U.S.-Funded Assistance Programs in China

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Summary

This report provides legislative and policy background concerning U.S. assistance programs in the People’s Republic of China (PRC). The U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) does not have an official presence in China. The majority of congressional foreign operations appropriations for the PRC promotes the rule of law, civil society, and political development in the country. These programs constitute a key component of U.S. efforts to promote democratic change in the PRC. Other related U.S. activities include participation in official bilateral dialogues on human rights, public diplomacy programs, and open criticism of PRC policies.

During the past decade, U.S. democracy assistance to China has grown in size and breadth. Funding has grown from an annual average of $9.9 million during the 2000-2004 period, mostly for democracy assistance and aid to Tibetans, to $35.3 million during the 2005-2009 period. During the latter period, the United States supported not only democracy and Tibetan programs but also HIV/AIDS programs, educational exchanges, and expanded rule of law programs in the PRC that include environmental law and criminal justice. Between 2001 and 2010, the United States government authorized or made available nearly $275 million for foreign operations programs in China, of which $229 million was devoted to rule of law and civil society programs and to Tibetan communities.

The Department of State’s Human Rights and Democracy Fund (HRDF) has been the principal means of support for U.S. rule of law and civil society activities in China. The Development Assistance (DA) account, administered by the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), has been a growing source of funding for rule of law programs. The U.S. Congress has played a leading role in initiating programs and determining funding levels for these objectives. Non-governmental organizations, such as the Ford Foundation, and other countries also provide substantial democracy-related assistance to the PRC.

U.S. rule of law and civil society programs have created a web of relationships among governmental and non-governmental actors and educational institutions in the United States and China. Despite growing contacts and common interests among these entities, Chinese civil society groups remain subject to PRC restrictions and periodic crackdowns on their activities. Some of these groups also have been affected by the ups and downs of the U.S.-China bilateral relationship. Some experts argue that foreign-funded rule of law and civil society efforts in China have produced limited gains due to PRC political constraints. Others contend that such programs have helped to build social foundations for political change and have bolstered reform-minded officials in the PRC government.
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Overview

U.S. government support of rule of law and civil society programs (democracy assistance) in the People’s Republic of China (PRC) constitutes a key component of its efforts to promote democratic change in China. Other related U.S. activities include the U.S.-China bilateral human rights dialogue, public diplomacy programs, and open criticism of PRC policies.\(^1\) During the past decade, U.S. assistance to the China has grown in size and breadth. Funding has grown from an annual average of $9.9 million during the 2000-2004 period, mostly for democracy assistance and aid to Tibetans, to $35.3 million during the 2005-2009 period, which included not only democracy and Tibetan assistance but also new funding for HIV/AIDS programs and expanded rule of law programs, such as environmental law and criminal justice.

Compared to U.S. assistance missions in most other Asian countries, U.S. foreign operations programs in China play less significant roles in the areas of development (health, education, and economic growth), good governance (through direct assistance to government entities), and international security. The majority of U.S. funding for programs in China promotes rule of law, civil society, and political development using special allocations from the Department of State’s Human Rights and Democracy Fund (HRDF). The U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID)’s Development Assistance (DA) account has provided growing support for rule of law programs since 2006. Other foreign operations appropriations provide for aid activities related to promoting sustainable development and protecting the culture and natural environment of Tibet and Tibetan areas of China.

The U.S. Congress plays a greater role in determining foreign operations appropriations for China than it does for most other aid recipients. USAID does not have an official presence or mission in the PRC, due in part to the PRC government’s reported human rights abuses. Democracy programs in China are mostly administered by the Department of State’s Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor (DRL), which follows Congress’ authorizations in annual foreign operations appropriations measures, and the Regional Development Mission for Asia. By contrast, most countries with USAID missions receive most of their assistance through the Department of State’s regional bureaus, which play principal roles in determining aid levels through annual congressional budget justifications.

Despite its growth, U.S. assistance to China remains relatively limited. Between 2001 and 2010, the United States government authorized or made available nearly $275 million for foreign operations programs in China, of which $229 million was devoted to rule of law and civil society programs and to Tibetan communities. In FY2010, total funding for U.S. assistance programs in the East Asia and the Pacific region was an estimated $776 million while appropriations for China was $48.9 million.\(^2\) The top recipients of U.S. assistance in East Asia in 2010 were Indonesia (an estimated $218 million), the Philippines ($144 million), and Vietnam ($122 million).\(^3\)

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\(^2\) U.S. Department of State Congressional Budget Justification, FY2011. Appropriations for China includes DRL grants of an estimated $17 million and Peace Corps funding of $2.7 million.

\(^3\) The bulk of U.S. assistance to Vietnam is HIV/AIDS program support.
According to the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), China’s top bilateral official development assistance (ODA) donors are Japan, Germany, France, and the United Kingdom. In terms of grant disbursements, in 2008, Japan, Germany, and France provided $283 million, $391 million, and $174 million, respectively. By contrast, the United States extended $65 million in grant assistance, according to OECD data. With the exception of the United States, major bilateral aid donors to China provide concessory loans that exceed grant assistance in dollar value. In 2008, Germany and France extended $493 million and $178 million, respectively, in ODA loans to the PRC while Japan provided $922 million in loans in 2007. Some policy makers in these countries have advocated reducing their development aid to China, due largely to China’s rise as an economic power. According to OECD statistics, Japanese, German, and French ODA to China in 2008 was devoted predominantly to education programs. In 2008, the United States provided the greatest funding for “government and civil society” sector programs ($27.7 million), compared to the largest donors.

European Union aid efforts in the PRC, particularly in the area of legal development, reportedly exceed those of the United States in terms of funding and place greater emphasis on commercially-oriented rule of law. According to the European Commission, EU assistance to China has moved away from the areas of infrastructure and rural development and towards support for social and economic reform, the environment and sustainable development, and good governance and the rule of law. The EU funded aid projects and programs worth €181 million ($235 million) in 2002-2006. For the 2007-2013 period, the EU plans to allocate €10 million ($13 million) for democracy and human rights programs and non-governmental organizations (NGOs). The European Union also has set up a joint law school administered through the University of Hamburg and located in the China University of Politics and Law in Beijing.

In other comparative terms, the Ford Foundation, which does not receive U.S. government support, offered grants worth $220 million for programs in China between 1988 and 2006. The Foundation extended grants worth $14.4 million and $21.4 million in 2007 and 2008, respectively. Ford Foundation program areas in China include government transparency and accountability, civil society, criminal justice, secondary education, community rights over natural resources, and reproductive rights.

Policy Debates

As with many efforts to help reform China’s political system from without, there has been little evidence of fundamental change. Some experts argue that foreign-funded rule of law and civil society efforts in China have produced marginal results due to PRC political constraints, such as the lack of judicial autonomy, restrictions on lawyers, weak enforcement of laws, and severe curbs on the ability of Chinese citizens to organize and perform social functions independently of state control. They suggest that the limited influence of China’s judicial, legal, and civil
institutions, organizations, and actors significantly reduces their value as real agents for
democracy, and contend that the U.S. focus should be on changing the way the law is used rather
than expanding existing rule of law programs. Some human rights activists also advocate more
rigorous methods of evaluating the effectiveness of democracy programs in China.9

Other analysts contend that foreign-funded rule of law, civil society, and democracy programs in
the PRC have helped to build foundations for political change – more comprehensive laws, more
professional judicial and legal personnel, more worldly and assertive NGOs or social
organizations, and a cadre of human rights activists and lawyers – and have bolstered reform-
minded officials in the PRC government. Some experts add that policies that support incremental
rather than fundamental change have the best chance of succeeding in the long run, through
increasing “the capacity of reform-oriented individuals in China to be effective in their own
work,” including those within the government and without.11 Many foreign and Chinese
observers have noted that awareness of legal rights in many areas of PRC society is growing.12
Another study suggests that rule of law and civil society programs are especially valuable through
their direct impact on local officials, social organizations, lawyers, and others.13

PRC civil society groups and social organizations, key targets of U.S.-funded democracy
programs, have raised concerns among China’s leadership about their growing influence and
foreign contacts. Many of them reportedly have experienced a tightening regulatory environment
in recent years.14 Some experts argue that to be more effective, U.S.-supported civil society
programs in China should be insulated as far as possible from U.S. government involvement and
the vagaries of U.S.-China bilateral relations.15

Program Development

United States foreign assistance to the PRC primarily has supported rule of law, civil society, and
democracy-related programs and assistance to Tibetan communities since 2000. Since 1999,
Congress has played a leading role in funding these programs through annual foreign operations
appropriations measures. In 1997, President Bill Clinton and PRC President Jiang Zemin agreed
upon a U.S.-China Rule of Law Initiative, although U.S. funding for the program was not
provided until 2002. In 1999, Congress began authorizing assistance (to non-governmental
organizations located outside China) for the purpose of fostering democracy in the PRC (P.L.
105-277). In 2000, the act granting permanent normal trade relations (PNTR) treatment to China
(P.L. 106-286) authorized programs to promote the rule of law and civil society in China. The
FY2002 appropriations measure (P.L. 107-115) removed China from a list of countries prohibited
from receiving U.S. indirect foreign assistance and lifted the requirement that Economic Support
Funds (ESF) for democracy programs be provided only to NGOs located outside the PRC. The

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12 Jamie P. Horsley, “The Rule of Law in China: Incremental Progress,” The China Balance Sheet in 2007 and Beyond,
14 Paul Mooney, “How to Deal with NGOs—Part 1, China,” YaleGlobal Online, August 1, 2006.
15 Gewirtz, op. cit.
FY2003 appropriations measure (P.L. 108-7) continued the requirement that Tibet assistance be granted to NGOs but lifted the stipulation that they be located outside China.


The Department of State’s East Asia and the Pacific (EAP) Bureau and Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor (DRL) have administered China programs primarily through DRL’s Human Rights and Democracy Fund (HRDF), which draws from the Economic Support Fund (ESF) account. In the past decade, Congress has supported increasing support for the Democracy Fund. Appropriations for the HRDF grew from $13 million in FY2001 to an estimated $70 million in FY2010. China programs have accounted for roughly one quarter of allocations from the Democracy Fund.

Democracy funding has been channeled largely to U.S.-based non-governmental organizations and educational institutions with operations or exchange programs in China, which in turn have provided some support or sub-grants to Chinese “partner NGOs.” Democracy program areas include human rights, religious freedom, freedom of expression, information, and the press, media reform, transparency, judicial independence, criminal and civil rule of law, electoral reform, public participation, labor rights, minority rights, and migrant rights. The East Asia Regional Democracy Fund and the HRDF global fund also have provided some ESF for China and Tibet programs. Because of political sensitivities, DRL does not openly disclose the names of its grant recipients in China.

The National Endowment for Democracy (NED) has played a major role in promoting democracy in China through congressional appropriations. NED is a private, non-profit organization that promotes democracy around the world. The United States government established NED in 1983 and provides most of its funding. NED supports Chinese pro-democracy organizations in the United States and Hong Kong; helps to advance the rule of law, promote the rights of workers and women, and strengthen village elections in China; and assists in the development of Tibetan communities. The Endowment’s China programs have received grants through three channels: the annual foreign operations appropriation for NED (an estimated $118 million in FY2010), out of which approximately $2 million has been devoted to China programs each year since 1999; annual congressional earmarks to NED for democracy-related programs in the PRC and Tibet; and DRL grants to NED’s “core institutes.” NED began awarding grants to U.S.-based organizations supporting democracy in China in the mid-1980s and supporting significant in-country programs in the 1990s. Compared to the U.S. government, NED’s non-governmental

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17 NED’s core institutes or grantees are: the International Republican Institute (IRI); the American Center for International Labor Solidarity (ACILS); the Center for International Private Enterprise (CIPE); and the National Democratic Institute for International Affairs (NDI).

status affords it greater ease and flexibility with which to support relatively overt democratic groups.

U.S. universities and organizations involved in U.S.-funded rule of law programs include the University of Massachusetts (judiciary reform), University of the Pacific McGeorge School of Law and American University Washington College of Law (legal training), Vermont Law School (environmental law), Western Kentucky University (environmental health), and the American Bar Association (criminal justice). Implementing partners for Tibet programs include the Bridge Fund, the Mountain Institute, the Tibet Poverty Alleviation Fund, and Winrock International. The Asia Foundation’s administrative law and procedures program also receives USAID support.19

In 1999, Temple University established the first foreign Master of Laws degree program in China. The LLM program, conducted in collaboration with Tsinghua University School of Law in Beijing, educates Chinese judges, prosecutors, government officials, law professors, and lawyers in U.S. and international legal principles. The State Department and USAID have provided roughly $12 million for Temple’s activities in China, which also include non-degree legal education, scholarly research, and curriculum development. The program has educated over 950 Chinese legal professionals, the majority of which (80%) work in the public sector, including judges, prosecutors, government officials, law professors, and NGO legal staff. “Graduates report that they are drawing on their Temple legal education as they write judicial decisions, apply rules of evidence in trial practice, draft laws for national and regional legislative bodies, and infuse their scholarship with principles of U.S. law.”20

Additional Programs

The Office of American Schools and Hospitals Abroad (ASHA) of the Department of State’s Bureau for Democracy, Conflict, and Humanitarian Assistance provides grants to private and non-profit educational and medical institutions in foreign countries. The purposes of such assistance include fostering mutual understanding, introducing foreign countries to U.S. ideas and practices in education and medicine, and promoting civil society. Since 1997, ASHA has supported programs in China, including helping to establish the Center for American Studies at Fudan University in Shanghai, supporting the Hopkins-Nanjing Center for Chinese and American Studies in Nanjing, and providing a grant to Project Hope for its efforts at the Shanghai Children’s Medical Center.

The measure granting permanent normal trade relations (PNTR) status to China (P.L. 106-286) authorized the Department of Labor to establish a program to promote worker rights and related rule of law training. In 2002, the Bush Administration released two grants totaling $6.4 million for labor programs in China. A grant of $4.1 million was awarded to a consortium of Worldwide Strategies, Inc., the Asia Foundation, and the National Committee on United States-China Relations to conduct education, training, and technical assistance to help improve labor laws and to promote greater awareness of labor laws among workers and employers as well as to provide legal aid services to women and migrant workers. The Department of Labor also awarded a $2.3

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million grant to the National Safety Council to help improve mine safety and health conditions in China.

Restrictions on Foreign Aid

Some U.S. sanctions on the PRC in response to the Tiananmen military crackdown in 1989 remain in effect, including required “no” votes or abstentions by U.S. representatives to international financial institutions on loans to China (except those that meet basic human needs).21 Congress also has required that U.S. representatives to international financial institutions support projects in Tibet only if they do not encourage the migration and settlement of non-Tibetans (majority Han Chinese) into Tibet or the transfer of Tibetan-owned properties to non-Tibetans, which some fear may erode Tibetan culture and identity. Furthermore, U.S. laws that can be invoked to deny foreign assistance on human rights grounds include Sections 116 and 502B (security assistance) of the Foreign Assistance Act of 1961 (P.L. 87-195).

The U.S. government suspended funding for the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) from 2002 through 2008 because of the UNFPA's programs in China, where the State Department determined that coercive family planning practices had occurred. In February 2009, the Obama Administration announced that it would restore U.S. funding for the UNFPA. The Consolidated Appropriations Act, FY2009 (P.L. 111-117) authorized $55 million for the UNFPA. However, none of these funds may be used for a country program in China.22

Foreign Operations Appropriations, FY2008-FY2011

The Consolidated Appropriations Act, FY2008 (P.L. 110-161) provided $15 million (through the HRDF) for democracy and rule of law programs in the PRC.23 The FY2008 appropriations measure also mandated $5 million from the ESF account for activities that preserve cultural traditions and promote sustainable development and environmental conservation in Tibetan communities in China, and $250,000 to NED for human rights and democracy programs related to Tibet. In addition, $10 million in Development Assistance was appropriated to American educational institutions and NGOs for programs and activities in the PRC related to democracy, rule of law, and the environment. China received approximately $7 million in HIV/AIDS program support in FY2008.

22 The “Kemp-Kasten” amendment to the FY1985 Supplemental Appropriations Act (P.L. 99-88) bans U.S. assistance to organizations that support or participate in the management of coercive family planning programs. For further information, see CRS Report RL32703, The U.N. Population Fund: Background and the U.S. Funding Debate, by Luisa Blanchfield.
23 Since 2004, annual congressional authorizations for democracy funds to China have included Hong Kong and Taiwan (if matching funds are provided). Hong Kong has received assistance for strengthening political parties ($840,000 in FY2006). Taiwan has not offered matching funds for legal and political reform programs and hence has not received democracy grants.
The Omnibus Appropriations Act, FY2009 (P.L. 111-8) appropriated $17 million for the promotion of democracy in China. The measure authorized $7.3 million in ESF for NGOs to support activities that preserve cultural traditions and promote sustainable development and environmental conservation in Tibetan communities in the Tibet Autonomous Region and other areas of China. The measure also included an appropriation of $250,000 for NED programs in Tibet. In addition, $11 million in Development Assistance account funding was made available to American educational institutions and NGOs for programs and activities in the PRC related to democracy, rule of law, and the environment. China received $7.3 million for HIV/AIDS programs in 2009. The United States government established a resident Legal Advisor at the U.S. Embassy in Beijing aimed at promoting criminal law reform, professionalizing the criminal justice system, and enhancing U.S.-China law enforcement cooperation, using $600,000 in INCLE account funds.

In FY2010, democracy programs in China are to receive $17 million out of the HRDF. In addition, the Consolidated Appropriations Act, FY2010 (P.L. 111-117) provided $7.4 million for NGOs to support activities that preserve cultural traditions and promote sustainable development and environmental conservation in Tibet and Tibetan communities in the PRC. The act appropriated $12 million in Development Assistance to U.S. educational institutions and nongovernmental organizations for programs and activities related to governance, the rule of law, and the environment in China. INCLE funding for criminal justice and HIV/AIDS programs are to total $800,000 and $7 million, respectively, in 2010.

For FY2011, the State Department requested $5 million out of the ESF account for Tibet programs, GHCS funding of $7 million for HIV/AIDS efforts, and $850,000 for INCLE programs. According to the FY2011 Congressional Budget Justification, human rights and governance remain “high priorities” for the United States. “U.S. assistance helps foster the development of civil society, and increases cooperation on global health and environmental issues of mutual concern.”

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25 H.Rept. 111-366, Sec. 7071(a).

26 Congressional Budget Justification for Foreign Operations, FY2011.
Table 1. Selected U.S. Assistance to China, FY2000-FY2010
(thousand U.S. dollars)

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Sources: U.S. Department of State Congressional budget justifications for foreign operations; Congressional foreign operations appropriations legislation.

a. Congressional appropriations – not specified in State Department annual budget requests for China.

b. The Peace Corps has been involved in teaching English language and environmental awareness in China since 1993.

CRS-8
Legislative History: Foreign Operations Appropriations, FY2000-FY2007

FY2000-FY2003

The Consolidated Appropriations Act for FY2000 (P.L. 106-113) provided $1 million for U.S.-based NGOs (to preserve cultural traditions and promote sustainable development and environmental conservation) in Tibet as well as $1 million to support research about China, and authorized ESF for NGOs to promote democracy in the PRC. For FY2001 (P.L. 106-429), Congress authorized up to $2 million for Tibet. In FY2002 (P.L. 107-115), Congress made available $10 million for assistance for activities to support democracy, human rights, and the rule of law in China, including up to $3 million for Tibet. The FY2003 appropriations measure (P.L. 108-7), provided $15 million for democracy-related programs in China, including up to $3 million for Tibet and $3 million for the National Endowment for Democracy (NED).

FY2004-FY2007

In 2004, the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor became the principal administrator of China democracy programs. The FY2004 Consolidated Appropriations Act (P.L. 108-199) made available $13.5 million for China, Hong Kong, and Taiwan, including $3 million for NED. Appropriations for FY2004 provided a special earmark for Tibet ($4 million). In FY2005 (P.L. 108-447), Congress provided $19 million for China, including $4 million for NED, and authorized $4 million for Tibet and $250,000 for NED in Tibet. In addition, the FY2005 appropriations measure authorized the use of Development Assistance for American universities to conduct U.S.-China educational exchange programs related to democracy, rule of law, and the environment. The conference agreement (H.Rept. 109-265) on the FY2006 foreign operations appropriations bill (H.R. 3057, signed into law as P.L. 109-102) extended $20 million for China. For Tibet, P.L. 109-102 authorized $4 million for Tibet and Tibetan communities in China and $250,000 to NED in Tibet. The FY2006 appropriations measure also provided $5 million in Development Assistance to American educational institutions for legal and environmental programs in the PRC. Because of the late enactment of the Continuing Appropriations Resolution for FY2007 (P.L. 110-5), funding levels for many U.S. foreign aid programs for the year were not specified but continued at or near FY2006 levels. In 2007, NGOs in China began to receive assistance for HIV/AIDS prevention, treatment, and control efforts ($6.75 million).
Acronyms

CSH: Child Survival and Health
DA: Development Assistance
DRL: Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor
ESF: Economic Support Fund
GHCS: Global Health and Child Survival
GHAI: Global HIV/AIDS Initiative
HRDF: Human Rights and Democracy Fund (Democracy Fund)
INCLE: International Narcotics Control and Law Enforcement
NED: National Endowment for Democracy
NGO: Non-governmental Organization
USAID: United States Agency for International Development

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