerry Dumbaugh, 'The Tibetan Policy Act of 2002: background and implementation', *CRS Report for Congress*, 17 March 2009, 4, available on the *Federation of American Scientists* website at [www.fas.org/sgp/crs/row/R40453.pdf](http://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/row/R40453.pdf) (viewed 19 September 2019).

110 'Support to ethnic Tibetans in China', available on the *Federal Grants* website at [www.federalgrants.com/Support-to-Ethnic-Tibetans-in-China-46072.html](http://www.federalgrants.com/Support-to-Ethnic-Tibetans-in-China-46072.html) (viewed 30 September 2019).

111 Data obtained from annual reports available on the *National Endowment for Democracy* website at [www.ned.org/featured-publications](http://www.ned.org/featured-publications) (viewed 19 September 2019).

112 'USAID awards a grant of USD 23 million to strengthen self-reliance and resilience of Tibetan communities in South Asia', 3 October 2016, available on the *CTA* website at <https://tibet.net/usaaid-awards-a-grant-of-usd-23-million-to-strengthen-self-reliance-and-resilience-of-tibetan-communities-in-south-asia> (viewed 19 September 2019).

113 Dumbaugh, 'The Tibetan Policy Act of 2002', 5. The original text of the law makes reference to Tibet's 'unique culture, religion, language, and way of life': 'Tibetan Policy Act of 2002', 16 May 2003, available on the *U.S. Department of State* website at <https://2001-2009.state.gov/p/eap/rls/rpt/20699.htm> (viewed 19 September 2019).



(CECC) also regularly reports on events in Tibet, and has produced special reports and roundtables related to such topics as self-immolations,<sup>114</sup> protest,<sup>115</sup> and the Dalai Lama,<sup>116</sup> including a 2003 roundtable on 'The Role of the Tibetan Language in Tibet's Future'.<sup>117</sup> And although the Trump administration originally proposed severe cuts to funding for Tibet,<sup>118</sup> funding for 2018 was later restored to the level of 2017, a total of at least US\$18.25 million,<sup>119</sup> including US\$8 million specifically 'to support activities that preserve cultural traditions ... in Tibetan communities in the Tibetan Autonomous Region and in other Tibetan autonomous areas in the PRC'.<sup>120</sup>

Finally, in addition to support from various NGOs and states, the global Tibet movement also works within United Nations forums. The International Campaign for Tibet, for example, leverages support within the UN by 'testifying before different UN bodies, organizing seminars and briefings and advocating for special rapporteurs and working groups to address the human rights issues facing the Tibetan people, such as the ongoing persecution of

114 'Special Report: Tibetan self-immolation: rising frequency, wider spread, greater diversity', available on the CECC website at [www.cecc.gov/publications/issue-papers/special-report-tibetan-self-immolation-rising-frequency-wider-spread](http://www.cecc.gov/publications/issue-papers/special-report-tibetan-self-immolation-rising-frequency-wider-spread); and 'Special Report: Tibetan monastic self-immolations appear to correlate with increasing repression of freedom of religion', available on the CECC website at [www.cecc.gov/publications/issue-papers/special-report-tibetan-monastic-self-immolations-appear-to-correlate-with](http://www.cecc.gov/publications/issue-papers/special-report-tibetan-monastic-self-immolations-appear-to-correlate-with) (CECC websites viewed 19 September 2019).

115 'A year after the March 2008 protests: is China promoting stability in Tibet?', roundtable available on the CECC website at [www.cecc.gov/events/roundtables/a-year-after-the-march-2008-protests-is-china-promoting-stability-in-tibet](http://www.cecc.gov/events/roundtables/a-year-after-the-march-2008-protests-is-china-promoting-stability-in-tibet) (viewed 19 September 2019).

116 'The Dalai Lama: what he means for Tibetans today', roundtable available on the CECC website at [www.cecc.gov/events/roundtables/the-dalai-lama-what-he-means-for-tibetans-today](http://www.cecc.gov/events/roundtables/the-dalai-lama-what-he-means-for-tibetans-today) (viewed 19 September 2019).

117 'Teaching and learning Tibetan: the role of Tibetan language in Tibet's future', 7 April 2003, roundtable available on the CECC website at [www.cecc.gov/events/roundtables/teaching-and-learning-tibetan-the-role-of-the-tibetan-language-in-tibets-future](http://www.cecc.gov/events/roundtables/teaching-and-learning-tibetan-the-role-of-the-tibetan-language-in-tibets-future) (viewed 19 September 2019).

118 'ICT concerned by cuts to Tibet programs proposed by President Trump's budget', 26 May 2017, available on the ICT website at [www.savetibet.org/ict-concerned-by-cuts-to-tibet-programs-proposed-by-the-president-trumps-budget](http://www.savetibet.org/ict-concerned-by-cuts-to-tibet-programs-proposed-by-the-president-trumps-budget); 'Donald Trump proposes Tibetans' AID cut', 26 May 2017, available on the *Tibetan Journal* website at [www.tibetanjournal.com/donald-trump-proposes-tibetans-aid-cut](http://www.tibetanjournal.com/donald-trump-proposes-tibetans-aid-cut) (both viewed 19 September 2019).

119 'After the House, the US Senate also restored funding for the Tibetan programs in the bill', 13 September 2019, available on the *Office of Tibet* website at <http://tibetoffice.org/media-press/news/us-senate-also-restored-funding-for-the-tibetans-programs-in-their-bill>; 'Congressional committee acts to reinstate funding for Tibet programs for FY 2018', 20 July 2017, available on the ICT website at [www.savetibet.org/congressional-committee-acts-to-reinstate-funding-for-tibet-programs-for-fy-2018](http://www.savetibet.org/congressional-committee-acts-to-reinstate-funding-for-tibet-programs-for-fy-2018) (both viewed 19 September 2019).

120 House of Representatives, 'State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs Appropriations Bill, 2019', 16 July 2018, 56, available on the *US Congress* website at [www.congress.gov/115/crpt/hrpt829/CRPT-115hrpt829.pdf](http://www.congress.gov/115/crpt/hrpt829/CRPT-115hrpt829.pdf) (viewed 19 September 2019).

Tibetan Buddhists'.<sup>121</sup> Recent examples of such advocacy have focused on the case of detained language activist Tashi Wangchuk; a statement released on 21 February 2018 by several UN human rights experts called for Tashi Wangchuk's release,<sup>122</sup> and a letter of 27 February 2018, signed by thirty-seven international NGOs (including the ICT) and submitted to UN member states, asked them to hold the PRC accountable for Tashi Wangchuk's detention.<sup>123</sup> Advocacy regarding the plight of the Tibetan language in the PRC was also seen in 2010, when members of the UN's Human Rights Council made an urgent appeal to the PRC regarding the role of 'the Tibetan language' in the education system for Tibetans in the PRC.

The erasure of linguistic diversity in Tibet, therefore, while juridically enforced within the PRC, is discursively reproduced by a global network of state and non-state actors. While the PRC's programme of erasure is enforced through juridical mechanisms and extra-legal coercion, the global Tibet movement's erasure operates through moral and material incentives. Nonetheless, from the standpoint of Tibet's linguistic minorities, these diverse methods coalesce into a common project of articulated oppression.

The emergence of this totalizing environment requires some manner of connectivity between Tibetans inside the PRC and global information flows. This is no straightforward matter. Tibetans' freedom of movement is restricted, both into and out of the PRC, as well as within it. Beyond restrictions on the circulation of bodies, the circulation of information is also curtailed. This is achieved through technological means (the so-called 'Great Firewall') but also surveillance, arrest and torture.<sup>124</sup> Despite these restrictions on the circulation of bodies and information, there exists what Whalen-Bridge calls an 'informational underground railroad' between Tibetans in the PRC and the outside world.<sup>125</sup> This subversive network includes aspects of US-sponsored radio services (Radio Free Asia, Voice of America), and transnational connectivity through social media, particularly WeChat.<sup>126</sup> Deliberate efforts have been made to cultivate these ligatures, for example, the US\$200,000 provided between 2009 and 2012 by the National Endowment for Democracy to an organization called 'Consultations Samdrup', which aims to 'share information, facilitate dialog, and improve understanding between Tibetans in

121 'United Nations', available on the ICT website at <https://savetibet.org/advocacy/united-nations> (viewed 19 September 2019).

122 'China: UN experts denounce the criminalization of linguistic and cultural rights advocacy', 21 February 2018, available on the *Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights* website at [www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=22683&LangID=E](http://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=22683&LangID=E) (viewed 19 September 2019).

123 'Hold China accountable: international rights groups urge UN member states', 27 February 2018, available on the CTA website at <https://tibet.net/hold-china-accountable-international-rights-groups-urge-un-member-states> (viewed 19 September 2019).

124 Human Rights Watch, *Relentless*.

125 Whalen-Bridge, *Tibet on Fire*, 46.

126 Hansjörg Bienier, 'Broadcasting to Tibet', *Central Asian Survey*, vol. 21, no. 4, 2002, 417–22.

Exile and Tibetan and Chinese inside China'.<sup>127</sup> Trine Brox has examined how discursive developments in the Indian diaspora community have, particularly since 2008, increasingly focused on efforts to promote 'unity' between Tibetans inside the PRC and the diaspora.<sup>128</sup> Tsering Topgyal, meanwhile, has examined the success of these efforts in creating a shared information community.<sup>129</sup> While careful to avoid portraying Tibetan politics in the PRC as merely a reflection of 'external forces'—a caution I share—Tsering Topgyal also concedes that 'it is undeniable that communication and mutual influence have increased in a host of areas, most significantly culture and politics, between local Tibetans and exile Tibetans', and points out that this 'transnational cross-fertilization' has intensified 'in spite of China's considerable apparatus of censorship and surveillance'.<sup>130</sup>

What we therefore see is that, despite the existence of formidable barriers erected by the PRC state, a common discursive field exists in which a united Tibetan language regime, focused on the promotion of a single Tibetan language, operates. What makes the global assemblage of Tibetan monoglot nationalism effective as a language management regime is its simplicity and ubiquity. Tibetans everywhere are faced, wherever they turn, with the same single, seemingly self-evident declarative statement that constitutes the substantive entirety of their language policy: Tibetans speak Tibetan.

### **From language oppression to language emancipation in Tibet and beyond**

The discursive erasure of Tibet's minority languages creates a commonsense monoglot representation of Tibetanness that forms the foundation for a programme of language oppression: '... the *enforcement* of language loss by physical, mental, social, and spiritual coercion...'<sup>131</sup> Evidence of this language oppression is seen in the fact that all of Tibet's spoken minority languages for which we have reliable information are presently undergoing language shift, either to Tibetan or Chinese,<sup>132</sup> while Tibetan Sign Language faces a precarious future.<sup>133</sup> The erasure that underpins this language oppression is carried out by both the PRC state and the global Tibet movement. Erasure by the state leads to the material deprivation and institutional exclusion of these languages, while erasure by the Tibet movement has suppressed the emergence of social mobilization that might work to challenge the state's

127 See the annual reports from the National Endowment for Democracy.

128 Brox, *Tibetan Democracy*.

129 Tsering Topgyal, *China and Tibet: The Perils of Insecurity* (London: C. Hurst 2016).

130 *Ibid.*, 122.

131 Taff, Chee, Hall, Hall, Martin and Johnston, 'Indigenous language use impacts wellness', 863.

132 Roche, *Draft Report on Tibet's Linguistic Minorities*.

133 Hofer, 'Is Lhasa Tibetan Sign Language emerging, endangered, or both?'

eliminatory practices. Despite the fact that the PRC and the global Tibet movement view and represent themselves as opposed, their shared refusal to acknowledge certain languages, and the rights of people who use them, has led to a state of 'articulated oppression'.

This 'articulated oppression' not only legitimizes and naturalizes Tibetan monoglot nationalism, but also provides massive institutional force, as well as both symbolic and material capital, to the project of erasure. Left unchallenged, this erasure will lead to elimination. The emancipation of Tibet's minority languages from this predicament requires that practices of erasure are exposed and opposed.<sup>134</sup> However, the articulated nature of this oppression makes this difficult. By creating the false impression of difference, between a project of domination and another of resistance, articulated oppression *erases erasure*, obscuring the need for emancipatory alternatives. However, the articulation that produces this totalizing field of erasure is fragile and tenuous. Emancipatory conditions—recognition rather than erasure—could potentially emerge from either side of the conflict. *Disarticulation* would have a profoundly destabilizing effect on the discursive, material and symbolic arrangements that are currently leading to the elimination of Tibet's minority languages. Indeed, the emergence of genuinely anti-systematic discourses that recognize the existence of these languages is a necessary condition for the institutional change, and redistribution of material and symbolic resources, needed to secure the emancipation of these languages.


This analysis demonstrates how understanding oppression is essential to resisting it. But, beyond this practical political goal, this article hopes to suggest ways in which language-based discrimination is similar to other forms of oppression along the lines of 'race', nation, colour and ethnicity, and the ways in which a continuing dialogue between analyses of these forms of oppression might be productive. In arguing for the colonial roots of language oppression, I have also claimed that we need to rigorously multiply our models of colonial domination and explore the differing ways that language oppression is produced in different contexts.<sup>135</sup> In the case of Tibet, I have argued that erasure lies at the heart of language oppression. However, the role that erasure plays, and the way that it manifests, will differ according to the particularities of different colonial and imperial formations,<sup>136</sup> and the nature of resistance to them. Furthermore, the case of language oppression in Tibet is particularly distinct with regard to the significant role played by articulation between opposing political projects. Studies of

134 Leena Huss and Anna-Riitta Lindgren, 'Introduction: defining language emancipation', *International Journal of the Sociology of Language*, no. 209, 2011, 1–15.

135 For a similar point, see Salikoko Mufwene, 'Colonisation, globalisation, and the future of languages in the twenty-first century', *International Journal on Multicultural Societies*, vol. 4, no. 2, 2002, 62–193. Unlike Mufwene, however, I argue that we need to understand different colonial systems, and their linguistic impacts, as fundamentally political.

136 Stoler and McGranahan, 'Introduction: Refiguring imperial terrains'.

language oppression in diverse contexts beyond Tibet will therefore lend much not only to our understanding of the variety of language oppressions, but also to the variety of techniques and political visions needed to pursue language emancipation around the world.

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