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ICT Special Report
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Tibetan survivors of self-immolation: repression and disappearance



“ *When we hear about a self-immolation, we pray that the person has died, because those who survive face unbearable physical and psychological suffering.* ”

- A Tibetan from Amdo in exile

<http://www.savetibet.org/newsroom/tibetan-survivors-of-self-immolation-repression-and-disappearance/>

More than 130 Tibetans have set fire to themselves in Tibet and China since 2009, in addition to seven in exile in India and Nepal, representing one of the biggest waves of self-immolation as political protest in the last 60 years. Virtually all of the Tibetans who have set themselves on fire have communicated a wish for the Dalai Lama to return home to Tibet and for freedom.

In most cases Tibetan self-immolators in Tibet have died either on the scene, or afterwards in hospital; some go to great lengths to ensure that they will not survive, such as wrapping barbed wire around their body and drinking or covering themselves with kerosene. This report documents how a small minority of Tibetans who survive self-immolation and remain alive face extreme physical and psychological suffering due to repressive measures against them by the Chinese authorities.

- As far as is known, 20 Tibetans have survived self-immolation in Tibet, and three in exile.^[1] Due to the political sensitivities around the act of self-immolation in Tibet, those who survive have generally been held by the authorities in conditions of extreme secrecy and isolation. While some have been returned home, in most other cases their families are still unaware of whether they are dead or alive, even years after their self-immolation, and often despite numerous appeals to the local authorities and police by relatives and friends.
- Some Tibetans not only suffer violent treatment after self-immolation, but are also not given urgently-needed and appropriate medical treatment. Kirti monk Tapey not only received no treatment for his bullet wounds after he was shot when he set himself on fire in February, 2009, but the wounds were also not allowed to heal while he was in custody, according to Tibetan sources. Similarly, another Kirti monk, Lobsang Kunchok, is believed to have undergone particular suffering in hospital after his self-immolation “because the doctors and nurses treated him as a national enemy.” Emergency medical care was only given to a Kardze monk after his self-immolation after local people and other monks boldly faced down armed police who sought to remove him from hospital. Although treatment of self-immolators differs according to circumstances in different areas where self-immolations take place, these responses appear to indicate the priorities of local officials and security personnel in suppressing information about self-immolations, and preventing gatherings of Tibetans after the event, rather than immediate care for the individual. In some cases, there is evidence that Tibetan self-immolators have been treated with care; in Rebkong, an impromptu clinic was set up at a monastery for Jamyang Palden, who self-immolated in March, 2012, and later died of his injuries.
- The cases of four Tibetans who survived self-immolation and had limbs amputated are documented in this report. Full information is not known about the circumstances and whether this was medically necessary. For instance, teenage Tibetan monk Sungdue Kyab was returned home two years after his self-immolation with both legs amputated. Some Tibetans fear that such amputations followed a period of time in custody in which full medical treatment is not given. It is possible that infections can set in if medical care is neglected, which may make amputations more likely. Others fear that amputations may be a form of punishment to the self-immolator.
- In some cases, injuries of self-immolators were worsened as armed police were observed beating Tibetans after extinguishing the flames. This harsh treatment of Tibetan self-immolators is most evident in areas under tight paramilitary control where there have been a number of self-immolations, such as Ngaba (Chinese: Aba) in Sichuan.

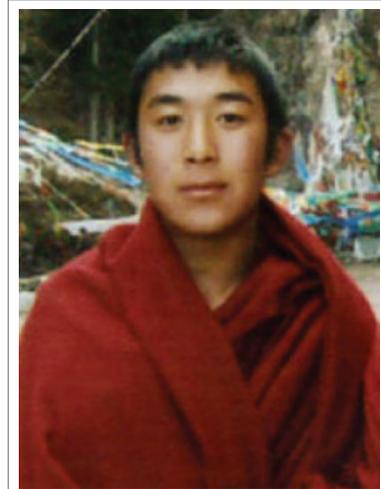
- Some Tibetans who have survived self-immolation are used by the authorities for propaganda purposes, causing further distress for them and the broader Tibetan community. In some cases these propaganda videos have been the first evidence for families that the self-immolator has survived. An official documentary broadcast by state media in May 2012 covered incidents involving 13 Tibetans who set themselves on fire, including statements from Tibetans who survived an attempt to self-immolate which, as Tibetan writer Woesser points out, “display the great courage of the Tibetan self-immolators”.^[2] Despite the pressure they must have been under to express regret for their actions, it is notable that some Tibetans interviewed simply talk about their physical condition.
- The context of the treatment of survivors of self-immolators is an intensified wave of repression in Tibet, with those allegedly “associated” with self-immolators, including friends, families and even entire communities, being punished by the authorities.^[3] According to guidelines announced in the state media in 2012, Tibetans can be sentenced on homicide charges based on their alleged ‘intent’ and presumed ability to influence a Tibetan who has self-immolated. ICT has documented detentions, disappearances and sentencing of more than 90 Tibetans since 2010 because of their alleged association to a self-immolation. Local officials and police may be seeking to deflect blame and attention from the central authorities in Beijing by keeping self-immolators who survive in isolation and their families under close surveillance.
- The first self-immolation in Tibetan society in the contemporary era was Thubten Ngodrup, who set himself on fire in New Delhi in 1998 as a Tibetan Youth Congress hunger strike was broken up by Indian police. A shocking video of his self-immolation caused great distress among Tibetans in exile, and a statue stands in his memory in Dharamsala, India. Thubten Ngodrup died in hospital in Delhi. Two of the six Tibetans who have set fire to themselves in exile in India and Nepal have survived.^[4]

The International Campaign for Tibet is concerned about the treatment of self-immolators in Tibet who survive, based on reports of enforced disappearance and denial of medical care, or medical treatment such as amputation without families being informed. ICT calls for the immediate disclosure of the whereabouts of those Tibetans who survived self-immolation documented in this report and full transparency in terms of application of medical treatment and care.

Tibetans who survived self-immolation

Tapey: the first self-immolator, used for a propaganda video

Tapey, a Kirti monk in his mid-twenties, was the first Tibetan to set fire to himself in Tibet. On February 27, 2009, he walked out of his monastery, Kirti, after prayer ceremonies were cancelled by the authorities. He had already doused himself with oil by the time he reached the crossroads in Ngaba county town, and he then set himself on fire and raised a home-made Tibetan flag that had at its center a photograph of the Dalai Lama. When Tapey began to shout slogans (no details are known of what he said), People's Armed Police (PAP) personnel stationed nearby opened fire, and Tapey fell to the ground. Reports indicate that the PAP extinguished the fire after Tapey was shot and he was immediately taken away by police.^[5]



This image of Tapey was taken while he was studying at Kirti, prior to his self-immolation in February, 2009.

Tapey survived his self-immolation attempt. According to Kirti monks in exile, when Tapey was taken to hospital after his self-immolation, he told his relatives: "I am not the son you wanted to see. I should have died that day, but I didn't manage it." According to Tibetan sources, Tapey was allowed to see his mother once at hospital in Ngaba. Some time after his self-immolation, the same sources said that the hospital planned to amputate Tapey's legs. Although full details are not known, it is believed that the amputation did not go ahead. Some Tibetans who know of the circumstances believed that because Tapey was shot while lying on the ground after his self-immolation, the local authorities wanted to remove any trace of evidence of the shooting.

Tapey also became the first of the self-immolators to be used for government propaganda blaming the 'Dalai clique' in exile for the self-immolations.

An official documentary broadcast by state media in May 2012 covered incidents involving 13 Tibetans who set themselves on fire, including detailed accounts of the cases of Tapey (February 2009) and Phuntsog (March 16, 2011). It included video footage and images that are made public for the first time.^[6]

The official documentary shows previously-unseen footage of Tapey's self-immolation in February 2009, and an interview with him in hospital. The footage shows him engulfed in flames, walking unsteadily forward, as several police officers approach from behind him. One man, probably plain clothes police, rushes forward and discharges a fire extinguisher over Tapey at close range. With the flames extinguished, Tapey then runs a few steps away. It is at this point that the video footage cuts away without showing what happened next.

The state media has strongly denied reports received by ICT that Tapey was shot.^[7] But a still photo of what happened after the flames around Tapey's body were extinguished that emerged through unofficial channels appears to confirm reports that officers opened fire after the flames were extinguished, while Tapey was attempting to run. The still photo shows Tapey lying on the ground in his charred robes surrounded by police, with at least three officers holding drawn firearms – the officer closest to the camera appears to be inspecting his rifle which invites speculation he had just fired at least one round.^[8]

Kirti monks in exile said that further information on Tapey received in January 2012 was that “They are not allowing the bullet wounds on his arms and legs to heal, but repeatedly re-opening them in the name of medical treatment.”^[9]

The official documentary depicts Tapey in hospital, wearing monks’ robes, with his head, neck, arms and legs heavily scarred, sitting under a pink quilt emblazoned with the word ‘Love.’ It is notable that in the video, he simply talks about his physical condition, saying that most parts of his body have physically healed and he can write slowly with one of his hands.^[10]

Lobsang Kunchok and Lobsang Kelsang: teenage monks whereabouts unknown

Two teenage monks from Kirti monastery set fire to themselves on September 26, 2011, in the Tibetan area of Ngaba (Chinese: Aba), while shouting “Long live His Holiness the Dalai Lama.” The Chinese state media reported the incident on the same day and stated that both monks were still alive. Their whereabouts and current condition are still not known, and their families have not been allowed to see them.

Both monks, Lobsang Kunchok and Lobsang Kalsang, later appeared in state media video clips that did not reveal the extent of their injuries and medical treatment. A Tibetan source said that in March, 2012, the family and friends of Lobsang Kunchok became aware that both his hands and his legs had been amputated. They were also told that he was only able to be fed through a drip, or tube inserted into his stomach. The source said: “It is believed that Lobsang Kunchok was suffering a lot in the hospital because the doctors and nurses treated him as a national enemy. He needed assistance for any movement from nurses or doctors as he could not move on his own.”

The extent of Lobsang Kalsang’s injuries are not known. He was first taken to a local hospital and then moved to Chengdu, according to ICT’s sources. But according to the same sources, his family and friends have not been permitted to see him, and do not even know if he is still alive. “His relatives have appealed to the local authorities and begged to see him even once, but have been refused,” said the Tibetan source.

Lobsang Kunchok’s family and friends have also not been permitted to see him, and do not know of his current condition.

Both monks are in their early twenties, had been educated at the monastery for some years, and are from Me’uruma township in Ngaba Tibetan and Qiang Autonomous Prefecture, Sichuan (the Tibetan area of Amdo).



Lobsang Kunchok, aged 18, at an earlier age.



Lobsang Kunchok, in a photo taken some time before his self-immolation.

It took more than three years from the first self-immolation in Tibet for the authorities to issue their most elaborate response to these actions in the form of a video.^[11] This appeared to expose a level of uncertainty and anxiety in how to handle the self-immolations, in particular when compared with the aggressive handling of, most notably, the self-immolation of apparent Falun Gong practitioners in Tiananmen Square in 2001, which led to a mass campaign by the authorities to eliminate the practice and its practitioners. While in this case the state media succeeded in whipping up widespread revulsion against Falun Gong, in Tibet the overwhelming response to the self-immolations has been one of respect, and the authorities' attempts to turn people against the self-immolators has been a failure.

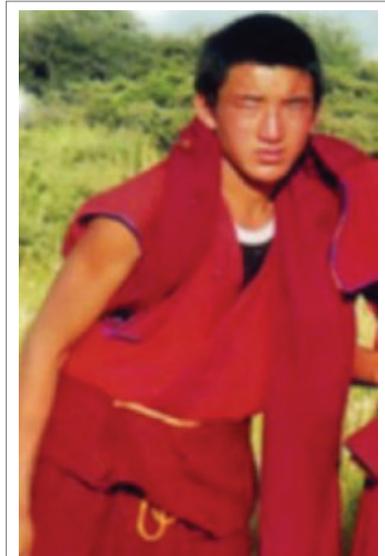
Kalsang Wangchuk: teenage monk beaten after flames extinguished

A 17-year old monk from Kirti monastery, Kalsang Wangchuk, survived after he set fire to himself and walked along the street in Ngaba holding a photograph of the Dalai Lama on October 3, 2011.

Kalsang Wangchuk, carried a photo of the Dalai Lama and was shouting slogans against the Chinese government when he set fire to himself along the main street in Ngaba county, Ngaba Tibetan and Qiang Autonomous Prefecture, Sichuan province. According to new information from Tibetan sources, he was immediately surrounded by security personnel, who extinguished the fire and beat Kalsang Wangchuk.

A Tibetan source in exile in contact with Tibetans in Tibet said: "Armed police on the scene immediately began to beat Kalsang Wangchuk; they hit him on the head and he was knocked unconscious. He was then moved to the local government hospital for medical treatment, and placed on the second floor. All other patients were removed from this area and the hospital was placed under tight security."

Another Tibetan said that Kalsang Wangchuk made some recovery from the burns, and was returned to his home town in mid-2014. He was not allowed to return to Kirti monastery, and he lives under close surveillance by the authorities.



Kalsang Wangchuk, aged 17, at a summer picnic prior to his self-immolation. He set himself on fire on October 3, 2011.

Dawa Tsering: held under tight security, protected by other monks

Dawa Tsering, a monk in his thirties from Kardze monastery in Kardze (Chinese: Ganzi) Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture in Sichuan, set fire to himself on the morning of October 25, 2011. Dawa Tsering was still alive immediately after monks and other people attending a religious ritual at the monastery extinguished the flames. He survived, although badly burnt and unable to walk properly. He is kept under tight security, and other monks and visitors are generally prevented from visiting him, according to Tibetan sources.



Dawa Tsering prior to his self-immolation.



Dawa Tsering following his self-immolation, showing burns on his face and neck.

According to new information from Tibetan sources about the circumstances of his self-immolation, monks gathered to protect Dawa Tsering after his self-immolation. He had chosen to set fire to himself at the site where devotees were burning incense inside Kardze monastery in Kardze (Chinese: Ganzi) Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, Sichuan, at the time of a religious ceremony.^[12]

Local people and pilgrims immediately gathered around to extinguish the flames, and carried Dawa Tsering to the hospital in Kardze county town with a group of monks. The authorities surrounded the hospital and attempted to take Dawa Tsering away, saying that they would take him to a major hospital in Chengdu. According to the same sources, monks and local people urged the local hospital to continue emergency medical treatment. Another source said: “There was a standoff between the local people and monks, and the armed police force at the hospital for around two hours. I heard that local people were prepared to die if troops removed Dawa Tsering from the hospital, where he was undergoing emergency treatment. Finally, the medical treatment was allowed to continue. The local people then again insisted on taking Dawa Tsering back to Kardze monastery so that he could recover.”

Dawa Tsering was participating in a religious ceremony at the time of a Cham (monastic) dance, attended by hundreds of local people inside the monastery when he set himself alight and shouted slogans calling for the Dalai Lama’s return to Tibet.

Sonam Rabyang: monk in his forties suffers amputation after self-immolation

Sonam Rabyang, a monk in his early forties from Lab monastery, set fire to himself on February 8, 2012 in Triwang (Chinese: Chen wen) town, the capital of Tridu (Chinese: Chenduo) County, Yulshul (Chinese: Yushu) in Yulshul Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture in Qinghai Province.

Sonam Rabyang survived the self-immolation and was taken by police to a military hospital in Xining, the provincial capital, for medical treatment. According to Tibetan sources, Sonam Rabyang suffered severe damage to his lungs from smoke inhalation, and his right leg was amputated below the knee.^[13]

Details about his current circumstances are not clear because of tight restrictions on communication in the area, and tight surveillance of Sonam Rabyang and his relatives.

Radio Free Asia (RFA) reported that following Sonam Rabyang's self-immolation, police removed the monastery's Khenpo (abbot) and several other high lamas to the prefectural capital. Local people were reportedly preparing to demonstrate if they weren't returned to the monastery.^[14]

Tridu County had been the scene of a large demonstration involving up to 350 monks the previous day. The monks staged a march calling for the return of the Dalai Lama to Tibet among other demands. Police reportedly blocked the marchers – who it was claimed were marching in response to international calls for an international day of Tibetan solidarity on February 8, 2012 – but no arrests were made, and the monks returned to their monasteries later that same day.^[15]

Sonam Rabyang became a Buddhist monk in 1995.



Sonam Rabyang, who set fire to himself on February 8, 2012.

Lobsang Gyatso: survival of a Kirti monk uncertain

It is not known whether a Kirti monk who set fire to himself on February 13, 2012 is still alive. Lobsang Gyatso, who was then 19, set fire to himself in Ngaba (Aba), while shouting slogans of protest against the Chinese government.^[16] Armed police extinguished the flames and were seen beating Lobsang Gyatso, and dragging him away in a police vehicle. Other Tibetans on the scene were also detained.

Lobsang Gyatso is thought to have survived the self-immolation, but his family has not been able to establish whether he is still alive or not. According to a Tibetan source, family and relatives have visited the local government office more than 30 times to ask about whether their son is alive or not, but the local authorities have not responded.



An image of Lobsang Gyatso, taken during a religious festival in Kirti monastery, Ngaba, before his self-immolation.

Jamyang Palden: monk who died after initial survival

Jamyang Palden from Rongwo monastery in Rebgong (Chinese: Tongren), Qinghai, initially survived self-immolation on March 14, 2012, but later died.

A monk in his mid-thirties at Rongpo Monastery in Qinghai Province, Jamyang Palden self-immolated in a public square outside the monastery.^[17] He reportedly shouted “Let His Holiness return! Freedom for Tibet and the Tibetan language!” before setting himself on fire.^[18]

Jamyang Palden survived and was taken to hospital by monks and laypeople, according to some sources;^[19] other sources say he was taken to hospital by monks and police officers.^[20]

While Jamyang Palden was in hospital, a large crowd of people gathered at the monastery to recite prayers and show solidarity with him. Security forces surrounded the monastery and tried to force people to leave the square, but according to a source who spoke to Radio Free Asia, “The local police ordered them not to recite prayers and to disperse, but the crowd refused.”^[21] Extraordinary footage

of the gathering^[22] soon emerged from Tibet showing several hundred people including monks and laypeople gathering while long-life prayers for the Dalai Lama are heard being recited in the background.^[23] Video footage also emerged of several dozen monks surrounding and tending to Jamyang Palden back at Rongpo Monastery on the night of March 14, 2012. The monks can be heard chanting long-life prayers for the Dalai Lama while Jamyang Palden can occasionally be glimpsed amid the crowd.^[24]

Xinhua, the Party-controlled official Chinese news agency, issued a report on March 15, 2012 of Jamyang Palden’s self-immolation, quoting a local spokesman saying “Monks and local residents went to the hospital at noon and forcibly took Jamyang Palden away from the hospital,” without attempting to explain why they would have done so. The report added, “Local authorities are talking with the monk’s relatives, hoping to send Jamyang Palden to a hospital in the provincial capital of Xining for better treatment.”^[25]

Various reports indicate that monks from Rongpo went to the hospital and took Jamyang Palden back to the monastery, fearing he would be arrested and possibly abused by police.^[26] Voice of America report that he was taken out of the hospital by the monks and then taken elsewhere for treatment before being taken back to the monastery.^[27] Photographs of Jamyang Palden being treated by two doctors emerged soon after his self-immolation, showing him wearing an oxygen mask while his arms appear to be seriously burned.^[28]



(Top) Jamyang Palden, aged 34, some time before his self-immolation in Rebgong.

(Left) Jamyang Palden breathing oxygen during emergency medical treatment following his self-immolation.

(Right) Jamyang Palden following his self-immolation, before he died.

The Chinese state media even acknowledged that a makeshift hospital ward was set up at his monastery to treat Jamyang Palden, who was highly respected among other monks.

A Xinhua article published on June 22, 2012, detailed how a semi-quarantined ward has been created at the monastery after Jamyang Palden refused to leave. A doctor is cited as saying: "Every day, we persuade him to go to hospital for surgery, but he is firm in opposing the idea," Rinchencog said. 'I don't want to go anywhere. Here is the best as I consult the Divine,' she quoted Palden as saying. Despite that, he repeatedly said, 'Thank you for treating me,' she said."

Jamyang Palden died at the monastery in September, 2012.^[29]

Dargye: disappeared after self-immolation in Lhasa

Dargye, a young Tibetan man, set fire to himself together with another Tibetan, Dorje Tseten, outside one of Tibet's holiest shrines, the Jokhang Temple, in the first self-immolation in Lhasa, Tibet's historic capital. Dorje Tseten died, and while some sources state that Dargye did too, it is not clear whether he survived or not. His family has not been informed whether he is alive or dead.

Dargye, a former monk from Kirti monastery, Ngaba, in his mid-twenties, had been working in a restaurant in Lhasa prior to his self-immolation on May 27, 2012. He and Dorje Tseten set fire to themselves during Saga Dawa, the holy fourth month for Tibetan Buddhists that commemorates the Buddha's birth, enlightenment and death. The self-immolations were the first in Lhasa where Chinese security has been tight since March 2008 when protests occurred across Tibet and rocked the capital city.



Dargye, who self-immolated in Lhasa in May, 2012.

A Tibetan source told ICT that Dargye booked a room in a small hotel in Lhasa the night before, where he prepared for the self-immolation. Soon after they set themselves alight, armed police extinguished the flames and removed Dargye and Dorje Tseten from the scene; vivid images emerged from Lhasa from eyewitnesses.^[30]

Following the self-immolations, the entire staff of the hotel where Dargye worked was detained. The Chinese state media reported that Dorje Tseten had died, and that Dargye was still alive but injured and in hospital. (May 28, 2012, Xinhua).

Dargye's father travelled from Ngaba to Lhasa and attempted to find his son. He went to the Lhasa police headquarters and to other officials, but was unable to find out anything about his son. The authorities have given no further responses on whether Dargye is still alive or his whereabouts.

According to monks from Kirti Monastery in exile, 25-year old Dargye had entered Kirti monastery as a boy and disrobed a few years before his self-immolation. He is the youngest of six children. In Lhasa, Dargye took a job as cashier at a restaurant owned by the Chukeytsang trading family, also from Ngaba. After Dargye's self-immolation, the restaurant owner, Chukey, and his wife and family were all arrested.

Dickyi Choezom: hands amputated after self-immolation

Dickyi Choezom, a Tibetan woman in her forties, survived after self-immolating on June 27, 2012, in the main street of Kyegudo county town Yushul (Chinese: Yushu) Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, Qinghai province, near a monastery.

More troops were sent to the area and took Dickyi Choezom to the main hospital in Xining, the provincial capital. Her hands were amputated.

An exile monk with contacts in the region told Tibetan media that police arrested two of her relatives but many Tibetans gathered and started demanding their release and threatening to set themselves on fire if the two were not released, and they were reportedly released later in the day with injuries from severe beatings.

Tibetans from Kyegudo have been protesting China's redevelopment plans in the region following the devastating earthquake in April 2010, and Dickyi Choezom's self-immolation is believed to have been a protest about the redevelopment and land seizures. Opaque government reconstruction plans have been implemented forward without local consultation, raising concerns over the distribution of land and the future of what is a centuries-old center of Tibetan culture and religion where Tibetans comprised 97% of the population. For three days from April 1, 2011, hundreds of Tibetans gathered to make a bold protest against the Chinese authorities' plans for land distribution and relocation, which have mainly excluded Tibetans from decision-making. Protestors who were detained after the protests were dispersed by armed police included many Tibetans who had been injured in the quake, some of whom had lost limbs.^[31]

The full circumstances of the hospitalization of Dickyi Choezom, a mother of two, and the amputation of her hands, are not known. One Tibetan source told ICT that she was returned home after medical treatment. Another Tibetan source said that her husband Wangdrag had been summoned to the hospital to discuss medical treatment and the amputation, and that Wangdrag had disappeared for some weeks after his visit to the hospital. According to the same source, he was later found to be seriously ill, with no explanation for his whereabouts after his hospital visit.

Pasang Lhamo: survived after setting herself alight in Beijing

A Tibetan woman survived after setting fire to herself in Beijing on September 13, 2012. Pasang Lhamo, in her fifties, is from Kyegudo Yushul (Chinese: Yushu) Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, Qinghai province and is the only Tibetan in the current wave of self-immolations to set fire to herself outside Tibet in the PRC. She was taken to hospital, seriously injured, and later returned to her family and relatives. Her current welfare is not known.

According to Tibetan sources, Pasang Lhamo set fire to herself as a protest over her land being seized by the government in her home area of Kyegudo. Pasang Lhamo's family had lived in the house for generations, and when it was slated for demolition for a government project, Pasang Lhamo appealed to both the prefectural and provincial authorities, according to Tibetan sources. When there was no response, she chose to set fire to herself in Beijing in protest.



Pasang Lhamo, believed to be in her fifties, while receiving medical treatment in hospital following her self-immolation in Beijing.

In China, more than 40 self-immolations have resulted from forced evictions, a longstanding cause of discontent, which have increased significantly in the past two years in order to clear the way for developments.^[32]

Pasang Lhamo's daughter, who worked for an official dance troupe in Kyegudo, lost her job after she also complained about the forced eviction.

Yangdang: uncertainty over his survival

It is not known if a Tibetan man in his twenties, Yangdang, who set himself on fire on September 29, 2012, is still alive. In an indication of the difficulties in confirming the survival or otherwise of self-immolators, Tibetan sources gave differing accounts of the aftermath of his self-immolation in Dzato (Chinese: Zadou) county, Yushul (Chinese: Yushu) Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, Qinghai province.

According to Tibetans in exile in contact with Tibetans in the area, Yangdang set fire to himself along the main road in Dzato county town at around 7 pm, and shouted slogans calling for freedom in Tibet and for the return of the Dalai Lama and the Karmapa (a prominent Tibetan lama).^[33] Other sources said that he had called for an end to mining in Tibet.^[34]



Yangdang, who fell on the ground, badly burnt, after his self-immolation.

After onlookers, including local Chinese shop owners, were able to put out the flames with buckets of water, security forces cordoned off the area and took Yangdang to the local hospital. The following day local authorities informed family members that Yangdang would be transferred to a hospital outside the Tibetan area due to his serious condition. Local authorities later informed family members that Yangdang died while in transport, but the authorities have yet to release Yangdang's body to his family, according to the same sources. Other sources indicate that he may have survived, although no information has been provided by the local authorities.

According to Tibetans in exile in contact with Tibetans in the area, security in the area was significantly increased following Yangdang's self-immolation, with officials placing heavy restrictions on local travel.

Yangdang was born in Karma township in Chamdo county, Chamdo prefecture, Tibet Autonomous Region, and was engaged in small business in the Dzato county area, according to the same source.

Yangdang's self-immolation took place while the Chinese authorities were preparing a major celebration in the area for the founding of the Chinese Communist Party on October 1. As a result of the self-immolation, celebrations were scaled down and security intensified.

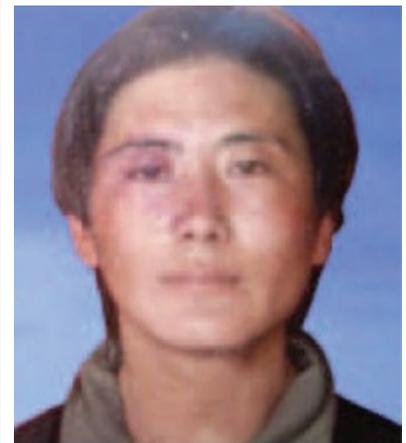
Tenzin: violent police response to self-immolation, no information about whereabouts

The welfare and whereabouts are not currently known of a young Tibetan, Tenzin, who is believed to have survived after he set fire to himself on October 25, 2012, in Nagchu, in the Tibet Autonomous Region.

Tenzin set himself on fire in a double self-immolation with another Tibetan, also aged around 20, near a government building in Nagchu (Chinese: Naqu). Both were from Bankar monastery and Bankar village in Driru County (Chinese: Biru) in Nagchu.

Tenzin, a nomad and farmer, was taken away by armed police and since then there has been no news of his whereabouts and whether he survived. A Tibetan source said: "We heard that the police were very aggressive towards Tenzin, they lifted up his body and threw it in a police vehicle without paying any attention to his fragile condition after the flames were extinguished. Since then Tenzin's family and relatives have heard nothing from the authorities about the whereabouts of Tenzin and his latest condition, although they have approached government officials many times. They desperately want to know whether he is dead or alive. But they have received no response."

Tenzin had lived in exile for some years, studying in Suja Tibetan school near Dharamsala, India, which is run by the exile Tibetan authorities. He returned to Tibet after he became ill in India. Tibetans who return from exile in India are treated with particular suspicion by the Chinese government as they are perceived to have come under the influence of the Dalai Lama. On the way back to his home area in Tibet, Tenzin was detained for two weeks by border security, and was only allowed to leave after his family paid a large fee.



Tenzin, in his twenties, taken some time before his self-immolation in Nagchu.

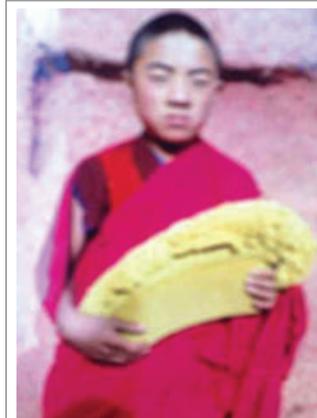
Dorjee Kyab and Samdrup: two young monks who survived

Young monks Dorjee Kyab and Samdrup set themselves on fire together with 15-year old fellow monk Dorjee in Ngaba on November 7, 2012. Dorjee died immediately, while the then 16-year olds Dorjee Kyab and Samdrup were immediately taken away by the authorities.

The group of three monks from Ngoshul monastery self-immolated outside the local police station at Gomang Township in Ngaba. They shouted slogans calling for freedom for Tibet and the return of the Dalai Lama. All three were taken away by police. Both Dorjee Kyab and Samdrup were believed to have been taken to Ngaba hospital.



Dorjee Kyab at the age of 16 in the monastery, where he studied before his self-immolation in Ngaba.



Samdrup, aged around 16, while at his monastery before his self-immolation. The picture was taken following a major religious assembly.

Due to restrictions on information flow, it has not been possible to confirm whether both Dorjee Kyab and Samdrup have been returned home to their families. They were both in critical condition when they were admitted to hospital, and Tibetans report that they were in hospital for a couple of months. One Tibetan source said: “It is believed that the local authorities may have returned Dorjee Kyab to his family in 2013, but that could not be confirmed.”

Wangyal: survival not confirmed

There were a number of witnesses to the self-immolation of Wangyal, a Tibetan man in his twenties, who set fire to himself on November 26, 2012^[35] in Serthar, northeastern Tibet. While he survived self-immolation, it is not known if he is still alive.

Wangyal set himself on fire in front of the golden horse statue, a well-known local landmark, in Serthar (Chinese: Seda) county town, Kardze (Chinese: Ganzi) Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture in Sichuan province. According to Tibetan sources, many local people in the town heard Wangyal calling for the return of the Dalai Lama and freedom for Tibetans. He was immediately taken away by police, who broke through the crowd gathered at the scene and took Wangyal away. Since then, communications were restricted, and more troops deployed in the area. A Tibetan source told ICT: “Wangyal was still alive when he was taken to hospital for medical treatment. But more than two years later, his family and friends don’t know where he is, or what medical treatment he is receiving. They have just been told that he is receiving medical treatment.”



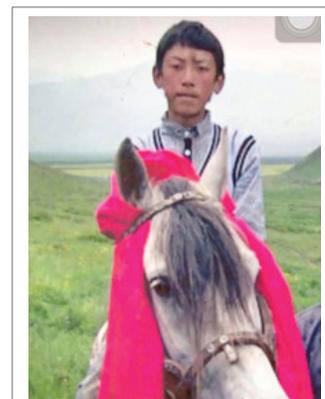
Wangyal, a Tibetan in his twenties, set fire to himself in 2012 at this location in Serthar county town, near the golden horse statue.

Wangyal has three brothers and one sister, and his parents are dead.

Sungdue Kyab: 17-year old sent home with legs amputated

Sungdue Kyab, then 17 years old, set fire to himself on the road to Bora monastery in Sangchu county, Kanlho (Chinese: Gannan) Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, Gansu province, on December 2, 2012. He survived his protest and was taken away by police, reportedly to the hospital in the city of Tsoe in Kanlho. His family sought information about his whereabouts and welfare from local officials on numerous occasions, but were met with no response.

According to the same sources, following the self-immolation, the authorities informed Sungdue Kyab’s family that he was receiving medical treatment and that they wanted to discuss amputation of his limbs.^[36] His family queried the amputations; according to Tibetan sources, they may have agreed to the amputation of one leg which was badly burnt, but not the other. They did not hear from the hospital or the authorities again, until he was returned to his home in late October – nearly two years after his self-immolation – with both his legs amputated, according to Tibetan sources. No information is



Sungdue Kyab, 17, who set fire to himself in 2012. This image of Sungdue Kyab was taken in 2007, when he was around 12 years old.

available about whether the amputations were judged to be imperative for his survival.

Tibetan sources in exile gave the following account of the aftermath of the self-immolation: “At first, the local authorities took Sungdue Kyab to Kanlho Prefecture Hospital for medical treatment for couple of months, and later moved him to the main hospital in Gansu province, where his parents were permitted to visit him.

“At the beginning of 2014, the prefectural authorities told Sungdue Kyab’s family that he was discharged from hospital and in police custody. The family sought to visit him there but were not allowed. Late in the evening on October 23, 2014, the authorities brought Sungdue Kyab back to his family home. Both of his legs had been amputated.”

Sangdag: a monk whose survival is not confirmed

On February 24, 2013, a monk called Sangdag set fire to himself on a road to the south of Ngaba (Chinese: Aba) town, Ngaba Tibetan and Qiang Autonomous Prefecture, Sichuan.

Following his self-immolation, Sangdag was taken to the local hospital, and Tibetan sources say that it is believed he is still alive. A Tibetan source told ICT: “Sangdag was not kept long at the local hospital but removed elsewhere, to an unknown location. His family and friends have applied for permission to visit Sangdag or at least to know his whereabouts, but their application was rejected straight away, and the authorities gave them no information about him.”

Sangdag was from Dowa village in Drotsig Shang, Ngaba county, and was a monk from the Diphu monastery (Sakya school) in Ngaba.

The wave of self-immolations that has swept across Tibet began in Ngaba in 2009 with the self-immolation of Kirti monk Tapey.

Kunchok Tsomo

Kunchok Tsomo, who was aged 40, was born in a village in Kyegudo Yushu (Chinese: Yushu) Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, Qinghai province. She set fire to herself to protest Chinese policies in Tibet at the end of March, 2013 (exact date not known) by a government building in Kyegudo, according to Tibetan sources.

According to the same sources, Kunchok Tsomo’s home was among those destroyed by the local authorities as part of the process of rebuilding Yushu as a ‘new city’ following the major earthquake in 2010.^[37]

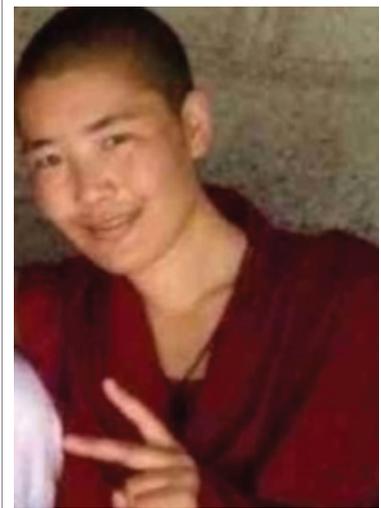
According to a Tibetan source, armed police arrived on the scene of Kunchok Tsomo’s self-immolation quickly and extinguished the flames, and removed her to hospital. She was given urgent medical treatment and recovered, according to the same source. She is now back in her home town and under close official scrutiny; full details of her welfare are not known, including whether her land was returned to her or not.

Dolma: survival of a Tibetan nun

A Tibetan nun in her early thirties who set fire to herself outside a monastery in the county town of Bathang (Chinese: Batang) in Kardze (Chinese: Ganzi) Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, on March 29, 2014, survived self-immolation. It is not known whether she is still alive, and if so, where she is. Communications in the area were restricted after the self-immolation.

Dolma, reported to be 31, is reported to have survived because Tibetans who were circumambulating the Ba Choede monastery extinguished the flames after she set herself alight. Dolma is from a large family; three of her relatives have been identified as reincarnate lamas, and her sister is also a nun. She is believed to have made religious offerings before setting fire to herself near the circumambulation (kora) route outside Ba Choede monastery in the county town of Bathang (Chinese: Batang) in Kardze (Chinese: Ganzi) Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture.

Security was tightened in the monastery and county town, with internet connections blocked and mobile phone connections cut, according to the same Tibetan sources. Local people were not allowed access to Dolma in hospital. She is believed to have survived after receiving emergency medical treatment at the hospital, but her current condition is not known.



Dolma, in her early thirties, survived after she set herself on fire outside a monastery in Kham in March, 2014. The photo was taken some time before her self-immolation.

Kunchok: monk who set fire to himself outside a police station

A 42 year-old Tibetan, Kunchok, set himself on fire outside a police station in Golog (Chinese: Guoluo) Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture in Qinghai Province on September 16, 2014. Tibetans nearby, in Tsangkor town in Gade (Chinese: Gande) county, managed to extinguish the flames and Kunchok was rushed to hospital. He was deeply distressed that he had survived, according to Tibetan sources. Although the self-immolation happened on September 16, 2014, news only reached Tibetans in exile two weeks later due to restrictions on information and tightened security in the area.

No further information is known of Kunchok's whereabouts, or whether he is still alive.

Self-immolations by Tibetans in exile

Seven Tibetans have set themselves on fire as protest in exile since 1998 – four in India, and three in Nepal. Of these individuals, three have survived.

Tibetan monk Butuk is now living in exile in Europe after setting himself on fire on November 10, 2011, in Kathmandu, Nepal. Butuk wrapped a Tibetan flag around himself, doused himself in kerosene while shouting slogans calling for a free Tibet, then set himself alight at the Boudhanath stupa (a reliquary) in central Kathmandu, the capital of Nepal and home to a large community of Tibetans. Buddhist pilgrims at the stupa managed to quickly put out the flames and he survived. Butuk left Nepal for India where he received medical treatment for 15-20% burns.

Sherap Tseodor, 25, stepped from a public bus outside the Chinese embassy in New Delhi on November 4, 2011, poured fuel over himself and started shouting slogans against the Chinese presence in Tibet after setting himself alight. Police on the scene intervened immediately and managed to put out the flames before they could take hold, leaving Sherap Tseodor with only minor burns on his legs and waist. He told The Guardian newspaper: “For me, it was a failure because I’m still alive... I would be ready to do it again. That is how strongly I feel about the situation there in Tibet.”^[38]

A Tibetan activist called Lhakpa Tsering, President of Regional Tibetan Youth Congress, Bangalore set himself on fire in protest at a visit by China’s then leader, Hu Jintao, to India on November 23, 2006. Lhakpa Tsering called for a free Tibet as he set himself alight in front of the Taj Hotel, Mumbai. Security personnel succeeded in dousing the flames and Lhakpa Tsering was taken to hospital with severe burns.^[39]

For information on the four Tibetans who did not survive self-immolation in exile, see ICT reporting ‘Self-immolations by Tibetans in exile’, <http://www.savetibet.org/resources/fact-sheets/self-immolations-by-tibetans/>.

Recommendations

The International Campaign for Tibet urges the People’s Republic of China:

- In cases where the individual survived self-immolation, ensure that families are informed of the whereabouts and welfare of the individual and are allowed full access to him or her. In cases where the individual has recovered, they should not be held in custody by the authorities;
- Survivors of self-immolation should not face criminal charges for their actions;
- Survivors of self-immolation should be given full and proper medical treatment;
- Families and friends of self-immolators should not face reprisals on account of their relationship with the self-immolator;
- The treatment of Tibetan self-immolators who have survived appears to reflect policies that rely on deterrence and repression. ICT is calling upon the Chinese government to instead address the underlying grievances of Tibetans by respecting their universal rights.

Methodology

This report presents 20 cases of Tibetans who survived self-immolation in Tibet, and three in exile, covering a period from the first self-immolation in exile in 1998, and in Tibet from February 2009 to the present-day.^[40] It is not known whether all of those individuals who survived in Tibet are still alive, due to the tight controls on information flow by Chinese authorities and the dangers faced by Tibetans in passing along information to the outside world. China does not allow independent nongovernmental organizations to freely conduct research or monitor human rights issues inside their borders. As a result, obtaining and verifying credible information presents great challenges. Details in this report are mainly from information gathered and cross-checked by ICT from unofficial sources inside and outside Tibet, including exile Tibetans in contact with Tibetans in Tibet.

Footnotes

- [1] The case of Jamyang Palden, who died six months after his self-immolation, is also included in this report.
- [2] "CCTV's explanation for the Tibetan self-immolations, by Woesser," July 18, 2012, High Peaks Pure Earth blog, see: <http://highpeakspureearth.com/2012/cctvs-explanation-for-the-tibetan-self-immolations-by-woesser/>
- [3] ICT report, 'Acts of Significant Evil: The Criminalisation of Self-immolations', <http://www.savetibet.org/acts-of-significant-evil/>
- [4] ICT factsheet, Self-Immolations by Tibetans in Exile, <http://www.savetibet.org/resources/fact-sheets/self-immolations-by-tibetans/>
- [5] See ICT report, 'Storm in the Grasslands: Self-immolations in Tibet and Chinese Policy', <http://www.savetibet.org/storm-in-the-grasslands-self-immolations-in-tibet-and-chinese-policy/>
- [6] "CCTV's explanation for the Tibetan self-immolations, by Woesser," July 18, 2012, High Peaks Pure Earth blog, see: <http://highpeakspureearth.com/2012/cctvs-explanation-for-the-tibetan-self-immolations-by-woesser/>
- [7] Official media specifically named Students for a Free Tibet in the following article: "Tibetan monk confesses spreading shooting rumors," May 3, 2009, Xinhua, see: http://www.china.org.cn/china/news/2009-03/05/content_17384798.htm
- [8] For this image, and other images relating to the wave of self-immolations in Tibet, see Students for a Free Tibet's photo archive at: <http://www.flickr.com/photos/sfthq/6323790362/in/photostream/>
- [9] "Iron Hare 2011: Flame of Resistance," by the Dharamsala-based Dhomay Alliance for Freedom and Justice, which can be downloaded from ICT's website at: <http://www.savetibet.org/media-center/ict-news-reports/iron-hare-2011-flames-resistance>
- [10] His mother is shown speaking to the interviewer in Tibetan, saying "He said he deeply regrets what he's done. "The Dalai clique and the self-immolation event, part 2," May 10, 2012, Chinese Central Television's YouTube account, see: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?NR=1&feature=endscreen&v=6H1eQpGgxFs> at 0 mins, 55 secs.
- [11] The state media documentary, entitled 'The Dalai clique and the self-immolation incident,' was broadcast in both Chinese and English (with some variations between the two) on Chinese Central Television (CCTV). The video can be viewed in English at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jYcVa7yp6BA&list=UUT8RMFbTJV5iLaVykrIUOQg&index=2&feature=plcp>
- [12] ICT report, October 28, 2011, <http://www.savetibet.org/11th-self-immolation-in-tibet-kardze-monk-sets-fire-to-himself-during-religious-ceremony/>
- [13] "自焚藏人索南熱央被截肢 中共官員紛紛為自焚狡辯 (Tibetan self-immolator Suonan Reyang's leg amputated; Chinese Party officials quibble over self-immolations)," March 8, 2012, Voice of Tibet, see (in Chinese): <http://www.vot.org/?p=8432>
- [14] "Two shot dead; another self-immolation," February 9, 2012, RFA, see: <http://www.rfa.org/english/news/tibet/another-02092012170023.html>
- [15] "Self-immolation and protests spread to new Tibetan prefecture," February 9, 2012, Free Tibet, see: <http://www.freetibet.org/newsmedia/self-immolation-and-protests-spread-new-tibetan-prefecture>
- [16] ICT report, <http://www.savetibet.org/nineteen-year-old-kirti-monk-sets-fire-to-himself-in-ngaba/>
- [17] "Tensions escalate in Qinghai: Rebkong self-immolation, student protest, monks commemorate March 10," March 14, 2012, ICT, see: <http://www.savetibet.org/tensions-escalate-in-qinghai-rebkong-self-immolation-student-protest-monks-commemorate-march-10/>

- [18] "Tibetan monk self-immolates in western China," March 15, 2012, AP, see: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/feedarticle/10145063>
- [19] "Tensions escalate in Qinghai: Rebkong self-immolation, student protest, monks commemorate March 10," March 14, 2012, ICT, see: <http://www.savetibet.org/tensions-escalate-in-qinghai-rebkong-self-immolation-student-protest-monks-commemorate-march-10/>
- [20] "Self-immolation as students protest," March 14, 2012, RFA, see: <http://www.rfa.org/english/news/tibet/protest-03142012093850.html>
- [21] "Self-immolation as students protest," March 14, 2012, RFA, see: <http://www.rfa.org/english/news/tibet/protest-03142012093850.html>
- [22] "Unprecedented footage from Tibet," March 15, 2012, Free Tibet, see "Rebkong 14 March 2012" at: <http://www.freetibet.org/newsmedia/unprecedented-footage-and-photographs-tibet-0>
- [23] "Tibetan Monk Self-Immolates in Rebkong, Thousands Gather to Pray and Protest," March 13, 2012, Voice of America, see: <http://www.voatibetanenglish.com/content/tibetan-monk-self-immolates-in-rebkong-thousandss-gather-to-pray-and-protest-exclusive-video-and-photos-142622016/1267274.html>
- [24] "Jamyang Palden, Rebkong, 14 March 2012," uploaded to FreeTibetUK's YouTube channel on March 15, 2012, see: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=J5fkaQ63_ww
- [25] "Tibetan monk self-immolates in Qinghai," March 15, 2012, Xinhua, see: http://www.china.org.cn/china/2012-03/15/content_24901584.htm
- [26] "Self-immolation sparks protest," March 14, 2012, Free Tibet, see: <http://www.freetibet.org/newsmedia/self-immolation-sparks-protest>
- [27] "Tibetan Monk Self-Immolates in Rebkong, Thousands Gather to Pray and Protest," March 13, 2012, Voice of America, see: <http://www.voatibetanenglish.com/content/tibetan-monk-self-immolates-in-rebkong-thousandss-gather-to-pray-and-protest-exclusive-video-and-photos-142622016/1267274.html>
- [28] "Tensions escalate in Qinghai: Rebkong self-immolation, student protest, monks commemorate March 10," March 14, 2012, ICT, see: <http://www.savetibet.org/tensions-escalate-in-qinghai-rebkong-self-immolation-student-protest-monks-commemorate-march-10/>
- [29] Voice of America, Tibetan service, October 1, 2012, <http://www.voatibetanenglish.com/content/article/1517704.html>
- [30] Image with ICT report, at <http://www.savetibet.org/detentions-fear-after-lhasa-self-immolations-prayer-gathering-in-dzamtang/>
- [31] ICT report, April 9, 2011, <http://www.savetibet.org/reconstruction-of-earthquake-hit-area-excludes-tibetan-participation-ignores-local-concerns-one-year-on-from-earthquake/>
- [32] Amnesty International documented 41 cases of self-immolation as protest against forced eviction. Amnesty International report, 'China: rise in forced evictions fuelling discontent', October 11, 2012, <http://www.amnesty.org/en/news/china-rise-forced-evictions-fuelling-discontent-2012-10-11>
- [33] The 17th Karmapa, head of the Karma Kagyu school of Tibetan Buddhism, lives in exile in Dharamsala, India, following his escape from Tibet in 2000.
- [34] For background on protests on mining in Tibet, see Gabriel Lafitte's book 'Spoiling Tibet: China and resource nationalism on the roof of the world', Zed Books, <http://zedbooks.co.uk/node/20382>

[35] There was an intense wave of self-immolations in November, 2012, coinciding with the once in a decade leadership transition that took place at the Chinese Communist Party Congress in the same month. Tibetans had feared that there would be more self-immolations at the time of this Party Congress, which marked the coming to power of Xi Jinping, perhaps indicating an intention by Tibetans to make a strong statement to the new leadership. ICT report, 'Storm in the Grasslands: Self-immolations in Tibet and Chinese Policy', <http://www.savetibet.org/storm-in-the-grasslands-self-immolations-in-tibet-and-chinese-policy/>

[36] It is not known whether the amputation was at the waist or knee.

[37] ICT report, April 9, 2011, <http://www.savetibet.org/reconstruction-of-earthquake-hit-area-excludes-tibetan-participation-ignores-local-concerns-one-year-on-from-earthquake/>

[38] The Guardian, Protesters' stories: Sherab Tshedor and Tibet – January 13, 2012

[39] Account and images, November 25, 2006, <http://www.phayul.com/news/article.aspx?id=14875>

[40] The last known survivor of self-immolation was Kunchok in December, 2014.