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— Tibet is burning —
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Self-Immolation: Ritual or Political Protest?

Edited by Katia Buffetrille and Françoise Robin

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This special issue of *Revue d'Eudes Tibétaines* is the result of an international conference entitled *Tibet is Burning. Self-Immolation: Ritual or Political Protest?* held on May 14 and 15 2012 at the Collège de France, in Paris.

This conference was made possible thanks to the financial and material support of four institutions: the École pratique des Hautes Études, the Collège de France, the Centre de recherche sur les civilisations de l'Asie orientale (CNRS/EPHE/Diderot/ Collège de France) and its director Annick Horiuchi; the Institut National des Langues et Civilisations Orientales and Manuelle Frank, vice-president of its Scientific Board. To all these we wish to express our gratitude. We thank also Choktsang Lungtok for the beautiful calligraphy he readily designed especially for the conference, as well as Eric Mélac for his help in the English translations, and the INALCO students who volunteered during the conference.

We are grateful to Tsherin Sherpa who kindly accepted that we use one of his paintings to illustrate these proceedings.

The publication of this issue has come about through the help of its editorial director Jean-Luc Achard, to whom we are indebted for his patient advices.

We wish also to express our deepest appreciation to the fine scholars whose excellent contributions appear in this special issue of *Revue d'Etudes Tibétaines.*

Katia Buffetrille (EPHE) and
Françoise Robin (INALCO)

Preface

The idea that an international symposium on self-immolation in Tibet would be organised in Paris was far from the thoughts of the French Tibetological community at the beginning of 2011. However, pushed by events, with news of one immolation quickly followed by news of another at the beginning of 2012, we realised that an unprecedented shocking social phenomenon was taking place in the Land of snow. In spite of our years of fieldwork in Tibet, none of us had foreseen such a tragic development.

While Ronald Schwartz (1994: 22)[1] had written about the protests in Lhasa in the 1980s that their "novelty lies in extending the meaning of familiar cultural symbols and practices into (…) public opposition to Chinese rule," self-immolation in present-day Tibet cannot be linked to anything familiar. Indeed, self-immolation by fire was almost unheard of in the Tibetan world until 1998.

Heather Stoddard launched the idea of convening a roundtable on the subject as early as January 2012, a proposal that was supported immediately by Katia Buffetrille. It soon became obvious that an international seminar would be more productive. Later, Heather Stoddard, due to press of other engagements, had to withdraw from the organisation. Françoise Robin took over and co-organised this symposium with Katia Buffetrille.

While the organisation of the French international symposium was underway, Carole McGranahan and Ralph Litzinger edited online, in April, 2012, a special issue of *Cultural Anthropology* dedicated to this tragic and puzzling phenomenon.[2] This collection of 20 short essays (2-3 pages each) written by a group of Tibetologists, intellectuals and journalists asked, as Carole McGranahan phrased it, "how [to] write about self-

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1 Ronald D. Schwartz, *Circle of Protest. Political Ritual in the Tibetan Uprising*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1994.

2 http://www.culanth.org/?q=node/526.

immolation—an act that is simultaneously politically charged, emotionally fraught, visually graphic, individually grounded, collectively felt—and what does one write? How do we intellectually make sense of these self-immolations, and how do we do so while writing in the moment, but writing from the outside?"[3] These essays presented a preliminary analysis of, and reflections on, self-immolation in the Tibetan world, from the Buddhist, anthropological, sociological, political, historical, artistic and economic angles.

Inspired by Ronald Schwartz's work, which describes the 1989 protests as "rituals [that are] a way of solving problems in the form of drama and symbols",[4] we decided to entitle the conference "Tibet is Burning. Self-Immolation: Ritual or Political Protest?" We went ahead with the organisation of the conference fully aware of the fact that we lacked (and still do) the benefit of hindsight. Emile Durkheim's assertion in *Le Suicide* that "we can explain only by comparing"[5] stimulated us to open up the conference to scholars whose studies are focused on a variety of areas—either on regions in which Buddhism prevails or had prevailed, or on other religious traditions within which self-immolations have occurred. Like the editors of *Cultural Anthropology*, we estimated that the presence of historians, anthropologists, sociologists, specialists in literature and art could help shed a particular light on these actions.

We are pleased to present here the papers as they were given at this international conference, with the exception of those of Robert Barnett and Tsering Shakya who decided to write more substantial articles.

The first batch of papers comes from the Tibetan studies community. Katia Buffetrille presents a chronology of self-immolations in Tibet since 1998, and also looks into previous recorded instances of this action, highlighting some of the reactions the phenomenon has set off. Moreover, she raises many questions which still need to be answered, among them the problem of writing on a subject whose history is still unfolding

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3 *Ibid.*

4 R. Schwartz, *op. cit.*, 20.

5 "On n'explique qu'en comparant," Émile Durkheim, *Le suicide. Étude de sociologie*. 1897. http://classiques.uqac.ca/classiques/Durkheim_emile/suicide/suicide.html.

(95 self-immolations in Tibet proper have occurred at the time this introduction is being written, December 14 2012). Tsering Shakya takes up the ethnonationalistic aspect of the subject and notes the "civilisational preservation" aspect that is at stake in the self-immolations, emphasising the need to resort to the historical dimension to explain the phenomenon. Robert Barnett distances himself from the "outside instigation" or "policy-response" causes that have been put forward to explain the self-immolations by most commentators, and suggests also the influence of Chinese popular culture on self-immolators. In an article based on Tibetan biographies and other historical sources as well as on fieldwork, Daniel Berounský sheds light on the flourishing past of Ngawa kingdom and adds an historical dimension of our knowledge of Kīrti monastery and the larger county to which it belongs. This foray into history is crucial, as Ngawa county is the place where the highest number of self-immolations have occurred to date.

With Fabienne Jagou and Elliot Sperling we turn to the Chinese side: the former offers an overview of the Chinese government's reaction to the self-immolations, raising the question of whether it shows any adaptation to these unprecedented events, or if it conforms to the well-known political ritual of repression used in the 1980s Tibetan protests. As for Elliot Sperling, he chooses to focus on debates on social networks among Han and Tibetan intellectuals and rights advocates, most prominently Woeser, the well-known blogger, poet, and dissident and her husband, the Chinese writer Wang Lixiong.

The three last contributions by Tibetologists deal with Tibetan bloggers' and social media reactions to self-immolations: Chung Tsering provides a brief summary (in Tibetan and in English) of online articles on self-immolation written in Tibetan by exiles. He shows how the debates are lively, rich and numerous, due to contradictory opinions and also to the interest expressed by exile bloggers. Noyontsang Lhamokyab looks into poems and songs about self-immolations that have appeared in social media in exile in 2011 and 2012, going from praise to prayers, most of them expressing solidarity with the immolators. Françoise Robin takes up a similar topic, but in Tibet proper, where coded poems have surfaced on websites. She

studies the images and questions the role and potency of these works.

With the historian Michel Vovelle, a transition to the non-Tibetan world is provided. He surveys the relationship between death and fire in the West from Ancient Greece to the present. He underlines how this relationship has evolved along with society itself and how one single phenomenon came to be interpreted differently along time.

After this opening to history, we turn to a sociological analysis of self-immolations in the world between 1963 and 2012 provided by Michael Biggs. This global perspective allows him to assert that generally this pattern of self-killing is more prevalent in Indic than Semitic societies. He remarks that the current wave of self-immolations in Tibet has reached unprecedented heights in terms of demography, when compared to other communities.

The issue of whether the Tibetan self-immolations could have been inspired by the gesture of the young Tunisian Mohamed Bouazizi was raised time and again. Analysts generally agree that his desperate act in a marketplace in December 2010 triggered the Arab spring and they wondered if Tibetans entertained a similar hope for Tibet. We thus invited three specialists on social and religious movements in the Muslim world.

Dominique Avon reminds us that, although suicide is forbidden in Islamic society, the interpretations given by imams in the case of recent immolations vary from condemnation to silent approval. He emphasises that the prevalent resort to self-immolation in today's Muslim societies is a symptom of secularisation. As for Olivier Grojean, who deals with the PKK, he suggests that self-immolation practices have varied throughout time, with shifting contexts, modes, and actors. They have helped the PKK in building a system which highly values commitment and readiness to die. He notes also the increase of self-immolations at the time when the PKK was undergoing difficulties. Turning towards Iran and the Arab world, Farhad Khosrokhavar agrees with Dominique Avon about immolations being a symptom of secularisation. Moreover, he underlines that, until the Arab spring, self-killing was associated with martyrdom in the name of Islam, with two exceptions: the Kurds who used it as a political weapon and women in general who

committed self-immolation under social pressure. With the Arab spring, though, self-immolation has become a male practice aimed at denouncing repressive power holders, with no religious dimension attached to it.

The three last contributions deal more specifically with self-immolation in other parts of Asia. Marie Lecomte-Tilouine focuses on the Hindu world, and shows how self-immolation, as a means of self-sacrifice, both emerges from the practice of sacrifice in Hinduism and disrupts it, linking the political to the religious. With François Macé, we enter the Japanese world where self-immolations were attested, although not encouraged. The phenomenon disappeared at the end of the 16th century leaving room for another: *seppuku*, commonly called *harakiri,* which took several forms. Lastly, James A. Benn insists on the multiplicity of interpretations that can be ascribed to self-immolation in medieval China. Such a tradition was attested since at least the 4th century; Chinese believers would utilise it in striving to import from India the path of the bodhisattva, emulating the *Lotus Sūtra*. He also shows how self-immolation was accepted as part of the Buddhist path and how immolators, far from being estranged from the world, were active participants in it.

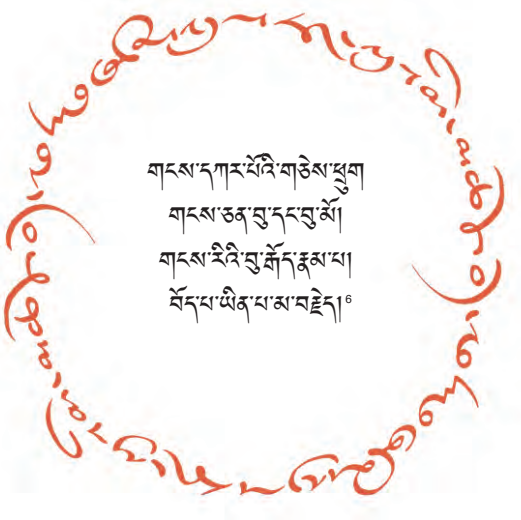
Readers might wonder why this collection does not contain a paper dealing with Vietnam where in 1963 the shocking, internationally publicised immolations of Thích Quảng Đ ức and other monks led to the fall of Ngô Đình Diệm's government. We had indeed planned to include the contribution of Nguyen The Anh but, unfortunately, personal circumstances prevented him from sending it in time for publication.

These papers all combine to show that self-immolations in a variety of cultural and religious contexts cannot be brushed aside simply as actions perpetuated by depressed individuals. Rather, they have to be interpreted in a network of meanings and values belonging to the society in which they take place. Some further similarities can be underlined: self-immolations are radical, they are spectacular, they often serve as a protest against power, and they ignore religious prohibitions against them.

In the more specific case of the Land of snow where Tibetans have become overwhelmingly disempowered, we suggest that

the self-immolators manifest a full and final mastery over their bodies, by ultimately offering them for the sake of their collective identity, giving new meaning to the "political lives of dead bodies," an expression aptly coined by Katherine Verderi.

Katia Buffetrille
and Françoise Robin



6 "Beloved children of the white snow / Sons and daughters of the land of the snows /Great sons of the snow-mountains / Do not forget that you are Tibetan!" Last written words by Sangay Dolma, who self-immolated on November 26 2012 (Translated by Lama Jabb).

Self-Immolation in Tibet: Some Reflections on an Unfolding History

Katia Buffetrille
(E.P.H.E./CRCAO)

Self-immolations by fire among Tibetans in contemporary times started in the exile community in 1998 and in Tibet[1] in 2009. Since then, these acts have continued, with rather long interruptions at some points but with a tremendous increase during the years 2011 and 2012. As all the contributions in this special issue show, this phenomenon has taken place in a number of other countries and has in each case a specific history and a possible array of explanations and interpretations.

This paper aims at putting the Tibetan self-immolations in context, giving their chronology and highlighting some of the reactions these events have set off. It will also briefly discuss the significance of speaking and writing on a subject such as this, while its history continues to unfold.

We have to go back 14 years back to understand the first modern Tibetan self-immolation by fire. In 1998, Thupten Ngodrup, a sixty-year old ex-Buddhist monk from Tashilhunpo monastery (Central Tibet) and ex-soldier (in exile), set himself on fire in Delhi (India). He was about to participate in a hunger strike unto death organised by the Tibetan Youth Congress[2] in order, as he said in an interview, "to give his life to bring about peace and fulfilment to his unhappy people."[3] But before his turn came, while the six hunger strikers were on the 49th day of their movement, the Indian police began their forced removal on April 27. Prevented from fasting unto death, Thupten Ngodrup self-immolated.

He was carried to the hospital where the Dalai Lama came to see visit him. The hierarch recognized that Thupten Ngodrup's "act had

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1 In this article, the term Tibet covers the three main Tibetan regions: Central Tibet (U-Tsang), Kham and Amdo, i.e., the entire Tibetan Plateau.

2 The Tibetan Youth Congress is an exile NGO that advocates independence for Tibet.

3 http://www.jamyangnorbu.com/blog/2008/05/12/remembering-thupten-ngodup/.

Katia Buffetrille, "Self-Immolation in Tibet: Some Reflections on an Unfolding History", *Revue d'Etudes Tibétaines*, no. 25, Décembre 2012, pp. 1-17.

created an unprecedented awareness of the Tibetan cause."[4] He was right, as can be seen from the message left by Lama Sobha[5] who self-immolated in Darlak (Golok Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, Qinghai province) in January 2012. This lama explained, in his recorded testament, that he drew his inspiration from "Thupten Ngodrup and all other Tibetan heroes, who have sacrificed their lives for Tibet and for uniting the Tibetan people in action."[6]

On the same day in 1998, while the Dalai Lama was at Thupten Ngodrup's bedside, the hierarch advised him not to "harbour any feeling of hatred towards the Chinese,"[7] thus stressing the importance of the state of mind of the individual at the time of dying in order for him or her to avoid a bad rebirth.

In a statement made the day after, the Dalai Lama expressed his disagreement with both actions, fasting unto death and self-immolation, on the grounds that "he was against any form of violence."[8] However, Gandhi to whom the Dalai Lama often refers when speaking about non-violence, or Thích Quảng Đức, the Vietnamese monk who self-immolated in 1963 in Saigon, regarded these acts as part of a non-violent struggle. This was also clearly expressed by Thích Nhất Hạnh, a Vietnamese Buddhist monk, in the open letter he wrote to Martin Luther King in 1963: "To express one's will by burning oneself is not to commit an act of destruction but to perform an act of construction, that is to say, to suffer and to die for the sake of one's people." In his turn, Thích Quảng Độ, Patriarch of the Unified Buddhist Church of Vietnam who is presently under house arrest at a monastery in Hô Chi Minh City, smuggled out a letter of solidarity he wrote to the Dalai Lama in which he expressed his feelings regarding self-immolation: "Self-immolation is indeed a tragic and extreme act, one that should be avoided at all costs. But there are moments when this ultimate gesture, that of offering one's body as a torch of compassion to dissipate darkness and ignorance, is the only possible recourse."[9]

At the time of Thupten Ngodrup's self-immolation, everyone was greatly shocked but, as far as I know, the scholarly community did

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4 http://www.jamyangnorbu.com/blog/2008/05/12/remembering-thupten-ngodup/.

5 Sobha is a common pet name of Sonam in Amdo which explains why both spellings can be found.

6 https://sites.google.com/site/tibetanpoliticalreview/articles/tibetanlamaurgesunitynationhoodbeforeself-immolating.

7 http://www.jamyangnorbu.com/blog/2008/05/12/remembering-thupten-ngodup/.

8 http://www.tibet.to/tyc1998/tyce.htm#09.

9 http://www.tncvonline.com/cms/index.php?op=news_details&id=5586.

not reflect upon nor react to the self-immolation itself in spite of the fact that, as far as we know, it was the first time a Tibetan had used this act as a form of protest.

Eight years later, on November 23 2006, another Tibetan, Lhakpa Tsering, an activist in the Tibetan Youth Congress, set himself on fire, also in India, this time in Mumbai as a protest against Hu Jintao's visit to India.[10]

The next immolation took place in 2009 in Tibet and was to be followed by many more.

We should recall here that an important series of events occurred in Tibet in 2008: that year demonstrations spread all over the Tibetan plateau, both in monasteries and among the lay community. As is well known, the resulting repression was very severe, leading to arrests, heavy sentences (including the death penalty), and an even stricter control of the monasteries. Nevertheless, from 2008 onwards, Tibetans in Tibet did not stop expressing their rejection of some Chinese policies and they resorted to various peaceful tactics: non-cooperation movements;[11] boycotts;[12] White Wednesdays *(lhakar)*[13] during which people eat Tibetan food but no meat, speak Tibetan and wear Tibetan clothes; vegetarianism; abandon of monasteries by nuns and monks to escape from the new rules;[14] demonstrations in support of the Tibetan language; coded radical poetry; and self-immolations.

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10 http://www.phayul.com/news/article.aspx?id=14875&t=1.

11 For example, Tibetans in February 2012 refused to celebrate New Year *(losar)* in spite of all attempts by Chinese authorities, by way of money or threat. Instead of the festival, they observed a period of mourning in memory of the self-immolators.

12 http://www.tchrd.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=221:farming-boycott-continues-in-ngaba-village-against-detention-of-fellow-villagers&catid=70:2012-news&Itemid=162 and http://www.tchrd.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=209:tibetans-beaten-arrested-for-protesting-official-corruption&catid=70:2012-news&Itemid=162.

13 In many blogs such as http://lhakardiaries.com/about/, it is written that *lhakar*, literally meaning "White Wednesday," that is the "soul's day of the Dalai Lama." According to Charles Bell, *Portrait of the Dalai Lama*. London: Collins, 1946, p. 338, "Everybody has two lucky days and one unlucky day every week. These all depend on what year out of the cycle of twelve animals he was born in. The [13th] Dalai Lama having been born in the Mouse year, his lucky days are Tuesday and Wednesday; his unlucky one is Saturday… The two lucky days in each week are termed the life day (*sok-sa*; [Tib. *srog gza'*] and the soul day (*la-za* [Tib. *bla gza'*])." According to Bell, then, the "soul's day" is called *laza (bla gza')* and not *lhakar (lha dkar)*. A Golok informant explained *lhakar* as "the soul's day of the Dalai Lama during which Tibetans do not eat meat": the soul day of the 14th Dalai Lama is Wednesday and the adjective *kar*, refers to *karkyong* or vegetarianism.

14 http://www.rfa.org/english/news/tibet/abandon-01312012130228.html.

On February 27 2009, this time in North-Eastern Tibet, in the traditional province of Amdo, Tapey, a young monk from Kīrti monastery, self-immolated in the market area of Ngawa (Ngawa Tibetan and Qiang Autonomous Prefecture, Sichuan) holding a Tibetan flag with a picture of the Dalai Lama. His gesture took place as a protest after the Chinese authorities forbade a prayer ceremony in his monastery. Kīrti monastery, a monastery belonging to the Geluk school of Tibetan Buddhism,[15] and the larger county to which it belongs (Ngawa county), were soon to become the places where the highest number of self-immolations would occur, possibly, as Kīrti Rinpoche told one day because Ngawa was the first place reached by the Long March in 1935. Many people were killed, many monasteries were destroyed and "these events have caused a wound in the heart of Ngawa people, which is hard to heal." The consequences of the "Democratic reforms" in 1958 and of the Cultural Revolution in 1966 led to "the wound of the second generation" that created a deep animosity against the Chinese Communist rule. The "wound of the third generation" developed from the various repressive dispositions taken against the monasteries since 1998.[16]

This radical form of taking one's own life, almost unheard of in Tibet, was not repeated until two years later, on March 16 2011, when Phuntsok, a monk from the same monastery, set himself on fire on the 3rd anniversary of the 2008 uprising in Ngawa. Since then, thirty-five other Tibetans have self-immolated in Tibet.[17]

According to the present Chinese administrative division, these self-immolations appear to take place in 3 provinces and 1 autonomous region (Qinghai, Gansu, Sichuan and the Tibet Autonomous Region). But if we look now at the traditional provinces of Tibet, which have disappeared from Chinese maps, only two of them, Kham and Amdo, which still exist as cultural entities, have been the

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[15] See Daniel Berounský's article on Kīrti monastery in this special issue.

[16] http://www.savetibet.org/policy-center/us-government-and-legislative-advocacy/testimony-kirti-rinpoche-chief-abbot-kirti-monastery-tom-lantos. See also http://historicaldocs.blogspot.in/2012/05/red-army-in-ngaba-1935-1936.html and *Mi thog gsum gyi rma kha 1935-2009*, Dharamsala: bzhugs sgar Kīrti'i byes pa grwa tshang gi dza drag 'brel mthud tshogs chung, n.d. See also Daniel Berounský and Tsering Shakya's contributions in this issue for other interpretations.

[17] This paper was presented on May 14 2012. At the time of writing (October 14 2012), the toll had risen to 55. This number does not include Thupten Nyendak Rinpoche and his niece Ani Atse who died on April 6 2012 in a house fire, because we do not know exactly if their death was the result of an accident or an immolation. In this paper, though, I will only analyse and provide details about the first 35 self-immolators. See http://www.rfa.org/english/news/tibet/fire-05042012163355.html?searchterm=Nyendak%20Rinpoche.

scene of self-immolations, with a majority having taken place in Amdo alone.

Courtesy ICT (MAP 2009-MAY 2012)

In Amdo — 30 immolations

— 14 self-immolators were monks or former monks from Kīrti monastery in Ngawa (Ch. Aba) county in the Ngawa Tibetan and Qiang Autonomous Prefecture (Sichuan),
— 8 more came from the same county, among them 2 were nuns
— 3 were from Dzamthang (Ch. Rangtang), also in the Ngawa Tibetan and Qiang Autonomous Prefecture (Sichuan),
— 1 from Themchen in the Tsonup (Ch. Haixi) Mongolian and Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture (Qinghai),
— 1 from Darlak in the Golok (Ch. Guolo) Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture (Qinghai),
— 2 from Rebkong in the Malho (Ch. Hainan) Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture (Qinghai), and
— 1 from Machu in the Kanlho (Ch. Gannan) Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture (Gansu).

In Kham — 5 immolations

— 1 Tibetan set himself on fire in Kardze and two in Tawu in the Kardze (Ch. Ganzi) Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture (Sichuan),

— 1 was from Jyekundo in the Jyekundo (Ch. Yushu) Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture (Qinghai),
— 1 immolation took place in Chamdo (Ch. Changdu), the traditional administrative centre of Kham (currently in the Tibet Autonomous Region).

Among these 35 Tibetans, 25 were monks or ex-monks (among them one reincarnated lama), 3 were nuns and 7 were lay people (5 men and 2 women).

As for age, more than two-thirds (26) were in their twenties or younger; the others were a little older; the oldest being in his forties. All were born and educated in the People's Republic of China. As far as we know, as of May 2012, 25 of them had died from their burns.

In exile, 3 Tibetans have self-immolated since 2011: 1 in Nepal and 2 in India. The most recent one, Jamphel Yeshe, died on March 29 2012. Many pictures of him in flames found their way into newspapers all around the world, drawing the interest of the international media to the situation in Tibet for a few days. This is in sharp contrast to the lack of coverage by the international media of the 35 Tibetan self-immolators in Tibet.[18]

In exile, foreign media in Tibetan (Voice of America, Radio Free Asia) or Tibetan media in English (such as *Phayul* or the *Tibetan Political Review*) or in Tibetan (such as *Khabdha*), all give the same information about the self-immolators: name, father and mother's names; status (monastic or lay); if lay, the information includes: occupation, family circumstances for lay people (siblings, marital status, children) and age. But one detail that is never given, as far as I know, is the Buddhist sect to which the self-immolator belongs, leading one to think that there is no relationship (at least in the mind of Tibetans) between religious school and immolation. Nevertheless, it should be noted that regarding those whose religious affiliation is known with certainty, 25 were Gelukpa, i.e. the majority, reflecting the fact that most self-immolations concerned monks from one single big Gelukpa monastery.

To this tragic list we have to add the case of a young Tibetan who, instead of self-immolation, chose another form of self-inflicted death to protest against the Chinese occupation: he jumped to his death from Howrah bridge in Kalkotta (India) in April 2012 wearing a Free Tibet T-shirt.

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[18] See on the subject: http://www.hrw.org/news/2012/07/13/china-attempts-seal-tibet-outside-information. A *TIME magazine* survey has listed the "Self-Immolation of Tibetan Monks" as the number one "underreported story" for the year 2011. See http://www.examiner.com/article/self-immolations-most-underreported-story-of-2011.

Following this wave of self-immolations, the reactions among Tibetan leaders and the diaspora population were far from uniform. In 2011, the Dalai Lama was much less peremptory than after Thupten Ngodrup's immolation. He did not condemn the self-immolations anymore but questioned their effectiveness,[19] as he considered them to be "a sign of deep desperation."[20] For his part, Lobsang Sangay, the Prime Minister in exile elected in 2011, agreed with the description of the self-immolators as desperate people and claimed that these acts were a waste of life,[21] somehow depriving those Tibetans of their own agency. As for the Karmapa, one of the most important Tibetan hierarchs in exile, he called for a halt to them.[22] This opposition on the part of charismatic leaders in exile clearly had a limited effect since, as we saw, immolations took place, not only in Tibet but also in India and Nepal.

The scholarly community was greatly affected and alerted by this wave of self-immolations. The international symposium of which results are presented in this issue was one of the responses to this phenomenon and aims at providing a means to understand it better. But to address a phenomenon pertaining to an unfolding history is a challenge: how to grasp the meaning of these acts without being able to stand back and look at them retrospectively? How to answer the many questions that these acts raise? Do they belong to the religious or the political sphere? Are they both protests and offerings? How to explain why it is mostly clerics who have immolated themselves, in spite of the fact that some Buddhists[23] consider self-immolations by nuns and monks more problematic than those committed by lay people, since these actions will prevent them from continuing their spiritual practices?

Moreover, given our lack of access to the Tibetan areas ever since the dramatic chain of suicides began, how to assess the situation on the ground? We should also make it clear that it is almost impossible for any of us here to contact friends and relatives in Tibet, given the amazingly tight and efficient control by the Chinese authorities over international communications (i.e., email and telephones) and the

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19 http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-15799562.

20 http://www.navhindtimes.in/india-news/go-vegetarian-kalachakra-ceremony.

21 http://www.moneycontrol.com/news/special-videos/immolation-is-wastelife support-is-vital_690429.html.

22 http://kagyuoffice.org/#KarmapaBG5>.

23 Yijing (635-713), a Chinese pilgrim who went to India, opposed immolation by fire if they were committed by monks and nuns, since their deaths "would deprive them of the opportunities to continue spiritual practices" (see Martin Delhey, "Views on Suicide in Buddhism: Some remarks," in M. Zimmermann (ed.) *Buddhism and Violence*. Lumbini: Lumbini International Research Institute, 2006, p. 49). One may note that this remark concerns Chinese Buddhism only.

danger that our friends would face if we phoned them to ask their opinions.

In our particular field, Tibetologists and intellectuals began questioning the act of self-immolation in the Tibetan world on various blogs in 2009, that is after the self-immolation of Tabey, a gesture, as was noted, that was not repeated until 2011.

The first and main question raised in these discussions was whether self-immolation was or was not a Tibetan Buddhist practice and whether there were earlier cases of self-immolations in Tibetan history. As for the former, some claimed that such an act was absolutely against Tibetan Buddhist practice since the taking of one's own lives is considered a very negative act.[24] A few added that only a lack of proper Buddhist education in occupied Tibet could explain that monks and nuns took their own life in such a way. Others, on the contrary, made a parallel with the previous lives of the Buddha, pointing to the fact that the *jātaka* tales (stories of Buddha's lives) were full of stories recounting the Bodhisattva's self-sacrifice for altruistic reasons.[25] Several made a reference to the self-immolation of the Bodhisattva Medecine King told in the 23rd chapter of the *Lotus Sūtra*.[26]

Actually, it seems very difficult to answer this question, since self-immolation is viewed differently according to the period and the school of Buddhism to which one refers.[27] It seems that one can always find the answer one wants to find in one text or another.

Regarding the question of self-immolations in Tibetan history, we can turn to the *Bashe*,[28] a historical text believed to have been written in the 9th century. It focuses on the introduction of Buddhism in Tibet, the construction of Samye (the first Tibetan monastery) and the debate that took place between the adepts of Chinese and Indian Buddhism. It mentions a dispute that led to the immolation of one of the protagonists: "Rgya set fire to his own head and died."[29] It should

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[24] http://www.vipassana.fr/Textes/DalaiLamaEthique3Millenaire.htm.

[25] Among them, Jamyang Norbu, an exile intellectual and activist. See http://www.jamyangnorbu.com/blog/2012/01/03/self-immolation-and-buddhism/

[26] On which topic, see J. A. Benn, *Burning for the Buddha: Self-Immolation in Chinese Buddhism*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2007, chapter 2 and James Benn's article in this issue.

[27] As Delhey *(op. cit.)* has shown through the various sources he studied.

[28] Pasang Wangdu and Hildegard Diemberger, *Dba' bzhed: The Royal Narrative Concerning the Bringing of the Buddha's Doctrine in Tibet*. Wien : Österreichische Akademie der Wissenschaften-Tibetan Academy of Social Sciences of the Tibet Autonomous Region, 2000, pp. 77, 80.

[29] *Rgyas ni rang gi mgo la me btang ste shi /*

be noted, though, that the name could refer to a Chinese master rather than a Tibetan one.[30]

As for Tashi Tsering,[31] he mentions, based on Pawo Tsuglak Trengwa's *Feast for the Learned*,[32] the self-immolation in the 11th century of Dolchung Korpon, "the local functionary,"[33] in front of the Jowo, the most sacred statue in the main temple of Lhasa: "he wrapped his body in an oiled cloth, and immolated himself (*mar mer sbar*) … as an offering in the presence of the Jowo…" When he passed away, "a great light emerged from the crown of his head, in the place where his skull had caved in, and vanished into the sky."[34] This last sentence leads us to think that by offering his body, he attained salvation.

Tashi Tsering gives also the example of Karma Chagme (1613-1678), a great master of the 17th century, who gave one of his left fingers as an offering lamp to the Jowo.[35]

More recently, Robert Ekvall, an American missionary who spent many years among pastoralists in North-Eastern Tibet during the first half of the 20th century and was quite immersed in the milieu of Tibetan culture, mentioned "suicidal immolation" that, he thought, survived "from pre-Buddhist forms of propitiation in violation of basic Buddhist ideals."[36] This pre-Buddhist hypothesis needs further research and, as far as I know, has not been mentioned anywhere else.

Yet, even if we can assume, on the grounds of such attested incidents, that more cases of self-immolation might be found in Tibetan biographies and other sources than we initially thought, it is difficult to assert that self-immolation as an act of offering or protest constituted a widespread tradition in Tibet.

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30 "The *Nyang chos 'byung* (407) rejects the self-immolation of the Chinese Master and his followers as false." Pasang Wangdu and Hildegard Diemberger, *op. cit.* 2000, p. 88, n. 331.

31 Tashi Tsering, in Gyurme Dorje, Tashi Tsering, Heather Stoddard, André Alexander (eds.), *Jokhang, Tibet's most sacred Buddhist Temple*. London and Bangkok: Edition Hansjörg Mayer, 2010, pp. 136-37.

32 Tashi Tsering, *op. cit.*, and Dpa' bo Gtsug lag phreng ba, *Dam pa'i chos kyi 'khor lo bsgyur ba rnams kyi byung ba gsal bar byed dpa mkhas pa'i dga' ston*. Stod cha. Beijing: Mi rigs dpe skrun khang, 1986, p. 447.

33 Ronald M. Davidson, *Tibetan Renaissance. Tantric Buddhism in the Rebirth of Tibetan Culture*. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidas, 2008, p. 254.

34 Dpa' bo Gtsug lag phreng ba, *op. cit.*, p. 447.

35 Tashi Tsering, in Gyurme Dorje *et al.*, *op. cit.*, p. 137.

36 Robert B. Ekvall, *Religious Observances in Tibet: Patterns and Functions.* Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1964, p. 165.

Terminology

Terminology is an aspect of self-immolation that might provide us with some information on how Tibetans perceive the act of self-immolation today.

Ekvall claimed in his book[37] that immolations are called "blood offerings" *(marcho)*, a term used at the present time mainly, as far as I know, to describe animal sacrifices or the offering of human blood to local deities during some rituals like the *lurol* in Rebkong (Amdo).

Concerning the contemporary situation, I have never come across the expression *marcho* or blood offerings in articles or blogs speaking about self-immolations. Instead, I have found various other Tibetan expressions such as:

rang sreg: to burn oneself
rang lus mer sreg: to burn one's body
rang lus me sbar: to set one's body on fire
sku lus zhugs mer 'bul: to offer one's body to fire (humilific)
rang lus me sbyin: to give fire to the body
rang lus me mchod: offering fire to the body
rang lus me sgron: to light one's body on fire[38]
[rang lus] mar mer sbar: to burn [one's body] as an offering lamp
rang srog blos btang: to give up one's life-force
lus sbyin: to give one's body
rang lus zhugs 'bul: to offer one's body to the fire (humilific)

We can see that Tibetan commentators are striving to create new terms for a new phenomenon that they interpret in diverse ways, showing the novelty and diversity of interpretations of the phenomenon. But the expression *rang lus la me gtong*, "set fire to his own body," used in the *Bashe*, does not seem to be used anymore.

Many other questions are to be raised: Are the immolators martyrs? Tibetans in exile tend to describe them as "heroes" *(pawo)*, but they also used the term "martyr" in their translations from Tibetan to English.[39] Yet, a martyr is "a person bearing witness to his or her religious beliefs by refusing to renounce them in death"[40] and it is a term that is heavily inscribed in the Christian and Muslim world. The translation of *pawo* as "martyr" can thus be considered as an over-

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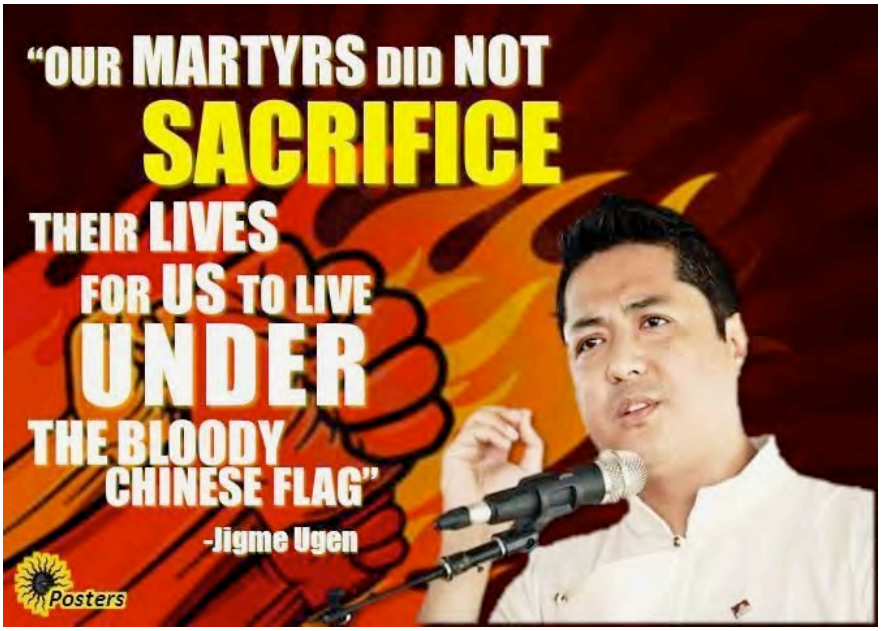
37 Robert B. Ekvall, *op. cit.*, p. 165.
38 This expression has been used only recently according to the Board of *Tibetan Political review* (April 14 2012).
39 http://tibetanyouthcongress.org/tyc-archives/press-releases/2012/03/28/pawo-jamphel-yeshi-passes-away/.
40 *Engligh Dictionary Harraps Chambers*, 2006, p. 917.

interpretation and leads to many questions, which will be discussed in a longer paper.



Courtesy Jigme Ugen

How can we describe these actions? Are they suicides or sacrifices? Are they suicide and sacrifice at one and the same time? According to Émile Durkheim, one of the pioneering social scientists who examined suicide as a social phenomenon, "the term suicide is applied to all cases of death resulting directly or indirectly from a positive or a negative act performed by the victim himself, which he knows will produce this result."[41] But this definition does not take into account the motivation leading to such an act, which in Buddhism is fundamental. Those self-immolators who left letters have all expressed their motivation as being an altruistic one.

In his letter to Martin Luther King, Thích Nhất Hạnh expressed his total disagreement with the qualification of self-immolation as suicidal since "suicide is an act of self-destruction." In an audio recording he left before immolating himself in January 2012, Lama Sobha, a

[41] Émile Durkheim, *Le suicide. Étude de sociologie*. "Les classiques des sciences sociales," Livre I : pp. 14-15. http://www.uqac.uquebec.ca/zone30/Classiques_des_sciences_sociales/index.

reincarnated lama said: "I am giving my body as an offering of light to chase away the darkness, to free all beings from suffering."[42]

So, when a Tibetan chose to jump from an Indian bridge in protest against the Chinese occupation, was it a suicide as protest or was it a sacrifice? What are the necessary conditions for an act to be labelled suicide or sacrifice? Without a common definition of the words, how can we move forward?

The question can also be raised of the right to dispose of one's own life: when all freedom is prohibited, could the sacrifice of one's own life be the only and last freedom an individual has, since even an authoritarian government like China's does not seem able to prevent its exercise?

This paper raises more questions than it gives answers to an unfolding history.

Whatever might be the case, the very fact that Tibetans now commit self-immolation on an increasingly massive scale might be a sad confirmation, for those who still doubted it, that globalisation has reached Tibet, which is still complacently seen by some people as a realm of a pristine, untouched, and radically otherworldly civilisation.

As a postcript

Since our symposium was held, 20 more immolations have taken place in Tibet: on May 28 2012, in a highly symbolic gesture, two young Tibetans set themselves on fire in Lhasa. One of these men was a former monk from Kīrti monastery and the other was from Labrang (Gansu), so they both came from the province of Amdo. The novelty of their action lay in the choice of a location for their radical act: in front of the heart of hearts of Tibetan Buddhism, the Jokhang temple. As if to echo this act, two days later a mother of three children torched herself near a monastery in Dzamthang. This was followed by the immolation of a herder in Chensa (Ch. Jianza), Malho Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, Qinghai, on June 15, and 5 days after, that of 2 more young Tibetans in Jyekundo. Both of them were carrying Tibetan national flags in their hands at the time of their self-immolation and called for Tibetan independence. Then, on June 27, a woman set herself ablaze in Jyekundo[43] in protest against the confiscation of her residence, a policy decided on by the Chinese authori-

[42] https://groups.google.com/forum/?forumgroups#!topic/soc.culture.indian/kT4WWV3CuyE.

[43] http://www.rfa.org/english/news/tibet/selfimmolation-07022012183039.html.

ties to fit in with their reconstruction plan for the city of Jyekundo following the 2010 earthquake. On July 8, a young herder self-immolated in Damzhung, a city north of Lhasa. This was the first time a Tibetan from Central Tibet set himself on fire. Then, on July 17, a monk from a branch of Kīrti monastery self-immolated in Barkham. Again, on August 6, another monk from Kīrti set himself on fire and on August 7, it was the turn of a young mother of 2 to die after having set herself ablaze in the city of Tsö in the Kanlho (Ch. Gannan) Tibet Autonomous Prefecture (Gansu). On August 10, Ngawa county was again the scene of a new immolation by a young nomad followed by that of a monk from Kīrti monastery and of a young nomad on August 13, and that of one monk and one ex-monk from Kīrti monastery on August 27.

In spite of the plea to stop self-immolations expressed by 400 the representatives of the exiled community who gathered in Dharamsala (India) for a special four days meeting in September, the week between September 29 and October 6 saw the self-immolation of three Tibetans: a lay man set ablaze himself in Dzato (Ch. Zaduo) county in the Jyekundo (Ch. Yushu) Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture on September 29, followed by the self-immolation of the first lay Tibetan writer, Gudrup, in Driru (Nakchu Prefecture, Tibet Autonomous Region) on October 4 and by another layman, father of two who torched himself on October 6, on the grounds of Tso (Ch. Hezuo) monastery, Kanlho (Ch. Gannan) Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, in Gansu Province. On October 13, a man of 52, the grandfather of the 7th Gungthang Rinpoche of Labrang Monastery, one of the most revered and important reincarnation lineages in this famous monastery, self-immolated, also on the grounds of Tso monastery.

Courtesy ICT (Map 2009-October 1 2012)

As for the Dalai Lama, he expressed in July 2012 his desire "to remain neutral" since self-immolations are "a very, very delicate political issue." He added: "now, the reality is that if I say something positive, then the Chinese immediately blame me," he said. "If I say something negative, then the family members of those people feel very sad. They sacrificed their life. It is not easy. So I do not want to create some kind of impression that this is wrong."[44] Nevertheless, he said in August 2012 that he would "not give encouragement to these acts, these drastic actions, but it is understandable and indeed very, very sad."[45]

It might be interesting to note that (as far as we know) all women (lay and nuns) except one (Tsering Kyi in Machu who died in the market place) sacrificed their lives near a monastery. In contrast, until recently, men, lay and monks alike, have so far self-immolated mainly close to official buildings, as is the case in Ngawa where 27 self-immolations already took place, most of them on the main street. This street is now called "Heroes' street" or "Martyrs' street" in the Tibetan medias in English.

But the recent immolations show the involvement of older laymen and also a change in the place of sacrifice, since the two last self-immolators, who were lay people, set themselves ablaze on the grounds of a monastery.

GLOSSARY

Transcription	Transliteration	Tibetan
Amdo	A mdo	ཨ་མདོ།
Barkham	'Bar khams	འབར་ཁམས།
Bazhe	*Dba' bzhed* *Sba bzhed*	དབའ་བཞེད། སྦ་བཞེད།
Chamdo	Chab mdo	ཆབ་མདོ།
Chentsa	Gcan tsha	གཅན་ཚ།
Darlak	Dar lag	དར་ལག

[44] http://www.thehindu.com/news/national/article3617428.ece
[45] http://in.reuters.com/article/2012/08/29/tibet-dalai-lama-india-idINDE87S0B820120829

Damzhung	′Dam gzhung	འདམ་གཞུང་།
Dolchung Korpon	Mdol chung bskor dpon	མདོལ་ཆུང་བསྐོར་དཔོན།
Driru	′Bri ru	འབྲི་རུ།
Dzamthang	′Dzam thang	འཛམ་ཐང་།
Dzato	Rdza stod	རྫ་སྟོད།
Gelukpa	Dge lugs pa	དགེ་ལུགས་པ།
Golok	Mgo log	མགོ་ལོག
Gudrup	Dgu ′grub	དགུ་འགྲུབ།
Gungthang rinpoche	Gung thang rin po che	གུང་ཐང་རིན་པོ་ཆེ།
Jamphel Yeshe	′Jam dpal ye shes	འཇམ་དཔལ་ཡེ་ཤེས།
Jokhang	Jo khang	ཇོ་ཁང་།
Jowo	Jo bo	ཇོ་བོ།
Jyekundo	Skye rgu mdo	སྐྱེ་རྒུ་མདོ།
Khabdha	*Kha brda*	ཁ་བད།
Kanlho	Kan lho	ཀན་ལྷོ།
karkyong	dkar skyong	དཀར་སྐྱོང་།
Karma Chagme	Karma chags med	ཀརྨ་ཆགས་མེད།
Karmapa	Karma pa	ཀརྨ་པ།
Kardze	Dkar mdzes	དཀར་མཛེས།
Kham	Khams	ཁམས།
Kīrti	Kīrti	ཀཱིརྟི།
Labrang	Bla brang	བླ་བྲང་།
Lama Sonam	Bla ma Bsod nams	བླ་མ་བསོད་ནམས།

Lama Sobha	Bla ma Bsod bha	བླ་མ་བསོད་སྦྱ།
la za	bla gza′	བླ་གཟའ།
Lhakpa Tsering	Lhag pa tshe ring	ལྷག་པ་ཚེ་རིང་།
lhakar	*lhag dkar* *bla dkar*	ལྷག་དཀར། བླ་དཀར།
Lobsang Sangay	Blo bzang seng ge	བློ་བཟང་སེང་གེ
Lurol	*glu rol*	གླུ་རོལ།
Machu	Rma chu	རྨ་ཆུ།
marcho	*dmar mchod*	དམར་མཆོད།
Ngawa	Rnga ba	ཉ་བ།
Nakchu	Nag chu	ནག་ཆུ།
pawo	*dpa′ bo*	དཔའ་བོ།
Pawo Tsuglak Trengwa	Dpa′ bo gtsug lag phreng ba	དཔའ་བོ་གཙུག་ལག་ཕྲེང་བ།
Phuntsok	Phun tshogs	ཕུན་ཚོགས།
Rebkong	Reb gong	རེབ་གོང་།
Samye	Bsam yas	བསམ་ཡས།
sok za	*srog gza′*	སྲོག་གཟའ།
Tapey	Bkra bhe	བཀྲ་སྦྱི།
Tashilhunpo	Bkra shis lhun po	བཀྲ་ཤིས་ལྷུན་པོ།

Tawu	Rta′u	རྟ་ཝུ།
Thupten Ngodrup	Thub bstan dngos grub	ཐུབ་བསྟན་དངོས་གྲུབ།
Tso	Gtsod	གཙོད།

❖

Self-Immolation: the Changing Language of Protest in Tibet

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The unprecedented spurt of self-immolations in Tibet since 2009, mostly by monks, now[1] numbering over 45 and including incidents even in the Tibetan capital Lhasa, has led to a wide variety of reactions. The Tibetans have valorised these acts as an ultimate form of heroic resistance to Chinese rule, referring to the immolators as "heroes" *(pawo)*, while the Chinese state has viewed self-immolation as the actions of unstable people instigated by "the Dalai clique."[2] For the Tibetans, the act is a demonstration of the repressive nature of Chinese rule; for the Chinese government, these actions are not individual acts of protest, but part of a carefully orchestrated plan to heighten Tibetan agitation, engineered by the exile government in Dharamsala, India. The horrific images and videos which have been circulated of these events on the web have accrued visual currency to them and have galvanised the Tibetan diaspora community, giving them a particular political force and significance, even though self-immolation as a form of political and social protest is neither new nor confined to a particular ethnic group, region or religion—burning one's body has long been part of the modern repertoire of the politics of protest and has been used by different individuals and groups. In the 1990s middle-class Iranian women set themselves on fire in protest against the treatment of women under the Islamic regime, most notably the case of Dr Homa Darabi, who burned herself in Tajrish Square, shouting "Death to oppression! Long Live Liberty!"[3]

In 2001 there were 1584 acts of self-immolation carried out in protests of various kinds in India,[4] while in recent years mass protests in

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1 This article was completed on August 5 2012.

2 http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/china/2012-05/16/c_131591351.htm.

3 Martha Shelley, "A Sacrificial Light: Self-Immolation in Tajrish Square, Tehran," *On the Issue*, Fall 1994, http://www.ontheissuesmagazine.com/1994fall/tehran.php.
See also Farad Khosrokhavar's article in this issue.

4 See Marie Lecomte's article in this issue.

Tsering Shakya, "Self-Immolation, the Changing Language of Protest in Tibet", *Revue d'Etudes Tibétaines*, no. 25, Décembre 2012, pp. 19-39.

the Arab world have been accompanied by acts of self-immolation, the most moving story being that of the death of Mohamed Bouazizi, said to have been the catalyst of the Tunisian uprising.[5] Since the overthrow of Ben Ali's regime, however, a further 107 people have tried to set themselves on fire as protest against corruption and the lack of jobs.[6] In China also, acts of self-immolation as protest are not a new phenomenon: in January 2001 five people burned themselves in Tiananmen Square, Beijing, allegedly, according to the Chinese government, to protest the banning of the Falun Dafa group.[7] Other cases there are not uncommon: on March 17 2012, China Daily reported that a 28 year old woman named Chen had set herself on fire in Guangzhou; in 2008, a woman named Tang Fuzhen died of self-immolation in Sichuan protesting against the demolition of her garment factory;[8] that same year, in Xintai, Hebei province, a 91-year-old man and his son in his 60s burned themselves to death in protest against the forcible demolition of their home.[9] Such reports of self-immolations by individuals often involve property owners or renters who self-immolate to protest forced demolitions and the expropriation of land.[10]

Although acts of self-immolation are not unknown in Tibetan Buddhism, the historical memory of such practices had more or less faded from Tibetan memory, being only recorded in ancient texts.[11] The current spate of self-immolation that is taking place, aimed at protest rather than devotion, is thus a new development in forms of Tibetan protests. The first self-immolation of this kind by a Tibetan occurred in India in April 1998, when a former Tibetan soldier in the Indian army named Thupten Ngodrup set himself alight in Delhi. Thupten Ngodrup's death was immediately hailed among exiles as a

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5 See Dominique Avon's article in this issue.

6 BBC, January 12 2012, http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-16526462.

7 The Falun Dafa group deny the people who carried out the action are members of the group and argue the act was staged by the Chinese government to turn Chinese's public opinion against the group. My point here is not to argue who carried out the action, but merely to show public awareness. The news of Tiananmen Square incident was widely reported in Chinese television news.

8 *China Daily*, December 16 2012, http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/bizchina/2010-12/16/content_11710621.htm.

9 *China Daily*, April 27 2010, http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/cndy/2010-04/27/content_9777585.htm.

10 *China Daily*, July 1 2011, http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/cndy/2011-07/01/content_12813471.htm.

11 For historical account of self-immolation in Tibet, see "Bod kyi lo rgyus thog byung ba'i rang sreg gi gnas tshul khag gnyis gleng ba," *Tibet Times*, July 26 2012, http://tibettimes.net/news.php?id=6220. See also Warner Cameron David, "The Blazing Horror of Now," *Hot Spot Forum, Cultural Anthropology Online*, April 11 2012, http://culanth.org/?q=node/527 and Katia Buffetrille's article in this issue.

heroic act and in all exile Tibetan publications his name has since been prefixed with the title *pawo* (hero). His action is still honoured by Tibetan diaspora community, and a prominent exile group, the Tibetan Youth Congress, erected a bust of Ngodrup in Dharamsala, giving it the title *Chol sum pawo doring* ("The Martyr's Pillar of the Three Provinces [of Tibet]"). The Tibetan community in North America holds an annual basketball tournament in his honour, a song dedicated to him has been written by the popular singer Techung, and his death has now become ritualised and a part of the political memory of the Tibetan diaspora.[12]

It is a ritualisation of this sort that helps to frame death by self-immolation and turn it into martyrdom.[13] Nevertheless, the question why the Tibetans have now adopted self-immolation as the language of protest is complex and cannot be understood in terms of individual motives or by simply studying the social backgrounds of the individuals. As we have seen, self-immolation as an act of disavowal has no specific markers of gender, ethnicity or region, but has become a global phenomenon. It cannot be explained in generalised thesis; instead, we must seek localised explanations.

Since the establishment of the People's Republic of China and the extension of its rule on the Tibetan plateau, the relationship between the Chinese state and the Tibetan people has been characterised as one of confrontation. The Communist-led Chinese state has been the most successful of all regimes in consolidating state power over the Tibetan plateau, for previously the Qing or the Republican regimes had achieved differing degrees of control and authority over Tibetan areas in Sichuan, Gansu, Qinghai and Yunnan, with only a limited degree of state penetration into everyday lives, leaving the local Tibetans there to maintain a high degree of self-governance. The establishment of the PRC and the Communist regime completely shifted governance in those areas to centralised administration, resulting in the loss of local autonomy. The CCP's underlying minority policies remained based on what it calls "regional autonomy," and there is some degree of preferential treatment involved, such as minority groups being exempt from the one-child policy and enjoying easier

[12] Not all Tibetans subscribe to the idea of self-immolation as a heroic act. There is a debate raging on Tibetan internet forum and blogosphere and some oppose the portrayal of self-immolation as heroic act, for an English language blog post see: mountainphoenixovertibet.blogspot.ca/2012/05/rising-from-ashes.html. See also Chung Tsering's and Noyontsang Lhamokyab's contributions in this issue.

[13] For articles on Thupten Ngodrup, see Jamyang Norbu, "Remembering Thupten Ngodup," http://www.jamyangnorbu.com/blog/2008/05/12/remembering-thupten-ngodup/ and Patrick French, "My Friend Ngodup," *Outlook*, May 18 1998.

requirements for admission to colleges. But administration of these areas by the PRC has never recovered from the initial cutting down of local governance: it remains paradoxical, with a constitutional and legal system that enshrines autonomy as the declared system of management for minorities while, in practice, its promise of self-governance is seen as a cosmetic, residual component of early CCP efforts to win over minority populations.[14]

The Sources of Tibetan Protest

Since the liberalisation of the early 1980s and particularly the period of rapid economic transition that has followed, China has faced a massive increase in social protests, causing a general fear of social instability among the CCP leadership. While social unrest in China is generally seen as a mark of economic transition, protests generally reflect both grievances and rights-based claims and are often attributed to the lack of legal remedy for public grievances and to the state's labelling of protesters as 'trouble makers.' Kevin O'Brien and Lianjiang Li have described the prevalent form of protest in China today as "rightful resistance," whereby protesters seek to restore rights conferred on them by the state and perceived as having been denied to them by local officials.[15] Borrowing from an earlier work by S. Tarrow, K. O'Brien and L. Li argue that "rightful resistance" is episodic rather than sustained, "local rather than national."[16] Similarly, C.K. Lee in *Against the Law: Labor Protests in China's Rustbelt and Sunbelt* termed labour protests in China as "cellular," being both localised and without national or regional organisation.

The protests by the Tibetans and Uyghurs in China present very different patterns both in terms of ideology and the objectives of the protestors. Both these conflicts share the hallmarks of an ethno-nationalistic movement, with their main source of mobilisation and organisation centred on shared ethnicity and territory rather than on questions of particular rights or grievances. In scholarly literature, ethnic unrest is explained in terms of group deprivation and disparity of socio-economic development. Ted Gurr, in his *Minorities at Risk: the Global View of Ethnopolitical Conflict*, a comprehensive survey of ethnic conflict around the world, finds direct correlation between

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[14] Xia Chunli, "To Be The Masters of Their Own Affairs: Minorities' Representation and Regional Ethnic Autonomy in the People's Republic of China," *Asia-Pacific Journal on Human Rights and the Law* 1, 2007, pp. 24-46.

[15] Kevin J. O'Brien, Lianjiang Li, *Rightful Resistance in Rural China.* New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006.

[16] *Ibid.*, p. 4.

levels of deprivation and ethnic conflicts.[17] The political scientist Ben Hillman, writing about the 2008 protests in Tibet, attributed their underlying tension to uneven development and stressed the high level of illiteracy and under-qualification among Tibetans, preventing them from competing in the open market.[18] If we examine any social indices—health, life expectancy, literacy or education—it is clear that Tibetans lag behind the average in China in every respect and that there is enormous variation in economic development between the Tibetan areas and other Chinese provinces.

However, the argument that economic and social disparity is the source of the conflict fails to take into account the protracted and historical nature of ethnic conflict. The Tibetans' resistance to Chinese state penetration into what they see as their homeland has a long history, and the Tibetans revolts in the 1950s could not in any way have been a result of Tibetan perceptions that they needed to redress an imbalance in socio-economic development. Similarly, the protests in the mid-1980s, which were confined to the central Tibetan area (the Tibet Autonomous Region), did not suggest that economic disparity was an issue, nor that the protesters were acting because of the influx of Chinese migrants into their area. Uneven development is thus not sufficient to explain the ethno-nationalistic nature of Tibetan protests politics of the ethno-nationalistic kind tends to stress "primordial" linkages and to refer to perceived aggression inflicted on the group, with the aggrieved community articulating its concerns in terms of culture and territory and speaking to its community as a means of mobilisation rather than addressing specific grievances or economic inequities. Ethno-nationalist unrest thus tends to challenge the fundamental structure and legitimacy of the state, with demands that are often taken outside the authorised channels set up by the state for dealing with contentious claims. The Tibetan protesters act as if "the state and its laws are typically inaccessible, arbitrary and alien".[19] Tsering Topgyal has argued that the cause of the protests in Tibet reflects an "identity insecurity" among Tibetans,[20] in response to the rapid pace of economic transition and the movement of migrants into their areas, both being perceived as strategies of assimilation, although there is no overt instance of such a strategy being carried out by the state. The underlying perception remains that Tibetan culture,

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17 Ted Gurr, *Minorities at Risk: the Global View of Ethnopolitical Conflict*. Arlington: Institute of Peace Press, 1993.

18 *Japan Focus*, http://www.japanfocus.org/-Ben-Hillman/2773.

19 James C. Scott, "Everyday Forms Resistance," in Forrest D. Colburn (ed.) *Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance*, New York: M.E. Sharpe, 1989, p. 28.

20 Tsering Topgyal, "Insecurity Dilemma and the Tibetan Uprising in 2008," *Journal of Contemporary China* 20:69, 2011, p. 185.

and thus the essence of the traditional homeland, is being eroded by the changing social environment and economy that are being fostered in Tibetan regions.

Anthony Smith writes of the "ethnoscape" as the main source of ethno-nationalism, whereby territories are memorialised and historicised. He argues that "the core of ethnoscape formation is the development of historical memories associated with landscapes and territories."[21] The Tibetans in Amdo (mainly in Qinghai) and Kham (mainly in western Sichuan) view their territory as the sacred homeland and natural domain of the local. In these eastern Tibetan areas, the reform period brought revitalisation of the local identity and the reconstitution of scarred sites, with this revival of religion and traditional practices heightening local identity. However, revival is not a simple resurrection of the past, but one that involves the reimagining and memorialisation of territory as a sacred homeland. This often brings differing perception of the territory: the state, when it appropriates territory in the name of modernisation and development, only sees the land in terms of productive utility, quite different from the local view of the territory as a homeland.

It is beyond the scope of this short paper to go into details of the formation of Tibetan identity—my point here is to characterise the Tibetan protests as differing from rights-based protests that are prevalent in China today and also to show that disparity in socio-economic development cannot fully explain protests by the Tibetans. The roots of Tibetan grievances are based on ethno-nationalistic claims of a homeland and on opposition to the legitimacy of the current authority. But here the question of authority is not confined solely in the domain of politics, but encompasses the larger field of religion and cultural practices. This is particularly significant in Tibet because of the complex issue of religious authority. It is accompanied by another significant issue, which in fact is new: a change in Tibetan practices of self-identification, namely the creation of the idea of a single Tibetan group, termed in Tibetan *bod rigs* or "Tibetan nationality." To some degree the creation of a single Tibetan group owes much to the nationality policies and ethnic categorisation system introduced by the Communists. Before 1950, there was no single Tibetan group with this name, because local identity was the primary marker of group identity. During the Republican period, there was an attempt to create a local Khampa identity in the eastern and southeastern part of the Tibetan plateau by the Guomindang-

[21] Anthony D. Smith, "Sacred territories and national conflict", *Israel Affairs*, 5:4, 2007, p. 16.

educated elite, who sought to create a "Kham for Khampas"[22] movement, and in the census conducted by the Guomindang at that time in the Sichuan areas of Kham, the Tibetans were classified as "Khampa."[23] When the Communist scholar-cadres arrived, they categorised the people of the Tibetan plateau as a single *borig* and provided fixity to "Tibetanness," homogenising it typologically. This is not to say that there was no foundation for a single Tibetan group—the people of Kham and Amdo had shared with the central Tibetans (Utsang) a common history, mythology, religion, language-type and a strong sense of territoriality, and this has now come to form the basis of contemporary Tibetan ethno-nationalism.

The differences in the terminology of ethnicity are instructive. Inside Tibet—that is, within China—the use of the term *borig* is standard, in conformity with the Chinese official practice, analogous to the Communists idea of a *minzu* or nationality, now called by them an "ethnic group." This term *(borig)* has been appropriated by ordinary people to mean "the Tibetans." In the Tibetan diaspora, the idea of a homogenous Tibetan community or people based on shared language, history and religion has become a powerful normative self-image, and for them, the word *bopa* (Tibetan), without a category term indicating "ethnic group" or "nationality," is used to refer to Tibetans. Nevertheless, for different reasons and because of different practices, there is a convergence in the idea of "Tibetanness" developed through state construction within China and the idea that has been fashioned in the Tibetan diaspora.

Spatial transformation of Protest

The protest that spread swiftly across the Tibetan plateau in 2008 was remarkable for its geographical scale.[24] If one plots the places where the protests occurred on a map, it will show the cultural and linguistic spread of the Tibetan population. The conformity between a cultural map and the range of protest is not so surprising, however, given that in the late 1950s too, the Tibetan rebellion against China at its peak had shown a similar geographic spread. Another new feature of

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[22] See Wenbin Peng, "Frontier Process, Provincial Politics and Movements for Khampa Autonomy during the Republican Period," in Lawrence Epstein (ed.), *Khams pa Histories: Visions of People, Place and Authority. PIATS 2000: Tibetan Studies*. Proceedings of the Ninth Seminar of the International Association for Tibetan Studies, Leiden 2000. Leiden and Boston: E. J. Brill, 2002, pp. 57-84.

[23] In Chinese as *kangzu*.

[24] Robert Barnett, "The Tibet Protests of Spring 2008: Conflict between the Nation and the State," *China Perspectives*, 2009, 3, pp. 6-23.

recent protest is the shift in the hub of protest from central Tibet to the areas along the traditional Sino-Tibetan frontier. In the mid- and late-1980s, the Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR) was the main theatre of confrontation between the Tibetans and the Chinese state, and during that period, the Tibetan areas in the Sino-Tibetan frontier regions remained stable, with no major disturbances. The state too recognised the then stable nature of the eastern regions (Kham and Amdo) and exempted them from security measures that were implemented in the TAR. The liberal policies enjoyed by the Tibetans in Qinghai and Amdo included relatively lax policy towards travel that meant that people from these regions not only could visit Lhasa for trade and pilgrimage but also could journey on to India and Nepal. There is no clear statistical data on the number of people from Kham and Amdo who travelled to India relative to those from the TAR but it is generally recognised that from the mid-1990s onwards, the greater number of Tibetans coming to India both for short trips and for permanent refuge were people from Kham and Amdo, even though this involved them in far longer journeys than those from the TAR. This is particularly the case with monks, as shown by a study of Tibetans in India which found that in the monasteries in Mungod, Bylakuppe, and Hunsur (the three major Tibetans monastic settlements in South India), respectively 60.3%, 45% and 98% of the monks were born in Tibet,[25] and it is probable that the vast majority of the Tibetan-born monks in India originate from the eastern areas. This flow of people has been accompanied by flows of ideas and contacts, with these monks maintaining close links with their home regions, frequent movement between monasteries in India and Tibet, and the active exchange of ideas and information.

The relatively relaxed minority policies in Qinghai, Gansu and Sichuan reflect the provincial system of administration and the governance structure of China. Between 1987 and 1997 the TAR, seen as the main theatre of Tibetan opposition, was viewed by the central government and the regional authorities as a source of instability, leading to severe security measures and less tolerance of dissent. The high degree of self-governance legally promised to the region remained moot, and in practice the TAR enjoyed lesser freedom than other areas because it was seen as a trouble spot and in need of a high degree of vigilance. At the same time, and for the same reasons, central government subsidies to the TAR mushroomed, with 91% of the TAR's annual budget made up of funding from Beijing, leading to

[25] Shushum Bhatia, Dranyi Tsegyal & Derrick Rowley, "A social and demographic study of Tibetan refugees in India," *Social Science & Medicine*, 54:3, 2001, p. 419.

chronic dependency in the local economy.[26] This was a result of the decision to reserve policy development and overall strategy in Tibet for Beijing and its high-level central planning teams. This practice has been in place since 1980 when the first Tibet Work Forum was convened in the Chinese capital by Hu Yaobang, and was reflected in the decision after the 2008 protests in Tibet to convene the 5th Tibet Work Forum in Beijing shortly afterwards.

Between 1984 and 2008, the policies devised by the Tibet Work Forum were only applicable to the TAR; policies in other Tibetan areas remained the concern of the various provincial authorities. The resulting differences in policy can be seen in policies toward cultural development in these different areas. Thus the publication of Tibetan-language books and music videos is thriving in Xining and Chengdu, whilst in TAR there is little independent production. In terms of Tibetan-language websites or independent online forums specifically designed for the Tibetans, there are none originating from TAR, partly because it has been easier to obtain permissions for Tibetans in Qinghai, Sichuan, or other eastern areas, compared to the TAR. The relatively relaxed policies in Qinghai, Gansu, Yunnan and Sichuan shifted the production of Tibetan cultural identity to the areas outside the TAR and created a vibrant new fashioning of shared Tibetan culture. To some degree it brought about a much more democratic production of Tibetan ideas and images that in many ways resembled the traditional localised flourishing of religious practice in the past. This was particularly evident in the production of popular music, publications, and in the uses of the new social media.

Policies concerning religion were also more relaxed in these eastern areas. This led to the re-emergence of monasteries as the centres of Tibetan community life. In the TAR only the largest and historically more important monasteries were allowed to re-open, and the number of monks in these institutions was severely restricted. Official Chinese sources say that there are across the larger Tibetan area some 3,500 monasteries and 140,000 monks and nuns, representing some 2.8% of the population, or a much higher figure if we break it down by gender and age group. The official figures indicated that half of the monasteries and two thirds of the monks and nuns are in the eastern Tibetan areas.[27]

In the early 1990s a number of events and policy changes took place, which brought the wider Tibetans areas into a situation of in-

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[26] Andrew M. Fischer, *The Revenge of Fiscal Maoism in China's Tibet*, Working Paper 547. The Hague: International Institute of Social Studies, University Institute of the Erasmus University Rotterdam, 2012, p. 6. Downloadable from http://repub.eur.nl/res/pub/32995/.

[27] http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/china/2012-05/16/c_131591351.htm.

creasing conflict. The death of the 10th Panchen Lama in 1989 and subsequent developments regarding his succession created a sharp conflict between the Tibetan Buddhist community and the Chinese government, with the latter selecting its own 11th Panchen Lama in a ceremony convened in the Jokhang temple in Lhasa in December 1995, six months after the Dalai Lama had announced his own choice of the Panchen Lama.[28] The contention over this issue created an unbridgeable chasm between the religious community and the Chinese government. The Buddhists in Tibet refused to back the child appointed by the Chinese government and the attempts by officials to induce or force the monks to accept the official candidate were rebuffed by the monks and the Tibetan public. Even Tashilhunpo, the traditional home monastery of the Panchen Lamas, refused to accept the boy selected by the government. For the Chinese government the refusal of monasteries and monks to endorse him was "anti-patriotic" and a clear demonstration of the monks' support of the Dalai Lama, and they followed the campaign to force the monasteries and monks to endorse the official candidate with a new campaign of forced patriotic education. The monasteries and monks found themselves placed in an awkward situation, between the demands of faith on the one hand and the needs of state to display its power and authority on the other.

The death of the 10th Panchen Lama created a vacuum in religious leadership within Tibet. It was already becoming problematic with the deaths of the older generation of influential and respected lamas, who were immensely respected by both the lay and religious communities, and who exercised considerable moral and religious authority, particularly in the Amdo region. Alak Tseten Zhabdrung,[29] of Tak monastery, had passed away in 1985; another important Gelukpa Lama in Amdo, Shardong Rinpoche, passed away in 2002;[30] and 2004 saw the death of the charismatic Nyingmapa lama, Khenpo Jikme Phuntsok,[31]who had been instrumental in the revival of Buddhism in Kham-Amdo and who had enjoyed immense popularity. Shortly be-

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[28] On this subject, see Fabienne Jagou, "The Use of the Ritual Drawing of Lots for the Selection of the 11th Panchen Lama," in K. Buffetrille (ed.) *Revisiting Rituals in a Changing Tibetan World*. Leiden-Boston: Brill, 2012, pp. 43-68.

[29] Nicole Willock, "Rekindling Ashes of the Dharma and the Formation of Modern Tibetan Studies: The Busy Life of Alak Tseten Zhabdrung," *Latse Library Newsletter*, 6, 2009-2010, pp: 2-26.

[30] Full Name Shardong Lobsang Shedrub Gyatso. See http://tb.tibet.cn/2010rw/zjxz/201205/t20120513_1741848.htm.

[31] David Germano, "Re-membering the Dismembered Body of Tibet. Contemporary Tibetan Visionary Movements in the People's Republic of China," in M. C. Goldstein & M. T. Kapstein (eds.), *Buddhism in Contemporary Tibet: Religious Revival and Cultural Identity*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998, pp. 53-94.

fore his death, the Chinese authorities forcefully disbanded the institute he had founded, which had become one of the major centres of Buddhist revival in eastern Tibet.

The deaths of the lamas of the older generation combined with the growing pressure on the lamas and monks to denounce the Dalai Lama or to distance themselves from religious communities in India, creating protracted tension. The older lamas had been through the Cultural Revolution and were cautious, seeing to some degree a possibility of being able to revive Buddhism in their homeland. They therefore shied away from any overt political challenges to the government and instead concentrated on rebuilding their monasteries. Before the mid-1990s, the Chinese authorities had allowed exiled lamas from India to return to visit their homeland, and many of the senior lamas who had fled to India in 1959 came back to visit or give teachings, and to assist in the reconstruction of the monasteries, including the chief lama of Kīrti monastery, now the main site of self-immolations, who had been in exile in India since 1959; he was allowed to visit his monastery in the late 1980s. But by the late 1990s the growing, uneasy relationship between the government and the seniormost Tibetan lamas had become evident with the flight to America of Arjia Rinpoche,[32] a leading figure at Kumbum monastery in Amdo, in 1998, and the flight of the Karmapa, head of the Karma Kagyu school of Tibetan Buddhism, to India in January 2000. Arjia Rinpoche had been designated to become Vice President of the Chinese Buddhist Association and the Karmapa had also been directly patronised by the Chinese government, including highly publicised audiences with the Chinese president. Their flight is evidence of the increasing difficulties in the relationship between the Chinese government and religious leaders in Tibet.

The monks' refusal to accept the Chinese government's choice of the 11th Panchen Lama and also the growing size of monasteries and of the monastic population presented a challenge to the Chinese authorities. Restrictions began to be imposed on lamas from India travelling to Tibet, and, coupled with the deaths of many senior lamas, this fuelled a concern amongst the religious community regarding the ability to transmit Buddhist teachings and thus to ensure their legitimacy and authority. The Chinese government, clearly aware of the influence of lamas in Tibetan society, devised various strategies to co-opt them into impressive positions, such as membership of the "Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference" (CPPCC), an

[32] See his autobiography: Arjia Rinpoche, *Surviving the Dragon, A Tibetan Lama's Account of 40 Years under Chinese Rule*. New York: Rodale, 2010. The full name of Arjia Rinpoche is Lobsang Thupten Jikme Gyatso.

unelected advisory body. But lamas, also known as *trulku*s or reincarnated lamas, who accept senior positions from the state tend to be viewed by the public as self-aggrandising or contaminated, and the official religious organisations tend to be elite and generally out of touch with ordinary monks and nuns. A recent satirical poem posted on a Tibetan language internet forum gives a sense of popular opinion about *trulku*s, as high lamas are called in Tibetan, who have accepted positions in the state system:

> The CPPCC is filled with *trulku*s
> Speeches from the United Front bureau are filled with the voices of *trulku*s
> The Nationalities Religious Affairs Office is filled with the minds of *trulku*s
> The skill of *trulku*s is to occupy the political throne.[33]

The derisory perception of lamas co-opted by the government helps explain their lack of ability to retain influence over the monasteries and monks or to contain monks' opposition to the state. This absence of a religious authority recognised by the community as legitimate and authoritative has led the monks and the public to look for legitimate sources of religious authority in India. This is particularly true of the Gelukpa order of Tibetan Buddhism, where the problem the Chinese government faces in terms of religious management is the fact that all the head or high lamas of Tibetan Buddhism are now residing outside Tibet.

The tension over the Panchen Lama issue coincided with another major shift in Chinese policy towards the Tibetan areas. In 1999 the government launched the "Open Up the West" program (Ch. *Xibu da kaifa*), aimed at accelerating development in China's impoverished interior regions. The stated aim was to redress uneven development between the coastal regions and the interior provinces. One of the implications of the new direction was noted by David Goodman: "there was now to be a higher degree of state intervention in econom-

[33] The verse is written by Dawa Dorje. According to news report he was arrested by Chinese security personnel at Lhasa Gonggar Airport after he participated in a cultural conference in Chengdu. Previous publications by Dawa Dorje include the book Lam (Road), which discusses democracy, freedom and human rights. As far as we know, Dawa Dorje is a graduate in Tibetan language from Tibet University and at the time of arrest, he was working as a researcher in the office of the county prosecutor in Nyenrong, Nagchu Prefecture, TAR. *See* http://highpeakspureearth.com/2012/satirical-poem-treaty-on-man-by-detained -tibetan-writer-dawa-dorje/.

ic development than had so far characterised the reform era."[34] The Tibetan areas after the reform period had seen a revival of traditional patterns of economy, based mainly on subsistence farming and herding, with the household responsibility system. Production based on household responsibility was highly popular and many saw this as a return to a traditional mode of existence with a high degree of autonomy.

The government's grand development strategies were couched in terms of the alleviation of poverty and the improvement of a region's productivity. But the nation and state building element of the program was evident. Zhu Rongji in his report to the National People's Congress in March 2000 stated that "Open Up the West" was a means for the "strengthening of national unity, safeguarding of social stability, and consolidation of border defense."[35] In the opening up of the West, key projects were designed to provide infrastructure and particularly transportation links that would strengthen state and nation building. The new policies meant a higher level of state intrusion both in terms of economic development in the guise of infrastructural construction and also in terms of social and cultural intervention. The relationship of this project to nation-building and the integration of the minority groups was spelt out in a lengthy article by Li Dezhu, Minister of the State Ethnic Affairs Commission, which was published in the ideological journal of the CCP, *Qiushi (Seeking Truth)*, in 2000.[36] "If these disparities are allowed to exist in the long term," Li wrote of the gaps between East and West in China, between Han and other nationalities, "they will certainly affect national unity and harm social stability." It was envisioned that greater economic and geographical integration would foster "unity" and build what Li Dezhu called the "coagulability" of nationalities. Economic disparity and the ethnic divide were problematic to the state, which saw these divisions as accentuating the differences between mainstream China and the Tibetan areas in particular.[37]

Whatever might have been the stated goal, the implication and resultant impact as perceived by the populace in the Tibetan areas were very different. For the Tibetans the new, aggressive development program was viewed with suspicion; they saw the policy as an attempt to further integrate and open up the Tibetans areas. The opening up of the West was also accompanied by new strategies for deal-

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[34] David Goodman, "The Campaign to "Open Up the West:" National, Provincial-level and Local perspectives," *The China Quarterly* 178, 2004, pp. 317-334.

[35] http://www.china-embassy.org/eng/sgxx/sggg/sstx/2000/t35055.htm.

[36] Li Dezhu, "Large-scale Development of Western China and China's Nationality Problems," *Qiushi*, June 1 2000, in FBIS, June 15 2000.

[37] Li Dezhu, *ibid*.

ing with Tibetan herders in the guise of providing environmental protection for the Tibetan grasslands. This related to a prolonged debate amongst scientists and cadres about the problem of grassland degradation, with the cadres arguing that increases in herd size and new herding practices were causing the large-scale degradation of the grassland and leading to environmental damage. One of the government's solutions was the sedentarisation of Tibetan nomads and the forced reduction of herd size. In Qinghai, the head of the resettlement program, Zhang Huangyuan, reported that 64,006 families (270,000 individuals) had been moved into settlements since 2009.[38] Official reports say that these resettlement programs have proven to be successful in terms of economic opportunity, but so far there have been no studies of their long-term effects. The experience of such programs in the past has shown that resettlement does bring lower infant mortality rate and increase life expectancy, but that it brings a host of social problems such as lack of employment and increasing social division. Whatever the merits of the program, the Tibetans view the sedentarisation as an infringement of their traditional rights and do not welcome government intervention, and Andrew Fischer has noted a correlation between the geographic spread of the Tibetan protests, including incidents of self-immolation, and the program of resettlement.[39] Although so far none of those who have set themselves on fire have come from these settlements, this does demonstrate the undoubted effect of social transformation on the level of apprehension among people in the area.

The three situations I have mentioned—the conflict over the selection of the Panchen Lama, the loss of community leadership or authoritative voice, and the greater state intervention in the Tibetan regions—created a situation that exacerbated local conflict. The fear and apprehension of greater integration and the increasing state presence demonstrated by developmental projects were viewed as a threat to local identity and culture. This general assumption is widely shared by the ordinary public as well as by the emergent younger generation among the educated youth. The response to these perceived threats has heightened Tibetan ethno-nationalism. At one level this was reflected in the development of vibrant public discourse on the status of Tibetan culture and identity, most notably the attempt to engender what is termed *mirig kyi lagya* (i.e. "pride in one's

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[38] "More nomadic herders to settle down in NW China province," English.news.cn, March 23 2012, see http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/china/2012-03/27/c_131492625.htm.

[39] Andrew Fischer, "The Geopolitics of Politico-Religious Protest in Eastern Tibet," *Hot Spot Forum, Cultural Anthropology Online*, April 11 2012, http://www.culanth.org/?q=node/530.

nationality"). This is most visible in popular culture, particularly in song and music, and in attempts to restore the use of Tibetan language. Almost all lyrics to popular songs that emerged from Kham and Amdo were littered with calls for the unity of the Tibetan people, the celebration of Tibetan cultural identity, and admiration for the land. These songs were easily and widely disseminated through new, popular forms of social media.

Self-immolation

Since 2009, there have been over 45 cases of self-immolation in Tibet, with the majority taking place in the Ngawa region. The largest number of people who set themselves on fire have come from Kīrti monastery, with 16 of them being young monks from this monastery and 26 others being people from the surrounding area. The two confirmed cases of self-immolation in Lhasa were by Tibetans from the same area who had moved to Lhasa for work, and other cases have also had some form of association with Kīrti monastery or its locality. Almost all those who set themselves alight could be termed as religious figures in that they were monks and nuns or were related to monks and nuns. This overwhelming association with a particular monastery or region raises questions about the conditions, influences and pressures within that locality.[40] To a large degree, the self-immolations are largely taking place in what is the traditional southern Amdo area within Sichuan region, and although they are now spreading to other Tibetan areas, without knowing the local conditions and influences that are at play in Ngawa, it is difficult to speak of the precipitating causes of these protests.

As we have seen, the larger politics of China's minority policies and particularly the state's attempts to bring the minority areas into a new market economy had led to greater state intervention and extensive intrusion by China's new market economy into the traditional subsistence system, along with major changes in religious leadership and authority among Tibetans. This had put the Chinese state in a problematic and contradictory position. The state had been willing to tolerate and, to some degree, had turned a blind eye to the re-emergence of religion as the epicentre of Tibetan lives. Since the reform era, there had been a successful revival of Tibetan Buddhism in Tibet, despite the protests of Tibetans abroad about the lack of freedom of religion in their homeland. Until the conflict over the selection of the Panchen Lama, most monasteries at least in eastern Tibet

[40] See Daniel Berounský's contribution to the present issue.

had been relatively free and had been allowed to grow without much restriction, and government restrictions on the number of monks at each monastery had been openly flouted, with no serious attempt up to that time by the government to enforce them. Monasteries in Kham and Amdo had enjoyed other privileges too, such as the relative ease with which monks and lamas from abroad were able to get permission to visit, and with which those from inside Tibet were allowed to travel to India, as reflected in the decreasing percentage of Indian-born monks in monasteries in India—in the exile branch of Kīrti monastery in Dharmasala, India, for example, of 150 monks, 127 are from Ngawa and only one is a Tibetan born in India; the others are from the Tibetan-speaking peoples in the Himalayas.[41] These monks naturally have close family ties with their counterparts in Ngawa.

After the Chinese government's failure to gain acquiescence for the government's choice of the new Panchen Lama in 1995, the authorities began to restrict the travel of Tibetan monks to India, since they viewed this as evidence of the continuing influence of the Dalai Lama and of the close links that had been formed between monasteries in Tibet and those established in India. The government also began to restrict access to monasteries in Tibet for high lamas visiting from India or abroad and, in order to limit the influence of lamas based in India, it initiated the "patriotic education" drive in monasteries. The drive focuses on the dissemination of information about China's constitution and laws relating to religion, often requiring monks to sign a pledge supporting the CCP and dissociating themselves from the Dalai Lama. Patriotic education and the general surveillance of monasteries was intensified in the aftermath of the 2008 Tibetan revolt, where the monasteries became the focal point of the protests, particularly in the cases of Kīrti monastery[42] in Ngawa and Labrang in Gansu.

Of the 45 cases of self-immolation reported until August 5 2012, 34 are monks or nuns, reflecting the framing among Tibetans of monks as the guardians of tradition and as moral leaders. The active involvement of religious figures in protest is an indication that the monks have indeed taken on the onerous task of acting as the defenders of Tibetan tradition. However, this assumption cannot fully explain the nature of mobilisation nor the local conditions where the incidents are occurring, for these incidents are specific to certain localities, not only in terms of place, but also in terms of religious sects. The self-immolations have taken place primarily among monasteries

[41] Personal communication with a monk at Kīrti monastery in Dharamsala, June 2012.

[42] The full name of Kīrti monastery is Ganden Lekshe Ling. It was founded in 1870 by the Eighth Kīrti Lobsang Trinley Konchok Tenpa Gyatso.

of the Gelukpa school, and it is those that have most been involved in protests. Why has this particular school been more active? Does it indicate the Chinese state practices a policy of divide and rule amongst different Tibetan Buddhist sects? In fact, the Chinese state does not show any particular bias in its treatment of different sects and attempts to maintain equal distance towards them, with various religious control mechanisms applied equally among the different religions and sects. However, because of the varying ideological foundation of the sects, the effects of state control are felt differently. The Nyingma school of Tibetan Buddhism is less hierarchical and less focused on monastic tradition, whereas the Gelukpa is hierarchical and focused more on monastic tradition and training, hence it is easier to exert control over it. Another reason is historical: Kīrti and Labrang monasteries have not only been among the largest religious institutions in Tibet, but also have been important centres of political power.[43] The northern part of the Amdo region, in present day Gansu, were under the control of Labrang,[44] and the southern part, although it was ruled by the kings of Ngawa, was under the influence of Kīrti monastery. For historical reasons, whatever the details or virtues of this legacy, it reflects an acute sense of the loss of Geluk hegemony.

Geluk monasteries also faced particular challenges from the state because of their historic role as the leading, established sect. Thus, when the Chinese government attempted to force the monks to endorse its chosen candidate as the new Panchen Lama, the non-Geluk monasteries were easily able to evade the government demands by claiming that the issue was not their concern, since the Panchen Lama belongs to the Geluk tradition. The Geluk monasteries had no such option and faced a challenge to the heart of their sect. The sense of grievances and rage felt within the Geluk monasteries is thus more intimate and immediate. At this stage, we simply do not know the influences and pressures that have been present within Kīrti monastery, the particular factors that have fuelled a sense of rage within it. For the Chinese authorities, it is not an accident that this monastery has become the centre of protest and it has not gone unnoticed. Zhu Weiqun, Vice-Minister of the United Front department of the CCP in an interview with Xinhua pointed out that Kīrti Rinpoche, the head lama of the monastery, based in Dharamsala since 1959, had "served as the 'security minister' of the 'Tibetan government-in-exile' for a long time." Zhu went on to say, "His ministry is widely known for

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[43] See Daniel Berounský's article in this issue.

[44] On the role played by Labrang monastery in Amdo region, see Paul Kocot Nietupski, *Labrang Monastery. A Tibetan Buddhist Community on the Inner Asian Borderland, 1709-1958*. Lanham: Lexington Books, Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2011.

organising bloodshed, sabotage and penetration." [45] While Zhu Weiqun is wrong that Kīrti Rinpoche served as the "security minister," he has indeed been a member of the exile government and served as minister for religious affairs between April 1997 and March 1999. The Chinese authorities have not provided any evidence of instigation of protests in Tibet by Kīrti Rinpoche or by Dharamsala beyond pointing to his role in the exile government and his campaigning speeches while travelling abroad, but the links between the monastery and the posts held by its exiled lama will have fuelled strong suspicions of outside involvement in unrest.

The Tibetans have framed the recent wave of self-immolations not only as acts of sacrifice but as acts with religious meaning, as in the tradition of offering one's body for the benefit of others. A number of testimonies left by the people who have burned themselves show that they were motivated by the wish to preserve Tibetan religion and culture and to ensure the return of the Dalai Lama. In these testimonies, the protesters do not articulate their grievances in terms of particular policies but in terms of what we could call 'civilisational preservation.'[46] The testimonies speak to co-nationals and rather than directly appealing to authorities or calling on them to rescind a particular policy, they present Tibetan culture and identity as being on the verge of being destroyed by the modernist state project. Such positioning is typical of ethno-nationalistic claims, which see the preservation of identity and territory as the core of the struggle and in which perceived threats to this identity serve as motivating and mobilising points.

The influences and pressures on monks within Kīrti monastery are hard to gauge. Tapey, the first young monk to set himself on fire within Tibet, in February 2009, is one of the few to have survived. In May 2012 a Chinese TV documentary broadcast an interview with him in which he said that he had not participated in the 2008 protests and that this had led others to mock him, and so setting himself on fire had in part been intended to counter the ridicule.[47] Whether or not this was the major factor, it indicates some of the influences and pressures that are operating at the micro-level within the monastery. The localised nature of the self-immolations both in terms of space and action can also be explained by the relational nature of mobilisation in general. All forms of protest are 'relational,' in that the pro-

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[45] "Investigations show political motive behind self-immolations in Tibetan-populated regions," http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/china/2012-03/07/c_131452109.htm

[46] See Robert Barnett's article in this issue.

[47] CCTV Broadcast, May 7 2012, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d5rHgm5LyCY&feature=youtu.be.

cesses of learning and mobilisation take place at the level of kinship, residence, religion and workplace. Thus protests in China often operate at the neighbourhood level, and involve a collective of residents from within that neighbourhood. In the Tibetans areas, it is the monasteries that act like a work unit or neighbourhood. Given that they stand in opposition to state ideology, and that the religious community increasingly seeks for its sources of authority and legitimacy outside the parameters of the state, let alone the CCP, conflicts emanating from institutions coupled with Tibetan ethno-nationalism provide a likely template for further tension.

Once the initial self-immolation had occurred within Tibet, the act was imitated and others followed. As we have seen, self-immolation is a part of the global repertoire of protest, and images of the act are circulated and easily shared through social media, gaining currency and value amongst co-nationals. Whatever the local influences might have been, in the absence of legal avenues to voice their demands, the monks see self-immolation as the only alternative. However, as the demands of the protesters are couched in the all-encompassing language of ethno-nationalism, a position on which the Chinese state cannot compromise, the Tibetans are labelled as "terrorists" by the state and their demands are seen as separatist rather than as motivated by policy grievances. As the demands of the Tibetans challenge the legitimacy of the state, thus placing them in the 'forbidden' zone of contention and distinguishing them from the relatively tolerated protests widespread in China—so the gulf between them and the state is irreconcilable, especially given the current high tide of Chinese nationalism. This means that the conflict will continue to fluctuate between phases of repression and local resistance.

Like all states faced with separatist demands, the government adopts two strategies: increased surveillance to control the local population and pumping money into the affected area to induce cooperation and compliance. These policies are problematic, as the increased economic development does not induce greater acceptance and the greater surveillance in the form of restrictions on movement and controlling cultural production has the effect of arousing a greater sense of Tibetan victimisation. The authorities have already put in place greater restrictions on people travelling and moving between Tibetan areas, with hundreds of Tibetans from Sichuan and Qinghai expelled from Lhasa and rapidly increasing restrictions on eastern Tibetans travelling into the TAR while there is little control on ethnic Chinese migrants into the same area. This approach applies even to body and luggage inspections at airports within China: since 2008 Tibetan travellers have to pass through additional searches or, at Lhasa airport, through a special, designated check. Such policies are

typical of a wide range of actions by the Chinese state, contributing to it being increasingly viewed by Tibetans as discriminatory, aggravating an existing sense of marginalisation, and leading to continued acts of self-immolation to be seen as a demonstration of collective disaffection and rage at their conditions.

GLOSSARY

Transcription	Transliteration	Tibetan
Alak Tseten Zhabdrung	A lags Tshe tan zhab drung	ཨ་ལགས་ཚེ་ཏན་ཞབས་དྲུང།
Amdo	A mdo	ཨ་མདོ།
Arjia Rinpoche	A kyā rin po che	ཨ་སྐྱ་རིན་པོ་ཆེ།
Bopa	*bod pa*	བོད་པ།
borig	*bod rigs*	བོད་རིགས།
Chol sum pawo doring	*Chol gsum dpa' bo rdo ring*	ཆོལ་གསུམ་དཔའ་བོ་རྡོ་རིང་།
Ganden Lekshe Ling	Dga' ldan legs bshad gling	དགའ་ལྡན་ལེགས་བཤད་གླིང་།
Geluk	*dge lugs*	དགེ་ལུགས།
Pawo	*dpa' bo*	དཔའ་བོ།
Karmapa	Karma pa	ཀརྨ་པ།
Karma Kagyu	Karma bka' brgyud	ཀརྨ་བཀའ་བརྒྱུད།
Kham	Khams	ཁམས།
Khampa	Khams pa	ཁམས་པ།
Khenpo Jikme Phuntsog	Mkhan po 'Jigs med phun tshogs	མཁན་པོ་འཇིགས་མེད་ཕུན་ཚོགས།
Kīrti	Kīrti	ཀཱིརྟི།
Kumbum	Sku 'bum	སྐུ་འབུམ།
Lobsang Trinley Konchok Tenpa Gyatso	Blo bzang 'phrin las dkon mchog bstan pa rgya mtsho	བློ་བཟང་འཕྲིན་ལས་དཀོན་མཆོག་བསྟན་པ་རྒྱ་མཚོ།

Lobsang Thupten Jikme Gyatso	Blo bzang Thub bstan ′jigs med rgya mtsho	བློ་བཟང་ཐུབ་བསྟན་འཇིགས་མེད་རྒྱ་མཚོ།
mirig kyi lagya	*mi rigs kyi la rgya*	མི་རིགས་ཀྱི་ལ་རྒྱ།
Nagchu	*Nag chu*	ནག་ཆུ།
Nyenrong	*Gnyan rong*	གཉན་རོང།
Nyingmapa	rnying ma pa	རྙིང་མ་པ།
Tak	Stag	སྟག
Tashilhunpo	Bkra shis lhun po	བཀྲ་ཤིས་ལྷུན་པོ།
Tapey	Bkra bhe	བཀྲ་སྦེ།
Shardong Lobsang Shedrub Gyatso	Shar gdong blo bzang bshad sgrub rgya mtsho	ཤར་གདོང་བློ་བཟང་བཤད་སྒྲུབ་རྒྱ་མཚོ།
Techung	Bkras chung	བཀྲས་ཆུང།
Trulku	*sprul sku*	སྤྲུལ་སྐུ།
Thupten Ngo-drup	Thub bstan dngos grub	ཐུབ་བསྟན་དངོས་གྲུབ།

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Political Self-Immolation in Tibet: Causes and Influences[1]

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Much of the discussion about the self-immolations in Tibet has been about their causes. Why did the protestors decide to stage their demonstrations? Why did they choose this method, little known inside Tibet? Why is it used by people in some localities but not in others, and why at this time?

These discussions can be divided into two categories, those that look for causes of the self-immolations and those that discuss what might be termed their sources of influence. The first looks for immediate or recent factors that might have motivated the protestors, while the second seeks factors that might have predisposed them to choosing this lethal form of self-expression and dissent. The distinctions between the two are not always clear, and the conclusions reached are largely speculation, since only nine of the immolators in Tibet are known to have left statements about their decisions, and no independent scholars, if any, have so far been allowed to carry out research with survivors or those directly involved.

Part 1
Looking for causes: outside instigation or policy-response

If we look first at the causal approach, the attempt by outsiders to imagine the thinking process of self-immolators, two schools of argument stand out. One of these attributes the events to outside instigation, a deliberate attempt by certain outsiders to persuade, encourage or organize Tibetans to carry out these actions. In this view, the protagonists are victims of manipulation of some kind by powerful outsiders. The other school sees the protests as a form of policy response. It envisages them as, more or less, the result of a reasoning process by each of the participants, one in which they are responding

[1] A longer version of this article will be available on http://www.columbia.edu/cu/weai/tibetan-issues.html.

Robert Barnett, "Political Self-Immolation in Tibet: Causes and Influences", *Revue d'Etudes Tibétaines*, no. 25, Décembre 2012, pp. 41-64.

in a coherent way to certain governmental policies in Tibet (the term is used here in its loosest sense to include all Tibetan-inhabited areas within China), particularly those seen as unjustifiably restrictive or unfair.

A subsidiary group, associated chiefly with overseas and exile bloggers connected to the more radical exile Tibetan movement that is strongly opposed to the Dalai Lama's compromise approach, has argued that the immolations are proof that Tibetans in Tibet want independence; the group argued in the same way about the widespread protests that occurred across Tibet in the spring of 2008. For them, the root cause of the protests remains China's annexation of Tibet in 1950 or earlier, and they argue that the immolators wish directly to address this issue and are seeking independence. This interpretation of the immolations has not received mainstream or academic support, probably because all the immolators have expressed support in their final moments for the Dalai Lama, who has not sought independence for some thirty years or so. But even proponents of this view appear to accept that it is probably current policies in Tibet that are the immediate causes of the immolations, whatever their objectives.

The same division between the outside-instigation and the policy-response schools dominated public discussion of the widespread unrest that occurred in Tibet in 2008 and the massacre in Urumqi in July 2009. This division has also marked governmental responses in all three cases, with the Chinese government saying that outside instigators caused the incidents, while democratic governments in the West and elsewhere have generally described them as responses to excessively restrictive domestic policies.[2] In the case of the immolations, the division has been much clearer than it was after the protests of 2008 and 2009, and democratic governments have been more consistent in their stance; this is probably because in each immolation only one or two people have been involved, and because they

[2] A spokeswoman for the US State Department told the press on January 9 2012, speaking of the Tibetan immolations: "These actions clearly represent enormous anger, enormous frustration, with regard to the severe restrictions on human rights, including religious freedom, inside China … We have called the Chinese government policies counterproductive, and have urged the Chinese government to have a productive dialogue, to loosen up in Tibet and allow journalists and diplomats and other observers to report accurately, and to respect the human rights of all their citizens" (RFA,"Thousands Attend Funeral," January 9 2012, http://www.rfa.org/english/news/tibet/funeral-0109201216 0953.html). See also Tibetan Women's Association, "A Study of Tibetan Self-Immolations: February 27, 2009-March 30, 2012: The History, The Motive, and The Reaction," March 5 2012, http://www.strengthofasnowlioness.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/06/A-Study-of-Tibetan-Self-Immolation.pdf.

caused no direct damage to property or to other people. This has made it much easier for outside commentators to focus attention on the specific reasoning of the participants and to present their acts as rational responses to a specific cause, something that is always difficult to show in the case of mass incidents or collective actions. The policy-response thesis always becomes morally fraught and contentious when it is offered to justify actions which have led to violence against others, and it is perhaps the chief significance of the Tibetan self-immolations that as a form of protest they avoid the moral and political quagmire that always follows large-scale unrest, especially if violent. It is in large part this which has given them particularly effective symbolic force and resonance.

Changes in the 'outside instigation' view

The 'outside instigation' school, mostly associated with the Chinese authorities or scholars working for them, has faced some difficulties in applying its thesis to the self-immolations, judging from the shifting views found amongst its proponents about how to frame this argument. Initially, some officials had suggested that the immolations had been personally organized by the Dalai Lama, an allegation that had also been made in official Chinese literature about the 2008 rioting in Lhasa.[3] But this accusation was soon replaced by accusations that the immolations had been arranged by the "Dalai clique," an inexact term used in Chinese propaganda to refer to the exile Tibetan government (or administration, as it has termed itself since at least 2011) and associated exile organisations. Two pieces of evidence were produced by officials in the Chinese media to support this claim of outside organisation: one, that photographs of self-immolators had been sent out to exiles before the events took place, and the other, that two mass demonstrations in a Tibetan area of Sichuan province, indirectly linked to immolations, had taken place in January 2012 within a day of each other. Both these facts were correct–photographs do seem to have been sent to exiles a day or so in advance of an immolation in at least one case (they were released by foreign lobby groups within hours of the immolations taking place, making it clear that they had been available previously), and the two most significant mass demonstrations that spring, which both occurred in Tibetan areas of Sichuan and ended in violence and deaths,

[3] Wang Chen and Dong Yunhu (compilers), "What do you know: About Tibet – Questions and Answers." Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 2011, p. 347.

took place on successive days. Neither of these facts, however, showed that these events had been organised by outsiders.

By early 2012, the public position of the Chinese government had changed concerning the claim of outside instigation. In more careful statements from Beijing, Chinese officials, scholars and journalists used somewhat ambiguous terms to describe exile involvement, such as "instigated" or "encouraged," rather than "organised." In January 2012, the *Global Times*, an official publication in China linked to the *People's Daily*, published an editorial attacking the Dalai Lama and those around him for "using" the immolations, but without alleging that they had been involved in planning the protests.[4] Increasingly, Dharamsala was attacked in Chinese press articles only for having "encouraged" the self-immolations through its opportunistic response and celebration of the deaths, rather than for initiating them. This shift in approach was confirmed by a 40-minute documentary released in May 2012 by Central China Television (CCTV), the main official broadcaster in China. The documentary, which seems to have been intended only for external consumption, perhaps to avoid giving too much information about the immolations to audiences within China, did not present any evidence that immolations had been organised by outsiders. In fact, it stated specifically that the plan to stage the first immolation in the current series, that of Phuntsok, a monk at Kīrti monastery in Ngawa (Ch. Aba) in March 2011, was devised entirely by the monk and his immediate friends, without any outside help. According to the documentary, an exile Tibetan had contacted the monks by telephone from abroad shortly before the March incident, but had only asked if they had any information to pass on to the exiles. The Kīrti monk who took part in that secret conversation is shown in the documentary—he is wearing prison uniform, a detail which is not commented upon by the narrator—as saying that he then informed the exile of the plan by him and other monks to stage an immolation; this documentary then showed a copy of a police report that confirmed this claim.[5] Exile leaders were said to have "encouraged," "incited" or "instigated" self-immolations by celebrating them and lauding their victims after they had taken place, but neither they nor the exile head of Kīrti monastery were accused of organising them. The documentary concluded by stating that "some accuse [the Dalai Lama] of using the incidents

[4] "Dalai uses suicides for political gain," *Global Times*, January 11 2012. See http://www.globaltimes.cn/NEWS/tabid/99/ID/691630/Dalai-uses-suicides-for-political-gain.aspx.

[5] The police report shown in the CCTV documentary is also described as stating that the Kīrti monk's link with the exiles had only involved promising to send them photographs after the immolation.

to put international attention [to] focus on the Tibet issue," a relatively mild accusation.

As the immolations continued, there was thus a reduction in the intensity of allegations by proponents of the 'instigation' school in China. This recalibration is not likely to have been because the Chinese intelligence agencies failed to collect information supporting stronger allegations, but more likely to have been the result of a political decision in Beijing not to exacerbate the situation. It reflected a tendency for the media based in Beijing to be somewhat more measured than those in Lhasa or in the Tibetan areas of Sichuan, which, as usual, carried more aggressive statements.

Characterising self-immolators: criminals or victims

Official writings in China about the immolations evolved in a similar manner concerning how to characterise the self-immolators themselves. This reflected a somewhat confusing set of practices by officials on the ground when dealing with individual immolators. The immediate tactical objective of the authorities after a self-immolation was firstly to try to extinguish the flames in order to prevent the death of the immolator, and secondly to get possession of the immolator's body.[6] If still alive, officials then tried to take the immolator into custody or to a hospital, or arranged for the immediate cremation of the body if the immolator had died. The practice of seizing bodies led to serious social order problems in some cases, particularly in smaller towns, with hundreds of local people besieging police stations to demand that the body be returned to the monastery or the family so that the appropriate rituals could take place.[7]

It is not clear why officials were so determined to have control of immolators' bodies once they died—in at least three cases so far, Tibetans have been arrested and given long prison sentences for involvement in homicide after failing to hand over an immolator's body to the authorities. If the objective of the officials was to avoid large-scale funerals, they did not succeed: videos smuggled out to exiles or foreign news organisations have shown thousands of people attending funerals or prayers for those who have died, whether

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[6] Some exile organisations say that initially local police responded aggressively towards immolators, citing unconfirmed reports that in 2009 the first immolator was shot while still on fire and that other immolators were beaten during the burning or afterwards in custody, if they had survived that long.

[7] "Angry Tibetans Parade Corpse," Radio Free Asia (RFA), January 8 2012. See http://www.rfa.org/english/news/tibet/burn-01082012101534.html.

or not the body had been returned intact to the victim's family or monastery.[8]

The mixed ideas behind these responses on the ground were reflected in public statements made by officials. Some, usually at the local level, used the word "terrorism" in the early phase of the immolations occasionally to characterise the incidents, but this accusation does not seem to have been widespread and seems usually to have referred not to the immolators but to the "playing up" of the incidents by exiles "to incite more people to follow suit."[9] A more aggressive approach emerged once laypeople and ex-monks started to stage self-immolations—then the official media accused them of being reprobates, minor criminals or social misfits of some kind,[10] but such statements were mostly found in local rather than central reports. When a young Tibetan laywoman set herself on fire in March 2012, the main official Chinese news agency turned to the usual strategy found world-wide in the case of self-immolations—the suggestion that she was mentally impaired[11]—but that approach seems to have been subsequently discarded. Initially, a different sort of criticism was leveled in official reports in China against monks and nuns who self-immolated: they were accused of having breached the rules and traditions of Buddhism. But attacks on the character, sanity or personal rectitude of monks and nuns were generally avoided.[12]

By at least the autumn of 2011, officials from Beijing had begun to express sympathy for the immolators. Senior Chinese officials were sent on delegations to western countries where they described spe-

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8 "Thousands attend Rikyo's funeral," *Phayul* (Dharamsala, India), May 31 2012. See http://www.phayul.com/news/article.aspx?id=31503&t=1; "Thousands Attend Funeral," RFA, January 9 2012, http://www.rfa.org/english/news /tibet /funeral-01092012160953.html.

9 "China blames 'Dalai group' for Tibet unrest," Agence France Presse (AFP), October 18 2011. See http://www.google.com/ hostednews/afp /article /ALeqM5hoJTOXLXvp7W3quh8d91bZAtlBNg?docId=CNG.a746b6390d2f97862120566716983d34.561; "Dalai Lama's prayers for Tibetans 'terrorism in disguise', China says," *The Guardian*, October 19 2011. See http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2011/oct/19/dalai-lama-prayers-tibetans-terrorism.

10 Woeser, "Self-Immolation and Slander," *Cultural Anthropology*, April 8 2012. See http://www.culanth.org/?q=node/525; "Tibetan self-immolators dismissed as 'criminals' by Chinese officials," *The Guardian*, March 7 2012. See http://www guardian.co.uk/world/2012/mar/07/tibet-selfimmolations-monks-aba-china.

11 "Tibetan student sets self on fire after head injury," Xinhua, March 7 2012. See http://www.china.org.cn/china/2012-03/07/content_24825417.htm.

12 In January 2012 a lama who had immolated himself in Qinghai was said to have been accused in the local press of having had an affair, an accusation that apparently led to a protest within the local community. Details of this press report have not been confirmed so far. See "Dead Lama Urged Unity," RFA, January 20 2012. See http://www.rfa.org/english/news/tibet/unity-01202012161051.html.

cial efforts made by their staff to save the lives of wounded and dying self-immolators and to provide assistance to their families. In public statements, they expressed concern for the self-immolators, depicting them as hapless victims. "The victims are mostly young monks. These tragedies are unexpected," wrote the *Global Times* in January 2012, "[i]t is cruel to put political pressure on young Tibetan monks. They are unable to distinguish good from evil in international politics and cannot imagine they have been used."[13] By March 2012, this view of the immolators as victims was given the highest seal of official approval when Wen Jiabao, China's Premier, stated at the annual press conference of China's parliament that "the young Tibetans are innocent and we feel deeply pained by such behaviour."[14]

This sympathetic view (or, in Maoist terminology, the determination that the motives of the principals in these incidents were non-antagonistic or "within the people") was limited to the self-immolators and did not apply to others connected with the protests. Several Tibetans accused of knowing about a self-immolation in advance or assisting in the planning of one, plus several who tried to care for victims afterwards, were detained and given prison sentences of up to 13 years.[15] Monks who sent photographs of an immolator to exiles or foreigners also received long prison sentences.[16]

The 'outside instigation' view thus generally accused exiles not of planning the immolations, but of encouraging them through their public feting of the victims. It distinguished immolators from those who assisted them, regarding the former as victims and the latter as criminals and as guilty of acting "against the people." Initially, it distinguished serving monks and nuns from laypeople and former clerics, treating the former as people who had been misled by the exiles into breaching Buddhist regulations, while seeing the latter as social misfits or as psychologically impaired. From early 2012, however, the media in China increasingly held back from making derog-

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[13] "Dalai uses suicides for political gain," *Global Times*, January 11 2012. See http://www.globaltimes.cn/NEWS/tabid/99/ID/691630/Dalai-uses-suicides-for-political-gain.aspx

[14] "China opposes clergy self-immolations to disrupt social harmony in Tibetan-inhabited areas," Xinhua, March 14 2012. See http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/china/2012-03/14/c_131466743.htm.

[15] "Another two Tibetan monks sentenced in self-immolation, murder case," Xinhua, August 31 2011. See http://news.xinhuanet.com/english 2010/china/2011-08/31/c_131085859.htm.

[16] See for example the case of Yonten Gyatso, reported in "Senior monk sentenced to 7 years for sharing information," Tibetan Centre for Human Rights and Democracy (TCHRD, Dharamsala), August 21 2012. See http://www.tchrd.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=274.

atory remarks about individual immolators. This may have been because individual Tibetan Buddhist monks and nuns have high standing both in their own community and in international opinion; perhaps it was felt that criticising them for actions which had not damaged others could inflame local opinion among Tibetans and backfire against the government. But despite these significant distinctions and adjustments to the argument that the immolations were part of an external attack on China, there was no public suggestion that another kind of explanation needed to be found to explain the immolations.

The policy-response approach

The second approach sees the immolations as a response to specific policies; it envisages them as an attempt by protestors to direct government and public attention to official abuses. It is found widely in Western and international writings, but occasional signs of it can be found in Chinese official writing too—"The majority of the crowds are young people who do not have jobs. So the priority is to improve life quality in Seda [Tib. Sertha] county and provide enough job opportunities for the young people," a Tibetan county leader is quoted as saying of an immolation-related protest, according to an article published in *China Daily*, an official paper in Beijing, in February 2012.[17] Although rare, this instance suggests that, as Fabienne Jagou has noted,[18] there is some debate within the Party over whether to attribute these protests to outside interference or to excessively restrictive policies.

One form of policy-response analysis attributes the immolations and earlier protests to sociological and economic discontent among Tibetans, seeing them as victims of broad trends such as modernisation, development, globalisation, and urbanisation. In this view, Ti-

[17] The article appeared in English and was intended for foreign readers. Cui Jia, "Riots linked to organised crime and subversion," *China Daily*, February 6 2012. See http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/usa/china/2012-02/06/content_14540963.htm. Social and economic factors that led to unrest in 2008 were discussed at length in the report on the 2008 protests prepared by Chinese scholars working with the Gongmeng Institute (see Li Kun, Huang Li, and Li Xiang, "藏区3.14事件社会、经济成因调查" (An investigative report into the social and economic causes of the 3.14 incident in Tibetan areas), Gongmeng Law Research Center, Beijing, 2008. For an English translation, see http://www.savetibet.org/media-center/ict-news-reports/bold-report-beijing-scholars-reveals-breakdown-china%E2%80%99s-tibet-policy.

[18] See Fabienne Jagou's article in this issue.

betans are depicted as envious of those who have been more successful than them in obtaining jobs, assets or resources. This view is quite often found among scholars and the public in China, where it is related to a widely-held perception of non-Chinese nationalities as developmentally "backward." Among foreign scholars who do not subscribe to theories of social evolution, a more empirical argument is made based on the wide gap between average urban and rural income in Tibet (13,544 and 3,532 yuan per person respectively in the TAR in 2009),[19] or the economic disparity between Tibetans and ethnic Chinese in China as a whole. Such interpretations, usually found among scholars who are unfamiliar with Tibetan culture and history, explain some of the economic issues faced by Tibetans but marginalise their cultural and political concerns, typically depicting them as driven primarily by material interests.

But most writers of this school, including Tibetan exiles and most Western commentators, have focused on policies that restrict political and cultural rights. Many of these policies have been listed by Chung Tsering, in this issue, in his description of the discussions taking place among Tibetans on the internet. These policies include insulting the Dalai Lama in the Chinese media, interfering in monasteries and religious practices, requiring nomads in eastern Tibetan areas to settle, refusing to continue the dialogue process with the Dalai Lama, and promoting Chinese language as the primary medium of instruction in Tibetan schools. Western analysts tend to focus more on regulatory and judicial policies, such as those that have increased restrictions on religious activities, limited the number of monks, required them to undergo "patriotic education," or led to killings and detentions during or after the protests of 2008. Such measures have been seen as provocative and thus as likely factors leading to the immolations.[20] A few observers have pointed to in-

[19] See "10 Years of Western Development Enables West China to Enter 'Adolescence Period' of Development," April 16 2010. See http://english.shaanxi.gov.cn/articleHottopic/hottopic/spmthaowd/aowdnew/201004/27030_1.html.

[20] See for example, the US State Department's annual review of human rights in Tibet, "State Department Report on Human Rights. 2011," May 24 2012, http://www.savetibet.org/policy-center/us-government-and-legislative-advocacy/state-department-annual-reports/state-department-report-human-righ-8; "Special Report: Tibetan Monastic Self-Immolations Appear To Correlate With Increasing Repression of Freedom of Religion," Congressional Executive Commission on China, December 23 2011, http://www.cecc.gov/pages/virtualAcad/index.phpd?showsingle=168140; "China: Address Causes of Tibet Self-Immolations: Protests Reflect Restrictions on Basic Freedoms," Human Rights Watch (HRW), November 7 2011, http://www.hrw.org/news/2011/11/07/china-address-causes-tibet-self-immolations. See also reports by the advocacy group International Campaign for Tibet.

creasing protests by Tibetans against mining projects in rural areas, because of fears of pollution and other forms of damage, and many have noted Tibetan concerns about the increased migration of non-Tibetans into Tibetan areas—we know, for example, that in Lhasa, even by 2000, 40% of the registered urban population aged 20-49, and around 53% of men in their early 30s, were non-Tibetans, according to the 2000 census.[21] However, migration in Tibet is mainly associated with towns, so this does not explain the immolations that have occurred in villages and rural areas where migrancy is infrequent or non-existent.

A fundamental factor in the immolations, if we relate them to governmental actions, was almost certainly the imposition of anti-Dalai Lama policies. Those included a ban on the display of images of the Dalai Lama, a ban on any prayers or rituals relating to him, and a requirement that monks and nuns undergo political education and denounce him. They were first signaled in public statements by the Chinese leadership in Beijing in July 1994 and implemented two years later,[22] but were then applicable only to the Tibetan Autonomous Region (the TAR), the western half of the Tibetan Plateau, since many pro-independence protests had taken place there in the previous seven years. The eastern Tibetan areas, those in Sichuan, Qinghai, Gansu and Yunnan provinces, had been relatively tranquil since at least the late 1970s, unlike the area around Lhasa, and had enjoyed much more relaxed policies. But from about 1998, the same policies began to be applied in major monasteries in Qinghai, Gansu and Sichuan, although there had been little unrest in those areas. They seem to have been imposed unsystematically across these areas, one monastery at a time, starting with Kīrti monastery in Ngawa, then the largest monastery in the eastern part of the plateau if not in all Tibet, and the one that would become the centre of the immolation wave. By 2007, these anti-Dalai Lama measures seem to have been imposed on some lay communities in eastern Tibet as well as monasteries, at least in some areas. The impact of extending this policy to eastern Tibet is reflected in the fact that since at least 2008 almost all protests have been primarily expressions of support for the Dalai Lama and in most cases protestors have carried photographs of him.

Other general factors almost certainly aggravated the situation after 2008, such as the harsh response of the authorities to the 150 or so

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[21] Tibet Bureau of Statistics, *Tibet Statistical Yearbook*. Beijing: China Statistical Press, 2001.

[22] The Chinese authorities had continued to denounce the Dalai Lama after the end of the Cultural Revolution, but only for his political views. Until 1994 they had not questioned his religious standing or attacked him *ad hominem*.

protests in 2008, about 80% of which were peaceful, or the failure of the Chinese government to resume the talks process with the exile Tibetans after 2010.[23] But the erratic (and unexplained) decision to export the anti-Dalai Lama policy and its trappings into the relatively calm eastern Tibetan areas after 1998 is key to understanding the re-emergence of active Tibetan nationalism there in 2008, as well as its continuance today.

These explanations tend to be at a relatively high level of generality and do not explain why the immolations have happened at this time and not earlier, or why they are concentrated in certain locations—as of September 2012, immolations had occurred in just 19 towns or villages (7 places in Sichuan, 7 in Qinghai, 2 in Gansu, and 3 in the TAR). Some attempts to focus on area- and time-specific factors have been made by proponents of policy-based analysis. For example, a steep rise in security spending occurred in or just after 2006 in the two Tibetan prefectures of Sichuan province, well before the unrest of 2008; by 2009 the average cost on security per person was some five times higher in those areas than in non-Tibetan areas of the province.[24] What this extra money was spent on is not known, but it almost certainly reflects an abrupt increase in police and paramilitary activity in the Tibetan areas where subsequently most of the immolations have occurred.

The level of tension or dissatisfaction in these 19 localities might be related to other local factors, such as the experiences suffered by particular communities in the late 1950s, when atrocities occurred as the PLA moved to crush resistance to the land reform movement at that time. In some locations, the behaviour of particular officials may have aggravated an already tense situation; in Ngawa county, for example, the former Tibetan chief of police is said by some locals to have exaggerated disagreements with monks at Kīrti monastery and characterised them as attacks against the Chinese state in order to increase his funding and to promote his career. If so, his behaviour is part of a widespread syndrome that some observers, notably Wang Lixiong, have argued is at the root of the policy paralysis that has

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[23] See "Special Report: Tibetan Self-Immolation—Rising Frequency, Wider Spread, Greater Diversity," CECC, August 22 2012, http://www.cecc.gov/pages/virtualAcad/index.phpd?showsingle=180760.

[24] Published anonymously in "China: End Crackdown on Tibetan Monasteries - Heavy-Handed Security Exacerbates Grievances, Desperation," HRW, October 12 2011. See http://www.hrw.org/news/2011/10/12/china-end-crackdown-tibetan-monasteries. For "Appendix: Spending on Security in Aba Prefecture," see http://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/related_material/Appendix%20-%20Spending%20on%20Security%20in%20Aba%20Prefecture.pdf.

characterised China's dealings with Tibetans since at least the early 1990s.[25]

One locally specific factor that has not been discussed before is the increasing deployment of paramilitary forces — the Wu Jing or People's Armed Police (PAP) — within or around eastern Tibetan monasteries. The PAP are routinely used to respond to major protests and to riots throughout China, and several dozen Tibetans were shot dead by such troops during large-scale protests in 2008. But in eastern Tibetan areas from 2008 onwards they seem to have been deployed to deal with minor incidents more frequently than in the TAR, and to have even been used in situations where no protests had taken place, or ones not involving any violence or rioting. But what seems to have been seen as especially provocative was the sending of the PAP into monasteries. On several occasions after 2008, hundreds of PAP raided monasteries to search for suspects or, reportedly, to check for photographs of the Dalai Lama.[26] In March 2011, in response to the self-immolation by Phuntsok, troops surrounded Kīrti monastery and blockaded it for several weeks, reportedly preventing food and water supplies from being sent in. In July that year, troops surrounded and blockaded Nyitso monastery in Tawu, Sichuan, for a week after a number of monks and locals held a picnic to mark the Dalai Lama's birthday; that same month, the nunnery of Ganden Chokhorling, also in Tawu, was surrounded by PAP; and in October 2011, troops raided a famous monastery, Karma Gon, after a small bomb went off in a nearby village (no connection seems ever to have been found to the monks or to the monastery); in February 2012, troops were stationed beside or near the monastery of Bongtak in Themchen, Qinghai province, to deter monks from holding the annual prayer ceremony that follows the Tibetan New Year.[27] Each of

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[25] See Wang Lixiong, "Roadmap to independence," November 18 2008. See http://www.phayul.com/news/article.aspx?id=23246&article=Roadmap+of+Tibetan+Independence:+Wang+Lixiong.

[26] See, for example, the photograph of troops arriving to conduct a search at Tsendrok monastery in Mayma township, Machu county, Gansu, April 18 2008, published in *Tibet at a Turning Point: The Spring Uprising and China's New Crackdown*, International Campaign for Tibet (ICT), August 6 2008, http://www.savetibet.org/documents/reports/tibet-a-turning-point. The PAP raid of Drepung monastery in October 2007 was one of the chief complaints raised by the first protest in Lhasa the following March.

[27] The Bongtak case is reported in "Monk Burns to Protest Monastery Intrusion," RFA, February 17 2012, http://www.rfa.org/english/news/tibet/intrusion-02172012113723.html. Although monastery blockades seemed to have been stopped in most cases by the autumn of 2011, troops were positioned near monasteries and in towns that have seen frequent immolations, especially in Tibetan areas of Sichuan. This policy was relaxed in May or June 2012, when troops were removed from the vicinity of Kīrti monastery and their presence was reportedly

these paramilitary deployments in or around a monastery or nunnery was followed by the self-immolation of a monk, nun or former monk from that institution.[28] The increase in intrusions by the security forces into monastic precincts would have been a significant development for those involved, coming as it did after years of increasing intrusions by civilian officials, work teams, patriotic education teams, police and others within most if not all Tibetan monasteries after 1994 in the TAR and 1998 in the eastern regions.[29]

But even this cannot fully explain the range of incidents that have taken place, because not all immolations relate to monasteries where such intrusions have taken place, and many may not be related to a monastery at all. We can thus distinguish between a primary wave of immolations, those that were staged by monks or nuns from monasteries where particular provocations had taken place, and a secondary wave where laypeople and monks from other communities staged protests as acts of support or sympathy for the general principles implied by primary immolators.

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reduced in the local town as well, but RFA reported that paramilitary posts were re-established around Kīrti monastery in late August of that year. See "Security at Kirti Tightened," RFA, September 2 2012, http://www.rfa.org/english/news/ tibet/tibet-09022012094708.html.

28 The former monk who self-immolated at Karma Gon reportedly left a statement specifying that his action was a response to the monastery raid: "When Karma [monastery] abbots … are arrested and abused in this way, I would rather die in the name of all who feel grief for them than continue living." ("自焚藏人丁增平措四份遗书现世，自焚藏人曲培和卡央照片公布" (Four testimonies by self-immolated Tibetan Tenzin Phuntsok emerge; photographs of self-immolated Tibetans Qupei and Kayang [Choepel and Kayang] made public), December 14 2011, http://woeser.middle-way.net/2011/12/blog-post_14.htlm, in Chinese. I am grateful to Ben Carrdus for the translation and for drawing this to my attention.

29 After writing this, I received results of unofficial interviews done clandestinely in August 2012 by a contact in two monasteries in Sichuan where several immolations have taken place. In these interviews two monks noted as immediate reasons for the immolations: 1. The increasing intrusion of police or troops into their monasteries or beside them; 2. The restrictions on travel for monks beyond their local areas; 3. The constant monitoring and following of monks within the monastery or in the local town, on occasions when they were allowed to leave the monastery. The government's treatment of the Dalai Lama and the patriotic education drives were understood to be primary factors for overall dissatisfaction, but this seemed to be so self-evident that it did not need to be stated. This relates to monastic immolations, and might be different factors than those leading to immolations by lay people.

Immolators' statements

Nine of those who have self-immolated in Tibet have left statements in which they explain their decision to give up their lives.[30] Two of these were written jointly by two immolators each, making a total of seven statements. The most detailed is that of Sobha Trulku, a lama (religious teacher) from the Golok area of Qinghai who immolated himself in January 2012. His statement, recorded in his own voice and sent secretly abroad, calls for the return of the Dalai Lama and the rebuilding of "a strong and prosperous Tibetan nation in the future."[31] The growing Chinese resistance to holding substantive talks with the Dalai Lama may have been a factor behind this call (ten meetings took place between the two sides from 2002 to January 2010 but produced no concessions and increasingly aggressive criticisms from the Chinese side), but the statement is more concerned with spiritual and cultural issues than with details of Chinese policy. It calls on Tibetans to address three specific issues within their community: ending disputes among Tibetans over land or water resources; providing "education to the children," particularly in the traditional fields of study; and maintaining and protecting Tibetan language and culture.

The other final testaments express broadly similar concerns. All refer to the Tibetan nation or the Tibetan nationality and call for the nation or the people to be protected from suffering, to be united, or to be given freedom. All of them refer to the primary importance of Tibetan Buddhism, and all except one specifically refer to the Dalai Lama and call for his return to Tibet. There is little mention of specific government policies or incidents, apart from the one which is a response to the arrest of the abbots of Karma Gon. Instead, the statements insist on the importance of the Tibetans acting to preserve their ethical and cultural identity. They focus on broad, long-term concerns about the erosion of Tibetan culture, religion and education in general and the suffering of living under Chinese rule. In fact, four include even wider concerns and declare that their action is not just for Tibetans, but also to benefit all beings or to support world peace.

Thus the statement of Tenzin Phuntsok, who immolated himself at Karma Gon on December 1 2011, protests against the "dominion that forbids the teaching of religion" and "the suffering of Tibet in general." Chopa Kyap and Sonam, who immolated themselves on

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[30] These statements have been collected and distributed by exile organisations and are accepted by them as genuine.

[31] "Harrowing images and last message from Tibet of first lama to self-immolate," ICT, February 1 2012. See http://www.savetibet.org/media-center/ict-news-reports/harrowing-images-and-last-message-tibet-first-lama-self-immolate.

April 19 2012 "for the restoration of freedom in Tibet and world peace" and "due to lack of fundamental human rights," called on the Tibetan people to "learn and keep alive our culture and tradition in a right direction, sustain loyalty and affection for our brethren, make efforts for our culture and remained united."[32] Rikyo, a laywoman who died from burns in Dzamthang, Sichuan, on May 30 2012, left a note which said her protest was "to ensure His Holiness the Dalai Lama's return to Tibet" and called on people to "be united and study Tibetan culture," not to kill or trade animals, not to steal or fight, and to speak Tibetan.[33] Ngawang Norphel and Tenzin Khedrup, who immolated themselves in June 20 2012 in Jyekundo, Qinghai, wrote not just of their hope that the Dalai Lama would return to Tibet but also called on young Tibetans not to quarrel among themselves and "to uphold the cause of the Tibetan race and nationality."[34] In a video taken shortly before he died, Ngawang Norphel gave a statement that encapsulates the critical link between freedom and culture in this discourse:

> "We are in the Land of snow. If we don't have our freedom, cultural traditions and language, it would be extremely embarrassing for us. We must therefore learn them. Every nationality needs freedom, language and tradition. Without language, what would be our nationality? [Should we then] call ourselves Chinese or Tibetan?"[35]

Although all the statements refer to Tibetans as a distinct people, place or nation, and two refer to Tibet as having been occupied or invaded by China, most do not specify whether they seek independence or only what the Dalai Lama has called "meaningful autonomy." Only one makes an explicit call for independence from China–

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[32] "Video footage of twin self-immolations reaches exile," *Phayul*, May 9 2012, http://www.phayul.com/news/article.aspx?id=31355&t=1. For the Tibetan, see http://www.tibetexpress.net/bo/home/2010-02-04-05-37-19/8195-2012-05-09-07-15-12.

[33] "Note left by mother of three emerges months after self-immolation," TCHRD, August 18 2012, http://www.tchrd.org/index.php?option =com_content&view =article&id=271:note-left-by-mother-of-three-emerges-months-after-self-immolation&catid=70:2012-news&Itemid=162.

[34] "Two young Tibetans self-immolate," RFA, June 20 2012, http://www. rfa. org/english/news/tibet/burn-06202012095119.html.

[35] "New Video Footage of Latest Self-Immolation Incident," Central Tibetan Administration (Tibetan government-in-exile, Dharamsala), June 23 2012, http://tibet.net/2012/06/23/new-video-footage-of-latest-self-immolation-incident/.

that of Nangdrol, who immolated himself on February 19 2012.[36] He wrote that "this evil China has invaded Tibet," called for "liberation from China's evil rule," and stated that the "evil rule" has "inflicted … unbearable beatings and pain."[37] However, as in the other statements, his requests for the future focus on culture, thought and ethics rather than on politics:

> "I hope you all will keep unity and harmony; / Wear Tibetan (dress) if you are Tibetan; / Moreover, you must speak Tibetan; / Never forget you are Tibetan; / You must have love and compassion if you are Tibetan; / Have respect for parents; / Have unity and harmony amongst Tibetan; / Be compassionate to animals; / Restrain from taking lives of living beings."

Thus we can see that, while the statements focus on Tibetan nationhood and identity, the immolators are particularly concerned about religion, culture, language, and morality. Only one statement refers to economic issues, and then only in passing. In general, the political solution that they propose is the return of the Dalai Lama as their leader, without discussion of the modalities this might entail. The impression they give is that the immolations are protests against a generally deteriorating political climate composed of policies that over a long period have excluded the Dalai Lama from Tibet and have increasingly diminished the ability of Tibetans to maintain their national and cultural identity.

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[36] There are three versions circulating of the brief final statement left by Tamdrin Thar, who set himself on fire in Chentsa, Qinghai, on June 15 2012. All agree that he called for the return of the Dalai Lama, but one adds that he also called for "Tibet to be ruled by Tibetans." See http://www.phayul.com/news/article.aspx?id=31612&article=For+Tibet+to+be+ruled+by+Tibetans%2c+I+set+my+body+on+fire%3a+Tamding+Thar%E2%80%99s+last+words&t=1&c=1. The other versions are at "6 月 15 日自焚牺牲的牧民旦正塔的遗像和遗书" [The portrait and testimony of the June 15 self-immolated sacrificed nomad Tamdin Thar], http://woeser.middle-way.net/2012/06/615.html and "Two More Tibetans Self-immolate," https://www.studentsforafreetibet.org/news/two-tibetans-self-immolate-in-protest. I am grateful to Ben Carrdus and Rebecca Novick for these references.

[37] "New Video Footage Shows Self-Immolations in Zamthang," Central Tibetan Administration (CTA), Dharamsala, May 9 2012, http://tibet.net/2012/05/09/new-video-footage-show-self-immolations-in-zamthang/.

Part 2
Theories of influence

A number of discussions about the immolations have tried to explain why this method of protest has been chosen, rather than to identify the reasons why it has appeared in particular places at this time. By looking at Buddhist, Tibetan, global or other precedents, these arguments have offered theories of influence rather than of causality, aiming to identify the cultural and intellectual reservoirs of ideas that have shaped the form and character of these protests. These discussions have mainly taken two forms so far: the vertical and the horizontal. The first or vertical approach is time-based: it looks back to the past to find relevant precedents, and almost always focuses specifically on Tibetan religion and history (Benn's work on early Chinese origins of self-immolation is an important exception here). There we find powerful images of self-sacrifice and self-immolation such as the 23rd chapter of the *Lotus Sūtra* or the *jātaka* tales, in which are recounted tales of the Buddha in his former lives. Those tales include the *Stag mo lus sbyin,* the story of the Buddha giving his body to feed a dying tigress, which is cited in the final statement of Sobha Trulku, discussed above, and the story of the Buddha as a rabbit which jumps into a fire to offer itself as food for a visiting traveller. In other texts we find references to the ancient Tibetan tradition of "using one's body as an offering lamp," a phrase, which as Françoise Robin has noted in this issue, frequently occurs in internet commentary within Tibet on the immolations.

The horizontal approach, as we might term it, uses geography rather than history to provide its sources of influence, and looks beyond Tibetan borders to the wider world: it sees initiatives in Tibet as having come from outside. It finds significant models in the deaths of Thích Quảng Đức in Vietnam, of Bouazizi in Tunisia, or of the Tibetan exile Thubten Ngodup in India a decade earlier (also cited by Sobha Trulku), or sees the "Arab Spring" in general as the source—or even the cause—of the immolators' choice of protest method. Proponents of the horizontal view sometimes face the problem that their writings imply Tibetans to be retrograde and untouched, and as having to copy outside models of modern behaviour as if deprived of any such models or ideas themselves.

Pervasive influence

But in fact news from abroad, even when conveyed by modern technology, is probably a secondary influence on people in most coun-

tries, and especially so in those where the state restricts the distribution of almost all foreign news. The primary channels of cultural influence on most of us are more likely to be through our family and friends, plus school teachers and, in Tibet at least, members of the local religious community. It is through these internal, domestic vectors, through family histories, clan traditions and local memories, that traditions such as the *jātaka* stories or ideals of Buddhist behaviour are most likely to have been passed down to those who decided on immolation as an appropriate way of conveying their concerns. Many of the references in the statements left by the immolators reflect these stories and traditions, which frequently include such topics as the importance of compassion, non-violence, and not harming animals. These would surely have been learned through these circles of intimate and domestic contact, especially once the Maoist era was over and religion was no longer banned.

Such modes of circulation of ideas constitute a third type of cultural resource, which I call pervasive influence. It describes sources that are neither remote nor a product of deep learning, that are often oral rather than literary, and that surround and envelop the participants from birth. This may be why this type of influence is sometimes overlooked by scholars.

A prime example in this context of such an influence is the pervasive ethos of suicide as a political statement in modern Tibetan society. Suicides that are responses to a political event or action by the authorities are not at all unusual in Tibetan society: they have long had a social value among Tibetans which made them meaningful acts. They were frequent in the Cultural Revolution in Lhasa, where it is said that guards had to be posted along the Kyichu river to prevent people, even entire families, jumping into the river. There were similar events in Amdo in response to aggressive social reforms imposed in 1958. In recent years, protest suicides have included the post-imprisonment suicide of Champa Tenzin in 1988, the famous monk who was badly burnt in a protest in Lhasa the year before,[38]

[38] Since I wrote this I have interviewed the person who discovered Champa Tenzin's body, who says that the body was tied down and that the death cannot have been a suicide (see also A. Vidal d'Almeida Ribeiro, "Implementation of the Declaration on the Elimination of all Forms of Intolerance and of Discrimination based on Religion or Belief," Report submitted by Mr. Angelo Vidal d'Almeida Ribeiro, Special Rapporteur appointed in accordance with Commission on Human Rights Resolution 1986/20 of 10 March 1986, Commission on Human Rights, Forty-ninth session, item 22 of the provisional agenda (E/CN.4/1993/62), Geneva: Commission on Human Rights, January 6 1993, paragraph 22). But in public perception within Lhasa, it still may be understood as a suicide. Many of the suicides listed here remain disputed or unconfirmed.

possibly the five nuns who died in Drapchi prison in 1991,[39] the death of Ngawang Changchup during the Patriotic Education campaign at Drepung in 2005,[40] a number of monks at Drepung who died or nearly died after the monastery invasion by troops in April 2008,[41] and at least nine reported cases in spring 2008.[42] Countless other cases could be found in recent Tibetan history.

But these more recent deaths were private acts, unwitnessed, with 'meanings' that were rarely established beyond doubt, leaving it unclear for Tibetans as for outsiders whether or not they had been suicides and what might have been the rationales behind them. The immolations changed this existing, unclear practice of political suicide in the post-Mao era by ritualising it, giving it a specific form, and conducting it in public space. A hazy and probably pervasive notion in contemporary Tibetan society about suicide as protest has thus been re-framed by the immolators as a clear, emphatic statement embodying high motives and collective purpose, one in which the act of self-killing is noble, virtuous, and beneficial to the nation.

So, if we seek to explain why suicide appeared not just as an ethical act and as a form of resistance, but as a public one, where should we look to find the sources of new meanings that made this turn possible? The one form of vertical precedent in Tibetan history that is unquestionably most relevant to the immolations has not been discussed either by Tibetologists or media commentators: the overwhelming importance of blood-vows in modern Tibetan history before 1950, and especially vows to sacrifice one's life for the nation. All officials in the Tibetan government and lay people in southern border areas took such oaths in the face of British military incursions into Tibet in 1886 and again in 1903. In these oaths, judging from the text of the 1903 oath, the participants swore to die in order to defend their country:

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[39] Frank Langfit, "Suicide in Tibet: Buddhist nuns in Tibet reportedly kill themselves after being tortured by Chinese officials," *Baltimore Sun* [2000], no date, http://www.beliefnet.com/Faiths/Buddhism/2000/10/Suicide-In-Tibet.aspx.

[40] "A young monk dies under mysterious circumstances following the 'patriotic education' campaign in Drepung," *Human Rights Update*, Vol. X, no. 10, Tibetan Centre for Human Rights and Democracy, Dharamsala, October 2005, http://www.tchrd.org/report/hrupdate/2005/hr200510.pdf.

[41] "Tibetan Monks in Critical Condition After Attempted Suicide, as Protests Mount", RFA, March 13 2008, http://www.rfa.org/english/news/politics/tibet_protest-20080313.html.

[42] See *Tibet at a Turning Point: The Spring Uprising and China's New Crackdown*, ICT, 2008, pp. 29, 34-35, 38, 68, 76, http://www.savetibet.org/documents/reports/tibet-a-turning-point.

> All Tibetan people … specifically swear to this oath, and determine to obey its contents. At present this Buddhist holy land of Tibet and its sacred religion face a hostile foreign enemy who harbours ill intentions, and the danger of invasion. All Tibetans reasonably swear to death to protect their magical homeland, and to bravely keep out the foreign invasion.[43]

A similar oath had been taken by Tibetans in the border areas into which the British advanced in 1886, another had been taken by local people in Kharta, a part of southern Tibet currently within Tingri county, "for resisting the British army" in 1887, and another by the people of Kharta in 1888 "to defend themselves against the enemy," as well as to "fight against the enemy" and to "prevent foreigners from entering the border."[44] It is probable that similar vows were taken by Tibetan fighters in the resistance armies that fought against the People's Liberation Army in 1956-59, and among the Tibetan guerrillas who fought from within Nepal until 1974; it is widely reported that in that year many of the Tibetan guerrillas in Nepal committed suicide rather than surrender their arms after being told by the Dalai Lama to end their campaign. These specific instances of blood-vows and suicides by Tibetans in defence of the nation over the previous century may not have been known widely among younger Tibetans, but the notion of the blood-pledge is certainly prevalent in Tibetan society.

Contemporary Tibetans, however, live in a society in which access to their religious and historical traditions are heavily restricted. In terms of sheer quantity and volume, much of the cultural influence on them must come from the everyday ideas and images that sur-

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[43] A Chinese translation of the oath is given in Lo Bu (ed.), *Special historical material of the archives to commemorate the 100th anniversary of the struggle of the Gyantse region of Tibet to resist the British (first series of ten)*. Lhasa: Tibetan Archives Editorial Department, 2004. The English translation of the Chinese version is from Henry Sanderson, "Transgression of the Frontier: An Analysis of Documents Relating to the British Invasion of Tibet," *Inner Asia, Special Issue: The Younghusband 'Mission' to Tibet*, 14(1), 2012, pp. 27-60, on pp. 38, 51. Note that Pasang Wangdu gives a different title for the volume edited by Lo Bu, referring to it as an issue of the journal *Xizang dang-an* ("Tibetan Archives Journal – special issue for the commemoration of the centenary of the fight against the British," Xizang Dang-an Guan Publishing House, January 2004." See Pasang Wangdu, "Notes on Tibetan Sources Concerning the 1903-04 Younghusband Military Expedition to Tibet," *Inner Asia, Special Issue: The Younghusband 'Mission' to Tibet*, 14(1), 2012, pp. 99-112, on p. 102.

[44] The pledges made at Kharta and Tingkye in 1886-8 are published in Chinese translation in *Zang wen zi liao yi wen ji* [Tibetan materials translated into Chinese]. Beijing: Nationalities Research Department of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences and the Tibetan Archives, July 1985, according to Pasang Wangdu, *op. cit.*, 2012, p. 101.

round them as a result of the outflow of Chinese media, whether it be radio, television, music, drama, film, posters, art or print. Almost all television material in Tibet is in Chinese language or has been translated from Chinese versions, and the number of cassettes and DVDs made in Tibetan, apart from music videos, is probably small, as is the number secretly smuggled in from abroad. Even in rural areas, the influence of films, radio, television, textbooks and other forms of state-approved literature will have been significant, especially for those who attended a school at any level. This vector of cultural influence thus cannot be ignored.

From the 1950s until at least the 1980s, those forms of media, encountered in schools, tea-houses, cinema shows and village-broadcasting systems — as well as, at least until the 1990s, political education meetings at every level of society — would have conveyed stories about model individuals. Later, that role would have been taken up by television and DVDs. The earlier stories would have told of such figures as Yang Kaihui, Liu Hulan, Zhang Side, Ouyang Hai, Wang Jie and most famously, after 1963, Lei Feng, whose exploits were published in cartoon form in Tibetan language.[45] Almost all of these stories told of ordinary citizens dying to save their comrades or their nation. As television became the dominant medium in China, dramas and war films in particular, with their vivid celebrations of patriotic Chinese dying to defend the country from its enemies, would have continued that role. Taken together, these forms of modern Chinese culture placed heroic deaths and political self-sacrifice at the heart of the prevailing value system. As Geremie Barmé has put it,

> Sacrifice for a cause, while having a venerable tradition in China, has also been a central feature of Chinese communist education… Red Guards in the Cultural Revolution too had sworn to protect China and the revolution with their lives. Post-1949 China had encouraged the love of a martyr's death as an integral part of self-cultivation. The revolutionary tradition of the past century has shrouded death for a cause in a romantic garb.[46]

By the late 1990s, Chinese cultural producers were starting to distribute narratives that featured Tibetan exemplars too. One of these

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[45] See for example Liu Hanzheng and Qian Guisun (illustrations), *Le hpheng gi byis pa'i dus rabs* [Lei Feng's childhood]. Beijing: People's Publishing House [1974?].

[46] Geremie Barmé, "Confession, Redemption, and Death: Liu Xiaobo and the Protest Movement of 1989," in George L. Hicks (ed.), *The Broken Mirror: China after Tiananmen*. London: Longmans, pp. 52-99. See p. 79.

would have reached more Tibetans of the younger generation than probably any other film: *Honghegu* ("Red River Valley", Feng Xiaoning, 1997).[47] This was because, when it was first released, watching it was required for all schoolchildren throughout the country (and most government employees), including those in Tibetan areas of China. The film is a lightly-veiled fiction describing the British invasion of Tibet in 1903-4, that glorifies the efforts of Tibetans of all social classes who resisted the invaders. The climax of the film is the death of its hero, a Tibetan herdsman called Gesang (Kalsang in Tibetan), who chooses to kill himself rather than be taken prisoner by the British. *Honghegu* thus concludes with an epic, moving celebration of a Tibetan political suicide, the first to be shown in cinematic history. The manner of his suicide is shown with lavish attention to detail, accompanied by sonorous music and slow-motion imagery: he kills himself by pouring petrol all around and then setting it and himself on fire. This scene is thus the first depiction of a self-immolation by a Tibetan in film or perhaps any other medium, and it shows self-immolation as a noble act of protest carried out by a hero to defend his nation.

Conclusion

The exaltation of self-immolation in *Honghegu* was surely not a cause of any Tibetan's decision to court death in that way, any more than were the veneration of devotional self-immolation in the *Lotus Sūtra* or the reports of protests in Tunisia beamed into Tibet by foreign broadcasters. The causes are more likely, as we have seen, to be found in restrictive policies that limit cultural and religious expression, and that prevent the Dalai Lama from returning to exercise political authority of some sort in Tibet; and perhaps the exile responses to the early immolations also have a role of some sort, as the 'outside instigation' school has argued. But in terms of influences, the forces that shape modes of action and forms of expression, everyday Chinese forms of culture may be as significant as distinctively Tibetan ideas and histories. That in fact is at the heart of the concerns expressed by the immolators in the statements that have reached the outside world, that point to the increasing diminution of the role of Tibetan tradition in everyday life and its replacement by state-driven norms that are non-Tibetan and non-Buddhist.

China and its ruling party have thus done as much as any other source to shape and invigorate nationalist resistance in Tibet, quite

apart from their policies and oppressions: it bombarded Tibetans with much of the rhetoric that is now played back to it by dying people on Tibetan streets. Nor is this the only irony in this situation: the Chinese propaganda machinery that now berates the Dalai Lama and his fellow-exiles for celebrating acts of patriotic self-sacrifice is the same one which has long glorified the cult of dying for the nation. Similarly, the forces in popular Chinese culture that may have helped make public suicide by fire seem a valid form of political strategy and expression would seem to be the same ones whose role and dominance the immolators hope by their actions to diminish. The Tibetan self-immolations, while drawing on legacies of specifically Tibetan thought, are thus also reflections of Chinese political values and popular culture as well as at the same time expressions of opposition to their dominance.

GLOSSARY

Transcription	Transliteration	Tibetan
Bongtak	Bong stag	བོང་སྟག
Champa Tenzin	Byams pa bstan ′dzin	བྱམས་པ་བསྟན་འཛིན།
Chentsa	Gcan tsha	གཅན་ཚ།
Chokhorling	Chos ′khor gling	ཆོས་འཁོར་གླིང།
Chopa Kyap	Chos pa skyabs	ཆོས་པ་སྐྱབས།
Drapchi	Grwa bzhi	གྲྭ་བཞི།
Drepung	′Bras spungs	འབྲས་སྤུངས།
Dzamthang	′Dzam thang	འཛམ་ཐང་།
Jyekundo	Skye rgu mdo	སྐྱེ་དགུ་མདོ།
Kalsang	Skal bzang	སྐལ་བཟང།
Karma Gon	Karma dgon	ཀརྨ་དགོན།

Kharta	Kha rta	ཁ་རྟ།
Kīrti	Kīrti	ཀཱིརྟི།
Kyichu	Skyid chu	སྐྱིད་ཆུ།
Lhasa	Lha sa	ལྷ་ས།
Ngawa	Rnga ba	རྔ་བ།
Ngawang Changchup	Ngag dbang byang chub	ངག་དབང་བྱང་ཆུབ།
Ngawang Norphel	Ngag dbang nor ′phel	ངག་དབང་ནོར་འཕེལ།
Nyitso	Nyi mtsho / Nya mtsho	ཉི་མཚོ། ཉ་མཚོ།
Phuntsok	Phun tshogs	ཕུན་ཚོགས།
Rikyo	Ri skyo	རིསྐྱོ།
Sertha	Ser thar	སེར་ཐར།
Sobha	Bsod bha	བསོད་ན།
Tawu	Rta′u	རྟཱུ།
Tenzin Khedrup	Bstan ′dzin mkhas grub	བསྟན་འཛིན་མཁས་གྲུབ།
Tenzin Phuntsok	Bstan ′dzin phun tshogs	བསྟན་འཛིན་ཕུན་ཚོགས།
Themchen	Them chen	ཐེམ་ཆེན།
Thubten Ngodup	Thub bstan dngos grub	ཐུབ་བསྟན་དངོས་གྲུབ།
Tingri	Ding ri	དིང་རི།

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Kīrti Monastery of Ngawa: Its History and Recent Situation

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Introduction

For good reasons one can consider Ngawa town in Amdo[1] to be the heart of both the recent protests (starting in 2008) and the self-immolations (since 2009). Though no precise information is available, some 25 from the total of 37 cases of self-immolations have taken place in Ngawa or were done by former inhabitants of Ngawa up to the time of writing the paper (June 2012). Despite the large number of monasteries surrounding Ngawa, all evidence points to the Kīrti monastery of Geluk tradition as being one of the main sources of the protests: 14 self-immolators are reported to be monks or former monks of Kīrti monastery.[2]

This paper looks at the present situation through the lens of history since the historical background of the nerve-centre of the Tibetan protest might certainly help us to understand the circumstances of so many self-immolations in this monastery.[3]

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1 In the mass media this place is frequently referred to by its Chinese name Aba. The Tibetan toponym Ngawa is usually explained in two ways in the texts. The first explanation says that the shape of the valley, where Ngawa appeared, resembles that of a drum (*nga*) and so it gave the name to the locality (Ngawa: "Drum-like"). Another explanation says that Tibetans came here in the 8th century from Ngari in Western Tibet. Ngawa should be thus taken as abbreviation of Ngari ("Those from Ngari"). Cf. Dmu dge bsam gtan. "Mdo smad kyi lo rgyus," In *Rje dmu dge bsam gtan rgya mtsho'i gsung 'bum.* pod gsum pa, pp. 279-383. Xining: Mtsho sngon mi rigs dpe skrun khang, 1997, pp. 304-305; Blo bzang chos 'phel, *Rnga yul kirti dgon gyi chags rim*. Place unspecified, 1992, p. 6.

2 See Katia Buffetrille's contribution in this issue.

3 Very little is known about the history of this place in scholarly literature. Available in English are articles dealing solely with the Bonpo monastery Nangshik, located not far from the town itself (Per Kværne, "The monastery sNang zhig of the Bon religion in the rNga ba district of Amdo," In P. Daffina (ed.) *Revista degli Studii Orientali 63, Indo-Sino-Tibetica: Studi in onore di Luciano Petech*, Rome: Bardi, 1990, pp. 207-222; Donatella Rossi, "The monastic lineage of sNang zhig dgon pa in A mdo rNga ba," In *The Tibet journal*, Winter 1998, pp. 58-71) or not always reliable account of Kīrti monastery in Ngawa by Gruschke (Andreas Gruschke, *The Cultural Monuments of Tibet's Outer Provinces, Amdo.* 2 vols. Bangkok: White Lotus Press 2001, pp. 63-64). Moreover, a non-scholarly, but highly interesting source on Kīrti monasteries is Robert Ekvall's novel *The Lama Knows*, which takes place

Daniel Berounský, "Kīrti monastery of Ngawa: Its history and recent situation", *Revue d'Etudes Tibétaines*, no. 25, Décembre 2012, pp. 65-80.

The following sections will first concentrate on the Kīrti masters, then on the Megyal kings and finally offer some brief considerations based on observations made in Ngawa during my fieldwork in the years 2004-2007 and 2010.

The lineage of the Kīrti masters

Tradition claims that the origin of the lineage of the Kīrti masters goes back to the disciple of Tsongkhapa known under the strange nickname of "Black Tongued One" (Chenakpa/Jaknagpa, 1374-1450). The nickname is explained by a syllable "Ā" that allegedly appeared on his tongue. His monastic name was Rongchen Gendun Gyaltshen.[4] After his studies in Central Tibet he returned to Amdo and founded a temple (Kālari Gone Trashi Lhundrup), known also as Kāla hermitage (Kāla ritro). This temple, located some 100kms south of Ngawa, remains an important pilgrimage place and hermitage full of miraculous rock-imprints, treasures and curiosities. These features are witness to the fact that it was not only the Black Tongued One, but also his successors who were renowned as wonder-workers and powerful tantric masters.

The name Kīrti was acquired allegedly through the name of the tribe that became subject of the "Black Tongued" master, called Gurtima. He thus started to be called Gurti lama (Gur, meaning probably "tent").[5] However, the name is mostly written as Kīrti these days and taken as the Sanskrit equivalent of the Tibetan term *drakpa* ("renowned").[6]

The Lineage of Kīrti masters

1. Rongchen Gendun Gyaltshen or "The Black-Tongued One" 1374-1450
2. Tenpa Rinchen 1474-1558

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in the beginning of 20th century (Robert B. Ekvall, *The Lama Knows: A Tibetan Legend Is Born.* New Delhi-Bombay-Calcutta: Oxford and IBH Publishing, 1979).

4 For details on Black Tongued One see Brag dgon pa dkon mchog bstan pa rab rgyas. *Mdo smad chos 'byung* (*Deb ther rgya mtsho*). Lanzhou: Kan su mi rigs dpe skrun khang 1982, p. 721; Blo bzang chos 'phel. *op. cit.*, 1992, pp. 5-6; Anonymous a. *Rnam thar gser phreng/ glegs bam dang po/ rong chen bstan pa'i sgron me kīrti sku phreng rim byon gyi 'khrung rabs rnam thar phyogs sgrigs*. Distributed from Amdo Ngawa Kīrti monastery (place and date unspecified), pp. 5-32.

5 Blo bzang chos 'phel, *op. cit.*, 1992, pp. 7-8.

6 This name is interpreted in such a sense in Brag dgon pa dkon mchog bstan pa rab rgyas, *op. cit.*, 1982, p. 721.

3. Tenpa Rapgye 1564-1643
4. Lobsang Jamyang 1656-1708
5. Lobsang Tenpay Gyaltshen 1712- 1771
6. Gendun Chokyi Wangchuk 1772-1796
7. Kunga Chophak Thupten Nyima 1797-1849
8. Lobsang Trinley Tenpa Gyatso 1850-1904
9. Kalsang Lodro Kunga Lungtok Gyatso 1905-1920
10. Ngagwang Lobsang Tenpa Tsering 1919-1939
11. Lobsang Tenzin Jikme Yeshe Gyatso 1942-

The third Kīrti master, Tenpa Rapgye (1564-1643) ranks among the important masters of the whole lineage. It is reported that he was renowned for his abilities as a tantric master. He allegedly tamed a number of local deities in Amdo and frequented pilgrimage places. Particularly interesting is the report of him as a tamer of the local deity in the locality of Taktshang Lhamo, north of Dzorge; he is also credited with the opening of the holy cave of Mahākāla, retrieving the "treasure" in the form of a ritual dagger and leaving behind several footprints in the rocks.[7]

Later, in the 18th century, during the life of the Great fifth Kīrti Lobsang Tenpay Gyaltshen (1712-1771), Taktshang Lhamo became the main seat of the Kīrti masters. There he built the foundation of Lhamo Kīrti Monastery (called Namgyal Dechen Ling), which, up to the present, is considered to be the "mother-monastery" (*magon/ densa*). The fifth Kīrti also seemed to expend much effort in establishing ties with secular leaders in the wider areas of Amdo and Kham. Thus, he is reported to have established a "priest-patron" (*choyon*) relationship with the Derge king Tenpa Tsering (1678-1738).[8]

But what interests us more here is that it was him who first established ties with the lords of Ngawa. As we will later see, the kings of Ngawa were not very powerful at that time and the zenith of their influence in Amdo was yet to come. In several Tibetan sources it is repeated that the fifth Kīrti master was invited by the lord of Ngawa, Mepon Tshewangkyap, and his wife Aboza around the year 1760. He appointed the deity Tshangpa to be the protector of the king and arranged ritual nets *(do)* and other "supports" *(ten)* for the worship of

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[7] For references on Tenpa Rapgye, see Anonymous a, *op. cit.*, pp. 212-226, 243-290; Anonymous c. 1999. "Stag tshang lha mo kirti dgon pa'i lo rgyus mdor bsdus." In Skal bzang, Padma sgron (eds.), *Mdzod dge'i bod rgyud nang bstan dgon ste so so'i lo rgyus mdor bsdus*, 1999, pp. 380-399; Brag dgon pa dkon mchog bstan pa rab rgyas, *op. cit.*, 1982, pp. 716-717; Blo bzang chos 'phel, *op. cit.*, 1992, pp. 10-11.

[8] For the biography of the fifth Kīrti see Anonymous c, *op. cit.*, pp. 380-399; Brag dgon pa dkon mchog bstan pa rab rgyas, *op. cit.*, 1982, pp. 717-719; Anonymous a, *op. cit.*, pp. 232-234, 330-334, 370-371; Blo bzang chos 'phel, *op. cit.*, 1992, pp. 12-14.

the deity.[9] Then he tamed the main local deity Dardzom and composed a ritual text *(sangyik)* for his worship. According to the text he also established priest-patron *(choyon)* ties with the king.[10] In the light of later development one can expect that the meeting was a bit overemphasised in the later sources especially with regard to the "priest-patron relationship," which is an ornamental expression often used without considering the actual situation. But the story is surely an indication of the first contacts between the future lords of Ngawa, those called Megyal (also spelt Metshang or Mepon), and the Kīrti masters.

All next Kīrti masters are credited with enlarging the Taktshang Lhamo monastery, but the person of the eighth Kīrti master Lobsang Trinley Tenpa Gyatso (1849-1904) stands out among them. He was the founder of the Kīrti monastery in Ngawa and a person who established close ties with the kings of Ngawa, who were later highly influential in the expansion of the power of Kīrti masters over southern Amdo. From the time of the eighth Kīrti master the fortunes of the Kīrti monasteries became bound up with the increasing power of Ngawa kings.[11]

The former secretary of the last king of Ngawa describes how the family of the Ngawa kings invited the eighth Kīrti master in order to avert certain inauspicious circumstances around the year 1860.[12] It is said that the eighth Kīrti master (at age 12) purified the formerly arranged "supports" of the protective deity Tshangpa established by the fifth Kīrti master, which according to some people had been overtaken by demons *(dre).* The inauspiciousness surrounding the king of Ngawa is specifically described as the danger of an interruption in

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[9] This deity possessed (at least during the life of the eighth Kīrti master) a renowned deity-medium in the area of Dzorge, who was close to the Kīrti masters. The medium is frequently mentioned in the hagiography of the eighth Kīrti master.

[10] Blo bzang chos 'phel, *op., cit.,* 1992, pp. 13-14; Blo bzang chos 'phel, *Rme'u sa dbang chen po rje 'bangs mnyam 'brel gyi byung ba gang nges mdo tsam brjod pa phyi rabs rna ba'i bdud rtsi zhes bya ba*. Place unspecified, 1993, p. 8; Dmu dge bsam gtan, *op. cit.,* 1997, p. 321.

[11] For an extensive biography of the eighth Kīrti see Zhwa dmar paṇḍita Dge 'dun bstan 'dzin rgya mtsho - Lcang lung khri rgan 'jam dbyangs thub bstan rgya mtsho, "Rigs dang dkyil 'khor rgya mtsho'i mnga' bdag rje btsun blo bzang 'phrin las bstan pa rgya mtsho dpal bzang po'i rnam par thar pa ngo mtshar rtsibs stong bkra ba'i gser gyi 'khor lo thub bstan mdzes rgyan zhes bya ba bzhugs," In *Rnam thar gser phreng/ gleng bam gsum pa stod cha/ gleg bam bzhi pa smad cha/ rong chen bstan pa'i sgron me skyabs mchog blo bzang 'phrin las kyi rnam thar chen mo*. II volumes. Distributed from Amdo Ngawa Kīrti monastery, 2007 (place of publishing unspecified).

[12] Blo bzang chos 'phel, *op. cit.,* 1992, pp. 28-32.

the family line, due to his one and only successor said to be mad *(lenpa)*.[13]

The founding of the Kīrti monastery in Ngawa is connected with the visit of the eighth Kīrti master to Ngawa some ten years later, around 1870. In the Tibetan sources this act is called "reestablishment." It is said that there already existed a small Gelukpa monastery known as Dongkhu monastery founded in 1723 by a certain Dongkhu Phuntsok Tshang,[14] It seems to have been connected with possible interests of Labrang monastery in gaining influence in the area. Through its "reestablishment" by Kīrti, the influence of Labrang monastery was probably weakened. In the wider perspective this can be seen as part of the process of rapid "gelukpaisation" of Amdo in the 19th century, and at the same time as a sign of competition between several powerful centers of Gelukpa tradition. Not long after the founding of Ngawa Kīrti monastery in 1870, there broke out a war around 1880 between Labrang monastery and the united Golok, Tshakho and Ngawa tribes.[15]

It was the eighth Kīrti who built up, through the network of Kīrti monasteries, a power capable of challenging the existing Gelukpa strongholds. His biography contains notes on his almost constant travels, during which he tamed local deities and established ties with existing monasteries, lords and tribal leaders, mostly in the area of southern Amdo.[16]

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[13] Blo bzang chos 'phel, *op. cit.*, 1993, pp. 16-17.

[14] The eighth Kīrti master only found a new place for the reestablished monastery in cooperation with the Me king of Ngawa. It is worth of note that around Ngawa there was very little presence of Gelukpa monasteries (Gomang, established in 1791 by Gungthang of Labrang; Amchok, established in 1823), as if the area were resisting the "gelukpaisation" of Amdo at that time. The oldest monasteries in Ngawa were those of Bon tradition (11th or 12th centuries) and later there appeared also Sakya monasteries (Sagang Gon, established in 18th century), Jonang (Segon, established around 1620) and Nyingma ones (Yangogon, in 1627). Cf. Skal bzang ngag dbang dam chos, *Rnga rdzong yongs kyi grub sde so so'i chos 'byung*. Rnga yul sngo shul dgon do dam u yon lhan khang. Ngawa (date unspecified); Bstan 'dzin (ed.), *Aba zhou zangchuan fojiao siyuan gaikuang*. Krung go bod kyi skad yig sde tshan mtho rim nang bstan slob gling gi bod rgyud nang bstan zhib 'jug khang (date and place unspecified).

[15] For interesting references on rivalry between Ngawa and Labrang monastery, see Dmu dge bsam gtan, *op. cit.*, 1997, pp. 323-326. The influence of Labrang monastery was present in Ngawa in the form of several subjected tribes (*lhade*), who probably became subjected to it in order to avoid the increasing power of Me kings.

[16] For the purpose of illustration, in the rather small area of Thewo today, some nine monasteries out of 22 are counted among the "branch monasteries" of Kīrti (cf. D. Berounský, "Lapsed Buddhists, evil tobacco and the opening of the Bon pilgrimage place of Dmu ri in the Thewo region of Amdo," In *Pandanus '07*, Prague, Triton, 2007, pp. 165-234 (172, note 10). Its influence stretched between Ser-

Other monasteries around Ngawa were considered to be subjects of the Ngawa king Megyal (the sources mention some 18 monasteries that were subject to him,)[17] but Ngawa Kīrti monastery remained independent and was the main focus of the kings' patronage. The king of Ngawa considered the eighth Kīrti master to be his "root master" and according to the texts he even had one of his residences within the monastery (the so-called Megyal Khang).

The next two Kīrti masters, the ninth and tenth, died at young ages. Interestingly, Robert Ekvall dedicates one of his novels to the conflict between two candidates for the reincarnation of the tenth Kīrti, which according to him divided the whole of Amdo.[18] In the Tibetan sources we hardly find any details on this beyond a few general notes. It is mentioned that the Kīrti monastery of Ngawa housed some 1700-1800 monks in the 1950s.[19]

The contemporary eleventh Kīrti (b. 1942) fled to India following the events of 1959. In 1992 he established the Kīrti monastery in Dharamsala and between the years 1997-1999 he held the position of *Kalon* when he was appointed as the Minister of Education in the Tibetan exile government.

Since Ngawa Kīrti monastery enjoyed a rather elevated position through its close relationship to the Ngawa kings, they too deserve a closer look.

Me Kings of Ngawa

It seems that the Megyal family, the designation by which the kings of Ngawa are known these days, had rather limited power in the area until the 19th century, controlling a few tribes near Ngawa and being just one among a number of tribal chiefs *(pon).* Their family name varies in the sources. The secretary of the last king of Ngawa writes the name as Rme'u and explains that he belonged to the clan with the same name that moved to Amdo from Central Tibet. However, a number of sources give alternative spellings, such as Dme or Rme.

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tha, northern Gyalrong, Dzorge, Thewo, and southern Golok. I did not come across a complete list of their branch monasteries and subjected villages.

17 For the list of these monasteries, see Blo bzang chos 'phel, *op. cit.*, 1993, p. 25.

18 Ekvall, *op. cit.*, 1979.

19 Re mdo sengge. *Kirti tshang dang 'brel ba'i ngag rgyun lo rgyus nyams myong rgan po'i gtam phreng/ deb phreng dang po/ dri lan byed po/ ja tshogs sprul sku blo bzang don grub*. Dharamsala: Kirti Jepa Datsang, 2002, p. 28.

"Tshang" is also spelt Tshang or Sang. The appellation "king" *(gyal)* probably appeared in the 19th century.[20]

Kings and Queen of Ngawa

1. Tshewangkyap, mid of 18th century
2. Aboza, 18th-19th century
3. Chaktharbum, 19th century
4. Gompo Sonam, 1871-1913
5. Shingkyong, ?
6. Pal Gompo Trinley Rapten, 1916-1966

We know the name of Metshang, Tshewangkyap, from the time when the fifth Kīrti master visited Ngawa around 1760. It is not clear whether he or his wife was considered to be the leader. She was known under the name Aboza, and she is mentioned more frequently in the texts under the titles of *ponmo* (female leader) or *gyalmo* (queen). At that time it seems that Jamyang Zhepa from Labrang monastery established some ties with them hoping that the Gelukpa tradition would spread there.[21]

As was already mentioned, one of his descendants is said to have been born somewhat mad *(lenpa).* The father (recorded simply as Metshang) therefore adopted the youngest son of the Golok leader

[20] The *History of Doctrine in Amdo* by Dragonpa Konchog Tenpa Rapgye from the year 1865 knows him already as a Megyal, i.e. "king" (see Brag dgon pa dkon mchog bstan pa rab rgyas *opt. cit.,* 1982, p. 755), while other sources such as the hagiography of the eighth Kīrti master call him Mepon (Zhwa dmar paṇḍita Dge 'dun bstan 'dzin rgya mtsho - Lcang lung khri rgan 'jam dbyangs thub bstan rgya mtsho, *op. cit.,*). Some sources attempt to trace back the ancient past of this family including the Meu clan, but it is not reliable since it is often based on the oral tradition; Muge Samten repeats that "it is uncertain" (see Blo bzang chos 'phel, *, cit.,* 1992, pp. 2-8; Dmu dge bsam gtan *, cit.,* 1997, pp. 310-312, Hor gtsang 'jigs med, *et al. Mdo smad lo rgyus chen mo las sde tsho'i skor, glegs bam dang po* (*Mdo smad chos 'byung chen mo,* vol. II). Dharamsala: Library of Tibetan Works and Archives, 2009, pp. 153-157).

[21] Muge Samten does not speak at all about Tshewangkyab in his text and takes for granted that Aboza was the leader of Me in 1790 during the visit of the second Jamyang Zhepa of Labrang monastery (Dmu dge bsam gtan, *op. cit.,* 1997, p. 320). It might be possible that Tshewangkyab had already passed away. He is mentioned by the former secretary of Ngawa kings, but not very clearly, stating that he was a leader around the year 1760, during the time of the visit of the fifth Kīrti master (Blo bzang chos 'phel, *op. cit.,* 1993, p. 8). Discussion concerning the visit of Jamyang Zhepa in 1790 and the ensuing conflicts are discussed in Hor gtsang, *op. cit.,* 2009, pp. 168-169; Blo bzang chos 'phel, *op. cit.,* 1993, pp. 8-13.

from Sertha called Chaktharbum who was then installed as the leader of Metshang (Metshang *pon*). Sources make it clear that he was present in Ngawa in 1870. He in turn married the daughter of the leader of Tshakho (northern Gyalrong), Choktseza Tsering Drolma, known to the sources as "White-Haired One" (Trakarma). These truly diplomatic acts of adoption and marriage led the Ngawa kings out from under the dominance of the Goloks and fostered a kind of alliance between the Goloks, the Ngawa king and the ruler of Tshakho.[22] These events happened in the second half of the 19th century and were contemporary with the time during which the eighth Kīrti founded Kīrti Monastery in Ngawa. As has been mentioned above, the three allies fought around 1880 against villages subjugated to Labrang.[23]

Chaktharbum first took as wife one of the daughters of the Golok leader of the respected Akyong family and in 1871 their son Gompo Sonam was born.[24] During his father's reign, Megyal Gompo Sonam subjugated and in some cases also killed several local tribal leaders around Ngawa.[25]

At least some such details appear concerning a certain leader, Ludrup from the Mowatshang family. In the text written by the secretary of the last king it is said that this leader employed some tantric master to cast spells on Megyal who later killed him together with his two sons, throwing them into the river. Megyal cut off the hand of a remaining man from the family, and the wife of the murdered leader had her nose cut off. Two young daughters were sent off and all the property was taken over by Metshang Gompo Sonam.[26]

Another similar case concerns a murdered leader from Thara village, near Ngawa. He was killed by Megyal together with his two children. It is believed in this village that the assassinated leader became a demon and only after his taming by a master from the Bonpo monastery Nangshik, did he become a protective deity. Until now the deity possesses his deity-medium from Thara village. This story is only remembered in the oral tradition of Thara village.[27]

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22 Blo bzang chos 'phel, *op. cit.*, 1993, pp.16-17.

23 Dmu dge bsam gtan, *op. cit.*, 1997, p. 323.

24 However, the history somehow repeated in his case. She was unfaithful to him and escaped with her lover to Choktse. The mother of the Megyal (Trakarma) led troops there and the lover, being the chief of Choktse, was forced to offer large part of his property (Hor gtsang, *op. cit.*, 2009, p. 159).

25 *Rang sa'i tsho dpon a 'dus 'jam ral/ rme srib klu mgon/ thar ba bu/ mkhar ba sang sogs kyis gong dpon la mgo ma sgur bar gdug rtsub ci 'khyol byas pas 'jig rten pha rol tu btang* (Blo bzang chos 'phel, *op. cit.*, 1993, p. 20).

26 Blo bzang chos 'phel, *op. cit.*, 1993, p. 20; Hor gtsang, *op. cit.*, 2009, p. 167.

27 The present deity medium in Thara village will be the subject of a separate article to be published in *Mongolo-Tibetica Pragensia '12*.

Gompo Sonam later married another lady from the Akyong family who was named Sonam Dron.[28] They both had a daughter called Palchen Dondruptso. Later, Gompo Sonam died accidentally in 1913 during the construction of one of the temples of Kīrti monastery.[29] His only child, his daughter, married a son from a noble Golok family called Shingkyong[30] who was then installed as a Megyal. In 1916 a son, Pal Gompo Trinley Rapten, was born to them.

It was this son who later became the Megyal of Ngawa and he is still remembered by the inhabitants of Ngawa and considered as a truly powerful and admirable king, particularly for those people associated with Kīrti monastery. During his rule the greater part of southern Amdo was united under his power and thus his reign could be seen as a climax of the effort of his last two predecessors. One of the sources says that the last three kings of Ngawa annihilated altogether some 80 lords and chiefs; some were killed, some surrendered.[31] The spread of his power was accompanied by the traditional support of Kīrti monasteries and their masters, and even deepened during his rule. It was he who sponsored the construction of the new temples in the monastery and the printing of the collected works of the Kīrti masters. The newly recognized tenth Kīrti master was even related to him.[32]

Megyal Trinley Rapten organized militarily the subjugated areas. He had up to 18 ministers (*lonpo*); subordinate to them were the so-called *gopo*. Each village had its village officer (*tshomi*) and military leader (*makpon*). Villages were divided into 5 different categories according to wealth, and then different taxes and military obligations were required from them. The villages of Kīrti monasteries (*lhade*) were exempted from obligations, but Megyal helped the Kīrti monasteries administer them.[33] The former secretary of Megyal lists the

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[28] A sister of Pon Kalsang Dramdul and Nyima Dondrup (Hor gtsang, *op. cit.,* 2009, p. 159).

[29] Blo bzang chos 'phel, *op. cit.,* 1993, p. 21; Hor gtsang, *op. cit.,* 2009, pp. 159-160.

[30] A son of Bopa Topgyal from the family of Golok Wangchenbum and Getseza (Hor gtsang, *op. cit.,* 2009, p. 160).

[31] Hor gtsang, *op. cit.,* 2009, p. 167.

[32] Blo bzang chos 'phel, *op. cit.,* 1993, p. 23; Hor gtsang, *op. cit.,* 2009, p. 160.

[33] For more detailed notes on organization see Blo bzang chos 'phel, *op. cit.,* 1993 and Hor gtsang, *op. cit.,* 2009. There are some quite interesting comments by the missionary Robert Dean Carleson, who travelled with Robert Ekvall to Ngawa around the year 1940. He reports that unlike the other areas of Amdo, there were no robbers in the lands subjugated to Ngawa king. He also says that in Ngawa they distributed large number of missionary texts translated into Tibetan. He explains that in comparison with other areas the literacy rate was rather high there. These notes might complement the picture of the Ngawa of those days. http://www2.wheaton.edu/bgc/archives/GUIDES/205.htm (Papers of Robert

number of households (*dukha*) subjugated by the kings in the past and they exceeded 10.000.[34]

It seems that this pragmatic and well-organised king of Ngawa was respected by the dreaded warlord Ma Bufang (1903–1975) and later also by the Communists.[35] It is reported that in 1949 his minister travelled to Lanzhou and offered gifts to the Communist leader. In 1953 Megyal helped to pacify a rebellion in Dzorge and in 1954 he visited Beijing and took part in the Great People's Assembly there, where he met the 14th Dalai Lama. After his travels to Central Tibet in 1956, he was appointed to several administrative positions in Ngawa district and in Sichuan province. But the beginning of the Cultural Revolution in 1966 was fatal for him. He is reported to have committed suicide during that year.[36]

Recent situation

There are a rather large number of Buddhist monasteries near Ngawa. During my field research in the years 2004-2007 and 2010, I came into closer contact with monks of the Jonang monastery of Segon, the Bonpo monastery of Nangshik and Kīrti monastery.

There were a dozen Han believers in the summer of 2010 in the Jonang monastery. Apparently, part of the strategy of some highly positioned monks was to attract potential believers and donors to the monastery by opening some branch temples and monasteries in China proper. Most of my acquaintances of the monastery did not support the protests that occurred at that time.

Nangshik monastery is probably the largest Bonpo monastery in Tibet today and has a considerably long history, stretching back to the 12th century. During my visit there in 2010, i.e. after the wave of

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Dean Carlson - Collection 205, a missionary in Amdo in the first half of 20th century).

34 Blo bzang chos 'phel, *op. cit.*, 1993, pp. 34-40.

35 The Tibetan sources contain memories of the first appearance of the Communist troops in Ngawa. They came here around 1934, destroyed Kīrti monastery and burnt the residence of the king. After some three months they drew back (Re mdo sengge, *op. cit.*, 2002, pp. 102 ff.). Their presence later in Ngawa, around the year 1950, was not accompanied with such violence.

36 Blo bzang chos 'phel, *op. cit.*, 1993, pp. 52-55; Hor gtsang, *op. cit.*, 2009, pp. 161-170; Dmu dge bsam gtan, *op. cit.*, 1997, pp. 318-319. He had two daughters. Both of them enrolled in a military school and later served as nurses in the army. The older daughter Tsering Drolma died in 1969. The younger daughter Gompotso later worked in Xinjiang, then as a teacher in Beijing. In 1989 she escaped to Dharamsala (India), where she is living now with her older daughter. Her son and daughter still remain in China.

the 2008 protests and the first case of self-immolation in Kīrti monastery (February 2009), the monks of the monastery expressed disapproval of the protests of Kīrti monks. According to them, the situation was far from ideal before the protests started in 2008, but was slowly improving.

As for Kīrti monastery, I was impressed by some of the monastery's monks' interest in its history. The monastery is very traditional, and it looked like the main aim was to restore the ways of the "old world" (*jikten nyingpa*), as Tibetans sometimes call pre-China times. This interest turned out to derive in part from the fact that the monastery enjoyed in the past status and power well beyond that of any other monastery in the area. The kings of Ngawa and the renowned scholars from Kīrti monastery's past were apparently heroes for them and also constituted a strong part of their own identity. When taking into account the historical outline concerning the kings of Ngawa and the Kīrti masters, it becomes apparent that the monks are strongly affected by their past history, which is seen as a golden time. The above-mentioned Jonang and Bonpo monasteries were often losers in the past, their bounded villages (*lhade*/*mide*) were frequently subjugated by Megyal. Such facts of course prevent them from looking at the recent past as a time of glory.

The number of monks in Kīrti monastery had been estimated to almost 3000 before the protests but the largest part of them were children-monks attending the school beside the monastery itself. This was seen by monks as a promising success, which was achieved through numerous lay sponsors and despite the obstructions of the authorities. This was regarded as a partial return to the past glory of the monastery.

I am inclined to see such historical awareness on the part of the Kīrti monks as one of the strong reasons why this specific monastery became the centre of the protests and also of the self-immolations. Yet, this historical awareness constitutes definitely only a partial explanation. One must take into account the specifics of the locality and the attempt to reconstruct the world-view of its inhabitants, which is undoubtedly religious.

One could hypothetically speculate about the role of the Kīrti monastery deity-medium. He is a monk and has attained rather recently the status of "reincarnated master." I have dealt with him elsewhere.[37] It must be stressed that deities, namely the local deities, play very important roles in Amdo. One should bear in mind that the

[37] Daniel Berounský, "Powerful Hero (*Dpa' rtsal*): Protective Deity from the 19th century Amdo and his mediums," in *Mongolo-Tibetica Pragensia*. Special Issue: *Mediums and Shamans in Central Asia*. Vol. 1/2, 2008, pp. 67-115.

Kīrti masters in the past came to power by taming a large number of them. The current deity-medium was ritually approved in 2000. Let me repeat the words recorded during the process of instructing the deity as a part of the ritual of "opening of the door of the deity" (*lha goche*), when the deity possessing him was instructed in the following way:

> Now, when the state of Teaching and governance is desperate, it is necessary to act with union between people and deities. This is the time of approaching the clear truth... Now, the time has come that the deities have to show their power.

It might well be that we will never learn what the role of the oracle for the local people was during these turbulent times. According to some Tibetans such evocation of "desperate state" and call for "union between people and deities" is a common utterance during such kind of ceremony. But the possibility that it acquired stronger meaning among the population nostalgic of an idealised past should be also considered. We may thus conclude with open question: Are the deities also involved in self-immolations?

GLOSSARY

Transcription	Transliteration	Tibetan
Aboza	A 'bos bza' A 'bus bza'	ཨ་འབོས་བཟའ། ཨ་འབུས་བཟའ།
Akyong	A skyong	ཨ་སྐྱོང།
Amchok	A mchog	ཨ་མཆོག
Amdo	A mdo	ཨ་མདོ།
Bonpo	Bon po	བོན་པོ།
Bopa Topgyal	'Bos pa stobs rgyal	འབོས་པ་སྟོབས་རྒྱལ།
Chaktharbum	Lcags thar 'bum	ལྕགས་ཐར་འབུམ།
Chenakgpa Jaknagpa	Lce nag pa Ljags nag pa	ལྕེ་ནག་པ། ལྕགས་ནག་པ།
Choktse	Cog tse	ཅོག་ཙེ།
Choktseza Tser-	Cog tse bza' Tshe ring	ཅོག་ཙེ་བཟའ་ཚེ་རིང་སྐྱོལ་མ།

ing Drolma	sgrol ma	
choyon	mchod yon	མཆོད་ཡོན།
Dardzom	Dar ′dzom	དར་འཛོམ།
densa gon	*gdan sa dgon*	གདན་ས་དགོན།
Derge	Sde dge	སྡེ་དགེ།
do	*mdos*	མདོས།
Dongkhu monastery	Gdong khu dgon pa	གདོང་ཁུ་དགོན་པ།
Dongkhu Phuntsok Tshang	Gdong khu tshogs tshang	གདོང་ཁུ་ཕུན་ཚོགས་ཚང་།
drakpa	*grags pa*	གྲགས་པ།
dre	*′dre*	འདྲེ།
dukha	*dud kha*	དུད་ཁ།
Dzorge	Mdzod dge	མཛོད་དགེ།
Geluk	dge lugs	དགེ་ལུགས།
Gelukpa	dge lugs pa	དགེ་ལུགས་པ།
Gendun Chokyi Wangchuk	Dge ′dun chos kyi dbang phyug	དགེ་འདུན་ཆོས་ཀྱི་དབང་ཕྱུག
Getseza	Dge rtse bza′	དགེ་རྩེ་བཟའ།
Golok	Mgo log	མགོ་ལོག
Golok Wangchenbum	Mgo log dbang chen ′bum	མགོ་ལོག་དབང་ཆེན་འབུམ།
Gomang	Sgo mang	སྒོ་མང་།
Gompo Sonam	Mgon po bsod nams	མགོན་པོ་བསོད་ནམས།
Gompotso	Mgon po ′tsho	མགོན་པོ་འཚོ།
gopo	*rgod po*	རྒོད་པོ།
Gungthang	Gung thang	གུང་ཐང་།
gyal	*rgyal*	རྒྱལ།
gyalmo	*rgyal mo.*	རྒྱལ་མོ།
Gyalrong	Rgyal rong	རྒྱལ་རོང་།

Jamyang Zhepa	'Jams dbyangs bzhad pa	འཇམ་དབྱངས་བཞད་པ།
jikten nyingpa	*'jigs rten rnying pa*	འཇིག་རྟེན་རྙིང་པ།
Jonang	Jo nang	ཇོ་ནང།
Kāla ritro	Kā la ri khrod	ཀཱ་ལ་རི་ཁྲོད།
Kālari Gone Trashi Lhündrup	Kā la ri'i dgon gnas bkra shis lhun grub	ཀཱ་ལ་རི་དགོན་གནས་བཀྲ་ཤིས་ལྷུན་གྲུབ།
kalon	*bka' blon*	བཀའ་བློན།
Kalsang Lodro Kunga Lungtog Gyatso	Bskal bzang blo gros kun dga' lung rtogs rgya mtsho	བསྐལ་བཟང་བློ་གྲོས་ཀུན་དགའ་ལུང་རྟོགས་རྒྱ་མཚོ།
Kīrti	Kīrti	ཀཱིརྟི།
Kunga Chophak Thupten Nyima	Kun dga' chos 'phags thub bstan nyi ma	ཀུན་དགའ་ཆོས་འཕགས་ཐུབ་བསྟན་ཉི་མ།
Labrang	Bla brang	བླ་བྲང།
lenpa	*glen pa*	གླེན་པ།
lha goche	*lha sgo phye*	ལྷ་སྒོ་ཕྱེ།
lhade	*lha sde*	ལྷ་སྡེ།
lonpo	*blon po*	བློན་པོ།
Lobsang Jamyang	Blo bzang 'jam dbyangs	བློ་བཟང་འཇམ་དབྱངས།
Lobsang Tenzin Jikme Yeshe Gyatso	Blo bzang bstan 'dzin 'jigs med ye shes rgya mtsho	བློ་བཟང་བསྟན་འཛིན་འཇིགས་མེད་ཡེ་ཤེས་རྒྱ་མཚོ།
Lobsang Tenpay Gyaltshen	Blo bzang bstan pa'i rgyal mtshan	བློ་བཟང་བསྟན་པའི་རྒྱལ་མཚན།
Lobsang Trinley Tenpa Gyatso	Blo bzang 'phrin las bstan pa rgya mtsho	བློ་བཟང་འཕྲིན་ལས་བསྟན་པ་རྒྱ་མཚོ།
Ludrup	Klu grub	ཀླུ་གྲུབ།
magon	*ma dgon*	མ་དགོན།
makpon	*dmag dpon*	དམག་དཔོན།
Megyal	Dme rgyal Rme rgyal	དམེ་རྒྱལ། རྨེ་རྒྱལ།

Megyal Khang	Rme rgyal khang	རྨེ་རྒྱལ་ཁང།
Megyalmo	Dme rgyal mo Rme rgyal mo	དམེ་རྒྱལ་མོ། རྨེ་རྒྱལ་མོ།
Mepon Tshe-wangkyap	Dme dpon Tshe dbang skyabs	དམེ་དཔོན་ཚེ་དབང་སྐྱབས།
Metshang pon	Dme tshang dpon Rme tshang dpon Rme′u tshang dpon	དམེ་ཚང་དཔོན། རྨེ་ཚང་དཔོན། རྨེའུ་ཚང་དཔོན།
mide	*mi sde*	མི་སྡེ།
Mowatshang	Mo ba tshang	མོ་བ་ཚང།
Namgyal Dechen Ling	Rnam rgyal bde chen gling	རྣམ་རྒྱལ་བདེ་ཆེན་གླིང།
Nangshik	Snang zhig	སྣང་ཞིག
nga	*rnga*	ཉ།
Ngari	Mnga′ ris	མངའ་རིས།
Ngagwang Lobsang Tenpa Tsering	Ngag dbang blo bzang bstan pa tshe ring	ངག་དབང་བློ་བཟང་བསྟན་པ་ཚེ་རིང།
Ngawa	Rnga ba Mnga′ ba	ཉ་བ། མངའ་བ།
Nyima Dondrup	Nyi ma don grub	ཉི་མ་དོན་གྲུབ།
Pal Gompo Trin-ley Rapten	Dpal mgon po ′phrin las rab brtan	དཔལ་མགོན་པོ་འཕྲིན་ལས་རབ་བརྟན།
Palchen Don-druptsho	Dpal chen don grub mtsho	དཔལ་ཆེན་དོན་གྲུབ་མཚོ།
pon	*dpon*	དཔོན།
Pon Kalsang Dramdul	Dpon Skal bzang dgra ′dul	དཔོན་སྐལ་བཟང་དགྲ་འདུལ།
ponmo	*dpon mo*	དཔོན་མོ།
Rongchen Gen-dun Gyaltshen	Rong chen dge ′dun rgyal mtshan	རོང་ཆེན་དགེ་འདུན་རྒྱལ་མཚན།
Sagang Gon	Sa sgang dgon	ས་སྒང་དགོན།
sangyik	*bsang yig*	བསངཡིག

Segon	Bse dgon	བསེ་དགོན།
Sertha	Gser thal Gser thar Gser rta	གསེར་ཐལ། གསེར་ཐར། གསེར་རྟ།
Shingkyong	Zhing skyong	ཞིང་སྐྱོང།
Sonam Dron	Bsod nams sgron	བསོད་ནམས་སྒྲོན།
Taktshang Lhamo	Stag tshang lha mo	སྟག་ཚང་ལྷ་མོ།
Tenpa Rinchen	Bstan pa rin chen	བསྟན་པ་རིན་ཆེན།
Tenpa Tsering	Bstan pa tshe ring	བསྟན་པ་ཚེ་རིང།
Tenpa Rapgye	Bstan pa rab rgyas	བསྟན་པ་ཡངས་རྒྱས།
Thara	Thar ba Tha ra Thar ra	ཐར་བ། ཐ་ར། ཐར་ར།
Trinley Rapten: see Pal Gompo Trinley Rapten		
Trakarma	Skra dkar ma	སྐྲ་དཀར་མ།
Tshakho	Tsha kho	ཚ་ཁོ།
Tshangpa	Tshangs pa	ཚངས་པ།
Tsering Drolma	Tshe ring sgrol ma	ཚེ་རིང་སྒྲོལ་མ།
Tshewangkyap	Tshe dbang skyabs	ཚེ་དབང་སྐྱབས།
tshomi	*tsho mi*	ཚོ་མི།
Tsongkhapa	Tsong kha pa	ཚོང་ཁ་པ།
Yangogon	Yas ngo'i dgon	ཡས་ངོའི་དགོན།

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Chinese Policy Towards Tibet versus Tibetan Expectations for Tibet: A Divergence Marked by Self-Immolations

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The title of the seminar *Tibet is burning: Ritual or Political Protest?* could be rephrased for the purpose of the present article 'political ritual or political protest?' At first glance, it looks quite difficult to include the Chinese government reactions or opinions on these Tibetan self-immolations through this questioning because it is a question centered on Tibetans. However, we will see that the official Chinese opinions justify qualifying the Tibetan self-immolations as 'political protest.'

Now, if we wonder whether the Tibetan self-immolations are a 'political ritual' or not, again, this question can be answered from the point of view of the Tibetans and the Tibetan culture. However, this question should also be asked from another point of view and could be reversed: could we consider the Chinese official reactions to be part of a 'Chinese political ritual' (see below for a definition of this expression) in a sense that any kind of Tibetan demonstration, at least since 1987 (the year of the first demonstration in Lhasa) is answered by identical official Chinese reactions? If yes, we should also analyse whether this 'Chinese political ritual' has met with some alteration since the late 1980s, because of a new international context, a new Inner China political fight and a new Tibetan government in exile.

'Political protest'

'Political protest' is expressed by the act of self-immolation and by the accompanying claims of the Tibetans who burnt themselves to death. From exile groups, we know that most individuals carrying out the act of self-immolation have asked for freedom for Tibet and for the return of the Dalai Lama.[1] Newspapers added that the pro-

[1] As Tenzin Dorjee, director of the New York-based Students for a Free Tibet, told

Fabienne Jagou, "Chinese Policy Towards Tibet versus Tibetan Expectations for Tibet: A Divergence Marked by Self-Immolations ", *Revue d'Etudes Tibétaines*, no. 25, Décembre 2012, pp. 81-87.

testers requested an end to government interference with their religion.[2]

Meanwhile, the Chinese press does not give any information about the demands expressed by the Tibetans, but only characterise these acts of self-immolation as a threat to the national unity and to the country stability, unity and stability that must be preserved at all cost. The Chinese press adds that, to maintain national unity and stability, the Chinese government has tightened security measures. A huge number of military forces are deployed within the sensitive areas, that is to say the areas were self-immolations already occurred.[3] Officials are ordered to regard maintaining stability as the most important political task and they must be on guard. According to a Tibetan called Luosang Jiangcun, member of the Standing committee of the Chinese Communist Party in Tibet, "Those who do not fulfill their responsibility and fail to prevent incidents from happening will be removed from office instantly."[4] We know that the head of the Chinese Communist Party in the Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR) has sacked four officials on grounds of "endangering stability" in the region. According to the *Tibet Daily* newspaper, they were dismissed for leaving their posts in the Chamdo region during the Lunar New Year.[5]

These reinforced security measures are not only intended to control the lay society but they imply also the control of the Buddhist monasteries and, as a matter of fact, the clergy. Indeed, most of the self-immolators are monks or nuns and one of their claims is in favour of more religious freedom.[6] The underlying idea behind the control over monastic population is "to push forward the patriotic and legal education among monks and nuns."[7] After the Chinese

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AFP on January 12 2012, https://www.studentsforafreetibet.org/news/sfts-executive-director-quoted-by-afp.

2 *The New Yorker*, April 4 2012, http://www.newyorker.com/online/blogs/evanosnos/2012/04/the-view-from-china-tibetan-self-immolations.html.

3 *The Himalayan Times,* February 5 2012, http://www.thehimalayantimes.com/fullNews.php?headline=1+Tibetan+killed%26sbquo%3B+2+injured+in+self+immolation+in+western+China&NewsID=319279.

4 *The Guardian*, January 31 2012, http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2012/jan/31/china-tightens-security-tibetan-monasteries; see also *Tibet Sun*, February 6 2012, http://www.tibetsun.com/archive/2012/02/06/china-stresses-need-to-keep-tibet-stable/.
Deccan Chronicle, January 31 2012, http://www.deccanchronicle.com/channels/world/asia/china-tightens-controls-over-temples-monasteries-tibet-570.

5 *Truthdive*, February 10 2012 http://truthdive.com/2012/02/10/China-sacks-four-officials-in-Tibet-for-endangering-stability.html.

6 *The Indian Express*, January 31 2012, http://www.indianexpress.com/news/china-tightens-controls-over-temples-monasteries-in-tibet/906045/0.

7 *English People's Daily Online*, February 29 2012, http://english. peopledaily.com.

takeover, Democratic Management Committees were established in every monastery in Tibet since 1962. They were run by monks elected by their own community—under close governmental supervision, but with only indirect involvement of officials. From now on, an unelected "Management Committee" (*zhusi danwei*) will be established in every monastery. These new "Management Committees" (which could involve up to 30 lay officials posted in every monastery) will run the monasteries and will have authority over the previous "Democratic Management Committees."

But many other forms of reforms aiming at a greater control of Buddhist communities are being implemented. For example, in eastern Tibetan areas outside the TAR, reports indicate that instead of establishing new committees, the old Democratic Management Committees will be retained as the leading body in each monastery, but that they are expected to include an outside official as the deputy director of each committee.[8] In Qinghai, each township-level monastery is to be placed under a "Masses Supervision and Appraisal Committee" that will supervise, monitor, and report to the government on the management and religious practices in local monasteries.

The rationale for the new system is explained in official documents as "enhancing social management"[9] in temples. This is seen as developing an underlying objective established in 1994 which aimed at "adapt[ing] Tibetan Buddhism to socialism."[10] The new theory argues that since monks are members of society just like any other citizens, their institutions should be run by social forces, meaning party and government organisations. As a result, in the new system, besides the party cadres stationed within monasteries, numerous local government offices at each level will have day-to-day responsibility for directly managing different aspects of Tibetan monastic life.[11]

And finally, the Chinese government will invest large amount of money for the construction of roads leading to monasteries.[12] By allowing a better and faster access to the monasteries, this measure will ensure a stricter control of the monastic population.

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cn/90882/7699616.html.

8 See note 9 below.

9 *Unrepresented Nations and Peoples Organization*, March 16 2012. In November 2011, the authorities began establishing the "Management Committees" in the 1,787 monasteries that are allowed to operate in the TAR. See http://www.unpo.org/article/14038.

10 *Ibid.*

11 *Ibid.*

12 *People Daily Online*, April 8 2012. See http://english.people.com. cn/90882/7780259.html.

Because of the official Chinese physical or visible reactions such as tightened security measures, management reform of the monasteries and so on, not to mention cutting phone and internet lines, and the imposed block-out,[13] the immolations of Tibetans can indeed be considered as 'political protest.' However, these reactions do not mean that the Chinese authorities have realized the drawbacks of their policy in Tibetan areas, nor that they have the will to change or to improve it. Suffice to say that they have tried to discredit the self-immolators. The official media wrote that they were "people with very bad reputation and criminal records"[14] and blamed them as terrorists.[15] They also charged the Dalai Lama, overseas activist groups or unspecified "separatist forces" of bearing responsibility of these self-immolations.[16] However, some Chinese Communist Party members from the base and from Tibetan areas also admitted that these immolations could be considered as 'economic protest' and that youth unemployment was probably also to blame.[17] Top Chinese officials cannot accept this rationale as they consider that they have lifted Tibetans out of poverty and servitude,[18] and that huge ongoing investment into Tibetan-inhabited areas has greatly raised the Tibetans' standard of living in China.[19] Two obvious possible factors leading to self-immolation that are never suggested in China, though, are the ethnic and cultural dimensions.[20] Being a Tibetan in China is far from easy and it has become even less so since 2008. But identity discomfort and the cultural despair are never mentioned in the China-approved commentaries, either because of insensitivity and indifference, or for fear of raising troublesome and deeply-ingrained issues.

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[13] *Rue89*, first published in *Global Voices*, February 1 2012, http://www. rue 89.com/2012/02/01/le-tibet-est-en-feu-mais-ou-sont-les-intellectuels-chinois-228993; see also *The Himalayan Times*, February 5 2012, http://www.thehimalayantimes.com/fullNews.php?headline=1+Tibetan+killed%26sbquo%3B+2+injured+in+self+immolation+in+western+China&NewsID=319279.

[14] *The Guardian*, March 7 2012, http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2012/mar/07/tibet-selfimmolations-monks-aba-china?INTCMP=SRCH.

[15] *The Himalayan Times*, February 5 2012, *ibid*.; see also *The Guardian*, March 7 2012, *ibid*.

[16] *Indian Express*, February 7 2012, www.indianexpress.com/news/...violence-in-tibet.../909158/; *Asia Times*, March 17 2012, www.atimes.com/atimes/South_Asia/NC17Df02.html.

[17] *Reuter*, February 6 2012, quoting *The China Daily*, http://af.reuters.com/article/worldNews/idAFTRE8150BR20120206. See Robert Barnett's article in this issue for details.

[18] *The Washington Post*, February 5 2012, http://www.intellasia.net/report-says-3-more-people-set-themselves-on-fire-in-china-to-protest-its-tibet-policies-186300.

[19] *AFP*, January 12 2012. https://www.studentsforafreetibet.org/news/sfts-executive-director-quoted-by-afp.

[20] On which see Tsering Shakya and Robert Barnett's articles in this issue.

As a matter of fact, these Tibetan political protests led the Chinese government to perform the political ritual that followed every Tibetan demonstration since 1987, which consists in denying any flaw in its Tibet-related policy and in reinforcing the administrative, political and military control on Tibet.

However, in the current international context, with everybody watching the images and films of the self-immolations, and given the huge publicity made to them by the Tibetan government-in-exile, despite the Chinese block-out, have the Chinese top officials adopted new positions besides the traditional (or usual) ones? Have the Chinese top officials' views changed in the context of the forthcoming shift in the Chinese government? Finally, has the Chinese political ritual changed?

The religious aspects of the Chinese reactions are not totally new. First, scholars from the China Tibetology Center (*Zhongguo Zangxue yanjiu zhongxin*) placed themselves as the guarantors of "traditional Buddhism" and expressed the opinion that immolations were contrary to the Buddhist principles according to which life is precious.[21] They added that self-immolation directly violated the Buddhist rule prohibiting killing and especially killing oneself.[22] This position is not new: we know that for the recognition of the 11th Panchen Lama, for example, the top Chinese Party officials considered themselves to be the keepers of the true tradition that lead to the enthronement of high Tibetan Buddhist masters.

Another instance of reaching out to religious leaders could be seen when Wen Jiabao, current Prime Minister, met with the China-appointed Panchen Lama and urged him to play a bigger role in maintaining national unity and ethnic harmony, according to a statement posted on the central government's website.[23] He also asked the Panchen Lama to "lead the Buddhist lamas and followers in loving the country, abiding by laws and abiding by Buddhist commandments," the official Xinhua news agency reported.[24] However, despite the recommendation of Wen Jiabao to the Panchen Lama, the latter has not expressed any opinion so far. On the contrary, it seems that the Panchen Lama has been asked not to speak about

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21 *New York Times*, January 10 2012, http://www.nytimes.com/2012/01/10/world/asia/3-monks-deaths-show-rise-of-self-immolation-among-tibetans.html?_r=1.

22 *Global Times*, February 15 2012, http://www.globaltimes.cn/NEWS/tabid/99/ID/695934/Officials-deny-self-immolation-reports.aspx.

23 *Washington Post*, February 10 2012, http://www.uyghurnews.com/tibetan/Readasp?TibetNews=china-premier-meets-govt-installed-tibetan-cleric&ItemID=RT-213201230934271284915l.

24 *The Hindu*, February 11 2012, http://www.thehindu.com/news/international/article2879897.ece; *People's Daily*, March 6 2012, http://english. people.com.cn/90785/7748720.html.

politics, from what could be seen at the Third Buddhist Forum that took place in Hong Kong on April 26 2012. Thus, it would be possible for Chinese leaders to help him to hold the role of the 'true' leader of Tibetan Buddhism, that is to say as the one who speaks only of Buddhist doctrine and who does not speak of politics at all, in contrast with the Dalai Lama.

However, the only real innovation since 1987 within the Chinese reactions is that, for the first time, a top Chinese official expressed a feeling that resembles sympathy or compassion towards the Tibetans who burnt themselves. Wen Jiabao, current Prime Minister and probably next vice-president of the People's Republic of China, said he was "deeply distressed" by the self-immolations. But going back to the Chinese political ritual, he also stressed that the Chinese government was "opposed to such radical moves that disturb and undermine social harmony."[25]

Striking also in these official Chinese responses to the Tibetan self-immolations is the number and variety of Chinese officials who expressed an opinion: they range from top leaders, like Prime Minister Wen Jiabao (see above), or the vice-president Xi Jinping, and the vice-foreign minister Zhang Zhijun, to provincial officials from Sichuan province and down to Chinese and Tibetan officials from the Tibet Autonomous Region. The old guard within the Chinese government did not intervene. But, except for the few words of compassion, all of them expressed identical opinions, all the same as in the past. Wen Jiabao is nowadays the voice of the Chinese government within China while Xi Jinping expresses official Chinese opinions outside of China proper.[26] Both, however, belong to the new generation of officials and members of the Communist Party. Both were disciples of Hu Yaobang (d. 1989) whose mentor was Deng Xiaoping. Wen Jiabao, Xi Jinping, but also Hu Jintao, the current president, and Li Keqiang, vice-prime minister, follow the principles of Deng Xiaoping and Hu Yaobang. They are in favor of an increasingly market-oriented economy and more liberal social environment while the old guard still demands absolute political control.

Could we expect that this new guard, which could be relatively liberal compared to the old guard and which will hold most power in its hands in November 2012, will follow Hu Yaobang's stance? As is known, he was the initiator of a more liberal policy, such as the end of the communes and more religious and cultural freedom in TAR after his visit there in 1980. Nothing is certain as this policy conduct-

[25] *Asia Times*, March 17 2012, www.atimes.com/atimes/South_Asia/NC17Df02.html.

[26] *Express India*, February 16 2012, http://www.expressindia.com/latest-news/China-asks-US-to-honour-its-commitment-on-Tibet/912837/.

ed to a revival of Tibetan nationalism. Indeed, except his one statement expressing distress, Wen Jiabao has always voiced the old guard's opinions: in March 2008, he blamed the supporters of the Dalai Lama for violence in Tibet; he refused to negotiate with the Dalai Lama unless he "gives up all separatist activities." He said it again in March 2009. Besides, it is certain that the old guard is watching how these new Communist leaders will manage the current Tibetan crisis. It is also sure that the actions of the new guard will be decisive for the forthcoming election of the top leader within the Chinese government, in the last quarter of 2012.

And, finally, we do not know if the emerging Chinese civil society might take the lead for a new kind of relationship between China and Tibet.[27]

On the other side, it is obvious that the Tibetan government in exile has changed its policy because of the self-immolations movement and because of the lack of results from negotiations held with the Chinese authorities (the last contact dated January 2010). The two Tibetan representatives in the Sino-Tibetan 'dialogue' have resigned, while the Dalai Lama and Lobsang Sangay, the newly elected Prime Minister in exile, do not try to prevent, nor do they condemn, the immolations.[28] Moreover, they accuse openly the Chinese government policy to be at the origins of these demonstrations of powerlessness. They did not ask exiled Tibetans to keep quiet during the visits of the Chinese vice-president, Xi Jinping while he was abroad (i.e. on February 14 2012, when he was in the US), in contrast with previous occurrences when the Dalai Lama and, more precisely, Samdhong Rinpoche (former Tibetan Prime Minister in exile) had requested Tibetan exiles not to demonstrate during Chinese top leaders visits in the West or in India, in the (always shattered) hope that negotiations with Chinese authorities could resume on a constructive basis. Moreover, five Tibetans self-immolated in exile. We still don't know what will be the result of the hardening of position of Tibetans in exile and what will be the answer of the Chinese government.

[27] On this topic, see Elliot Sperling's contribution in this issue.
[28] See Katia Buffetrille's contribution in this issue.

Conversations and Debates: Chinese and Tibetan Engagement with the Broader Discussion of Self-Immolation in Tibet

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In a previous, short look at the phenomenon of self-immolation in Tibet[1] I began by contrasting the early reactions of Tibetans in exile to the first instances of self-immolation with those of Chinese who posted online. Setting out the early exile interpretations of self-immolation as stemming from despair and hopelessness, I ascribed that interpretation to the circumstances of exile where there is, as I put it, a "structural dependency built into exile life, which often encourages pathos-based appeals to the consciences of benefactors." I also noted how that explanation largely disappeared following the online posting of an essay (by Christophe Besuchet)[2] refuting the basis of such an analysis, at least insofar as there were extant statements or similar indications of how self-immolation was understood by those who were committing the act, a limited body of evidence, to be sure.

I then turned to Chinese reactions. Not official Chinese reactions (though these too are worth exploring),[3] but those posted online, an activity that remains ongoing. I should stress that when the question is asked as to what 'Chinese' think of events in Tibet, or of Tibet in general, one must appreciate the fact that the vast majority of people in the People's Republic of China do not think about Tibet very much, if at all. In times of strife in Tibet they may reflect on Tibet somewhat, but most such thinking is usually related, uncritically, in some way to the official position (e.g., the idea that Tibetans are ungrateful for the liberation China has given them). I say this in order

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1 "On the Question of Why and to What End," *Hot Spot Forum, Cultural Anthropology Online*, April 11 2012, http://culanth.org/?q=node/532.

2 See the article by Christophe Besuchet, "Beacons of resistance, not desperate acts," *Rangzen Alliance*, January 28 2012, http://www.rangzen.net/2012/01/28/beacons-of-resistance-not-desperate-acts. See also http://www.phayul.com/news/article.aspx?id=30767&t=1.

3 See Fabienne Jagou in this issue for official reactions.

Elliot Sperling, "Conversations and Debates: Chinese and Tibetan Engagement with the Broader Discussion of Self-Immolation in Tibet", *Revue d'Etudes Tibétaines*, no. 25, Décembre 2012, pp. 89-97.

to underscore that whatever I might say about 'Chinese' perceptions of self-immolation in Tibet: they are the perceptions of a small number of people and I would not extrapolate from them a common Chinese attitude towards Tibet and towards self-immolation in Tibet. Indeed, the ideas expressed in the Chinese media and even more recently by a Chinese Christian activist that the self-immolations by Tibetans are similar to the self-immolation acts in earlier years by followers of Falun Gong (which is considered a 'cult' in China) are no doubt more typical of 'Chinese' thinking on the issue than much of what I will quote below.[4] But one must always be cognizant, as I have said, that Tibet is not a constant topic in China.

The reaction of several dissident Chinese intellectuals was certainly not like that of the Christian activist just mentioned, Song Xinkuan. There was some sympathy with the plight of Tibetans. But the tactic of self-immolation was a shock. A sense of this comes in the reaction of Zeng Jinyan, well known recently for her prominent role in helping Chen Guangcheng be heard by the outside world. In a twitter exchange with the Tibetan blogger Tsering Woeser in October 2011, she wrote:

> Tibetans who commit self-immolation are fairly lacking in sense. Any self-immolation can only illustrate the self-immolator's clinging to a fantasy of the authorities' ultimate goodwill. And it just proves that the authorities couldn't care less about their cries. Every life lost is to be deplored. I hope the Dalai Lama will wisely advise the mass of monks to refrain from any further self-immolation.[5]

And Woeser's response:

> No one regrets the loss of life in self-immolation more than Tibetans. But I truly resent the assessment that 'Tibetans who commit self-immolation are fairly lacking in sense'.[6] [n.b. This is a theme that one starts to notice, the tension between shock and sadness at the act and admiration for the person committing it.]

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4 See http://woeser.middle-way.net/2012/05/blog-post.html.

5 Zengjinyan. "藏人自焚相当不明智，任何自焚都只能说明自焚者对当局心存最后的善意幻想，而又恰恰证实了当局对其呼声根本不在乎，痛惜逝去的每一个生命，愿达赖喇嘛加持智慧给众僧，避免自焚再发生。" October 20 2011, 8:25 a.m. tweet, http://twitter.com/zengjinyan/statuses/127042860494237696.

6 唯色 (Tsering Woeser). "没有人比藏人更痛惜自焚中逝去的生命。但对"藏人自焚相当不明智"的评价甚为反感。" October 20 2011, 9:34 a.m. tweet, http://twitter.com/ degewa/statuses/127060010109894656.

And again, Zeng Jinyan:

> Woeser's heart is gentle and merciful. But in a society bereft of hope a single suicide (for whatever reason) can become something contagious through media reports, spreading so that its imitative influence on more people in similar straits ('the support effect') becomes wide-reaching. In order to avoid greater loss of life we should reflect on guidance in disseminating news of self-immolation.[7]

And finally Woeser:

> Excuse me. Whatever my heart is like, that's not at issue in this discussion. Your comments here are seemingly reasonable. What I resent is what is in the previous message, which betrays a feeling of some sort of superiority and infallibility. How can you know that Tibetans who commit self-immolation cling to fantasies about the authorities? How can you know that Tibetans who commit self-immolation have no wisdom, no sense? With astonishment, I read in that message something similar to what one gets from the authorities. What I'm pointing out is your approach to Tibetans who commit self-immolation…[8]
>
> Regarding your tweet, I'd like to ask, how many media reports 'disseminate news of self-immolation?' Do China's media report it? Foreign media report it but can Tibetans inside (especially in Ngawa, which is tightly sealed off) know about it? How can there be 'guidance in disseminating news of self-immolation?' I'll thank you not to stand on some high stage and evaluate things without understanding the situation in Tibetan areas.[9]

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[7] Zengjinyan."唯色拉内心柔软慈悲，可在一个绝望的社会，个体自杀（不管何因）通过媒体报道会产生传染、流行以致更多类似处境的人模仿（"维特效应"）的影响更为深远，为了不让更多的生命逝去，我们应反思传播自焚信息时的导向。" October 20 2011, 7:29 p.m. tweet, https://twitter.com/zengjinyan/status/127209823275188226.

[8] 唯色 (Tsering Woeser)."抱歉，我的内心如何，不在这个讨论之内。你这段留言说得貌似有理。而我反感的是上一个留言中，所流露的某种自以为是的优越感，如何知道自焚藏人对当局是心存幻想呢？如何认为自焚藏人就无智慧、不明智呢？我从那个留言，惊讶地看到的是与当局的某种相似，我指的是对待自焚藏人。" October 20 2011, 7:38 p.m. tweet, https://twitter.com/degewa/status/127212039423787008).

[9] 唯色 (Tsering Woeser)."就你这条推而言，我想问，有多少媒体报道、"传播自焚信息"？中国媒体有报道吗？境外媒体报道了，境内藏人（尤其是被严密封锁的阿坝地区）会知道吗？怎么就有了"传播自焚信息的导向"？不了解藏地的实情，还

This exchange fairly reasonably encapsulates two distinct positions. The interesting thing about the Chinese position as represented here, a moderate and sympathetic position, I might add, is its frame of reference. It essentially reads into the acts of self-immolation the question of state authority and dissent as those issues would manifest themselves in tactics adopted by Chinese dissidents and it very much misses the point. It assumes that the self-immolators are trying to soften the otherwise hard hearts of those in the bureaucracy.

And this attitude was largely deflected by Wang Lixiong in an essay that he wrote on the subject in January. He opted to describe the acts of self-immolators as successful, noting that

> Whether they have had a clear awareness of what they were doing, their cumulative effect has been to inspire courage among a people… Courage is a precious resource, especially for the party that is in a materially weaker position. Courage often turns into the key by which the weak come to defeat the strong. Self-immolation requires the highest degree of courage… From the standpoint of inspiring courage among the people I consider them to have succeeded.[10]

There is more to what Wang Lixiong said: there is an important element in his argument concerning what to do next and this is introduced in the same essay. I will turn to that presently, but first I would like to note that his remarks about courage and inspiration were particularly relevant to what was going on in the thinking of a number of Tibetans. I mention this because more than a few commentators were portraying the self-immolators as somehow dysfunctional, whether as a result of suffering under repressive rule or due to some other reason (n.b. the arguments about a level of despair and hopelessness due to which they were driven to commit self-immolation).[11] Wang Lixiong's description is one of courageous people. Thus, another comment from a Tibetan commenting on Woeser's blog in late December is pertinent.

是勿要站在某个制高点上评价为谢。" October 20 2011, 7:43 p.m. tweet, http://twitter.com/degewa/statuses/127213484004999168.

[10] "Wang Lixiong: Chulen zifen, hai neng zuon shenma?" 王力雄：除了自焚，还能做什么 January 14 2012, http://woeser.middle-way.net/2012/01/blog-post_14.html: 但无论他们有无明确意识，他们综合产生的作用，在于鼓舞了一个民族的勇气… 勇气是一种宝贵资源，尤其对实体资源处下风的一方，勇气往往成为以弱胜强的关键。自焚需要最大的勇气… 从鼓舞民族勇气的角度，我认为至此已达成。

[11] See Besuchet, *op. cit.*

> Self-immolation, self-immolation. It is easy to say it; it is a shock to hear it. And committing the act is harder than scaling the heavens. But 13 heroes and heroines inside Tibet have done it. Might I ask if we, who scream when we scrape our hands even slightly, would have the guts to sacrifice our lives for the cause of freedom? I don't know about anyone else, but as for me, with my lack of courage, I can't even dare to think about it. Really, this generation wouldn't dare to set their own bodies ablaze. I agonise over my own uselessness. I feel ashamed. But I rejoice at having a clear mind. The names, backgrounds, and deeds of a total of 13 Tibetans who have committed self-immolation—from 24-year-old Tapey from Kirti Monastery in Ngawa, who did so on February 27 2009, to 46-year-old Tenzin Phuntsok from the Karma district of Chamdo, who did so on December 1 2011—are recorded in my diary and deeply engraved in my mind. And as I want to always hold their memories dear, I light butter lamps, recite mantras… Yes, when I think of the heroes and heroines who have committed self-immolation I am ashamed of my inherent weakness, cowardice and uselessness.[12]

Clearly, the most salient characteristic of the act of self-immolation for many Tibetans has been the perceived heroic or courageous nature of the act itself. In other words, it was not something aimed at external actors, as Zeng Jinyan and others had assumed. On this point Wang Lixiong was very much reflecting the sentiments of many Tibetans. But, as I said, this was not the whole of his argument. A significant part of it followed from what he considered to be the success of self-immolation. He stated that it was now time to move beyond the act: it had achieved its noble purpose; it had catalyzed the spirit and imagination of Tibetans.

Wang Lixiong called for a campaign for the realization of village autonomy for Tibetan areas along the lines of what had come out of the struggle in the Guangdong village of Wukan. There, a democratic

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[12] "Qing jizhu meiyige zifen de jingnei tongbao… …" 请记住每一个自焚的境内同胞 ... ...December 29 2011 http://woeser.middle-way.net/2011/12/blog-post_29.html: 自焚、自焚，说着容易、听着震惊，可做起来比登天还难，但我们境内的13位男女英雄们却做到了，试问手稍微刮破却大声喊痛的我们有这个胆量为自由事业献出生命吗？我不知道别人，但我这个胆小鬼想都不敢想。真的，这辈子都不敢点燃自己的身体，我为自己的无用感到揪心，感到惭愧。不过，庆幸的是，我有一个清晰的头脑，从2009年2月27日24岁的阿坝格尔登寺僧人扎白到2011年12月1日46岁的昌都嘎玛区丹增平措共计13位自焚藏人的名字、背景和事迹一一记在我的日记本里，也深深地刻在我的脑海里，因为我要时刻缅怀他们，为他们供油灯、念心咒… 是的，一想到自焚英雄们，我为自己天生的懦弱、胆怯和无用感到惭愧…

election of genuine peoples' representatives was part of the resolution of a struggle against autocratic party domination. Full disclosure: Wang Lixiong and I have argued about this and our disagreements on the question of the applicability and feasibility of this sort of village autonomy to Tibet have also popped up on Woeser's blog. But this goes beyond the direct question of self-immolation, save for the fact that it came up as an alternative to self-immolation.

Wang Lixiong's essay was translated into English and into Tibetan, and the latter translation was posted on the *Khabdha* website. The reaction was mixed, some commenters were supportive but a good number were hostile. Among those who were hostile there was also a detectable undercurrent of anti-Chinese antagonism ("Wang Lixiong makes a pretense of pleasant words and nice thoughts but his intent is to see Tibet dissolve into China as quickly as possible"[13]). This, I would hasten to add, is not in any way a correct or fair characterisation of Wang Lixiong's thinking or writing; the hostility to Wang Lixiong was tinged with a strong identity-based reductionism. Indeed, much of the commentary devolved into the personal, with one person defending the work of Wang Lixiong ("Among the Chinese intellectuals supporting us whom His Holiness always mentions, who is there aside from Wang Lixiong?"[14]), and another defending Wang Lixiong's wife, Woeser, as well ("Now, the images and information that we use in external propaganda come via the sage woman Woeser. A few bad people, not knowing this, make baseless accusations; actually, 90% of them definitely have some other objective. There are a few Chinese intellectuals like Wang Lixiong who support us; look at this business of trying to get rid of them. Who has set them to this task? Even a child can understand that."[15])

This position expanded when, on March 8, Woeser herself posted an appeal for a halt to self-immolations, essentially echoing Wang Lixiong's idea about the need to go beyond it, but doing so in a very heartfelt manner. This came after a widow committed self-

13 Wang Li-zhung [=Wang Lixiong], "Bod kyi dka' gnad zer bar thabs lam mkho," *Kha brda*. February 8 2012, http://www.khabdha.org/?p=25335 [comment 1] "ཝང་ལྷུ་ཞུང་གིས་ཁ་ཡག་སེམས་བཟང་བྱེད་ཁུལ་གྱིས་དོན་གྱི་བོད་འདི་རྒྱ་ནག་ནང་དུ་གང་མགྱོགས་འཐིམས་སུ་འཇུག་རྒྱུ་དེ་རེད།"

14 *Ibid.*, [comment 17] "གོང་ས་མཆོག་གིས་རྒྱུན་དུ་རྒྱ་མི་ཤེས་ཡོན་ཅན་ང་ཚོར་རྒྱབ་སྐྱོར་ཡོད་གསུངས་པའི་ནང་ཝང་ལི་ཞུང་ལས་ལྷག་ཙམ་སུ་ཡོད།"

15 *Ibid.*, [comment 5]: "དཔྱ་ང་ཚོས་ཕྱི་ཕྱོགས་སུ་དྲིལ་བསྒྲགས་བྱེད་བཞིན་པའི་པར་དང་གནས་ཚུལ་མང་པོ་ཞིག་བོད་ཀྱི་མཛངས་མ་འོད་ཟེར་ལ་བརྒྱུད་ནས་ཡོང་གི་ཡོད་པ་རེད་མི་ངན་རེ་ཟུང་གི་དེ་ཙམ་ཧ་མི་གོ་བར་གཞི་མེད་སྐྱོན་འཛུགས་བྱེད་པ་ནི་ངོས་བརྒྱ་ཆ་༩༠ དམིགས་ཡུལ་གཞན་ཞིག་ཡོད་པ་ཐག་ཆོད། ང་ཚོའི་དོན་ལ་ཐུགས་འཁུར་ཡོད་མཁན་རྒྱ་རིགས་བསམ་ཡོད་ཅན་ཝང་ལི་ཞུང་ལྟ་བུ་ཁ་ཤས་ཙམ་ཡོད་པ་དེ་དག་ཡང་མེད་པ་བཟོ་རྒྱུར་འབད་སྟངས་དེ་ལ་ལྟོས་དང་ལས་འགན་དེ་སུས་སྤྲད་པ་བྱིས་པ་ཡིན་ཀྱང་ཤེས་ཆོད་རེད།"

immolation, leaving behind several orphaned children, though the thinking behind the appeal was forming well before then. Woeser's call was co-signed by Arjia Rinpoche in the United States, formerly the abbot of Kumbum Monastery in Amdo, and the Amdo poet Gabde. Woeser called for signers, and indeed several hundred from all around the world signed, including a good number of non-Tibetans. The petition reflected Wang Lixiong's studied respect for those who had committed self-immolation. While it sought to preserve Tibetan lives for the sake of the struggle for Tibet it did not repeat any of the language that had appeared in a few places—notably outside Tibet—about self-immolation being non-Buddhist, language and argumentation that have also been used by the authorities.

Such language, in fact, seems to have never gained much currency. As an essay on the website, *Khabdha* put it "Giving one's body as an offering lamp is not to avoid suffering through self-clinging; it is so that the Tibetan nation can reverse its suffering."[16]

It must be noted, however, that there has not been an end to self-immolation. Indeed, the debates over self-immolation continue, obviously, and the recent circulation of the CCTV polemical film on self-immolation in Tibet, in obvious response to international awareness and concern over the issue, is provoking a new round of thinking and commentary. In early May, when only a small clip from that film was circulating over the internet, many people were amazed to find that Tapey, generally reckoned as the first Tibetan to have committed self-immolation inside Tibet in 2009 was alive. And so Woeser (who had been vocal in seeing that he was not forgotten by those in exile who spoke out on the issue), wrote

> Three years ago, in an essay in memory of Tabey I wrote "This is possibly the first use of the method of self-immolation by Tibetans in Tibet to demonstrate resolution. Tabey must be remembered forever in Tibetan history; he's like the exile monk Thupten Ngodrup who committed self-immolation in 1998, in the midst of a hunger strike in Delhi, India. The difference is that Tabey was fired at on the spot by Chinese military and police. After March, 2008, military and police filled county seats and monasteries; advancing on Tabey as he burned they fired." [Here the quote ends and Woeser contin-

[16] Mi pham tshangs thig, "Sku srog me mchod kyi rin thang cha tshang zhig sus bshad thub yod dam," *Kha brda*, February 16 2012, http://www.khabdha.org/?p=25505: "རང་ལུས་མཆོད་ཞེས་ཐུབ་བ་ནི་རང་གཅེས་འཛིན་གྱིས་རང་སྡུག་མ་ཟེག་ནས་མ་རེད། བོད་མི་རིགས་ཀིས་སྡུག་བསྔལ་རྒྱོག་ཆེད་དུ་རང་སོག་བློས་བཏང་རེད།"

> ues.] Now, today, I want to read this passage out loud again and, moreover, to pray for him, to pay homage to him. I want, moreover, to pray for the other Tibetans who have committed self-immolation and who may yet be alive, to pay homage to them.[17]

Writing on Twitter, she also underlined the attitude of not disparaging or denigrating those who had committed self-immolation:

> On Facebook I saw a bit of the misleading CCTV film on self-immolation meant for foreign propaganda. It's no more than this year's recycling of the old tactics used to smear and demonize Falun Gong. It's useless. Even if it has Tibetans who have survived self-immolation and the relatives of Tibetans who have committed self-immolation speaking out, it will be to no avail. Those who have committed self-immolation are heroes of the Tibetan nation…[18]

I will stop at this point and ask how we may interpret the sample of reactions that I have mentioned in the course of this discussion. The sentiments are clear, but obviously I would be loath to accord them much finality. By that, I mean that contingent events can bring about studied reconsiderations or different directions. Indeed, I suspect that we may see a further coalescence around the 'heroic' image of self-immolators. But nothing is certain. We have already seen that the CCTV film has precipitated a reaction. It is, in spite of the fact that it is intended for external propaganda, an internal provocation and reactions to it are starting to appear. Certainly a very recent strong reassertion of the idea that Tibetans who have committed self-immolation are heroes follows from this outwardly slick but transparently skewed film. It remains for us to see how its introduction

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[17] "Cong CCTV waixuanpian zhong kandao zifen hou de Zhabai" 从CCTV外宣片中看到自焚后的扎白 May 9 2011, http://woeser.middle-way.net/2012/05 cctv_09.html:三年前，我曾在纪念扎白的文章中写过："这可能是境内藏人第一次以自焚的方式来表明心志。西藏的历史必须铭记扎白，就像铭记1998年，在印度德里举行的绝食抗议中国的活动中，点火自焚的流亡僧人图丹欧珠。不同的是，扎白当场遭到中共军警的枪击。从2008年3月之后就布满县城和寺院的军警，朝着燃烧的扎白射出了子弹。" 今天，此刻，我仍然要念诵这段文字，并为扎白祈祷，向扎白顶礼！并为其他可能还活着的自焚藏人祈祷，向他们顶礼。

[18] 唯色 (Tsering Woeser). "脸书上看到CCTV那部歪说藏人自焚外宣片的一些片断，不外乎是当年污名化、妖魔化法轮功的手法故伎重演。没有用的。即便是让幸存的自焚藏人或自焚藏人的亲属表态，也无济于事。自焚者是藏民族的英雄…" May 8 2012, 12:09 a.m. tweet, https://twitter.com/degewa/status/199757902989369344.

into an internal debate at this moment in time might affect sentiments and actions in the long term.

GLOSSARY

Transcription	Transliteration	Tibetan
Arjia	A kyā	ཨ་ཀྱ།
Amdo	A mdo	ཨ་མདོ།
Chamdo	Chab mdo	ཆབ་མདོ།
Gabde	Dga′ bde	དགའ་བདེ།
Karma	Karma (?)	ཀརྨ། (?)
Khabdha	Kha brda	ཁ་བརྡ།
Kīrti	Kīrti	ཀཱིརྟི།
Kumbum	Sku ′bum	སྐུ་འབུམ།
Ngawa	Rnga ba	ཨ་བ།
Tapey	Bkra bhe	བཀྲ་ཕེ།
Tenzin Phuntsok	Bstan ′dzin phun tshogs	བསྟན་འཛིན་ཕུན་ཚོགས།
Tsering Woeser	Tshe ring ′od zer	ཚེ་རིང་འོད་ཟེར།
Thupten Ngodrup	Thub bstan dngos grub	ཐུབ་བསྟན་དངོས་གྲུབ།

❖

Online Articles on Self-immolation by Tibetans in Exile — A Brief Survey

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When a teenage monk, Tapey, self-immolated on 17 February 2009, only a few articles by Tibetans in exile on self-immolation appeared on internet. However, with the sudden rise in the number of self-immolations in Tibet since March 2011, there has been a great increase in the number of Tibetan-language articles on the internet regarding this issue.

Among those I have read, there are about sixty articles published in the opinion sections of the *Tibet Times*[1] and articles I have read on *Khabdha*,[2] *Tibet Express*[3] and on blogs, together add up to more than one hundred.

The authors of these articles include both famous and unknown writers. Some have used their real names and others have used pseudonyms. Most of the authors who have signed their articles with real names are from Tibet and judging by their style of writing one can assume they mostly left Tibet fairly recently. In terms of age, almost all the authors using real names are over fifty.

Regarding the manner in which the articles are written, they can be classified under three categories: analytical, emotional and a mixture of the two. Analytical articles are very few. Moreover, the number of articles reflecting an in-depth study of the background and the evolution of self-immolation is very small.

From the outset, writers of online articles in Tibetan have used a variety of particular expressions to describe the act of self-immolation, such as "lighting one's body as a lamp-offering" (*rang lus mchod mer bsgron pa*), "burning one's body" (*rang lus mer bsregs*), "making a fire-offering with one's body" (*rang lus me mchod*), "uniting one's life with fire" (*rang srog bsregs sbyor*), "burning oneself" (*rang bsregs*) and "cremating one's body" (*rang lus zhugs 'bul*). Nowadays, the terms "burning one's body" and its abbreviation, "burning oneself," have become the most common.

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1 http://www.tibettimes.net.
2 www.khabdha.org.
3 www.tibetexpress.net.

Chung Tsering, "Online Articles on Self-Immolation by Tibetans in Exile — A Brief Survey", *Revue d'Etudes Tibétaines*, no. 25, Décembre 2012, pp. 99-104.

Also, from an early stage in the online discourse on this issue, authors of online Tibetan articles have taken a variety of views and understandings regarding the self-immolation movement, and on some occasions have entered heated discussions on major issues regarding the movement. Over time one can observe in these discussions the development and elaboration of a more or less unanimous view and assessment concerning the self-immolations taking shape.

In the following section, I will discuss 1) areas where views converge, 2) issues of contention, and 3) other issues related to self-immolation also discussed in online articles by Tibetans in exile.

Converging views

The causes that have led to self-immolations

The online articles unanimously recognise the following as the causes that have led to the self-immolations in Tibet:

- The emotional wound inflicted on all Tibetans, by the unscrupulous blasphemy towards His Holiness the Dalai Lama, and the severe restrictions on the freedom of religious practice carried out in the monasteries under the campaign known as 'patriotic education.'
- The severe restrictions and threats imposed on Tibetans by the Chinese government's appeal to maintain 'harmony and stability.'
- The forcible imposition of policies which effectively ban the study and teaching of Tibetan language.
- The annihilation of Tibetan culture through economic enticement and the relocation of nomads.
- The colonisation and environmental destruction of Tibet going on under the guise of 'aid and development of Tibet.'[4]

[4] See "Those lamps endowed with life belong to Tibetan culture" (Tib. *Tshe srog can gyi sgron me de dag bod kyi rig gnas shig red*), by Bongya Tenrap, *Khabdha*, October 2 2011, http://www.khabdha.org/?p=23074. See also *Iron-Hare 2011. Flames of resistance* (Tib. *Lcags yos btsan rgol me lce*). Translated and edited by Matthew Akester. Published by the Mdo smad Editorial Committee of the Sworn Alliance in Support of Truth to Combat Repression. Downloadable from http://www.tchrd.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=288:iron-hare-2011-flames-of-resistance&catid=70:2012-news&Itemid=162.

The courage to self-immolate

Most of the online articles are unanimous in acknowledging the courage required to carry out self-immolation. Debates on this matter are almost nil. Most articles concur in saying that:

> Heroes and heroines, both inside and outside Tibet, have immolated themselves non-violently and for the benefit of others, at the expense of their own life. Doing this is the greatest of courage.

Amongst all Tibetan movements, self-immolation is the one that needs urgent attention and it represents the culmination of previous movements. "We certainly have the courage and we could take the opportunity to hurt those who deny us freedom by stabbing them, but ours is only a small knife. But instead we have entered the path of not hurting others for the sake of our own freedom, and this is an extraordinary act," wrote Kyamda.[5]

Making a comparison between one's courage and the courage of the self-immolators, the exile Bongya Tenrap wrote :

> My monk students [in Tibet] demonstrated by making themselves lamps while living between the fangs of demons, and I went on a candle-light march in the alleys of McLeod Ganj. This is the difference of place. They demonstrated by truly engaging in the practice of exchanging oneself with others, the practice on which *bodhicitta* is based, while I paraded reciting prayers to generate *bodhicitta*. This is a real difference. My monk students demonstrated for the sake of the Buddha's teachings, the source of benefit for all sentient beings, and for the cause of Tibet. Will I be able to take to the West those who have not yet lost their lives, for them to be treated, thanks to international pressure? If their burns are so severe that there is no hope of survival, then I pray that they pass away soon. This is the difference of aims. My monk students demonstrated by burning their golden bodies of unfathomable value, on which others would even hesitate to prick a needle. While I, without feeling anything, lit a free candle and paraded. This is the difference of sacrifice. Or this is the distance. Thinking of this distance over and again gives me a real pain in the heart.

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[5] *The flame of freedom* (Tib. *Rang dbang gi me lce*), by Kyamda, *Tibet Times,* April 4 2012, http://tibettimes.net/news.php?cat=5&&id=5833.

Issues of debate

Amongst the issues debated in the online articles in exile, the most prevalent ones concern the question of whether the movement is non-violent or violent; whether it is in accordance with Buddhist teachings or not; and whether the movement should be stopped or continued.

Whether or not the movement is non-violent

Most of the arguments assessing the violent or non-violent nature of self-immolation are based on the question whether they are in accordance with Buddhist teachings or not. Almost all of the arguments lack a discussion of non-violence as understood by the world at large. Gradually, the articles have begun to manifest an ability to distinguish between the general non-violent approach of resistance movements from that of the non-violent doctrines advocated by Buddhist teachings.

Whether or not the movement is in accordance with Buddhist teachings

Discussing whether the self-immolation movement is concordant or discordant with Buddhist teachings is the central online debate. Those who regard the movement as concordant with Buddhist teachings tend to cite the *jātaka*s, in which the Buddha in one of his previous lives gave up his own body to feed a hungry tigress, and also the *Sūtra of White Lotus*. Having identified the gesture as *bodhisattva* conduct, they praise the act of complete self-sacrifice for the benefit of others.

Those that assess the movement as not in accordance with Buddhist teachings quote the *Vinaya* (Buddhist code of moral discipline) and assert that taking one's own life is violent because it brings harm upon numerous micro-living beings surviving on one's body, imposing on them an untimely death.

The majority of articles and most of the titles of the articles reflect strong inclinations toward spiritual belief on the part of their authors.

Whether or not the movement is effective

Along with praising the movement as courageous and worthy of admiration, online articles in exile also argue about its actual effec-

tiveness and timing. Underscoring the emotional grip that the self-immolations have on Tibetans inside and outside Tibet, they argue that the self-immolators are putting the Chinese government in an uncomfortable position and are revealing more clearly the cause of Tibet to the wider world. In these ways the self-immolations are regarded as effective and worthy of praise.

Others are of the opinion that the self-immolation movement is untimely, since China is presently undergoing a change in leadership. They also argue that the movement is not able to meet the hopes it was expected to fulfill.

Whether or not the movement should be stopped

On this question the articles are of two opinions: the movement of self-immolation is a great success, for which reason it should be continued and, the movement should be stopped, for it has caused the loss of life of many brave Tibetans and is not capable of producing actual results. Authors such as Sharkhen and Arjia Rinpoche have written online articles appealing for the containment of the movement and many articles have been written as counter-arguments to their appeals.

Other issues related to self-immolation

Following are other issues related to self-immolation, which are discussed in online articles by Tibetans in exile:

— The Middle-way approach policy advocated by the Central Tibetan Administration needs to be reviewed and changed.
— Protests and prayers carried out in exile in support for the self-immolations are insufficient. More productive and far-reaching activities should be undertaken.
— As the situation inside Tibet is critical, singing and dancing in exile is considered inappropriate.
— Worries and anger over the self-immolations are becoming more common.

GLOSSARY

Transcription	Transliteration	Tibetan
Arjia Rinpoche	A kyā rin po che	ཨ་སྐྱ་རིན་པོ་ཆེ།
Bongya Tenrap	Bon rgya bstan rab	བོན་རྒྱབསྟན་རབ།
Sūtra of the White Lotus	*Mdo padma dkar po*	མདོ་པདམ་དཀར་པོ།
Kyamda	Skya mda'	སྐྱ་མདའ།
Sharkhen	Shar mkhan	ཤར་མཁན།
Tapey	Bkra bhe	བཀྲ་ཤེ།

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བཙན་བྱོལ་བོད་མིའི་དྲྭ་ཐོག་བོད་ཡིག་དཔྱད་རྩོམ་ནས་རང་ལུས་མེར་ བསྲེགས་ལ་བལྟ་བ།
(རྩོམ་པོ་མའི་མདོར་བསྡུས།)

ཆུང་ཚེ་རིང།

།།ཕྱི་ལོ་ ༢༠༡༢ ཟླ་ ༢ ཚེས་ ༢༧ ཉིན་བོད་ནང་གི་འདུན་པ་བཀྲ་ཤིས་རང་ལུས་མེར་ བསྲེགས་གནང་སྐབས། བཙན་བྱོལ་གྱི་དྲྭ་ལམ་དུ་ཆེད་རྩོམ་རེ་ཟུངས་ཐག་མེད་ཀྱང། ཕྱི་ལོ་ ༢༠༡༡ ཟླ་ ༣ ནས་བོད་ནང་རང་ལུས་མེར་བསྲེགས་ཀྱི་ལས་འགུལ་སྤེལ་མ་ཁན་ཏོ་བུར་མང་དུ་ སོང་བ་དང་མཉམ་དུ། བཙན་བྱོལ་བོད་ཡིག་དྲྭ་ལམ་གྱི་རྩོམ་ཡིག་ཀྱང་མང་དུ་སོང་ཡོད།

དས་བལྟ་ཀློག་རོབ་ཙོམ་བྱས་པར་གཞིགས་ན། བོད་ཀྱི་དུས་བབ་དྲྭ་བའི་རྩོམ་སྒྲིག་ པའི་སྟངས་འཛིན་འོག་བཀོད་ཚོག་པའི་བསམ་ཚུལ་གྱི་ལེ་ཚན་གཅིག་ལྷའི་ཐོག་ཀུ་རང་ལུས་མེར་ བསྲེགས་དང་འབྲེལ་བའི་བོད་ཡིག་ཆེད་རྩོམ་ ༦༠ སྐོར་ཐོན་འདུག་ཅིང། ཁ་བརྡ་དྲྭ་བ་དང་བོད་ ཀྱི་བང་ཆེན་དྲྭ་བ། དེ་མིན་སྒེར་སོ་སོས་རང་མོས་ཀྱིས་སྤེལ་ཆོག་སའི་ཟིན་བྱིས་ཁག་གི་ནང་འབྲང་ རང་ལུས་མེར་བསྲེགས་དང་འབྲེལ་བའི་ཆེད་རྩོམ་མང་པོ་ཐོན་ཡོད་པ་རྣམས་བསྡོམས་ན། ཆེད་ རྩོམ་གྱི་གྲངས་འབོར་ ༡༠༠ ལྷག་ཡོད།

Chung Tshe ring, "bTsan byol bod mi'i drwa thog bod yig dpyad rtsom nas rang lus mer bsregs la blta ba", *Revue d'Etudes Tibétaines*, no. 25, Décembre 2012, pp. 105-112.

རྩོམ་ཡིག་སྒེལ་མཁན་གྱི་ཚནས་བཤད་ན། མིངག་གས་ཡོད་པ་དང་མེད་པ་གཉིས་ཀ་ཡོད་ཀ། དངོས་མིངག་ལ་བ་དང་མི་གལ་བ་གཉིས་ཀ་མཆིས། དངོས་མིངག་ལ་བ་མངའ་བ་བོད་ནས་སྒེབས་པ་ཡིན་ཞེད། ཚོག་སྒྲོར་སྒེལ་སྐང་གྱི་ཚནས་བསམས་ན། དངོས་མིངི་གལ་བ་མངའ་བོད་ནས་གས་ངའུ་སྒེབས་པའི་གྲས་ཡིན་པ་ཚོད་དལག་བྱེད་ཐུབ། ལོ་ཚོད་ཀྱི་དབང་དུ་བྱས་ན། དངོས་མིངག་ལ་ཀ་ལམ་ཡོངས་རྫོགས་ལོ་ ༡༠ བརྒལ་མེད་པ་ཤེས་ཀ་ནི།

རྩོམ་ཡིག་འབྲི་སྐང་ཀྱི་ཚནས་བཤད་ན། དཔྱད་ཞིབ་དང་བསམ་ཚུལ། དེ་གཉིས་འདེས་མའི་རྣམ་པ་བཅས་རྒྱ་བའི་དབྱེ་བ་གསུམ་མཆིས་ཤིང་། དེ་གསུམ་གྱི་ནང་ནས་དཔྱད་ཞིབ་ཀྱི་རྣམ་པའབྲིས་པ་ཉུང། ཁྱག་པའངང་ཁུས་མེའབགྲེགས་ཀྱི་རྒྱབ་ལྷོངས་དང་འཛེལ་ཕྱོགས་སྐོངས་དཔྱད་པ་གཉིའཛབ་བྱས་པའི་དཔྱད་རྩོམ་ཉུང་ཉུངའེད་འདུག

དུ་ལམ་དུ་ཕོན་པའི་བོད་ཡིག་རྩོམ་ཡིག་ཁག་གི་ནང་ཕོག་མའི་ཚངས་འགྱལ་འདིའ་མིངཡངག་ཅིག་མཐུན་ཞིག་མེད་པའ། ལ་ལས་“ངངཁུས་མཆོད་མེའབགྲོན་པ་” དང། ལ་ལས་“ངངཁུས་མེའབགྲེགས” ཡངཁ་ཤས་ཀྱིས་ “ངངཁུས་མེ་མཆོད”དང། “ངངསྒོག་བགྲེགས་སྒྲོར” “ངངབགྲེགས་” “ངངཁུས་ཞུགས་འབྱལ་”སོགས་ཐ་སྙད་མི་མཐུན་པ་མངའ་ཞིག་སྒྲུབ་ཡོད་ཀྱང། དཚ“ངངཁུས་མེའབགྲེགས་”དང་དེའི་བསྒྲུས་ཚོག་“ངངགྲེག་”ཅེས་པའི་ཐ་སྙད་འདི་སྒྲོར་མཁན་མངའ་ཚགས་འདུག

དེབཞིན་དུ་ཕོག་མའི་ཚངའབཅོན་བྱོལ་གྱི་དུ་སྐོར་ཁག་ཁུ་ངངཁུས་མེའབགྲེགས་ཀྱི་ལས་འབྱལ་འདིའཁྱ་སྐྱངས་དང་དོས་འཛིན་གཅིག་ཐུབ་མེའབ་མ་ཟད། གནའདོན་ཆེན་པོ་ཁ་ཤས་ཀྱི་ཕོག་སྐོའབྲིང་ཤུགས་ཆེབྱས་ཡོད་ཀྱང། རིམ་པས་ལས་འབྱལ་འདིའཁྱ་སྐྱངས་དང་དོས་འཛིན་གང་ཁ་གང་འཚམས་ཀྱི་གཅིག་ཐུབ་བྱའབའི་རྣམ་པ་མངོན་ཡོད།

གཤམ་དུ་ངས་བཙན་བྱོལ་དྭ་རྒྱའི་བོད་ཡིག་ཆེད་རྩོམ་ནང༧༽ གཅིག་མཐུན་གྱི་ལྟ་སྟངས་དང་དོན་འཛིན་བྱུང་བ་ཁག་དང་། ༢༽ རྩོད་གླེང་ཅན་གྱི་གནད་དོན་ཁག ༣༽ རང་ལུས་མེར་བསྲེགས་ལས་འཕྲོས་ཏེ་བརྗོད་པའི་གནད་དོན་གཞན་བཅས་གནད་དོན་གསུམ་གྱི་སྐོར་བཤད་ཀྱི་ཡིན།

དང་པོ། གཅིག་མཐུན་གྱི་ལྟ་སྟངས་དང་དོན་འཛིན།

ཀ༽ རང་ལུས་མེར་བསྲེགས་ཀྱི་རྒྱུ་རྐྱེན།

བོད་ནང་རང་ལུས་མེར་བསྲེགས་ཀྱི་གནས་ཚུལ་བྱུང་བའི་རྒྱུ་རྐྱེན་ག་རེ་ཡིན་མིན་ཐད། བཙན་བྱོལ་གྱི་བོད་ཡིག་དྭ་རྩོམ་ཁག་ནང་སྤྱིར་བཏང་རྩོད་གླེང་མེད་པར་གཅིག་གྱུར་གྱིས་ངོས་འཛིན་ལྟ་བུ་བྱུང་བ་ནི་གཤམ་གསལ།

1. རྒྱལ་གཅེས་ཆོས་གཅེས་སློབ་གསོ་ཞེས་པའི་འབོད་སྒྲའི་འོག་བོད་མིའི་ཆོས་དད་རང་དབང་ལ་དམ་བསྒྲགས་དང་༸གོང་ས་མཆོག་ལ་ཚབས་ཆེའི་མཚན་དམས་བྱེད་བཞིན་པ་དེས་བོད་མི་ཡོངས་ཀྱི་སེམས་ཁམས་ལ་ཚབས་ཆེའི་རྨ་ཁ་བཟོ་བཞིན་ཡོད་པ།
2. འཆམ་མཐུན་བརྟན་ལྷིང་ཞེས་པའི་འབོད་སྒྲའི་འོག་རྒྱ་གཞུང་གིས་བོད་མིར་དམ་བསྒྲགས་དང་འཇིགས་སྐུལ་ཤུགས་ཆེ་བྱེད་པ།
3. བོད་ནང་བཙན་ཤེད་ཀྱི་སྒོ་ནས། བོད་ཀྱི་སྐད་ཡིག་སློབ་ཁྲིད་བཀག་སྡོམ་གྱི་སྲིད་བྱུས་ལག་བསྟར་བྱས་པ།
4. དཔལ་འབྱོར་གྱི་བསྐྱུ་བྲིད་དང་འབྲོག་པ་གནས་སྤོར་གྱི་ལས་འགུལ་འོག་རིག་གཞུང་རྩ་གཏོར་བྱེད་པ།

5. བོད་མི་ར་རིགས་སྐྱོབ་འཛུགས་སྐྲུན་ཞེས་པའི་འབོད་སྒྲའི་འོག་མི་སེར་སྤྱིལ་ཡུལ་དང་ ཁོར་ཡུག་གཏོར་སྐྱོན་གཏོང་བཞིན་པ།[1]

ཁ༽ རང་ལུས་མེར་བསྲེགས་ཀྱི་སྙིང་སྟོབས།

བོད་མི་ཚོས་གཅིག་རྗེས་གཉིས་མཐུད་དུ། རང་ལུས་མེར་བསྲེགས་བཏང་བའི་སྙིང་སྟོབས་ཀྱི་ཐད་ ལ་འདང་། བཙན་བྱོལ་བོད་མིའི་བོད་ཡིག་དྲྭ་ལམ་ཁག་ཏུ་གཤམ་གསལ་གཅིག་གྱུར་གྱི་དོས་ འཛིན་ལས། རྗོད་གླེང་རྟ་ལམ་མཐོང་རྒྱུ་མི་འདུག

1. བོད་ཕྱི་ནང་གི་དཔའ་བོ་ཚོས། རང་གི་སྲོག་ལ་ཐུག་པའི་གནས་སྟངས་འོག་ཏུའང་། གཞན་ཕན་དང་ཞི་བའི་སྒོ་ནས་རང་ཉིད་བསྲེགས་ཏེ། མི་རིགས་ཤིག་གི་མངོན་འདོད་ མཚོན་པར་བྱས་པ་ནི། རླབས་ཆེ་ཤོས་ཀྱི་སྙིང་སྟོབས་ཤིག་ཡིན་པ།
2. རང་ལུས་མེར་བསྲེགས་ནི། བོད་མིའི་ལས་འགུལ་གྱི་ཁྲོད་ནས་ཛ་དྲག་ཤོས་དང་ཚད་ མཐོ་ཤོས་ཤིག་ཡིན་པ། “ཐ་ན་གྲི་ཆུང་ཞིག་ལས་མེད་ཀྱང་རང་དབང་འཐྲོག་མཁན་དེར་ འཛུགས་པའི་བློ་སྟོབས་དང་བགོ་སྐལ་ཡོད་ཀྱང་། རང་ཉིད་ཀྱི་རང་དབང་ཆེད་མི་གཞན་ ལ་གནོད་འཚེ་མི་གཏོང་བའི་ལམ་བུ་འདིར་བཞུགས་པ་ནི། སུས་ཀྱང་བློ་ཡུལ་དུ་ཤོང་ དཀའ་བ་ཞིག་རེད།”[2]
3. རང་ལུས་མེར་བསྲེགས་མཁན་གྱི་སྙིང་སྟོབས་དང་། རང་ཉིད་ཀྱི་སྙིང་སྟོབས་བསྡུར་བ། དཔེར་ན། བོན་རྒྱ་བསྟན་རབ་ཀྱི་ཆེད་རྩོམ་ནང་“ངའི་གྲྭ་ཞུག་ཚོས་སྲིན་པོའི་མཆེ་བར་

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[1] ལྕགས་ཡོས་བཙན་རྒོལ་མེ་ལྕེ། གླེང་བརྗོད། http://www.khabdha.org/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2012/04/Chapter-One-and-Two1.pdf ;བོན་རྒྱ་བསྟན་རབ་ཀྱི་རྩོམ་ཡིག ཆེ་སྲོག་ཅན་གྱི་སྒྲོན་མེ་དེདག་བོད་ཀྱི་རིག་གནས་ཤིག་རེད། http://www.khabdha.org/?p=23074.

[2] རང་དབང་གི་མེ་ལྕེ། སྐྱ་མདའ། བོད་ཀྱི་དུས་བབ། http://tibettimes.net/news.php?cat=5&&id =5833.

ནས་མར་མེ་ཁྲིམ་སྐོར་གནང་བ་རེད། ངས་མིག་ལོར་ཁྲིམ་ལམ་ནས་མར་མེ་ཁྲིམ་སྐོར་བྱས་པ་ཡིན་འདི་ནི་གནས་ཀྱི་ཁྱད་པར་རེད། ངའི་ གྲྭ་ཕྲུག་ཚོས་བྱང་ཆུབ་སེམས་ཀྱི་གདུགས་གཞི་བདག་གཞན་མཉམ་བརྗེས་དངོས་སུ་ བྱས་ནས་ཁྲིམ་སྐོར་གནང་བ་རེད། ངས་བྱང་ཆུབ་སེམས་མཆོག་མ་ཁ་ནས་དབྱངས་ལ་གྱེར་ནས་ཁྲིམ་སྐོར་བྱས་པ་ཡིན་འདི་དོན་དངོས་ཀྱི་བར་ཁྱད་རེད། ངའི་གྲྭ་ཕྲུག་ཚོས་སྐྱེ་འགྲོ་ཀུན་གྱི་བདེ་སྐྱིད་ཀྱི་གཞི་རྩ་སངས་རྒྱས་ཀྱི་བསྟན་པ་དང་བོད་ཁ་བ་ཅན་གྱི་ཆེད་དུ་ཁྲིམ་སྐོར་གནང་བ་རེད། ངའི་ཁོང་གཉིས་ཀྱི་སྐུ་སྲོག་ཕོར་མེད་ན་རྒྱལ་སྤྱིའི་གནོད་ཤུགས་ཀྱི་འོག་ནས་ ཕྱི་རྒྱལ་ལ་སྐྱན་བཙོས་བྱེད་པར་ལེན་ཨེ་ཐུབ་བམ་དང་། མི་སྐྱོན་ཚབས་ཆེ་ཞིང་གསོན་པར་རེབ་མེད་ན་མྱུར་དུ་གྲོངས་པར་ཕོག་ཅེས་པ་ཙམ་ཡིན། འདི་ནི་དམིགས་ཡུལ་གྱི་ཁྱད་པར་རེད། ངའི་གྲྭ་ཕྲུག་ཚོས་རིན་ཐང་གཞལ་དུ་མེད་ཅིང་སྲུས་ཀྱང་ཁབ་གཙག་རེའང་བྱེད་མི་ནུས་པའི་རིན་ཆེན་གསེར་གྱི་སྐུ་ལུས་མེར་སྒྲོན་ནས་ཁྲིམ་སྐོར་གནང་བ་རེད། ངས་ཚོར་བས་མ་ཐེན་ཞིང་རིན་པའང་མི་དགོས་པའི་ཞག་སྒྲོན་ཀང་ཐུར་གཅིག་མེར་སྒྲོན་ནས་ཁྲིམ་སྐོར་བྱས་པ་ཡིན་འདི་ནི་བློས་གཏོང་གི་ཁྱད་པར་རེད། ཡང་ན་བར་ཐག་རེད། བར་ཐག་འདིར་བསམ་ཞིང་བསམ་ཞིང་ངལ་དངོས་གནས་སེམས་གཟེར་རྒྱུག་གི་འདུག”ཅེས་འཁོད་ཡོད།

གཉིས་པ། རྩོད་གླེང་ཅན་གྱི་གནད་དོན།

བཙན་བྱོལ་གྱི་བོད་ཡིག་དྭ་ལམ་ཁག་ཏུ་རང་ལུས་མེར་བསྲེགས་ཀྱི་ཐད་རྩོད་གླེང་མང་པོ་བྱས་འདུག་པའི་ནང་ནས་མངོན་གསལ་དོད་ཤོས་ནི། ལས་འགྱུལ་དེ་འཚེ་མེད་ཞི་བ་ཡིན་མིན་དང་། ནང་པའི་ཆོས་དང་མཐུན་མིན། བཀག་འགོད་བྱེད་འོས་དང་མི་འོས་ཀྱི་སྐོར་རེད།

ཀ༽ **འཚོ་མེད་ཞི་བ་ཡིན་མིན།** བཙན་བྱོལ་གྱི་བོད་ཡིག་དྭ་ལམ་དུ་རང་ལུས་མེར་བསྲེགས་ཀྱི་ལས་འགུལ་འདི་འཚོ་མེད་ཞི་བ་ཡིན་མིན་གྱི་རྩོད་པ་ཤུགས་ཆེ་བྱུས་འདུག་ཀྱང་། རྩོད་པ་དེ་ཚོར་ཞིབ་ཕྲ་བལྟས་ན། མང་ཆེབ་ཆོས་དང་མཐུན་མ་མཐུན་གྱི་སྐད་ཆ་ལས། སྤྱིར་བཏང་འཇིག་རྟེན་ཡོངས་ཁྱབ་ཀྱི་འཚོ་མེད་ཞི་བ་ཡིན་མིན་ཐད་ལ་དེ་ཙམ་གླེང་སློང་བྱུས་མི་འདུག དོན་ཀྱང་ཕྱིས་སུ། སྤྱིར་བཏང་གི་ཞི་བའི་ལས་འགུལ་དང་། ནང་པ་སངས་རྒྱས་པའི་གཞུང་ནས་གསུངས་པའི་འཚོ་བ་མེད་པ་གཉིས་ལ་ཁྱད་པར་ཡོད་པ་དེ་ངོས་ཟིན་ཡོད་པའི་རྣམ་པ་འདུག

ཁ༽ **ཆོས་དང་མཐུན་མི་མཐུན།** ལས་འགུལ་འདི་ནང་པའི་ཆོས་དང་མཐུན་མིན་གྱི་རྩོད་པ་དེ་ནི། བཙན་བྱོལ་གྱི་བོད་ཡིག་དྭ་ལམ་དུ་མངོན་གསལ་དོད་ཤོས་ཤིག་རེད། དེ་ཡང་ཆོས་དང་མཐུན་པར་འདོད་མཁན་ཆོས་སྟོན་སངས་རྒྱས་ཀྱིས་སྟག་མོར་ལུས་སྦྱིན་པ་དང་། མདོ་སྡེ་པདྨ་དཀར་པོ་སོགས་ཀྱི་ལུང་དྲངས་ནས། གཞན་དོན་དུ་རང་སྲོག་དོར་བ་ནི་བྱང་ཆུབ་སེམས་པའི་སྤྱོད་པ་དང་མཐུན་པ་ཞིག་ཡིན་པར་བསྟུགས་བརྗོད་བྱུས་འདུག

ཡང་ལས་འགུལ་འདི་འཚོ་བ་ཡིན་པར་སླུ་མཁན་ཚོས། འདུལ་བའི་གཞུང་སོགས་ལུང་དུ་དྲངས་ཏེ། རང་སྲོག་བཅད་ན། རང་གི་ལུས་ལ་ཡོད་པའི་སྲིན་པོ་མང་པོ་དུས་མིན་དུ་འཆིབས་གཞན་ལ་འཚོ་བར་གྱུར་ཚུལ་སོགས་བཤད་འདུག་ཅིང་། རྩོམ་ཡིག་གི་ཁ་གྲངས་དང་མཆན་ཁག་ལ་གཞིགས་ན། ཆོས་དང་མཐུན་པ་ཡིན་པའི་ལྟ་ཚུལ་དེ་ཤུགས་ཆེབ་དང་མངབ་འདུག

ག༽ **ནུས་པ་ཐོན་མིན།** ལས་འགུལ་འདིའི་སྙིང་སྟོབས་དང་ཆོད་སེམས་ལ་བསྟུགས་བརྗོད་བྱུས་པ་དང་མཉམ་དུ། བཙན་བྱོལ་གྱི་བོད་ཡིག་དྭ་ལམ་དུ་ལས་འགུལ་འདི་དུས་ལ་བབས་པ་ཞིག་ཡིན་མིན་དང་། ནུས་པ་ཐོན་མིན་ལ་རྩོད་གླེང་བྱུས་འདུག དེ་ཡང་ནུས་པ་ཐོན་པར་འདོད་མཁན་ཚོས། ལས་འགུལ་འདིས་བོད་གཞིས་བྱེས་གཉིས་ཀའི་སྤྱི་ཚོགས་ནང་གཡོ་འགུལ་

ཨེབས་པར་མ་ཟད། རྒྱ་ནག་སྲིད་གཞུང་ཡང་ཅིའྱེད་ཀྱི་ཟེར་མི་ཤེས་པ་བཟོས་པ། དེ་བཞིན་རྒྱལ་སྤྱིའི་ནང་བོད་དོན་གྱི་གནས་སྟངས་རེ་གསལ་དུ་བཏང་སོགས་རྒྱུ་མཚན་དུ་དྲངས་ཏེ་བསྟན་བརྗོད་བྱས་ཡོད།

ཡང་གཞན་དག་ཁག་ཅིག་གིས། དཀྱུ་རྒྱ་ནག་ནང་འགོ་ཁྲིད་འཛུགས་འགྲོ་བཞིན་ཡོད་པས། ལས་འགུལ་འདི་དུས་ལ་བབས་མེད་ཀ། དེས་རེ་བ་བྱས་པ་ནང་ཞིན་གྱི་ནུས་པ་ཐོན་དཀའ་བའི་བསམ་ཚུལ་བཏོན་འདུག

ང་ལ། **བཀག་འགོག་བྱེད་ཀོས་དང་མི་ཀོས།** བཅོན་བྱོལ་གྱི་བོད་ཡིག་དྲྭ་ལམ་དུ། རངཀྱས་མེར་བསྒེགས་ཀྱི་ལས་འགུལ་འདིར་ནུས་པ་བླ་ན་མེད་པ་ལྟར་པས་སྐུ་མཐུན་དང་། ལས་འགུལ་འདི་ནི་སེམས་ཤུགས་ཅན་གྱི་བོད་མི་མང་ཚོའི་ཆོ་སྲོག་ཤོར་གཞི་ལས། གཞན་གྱི་ནུས་པ་ཐོན་དཀའ་བས་མཚམས་འཇོག་དགོས་པར་འདོད་མཁན་རིགས་གཉིས་བྱུང་ཡོད་ཅིང། ཤར་མཁན་སྐྱེལ་དང་ཙུ་རིན་པོ་ཆེ་སོགས་ཀྱིས་དྲྭ་ལམ་དུ་འབོད་སྐུལ་སྩོལ་ཡིག་སྐྱེལ་ཏེ། མཚམས་འཇོག་དགོས་པའི་རེ་བ་བཏོན་པར། དེ་ལ་ལྟོག་ཕྱོགས་ཀྱི་མཆན་འབྲི་མཁན་མང་པོ་བྱུང་འདུག །

གསུམ་པ། རངཀྱས་མེར་བསྒེགས་ལས་འཕྲོས་ཏེ་བཏོན་པའི་གནད་དོན་གཞན།

བཅོན་བྱོལ་བོད་མིའི་བོད་ཡིག་དྲྭ་ལམ་དུ། རངཀྱས་མེར་བསྒེགས་ལས་འཕྲོས་ཏེ། གནད་དོན་གཞན་དག་མང་པོ་བླུང་སྟེ་བྱས་པ་དལེར་ན།

ཀ། དབུས་བོད་མིའི་སྒྲིག་འཛུགས་ཀྱིས་འཛིན་བཞིན་པའི་དབུ་མའི་ལམ་གྱི་སྲིད་བྱུས་ལ་བསྐྱེད་ཞིབ་དང་བསྟུང་བཅོས་དགོས་པ།

ཁ། བཅོན་བྱོལ་ནང་བཀའ་ལས་མཁན་སྐྱེད་ཀྱི་ཁྲོམ་སྒོར་དང་བསྟོ་སྨོན་འདོན་པ་ཙམ་གྱིས་མི་ཆོག་པར། དེ་ལས་གཏིར་ཟིང་རྒྱ་ཆེབའི་ལས་འགུལ་སྤེལ་དགོས་པ།

ག། བོད་ནང་གི་གནས་སྟངས་ཧོ་ཏུག་ཡིན་དུས། བཅོན་བྱོལ་ནང་ཞུགས་ཞབས་བྲོ་སོགས་ལ་རོལ་ན་འོས་འཚམས་ཡིན་མིན།

ང། རང་ལུས་མེར་བསྲེགས་ཀྱི་གནས་ཚུལ་དེ་རྒྱུན་ལྡན་ལྟ་བུར་འཛུར་བཞིན་པར་སེམས་འཚབ་དང་འཁང་རོགས་བྱས་འདུག། །།

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ཞི།།དཔའ་བོ་མེ་འབར་ལས་མཆེད་པའི་སྙན་དངགས་ཀྱི་མེ་ལྕེ།

པེན་བོད་ཀྱི་རྩོམ་པ་པོའི་མཐུན་ཚོགས་ཀྱི་ ཚོགས་གཙོ་ཆབ་བྲག་ལྷ་མོ་སྐྱབས།

The flames of poetry spreading from the fire of heroes

Noyontsang Lhamokyab

(Inalco and President of the PEN Tibetans Writers Abroad)

[Summary: this article surveys the poems and songs that have appeared in exile in 2011 and 2012, that deal with the self-immolations. It analyses the poetic style of these works, their place of writing and the spatial origin of the readers, the media used, and the contents and tones of these poems and songs. It ends with a poem written by the author of the article on October 18 2011, "I fully accept".]

སྙན་རྩོམ་ཞལ་མོ་ཆེའི་ཁ་བྱང་མེ་དང་འབྲེལ་བས་དཔྱད་བརྗོད་འདིར་ཡང་ དེར་མཐུན་ཀྱི་མིང་འདི་བཏགས་པ་ཡིན། (༢༠༡༡ ནས་ ༢༠༡༢ བར་དུའོ)

དང་པོ། རྩོམ་ལུས་དང་གྲངས་འབོར་སྐོར།

༡ ། སྒོལ་རྒྱུན་ཚིགས་བཅད་སྙན་དངགས། (མང་ཞོས)

Noyontsang Lhamokyab, "dPa' bo me 'bar las mched pa'i snyan dngags kyi me lce", *Revue d'Etudes Tibétaines*, no. 25, Décembre 2012, pp. 113-122.

ཀ། རང་མོས་སྐྱན་དངགས། (མང་པོ)

ཁ། ཚིག་ལྷུག་སྐྱན་རྩོམ། (ཞུང་ཙམ)

ཚང་མ་བསྡོམས་ན་ཁ་བརྡ་དྲ་བར་སྐྱན་རྩོམ་བདུན་ཅུ་ཙམ་བཀོད་འདུག་ཅིང་། ཟིན་བྱིས་པ་༡༧༥ ཡོད་ཐལ་མོ་ཆེའི་ནང་ལ་ཡང་སྐྱན་ཚིག་རེ་རེ་ཡོད་ངེས་རེད། དེ་ལྟར་ན་སྐྱན་ཚིག་གི་གྲངས་འགོར་ཡང་མི་ཞུང་དོ།

གཉིས་པ། སྐྱན་རྩོམ་སྒེལ་མཁན་དང་བློག་པ་པོའི་སྐོར།

སྐྱན་རྩོམ་ཁོ་ན་སྒེལ་བ་པོ་སེར་སྐུ་ཞོ་མོ་ཅི་རིགས་བརྒྱ་ལྷག་ཅིག་ཡོད་ངེས་ལ། བློག་པ་པོའི་ཁྲབ་ཚད་ཀྱང་ཆུང་ཆེ་སྟེ།

ཀ། ཁ་བརྡ། རྒྱ་གར་དང་བལ་པོས་གཅོས་པོད་པ་ཡོད་ཙའི་རྒྱལ་ཁབ་མང་ཆེ་བའི་ནང་།

ཁ། ད་ལམ་གཞན་དག རྒྱ་གར་དང་བལ་པོས་གཅོས་པོད་པ་ཡོད་ཙའི་རྒྱལ་ཁབ་གང་མང་ཞིག

ག། ཚགས་པར་དང་དུས་དེབ་རིགས། རྒྱ་གར་དང་བལ་ཡུལ་སོགས་རྒྱལ་ཁབ་འགའ་ཞིག

གསུམ་པ། སྐྱན་རྩོམ་གྱི་བརྒྱུད་ལམ་ཁག

ཀ། ད་རྒྱ་ཁག

ཀ། <<ཁ་བརྡ།>>

༣། <<པེན་བོད་ཀྱི་རྩོམ་པ་པོའི་མཐུན་ཚོགས་ཀྱི་ངྷ་བ།>>

༤། <<རང་དབང་།>>

༥། <<བོད་ཀྱི་བང་ཆེན།>>

༦། <<དབྱངས་ཅན་སྐུ་འཕྲུལ་ངྷ་བ>>དང<<སྨོན་པའི་ངྷ་བ>>སོགས་སྐེར་གྱི་ངྷ་བའི་རིགས།

༢། ཚགས་པར་དང་དུས་དེབ་སོགས།

ཀ། <<ཞི་འབོད>> དཔའ་བོ་རྡེས་བྱན་གྱི་ཚགས་པར། (འདོོན་ཐེངས་དང་པོ། ཤོག་ངོས་བཞི་ཅན) རྩོམ་སྒྲིག་པ། ཤིང་ལོ།

ཁ། <<ང་ཚོས་ཁྱད་ཚོ་མི་གླེང་སུ་ཞིག་གླེང་>> (ཤོག་ངོས་༡༤། བོད་དབྱིན་གཉིས་ཀྱི་སྐན་རྩོམ་༡༩། ༢༠ཀཁ།ཀ) སུ་ང་སྨོ་བ་ག

ག། <<སྨྱུ་ཚོགས་མེ་ལོང་།>> ཟླ་རེའི་ཚགས་པར། པེན་བོད་ཀྱི་རྩོམ་པ་པོའི་མཐུན་ཚོགས་ནས།

ཅ། གཡུ་གྲྭབ་ནང་གི་གཞས་དང་སྐྱན་དངགས།

ཀ། <ཟླ་མ་མཁྱེན> (ལེན་མཁན། བཀྲས་ཆུང་།༢༠ཀཀཀཀ།༢༥) (ཚོགཚབ་བྱག་ཚོ་ཉ)

ཁ། <མེ་ལྟེ།> (ཚོགཀླུ་སྨོན། ཀྱེར་འདོོན་པ་ཟླ་བ་རིན་ཆེན། ༢༠ཀཀཁ།ཁ)

ཀ། <སྐྱོ་བའི་གླུ་ཚུང་།> (ཟླ་འོད། བོད་ནང་། ༡༩༧༨།)

ཅ། <དཔའ་བོ་དྲན་པའི་གདུང་དབྱངས> (རྣམ་མཁྱེན། ༡༩༧༩།)

ཇ། <ཆེ་སྒོག་གི་མེ་ལྕེ།> (རོལ་དབྱངས་དང་སྐུ་པར། ༡༩༧༤།)

ང་ཀ སྨན་རྩོམ་འགྲན་སྡུར།

<སེམས་པ་འདི ཁྱད་དང་ལྡན་དུ་འབར་གྱིན་ཡོད།> ས་རྟ་བོད་ཀྱི་མཐོ་སློབ་ཁང་།

བཞི་བ། སྐུ་སྒོག་མེར་མཆོད་ཀྱི་ངོས་འཛིན་སྐོར།

ཀ ཀ བོད་མི་རིགས་ཀྱི་དཔའ་རྩོད་དུ་ངོས་འཛིན་པ། དཔེར་ན།

ཀ། <བོད་ཀྱི་དཔའ་རྩོད་ཚོ།> (འབའ་སྒས།)

ཁ། <གངས་རིའི་དཔའ་རྩོད་སུམ་ཅུ།> (ནམ་མཁའ། ༡༩/ཇ/༡༩༧༡ཡོ་རོབ)

ཇ། <ཁྱོད་ཀྱི་དཔའ་ཤམས་མིག་གིས་མཐོང་ཡོད། ཁྱོད་ཀྱི་དཔའ་སྐད་རྣ་ཡིས་གོ་ཡོད།> (གཡུ་དྲུག་དཀར། རྡ་ས།) ལྷ་བུ་དང་།

ཁ ཀ བོད་ཀྱི་རྒྱལ་གཅེས་པ་ཆེན་མོར་ངོས་འཛིན་པ། དཔེར་ན།

ཀ། <རྒྱལ་གཅེས་དཔའ་བོ་ཕུན་ཚོགས་ལགས།> (རྡ་བ་ཚེ་སྐྱིད།)

ཀ། < བོད་བསྟན་སྲིད་ཀྱི་ཆེད་དང་ལུས་མཚོད་མེར་ཕྱལ་མཁན་ཀྱི་རྒྱལ་གཅེས་དཔའ་བོ་དང་དཔའ་མོ་རྣམས་ལ་རྗེས་དྲན་དུ་ཕྱལ་བ་ཡིན> (རྣམ་མཁྱེན་ཀྱི་གཞས)ལྟ་བུའི་ཁ་བྱང་ཙམ་ཀྱིས་ཀྱང་མཚོན་ནོ།

གཉེ འཚེ་མེད་ཞི་ཚོལ་ཆེན་མོར་ངོས་འཛིན་པ། དཔེར་ན།

“སྲོག་གིས་འཐབ་ཀྱང་འཚེ་བར་མི་འགྱུར་ཞིང་། །རང་དོན་བརྩད་ཀྱང་གཞན་ལ་མི་གནོད་པ། །བོད་ཀྱི་དཔའ་རྩོད་ཚོ་ཡི་ཚེ་སྲོག་གིས། །འཚེ་མེད་མེ་ཡི་དཀྱིལ་འཁོར་ས་ལ་བྱིས།།” <བོད་ཀྱི་དཔའ་རྩོད་ཚོ> (འབའ་སྲས)

ང་ཉེ བྷ་མེད་རྒྱལ་སྲས་སུ་ངོས་འཛིན་པ། དཔེར་ན།

ཀ། “ཆེས་སྐན་ནག་ཡིན་པའི་ཁོར་ཡུག་ཏུ་མེ་ཤེར་སྐྱལ་མཁན་བྱང་ཆུབ་སེམས་དཔའ་ཉིད་ཚོ་སུ་ཞིག་ཡིན།” <ངའི་སྐྱན་ངག་གི་མེ་ཤེ་དམར་ལྟབ་ལྟབ་འབར་བྱུང་།> (མདའ་ཚན་པ)

ཀ། “གཞན་སྡུག་སེལ་ལ་བྱང་ཆུབ་སེམས་འཕྲུངས་བའི། །སྡུག་མོ་ལུས་སྐྱིན་ལ་སོགས་རྒྱལ་སྲས་བཞིན། །གངས་ལྗོངས་སྐྱ་པ་སེལ་བའི་སྐྱོན་མེ་ཡི། །གངས་རིའི་རྒྱལ་སྲས་རྣམས་ལ་སྙིང་ནས་འདུད།།” <ང་སྐྱག་གི> (ཨ་རིག་འགྱུར་མེད)

ཅ།ཀ ཨཆོད་མེའི་ནུས་པར་ཐེ་ཚོམ་པ། དཔེར་ན།

“གལ་ཏེ་ཁོ་བོའི་ལུས་ཐུང་འདི་ཡང་དམར་བོ་མེ་རུ་ཐྱུར་བ་ན། ཁལ་བའི་ཁ་གྲངས་འཕེལ་བ་ཙམ་ལས་དོན་གྱི་གནད་ལ་ཞེ་སྡྲེབས་ཞེས། ཁྱི་སྤྲིག་མེད་པའི་སེམས་པ་འདི་ཡིས་དྲི་བའི་སྟེང་ལ་དྲི་བ་བསྟན། ཁ་ཐོགས་མེད་པའི་འཆར་སྣང་སྣ་ཚོགས་རྒྱང་གིས་དེད་པའི་སྒྲིན་བཞིན་འཁོར།།”

<མེས་པོའི་ལོ་རྒྱུས་དང་མེ་ཡི་ལོ་རྒྱུས> (གསལ་ལེ་རྒྱལ)

ཆ།ཀ ཁོན་མོངས་པའི་མེ་ལྷེར་མཐོང་ཚུལ་ཞིག་ཀྱང་། <སྟོན་པ། ངའི་གཟན་སྣེ་མེ་རུ་འབར་སོང་།> (ཀླུ་སྒྲུབ)

ལུ་པ། སྐན་ཚོམ་ཁག་གི་སྟིང་དོན་སྐོར།

ཀ།ཀ བསྟོད་བསྔགས་ཀྱི་སྐོར།

ཀ།ཀ གཙོ་ཆེར་མི་རིགས་ཀྱི་ལར་ཞེན་དང་རྒྱལ་གཅེས་ཀྱི་བསམ་བློ་བྱ་ན་མཐོ་བའི་ལྷག་བསམ་ཆེན་པོར་བསྔགས་པ་དང་། ལུས་སྲོག་ལོངས་སྤྱོད་དང་བཅས་པ་ཅི་མི་སྐམ་པར་ཡོད་ཚད་འདོར་བར་ཞོད་པའི་བློས་གཏོང་ཆེན་པོར་བསྔགས་པ། དཔེར་ན། “དེ་ནི་ལྷག་བསམ་དང་སྟིང་སྟོབས་བྱང་གིས་སྣར་བའི་མེ་ལྷེ་ཞིག་རེད། དེ་ནི་མི་རིགས་དང་རྒྱལ་ཁབ་ཤེག་གི་ཆེད་དུ་འབར་བའི་མེ་ལྷེ་ཞིག་རེད། དེ་ནི་

རང་དོན་ཡོད་ཚད་བློས་བཏང་བའི་རྟགས་ཆེན་གྱི་མེ་ལྷེ་ཞེག་རེད།”
<དེ་ནི་རྟགས་ཆེན་གྱི་མེ་ལྷེ་ཞེག་རེད།> (སྒྲ་རིགས་ཐོགས་མེད།)
ཅེ། འཆི་བར་འཇིགས་པ་མི་མངའ་བར་མ་ཟད་བཟོད་དཀའི་
མནར་གཅོད་ཆེན་པོ་ཉམས་སུ་བཞེས་པའི་སྙིང་སྟོབས་ཆེན་པོར་
བསྟགས་པ། དཔེར་ན། “མེ་ལྷེའི་རེག་བྱ་ཚ་བོ་དེ་ལ་སུ་ཡིས་བཟོད་
བསྒོམ་ཟེར་བར་ཤུས། ལྷུ་ཆོགས་རེ་རེ་མེ་ཡིས་སྲེག་དུས་ཅི་འདྲའི་
སྡུག་བསྔལ་ལྷེ་མོ་ཞེག ། མེ་རྟགས་རེ་རེ་རྟུང་གིས་སྐྱོད་དུས་ཚ་
གཟེར་སྟོང་ཐུག་སུ་ཡིས་བཟོད། །ཅི་ཡི་ཆེད་དུ་བདག་གི་སྲུན་ཟླ་
སྡུག་བསྔལ་འདི་ལ་འཐད་དགོས་བྱུང་།།” <མེ་ལྷེ་དང་སྙིང་
སྟོབས> (རིན་ཆེན་དོན་གྲུབ།) ལྷ་བྱའོ།

ཁ། གཞེན་སྐུལ་དང་ཞུ་སྐུལ་སྐོར།

ཀ། སྡུ་མཐུད་མདུན་སྐྱོད་ཀྱི་གཞེན་སྐུལ།

<ང་ཚོ་ཚང་མ་མེ་དཔུང་རེ་ཡིན་དགོས།> (འབའ་སྒས།)

<མ་འདུག་བོད་ཐུག་གཞོན་ནུ་དལ་ལོངས་ཤིག> (བསོད་
ནམས་ནོར་བུ།)

<དེ་ནི་མེ་ལྷེའི་སྤྲོང་ལ་ཞུགས་ནས་བླ་འབོད་ཐེངས་ཤིག་
བྱེད་སྙིང་འདོད།> (འཇུག་ལོ་བ།) ལྷ་བྱའོ།

ཅ། མེར་མཆོད་མཚམས་འཛོག་གི་ཞུ་སྐུལ།

<ཕྱིད་ཆ་མས་སྐུ་ལུས་མེ་རུ་མ་སྒོན་རོགས།> (བསམ་གྲིང་ཚེ་རིང་ལྷ་མོ།)

<ལང་ར་ན་མ་རེད་ཤལ་ར་ན་རེད།> (ཀུ་སྒོག) ལྷ་བུའོ།

ཀ། གདུང་སེམས་མཉམ་བསྒེད་ཀྱི་སྐོར།

ཀ། གདུང་འབོད་དང་སྡུ་ངན་ཞུ་བ།

ཀ། <སྡུག་རྩེའི་སྐྱོ་གར།> (མདའ་ཚན་པ།)

ཅ། <རྩེས་སུ་དན་པའི་དབྱངས།> (ཞ་འདུས་མིག་ཆུ།)

ཇ། <སྡུ་ངན་རྩེས་དན་དུ།> (གཙང་ཁ་བྱས།)

ཁ། གདེང་འཛོག་དང་གྱས་འདུད་ཞུ་བ།

ཀ། <འོད་སྐོང་འབར་བའི་ལེའུ་གསུམ།> (ཚྭ་རུ་མ་ཐབས་མཁས)

ཅ། <མེ་ལྷེ་འུར་འུར་འབར། འབོད་སྒྲ་ལྷང་ལྷང་གྲགས།> (རྡ་བ་རྒྱལ་ཁམས་པ།)

ང། གསོལ་འདེབས་དང་བསྔོ་སྨོན།

ཀ། <ཚེ་རབས་ཀུན་གྱི་ལྷག་པའི་ལྟ་སྐལ་ཡུམ་གཅིག་རྗེ་བཙུན་སྒྲོམ་མར་ཞུ་འབོད་སྟ་མཐའི་བུ་སྐྱོ་གདུང་བཞུགས་སོ།།> (ཤར་ཕྱོགས་ལྷག་རྩ)

ཁ། <དགེ་པའི་ཞིང་ནས་བདེ་བར་གཟིམ་རོགས།> (རྩ་སྐས) ལྟ་བུའོ།

མདུག་སྡོམ།

“ཀྱེ་ཀྱེ། ཕྱིད་ཚོ་ནི་ནམ་ཡང་འགྲན་ཟླ་མེད་པའི་མི་རིགས་ཀྱི་དཔའ་རྩོད་དམ་པ།
དེ་བས་ལགཔ་ཟུང་གི་མཚོན་ཆ་དོར་ནས་ཕྱིད་ཅག་ལ་མཐེ་བོང་སྟེང་།
ཀྱེ་ཀྱེ། ཕྱིད་ཚོ་ནི་ངོ་གནོང་མི་དགོས་པའི་བསྟན་འགྲོའི་སྐུང་མ་གསར་བ།
དེ་བས་སེམས་ཁོང་གི་ཁ བཏགས་རེ་རེས་ཕྱིད་ཅག་ལ་མཇལ་ཕྱག་འབུལ།
ཕྱིད་ཚོ་ནི་དོན་དམ་བདེན་པའི་ཞུ་ཚུགས་པ་དང་། དོན་དམ་ཞི་བདེའི་ཞོ་ཉ་བ།
དོན་དམ་རྒྱལ་གཅེས་དཔའ་བོ་ལགས་ཏེ། ད་ནི་ངོ་མ་ཁས་བླངས་པ་ཡིན།
ང་ཚོས་གང་སེང་གི་རྒྱལ་དར་ཞབས་སྟེ། ཕྱིད་ཅག་ལ་སྐུ་ངན་དང་གྱས་འདུད་ཞུ།

ང་ཚོས་མགོ་འཕང་གནམ་ལ་བཏེགས་ཏེ་ནམ་ཡང་མགོ་བོ་མི་སྐྱར་བའི་དམ་ཞིག་བཅའོ།

ང་ཚོས་ལག་གདང་གཅིག་ཏུ་སྦྲེལ་ཏེ་གཏན་དུ་མི་འཐོར་བའི་མཐའ་ཞིག་སྐྱེལ།
ང་ཚོས་རེ་བའི་འཆར་འགོད་བཞེངས་ཏེ་རྒྱལ་ཁའི་ཕྱོགས་ལ་མདུན་སྐྱོད་བྱེད།
བདེན་པའི་ཞི་གྲོལ་འདི་རྒྱལ་བར་ཤོག།
བདེན་པའི་འཐབ་རྩོད་འདི་རྒྱལ་བར་ཤོག།
བདེན་པའི་མི་རིགས་འདི་རྒྱལ་བར་ཤོག།
བདེན་པའི་ཕུགས་འདུན་འདི་རྒྱལ་བར་ཤོག།
‘བདེན་པ་ཉིད་རྣམ་པར་རྒྱལ་གྱུར་ཅིག’། །།”

<ངོ་མ་ཁས་བླངས་པ་ཡིན།>ལས། (ཆབ་བྲག་ཕོ་ཉ) ༢༠༡༡།༡༠།༡༥།

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Fire, Flames and Ashes. How Tibetan Poets Talk about Self-Immolations without Talking about Them

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Since its inception in 2005, Tibetan websites from within Tibet and, later, blogs, became a working tool with which to evaluate how the fraction of young Tibetans endowed with cultural capital represent social and ethnic crisis and react to it. This instance of "infrapolitics of the powerless"[1] became especially obvious in 2008, when a large-scale revolt started spreading in Lhasa and the Tibetan plateau for the first time in 20 years: poetry published online for days on revealed the lay Tibetan elite discourse about these dramatic events unfolding on the Tibetan plateau. But the identity of arrested protesters, or even the place where protests were taking place, were not dealt with by these bloggers. Those who did pass on images or information paid a high price, ranging from 5 to 15 years jail sentence,[2] suspected of "disclosing state secrets." If factual information was not possible, what did these bloggers talk about instead? They resorted to metaphors to express their angst: tempests and hurricanes were raging, strong winds, gales, black and red storms were blowing on the plateau, lakes and rivers froze under harsh climatic conditions, darkness enveloped the earth, wolves were howling, threatening harmless and defenseless sheep. As was obvious to all, those parallels with the mineral and animal kingdoms symbolized the gloom, despair, and helplessness felt by bloggers as armed forces swarmed on the Tibetan plateau. Resorting to similes was nothing new for Tibetans: thanks to their long-established and rich literature, Tibetan writers and poetry lovers were fully equipped to produce such works, and readers deciphered them easily. Centuries ago, Ti-

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1 James Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance. Hidden Transcripts.* New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1990, xiii.

2 A state employee, Rikdzin Wangmo, received a 5-year jail sentence, the famous singer Jamyangkyi was arrested and interrogated for one month and partly owed her release to international collective action. Upon her liberation, not fearing reprisals, she published the account of her days in jail. This was later translated into English and published under the title *A Sequence of Tortures: A Diary of Interrogations* (Dharamsala: Tibetan Women Association, n.d.). Konchok Tsepel, administrator of a popular literature website, was sentenced to 15 years in jail.

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betan literati had classified *ngonjo rikpa*, which can be translated as 'lexicology' or 'science of similes,' as one of the 5 'lesser sciences' that an accomplished cleric was supposed to master: virtuosity in the art of metaphors, similes and parallels, was deemed significant enough to be part of the scholarly curriculum. Apart from being a tool testifying intellectual distinction, it enabled writers to cleverly hide their criticisms and sarcasms towards spiritual or worldly opponents, even in pre-1950s Tibet. Today's poets, among whom one finds not only clerics, but a high proportion of high school students and university graduates, have perpetuated this tradition, but opacity and double-entendre have now become basic tools for political survival in the public arena. On the vibrant blogosphere, Tibetan writers have become "experts at metaphors," to use an expression applied to Jaan Kross, the most influential Estonian writer of the 20th century.[3]

This imperative of self-preservation explains why the Tibetan blogosphere in China seems on the surface to have remained silent on the topic of self-immolation. Quests for "auto-cremation"[4] on search engines in Tibetan, whatever the expression may be originally,[5] yield little results. But fire, torch, embers, cinders, flames, butter lamps, dust, have made a forceful appearance in Tibetan poems since October 2011.

The first poem that alluded to immolations, as far as I can tell, came only with the wave of October 2011 immolations which also attracted the world's attention: the first was "Mourning" (Tib. *Mya ngan zhu ba*) by the famous and charismatic Sangdor (b. 1976?),[6] on October 10. Two days later "Flames are flying" *(Mye lce 'phur gyin 'dug)* by Durphak[7] was posted online; "Lost lives" *(Bor song ba'i tshe srog)* by Dremila appeared on October 15–it had apparently been written on the October 12.[8] A fourth poem, entitled "Fire has burnt again" *(Yang me sgron song)* by Domepa,[9] appeared on that same day. This coincided with 3 immolations: one on October 3 and two on Oc-

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3 Jacob Antoine, « Jaan Kross, L'art de dénoncer les absurdités de l'Histoire par l'écriture », *Le Courrier des pays de l'Est*, 1066(2), 2008, pp. 89-91.

4 This term is used by J. Benn, *Burning for the Buddha: Self-immolation in Chinese Buddhism*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2007. It encapsulates two elements which the word 'immolation' does not include: the fact that immolators act upon themselves, and that they use fire to perpetuate their act.

5 See Katia Buffetrille's and Chung Tsering's contributions in this issue for a list of terms.

6 http://www.sangdhor.com/blog_c.asp?id=4907&a=sangdhor. Sangdor is the only poet whose year of birth can be specified in this article, as I have no information regarding the others.

7 http://www.sangdhor.com/blog_c.asp?id=4951&a=maliysia.

8 http://www.sangdhor.com/blog_c.asp?id=4983&a=1988021.

9 http://www.sangdhor.com/blog_c.asp?id=5049&a=09758533066.

tober 7. One last poem in this 'October series' was posted by someone called Tsetan Dorje, apparently a young monk from the Drigung school of Tibetan Buddhism. It is entitled "Don't say auto-cremation is violence" *(Rang lus mer bsregs 'tshe ba ma gsungs shig).* This poem was censored and is still irretrievable. The first 4 poems were posted on the same website, *Sangdhor*, which is run by the poet Sangdor,[10] who had launched himself the movement with his own poem, "Mourning." Unsurprisingly, this website was closed not long after the publication of these 4 poems, possibly because Sangdor's own poem was translated into English and attracted the censors' attention, or because the posting of 4 poems, obviously mourning the self-immolators' death, might have been considered too much for the censors.

One had to wait until the auto-cremation of a reincarnated lama, Lama Sobha, on 8 January 2012, to see the second wave of poems: it began with "Flames propagate from my homeland, Darlak" *(Pha yul dar lag nas me lce mched thal)* by Yepeng (?),[11] a rather active younger blogger. The poem bore as a subtitle "An incident that happened at 5 in the morning of January 8 2012,"[12] which leaves little doubt as to the event referred to. He published another poem 7 days later entitled "I was able to shout a war cry at the burning ground" *(Me 'bar sa nas ki 'bod thub thal)*, but this poem was censored and it has not been restored yet, like the rest of the poetic production of this author. When looking for it on the internet, the following formula appears: "You will be able to read this post only after the web administrator has checked it" *(zin tho 'di do dam pas zhib bsher byas rjes da gzod lta klog byed thub).* The day after the auto-cremation, the blogger Shokjang entered the stage. He is famous among Tibetan youth for having been detained for several months in 2010 after writing openly critical comments of the 2008 Chinese state handling of events in Tibet. According to its title "Written for Lhamkog and his 'A way a butter-lamp burns'" *(Lham kog gis mchod me sbar stangs shig la bris pa)*, the poem seems to be a rejoinder to a poem by another active poet on the Tibetan blogosphere, Lhamkok, although I could not find it. Shokjang's poem is subtitled "On the way butter lamps burn" *(Mchod me sbar tshul).*[13]

The fact that the person who had immolated in early January was a *trulku* (reincarnated lama) may partly explain why it resonated so strongly with Tibetan bloggers, but another reason might be the rela-

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[10] When mentioning him as a person, I do not follow the spelling chosen by Sangdor for his website *(Sangdhor).*

[11] http://blog.amdotibet.cn/yepeng/archives/47198.aspx.

[12] *2012 1 5 zhogs pa'i dus tshod lnga steng byung ba'i don rkyen cig.*

[13] http://www.sangdhor.com/blog_c.asp?id=5728&a=3.

tive geographical proximity of the location of this immolation with many bloggers: Lama Sobha was from Golok, an area pertaining to the Qinghai province, where many bloggers came from, so they might have been able to connect more easily with him than with other self-immolators, who hailed from different regions. Some might have even known him, which was unlikely to be the case of younger, ordinary monks or ex-monks from faraway Ngawa or Kardze.

The third series of poems was posted online between February 10 and 20 2012. It coincided with another wave of auto-cremations in February (8, 9, 11, 13, 17 and 19). One poem by someone called Jampel Dorje was entitled "Offering to the demise of a stranger" *(Rgyus med kyi mi zhig gi 'chi 'pho la phul ba)* and obviously referred to a self-immolator, though it is hard to identify precisely who.[14] The simultaneous advent of Tibetan New Year was the occasion of a number of poems, two of which referred obliquely to self-immolations: "A versified poem for 2012" *(2012 lo'i tshigs bcad cig)* by Droktruk[15] and "Celebrate New Year like this" *(Lo gsar 'di ltar gtong)* by a blogger calling himself Gongdeba. [16] Although devoid of clear hints to self-immolations, the poem ends with a call to celebrate New Year by lighting a butter lamp in remembrance of the "heroes," for the clear light of ultimate truth, and for aspirations to hope.[17] This reference to heroes, to ultimate truth and hope can be interpreted as allusions to the self-immolators of the past Tibetan year.

Between March and June 2012, in spite of 3 new self-immolations having been recorded, hardly any poem referring to them was posted from within Tibet. The crystal clear "Master, the end of my shawl is burning" *(Ston pa/Nga'i gzan sne me ru 'bar song)* on March 15 followed the much-commented self-immolation of Jamyang Palden, at Rongwo monastery, in March 14. But its author, Lunyon, is an active monk blogger in exile. The poem was censored within 24 hours of its posting online in Tibet.[18] But surprisingly the website altogether was not closed down, although this was a tense period for Tibetans. Two more poems may be ascribable to the self-immolations: "Tibet" *(Bod)* by Lungbu,[19] on March 30 and "Butter lamp, the pillar of my mind"

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14 http://www.tibetcm.com/html/list_22/201202204153.html.

15 http://www.tibetcm.com/html/list_25/201202204152.html. This poet has a blog: http:// blog.amdo tibet.cn/benbajia/index.aspx.

16 http://blog.nbyzwhzx.com/space.php?uid=496&do=blog&id=1080. The name is not given in Tibetan, only in Roman letters.

17 *dpa' bo yi rjes dran la mchod me spar / bden mtha yi 'od gsal la mchod me spar / re ba yi smon 'dun la mchod me spar / mchod me yi 'od ngogs su lo gsar gtong* /http://blog.nbyzwhzx. com/space.php?uid =496&do= blog&id=1080.

18 http://www.sangdhor.com/blog_c.asp?id=5962&a=1000.

19 http://www.gdqpzhx.com/bo/html/literature/201203301730.html.

(Mchod me/Nga'i sems kyi rdo ring), by Dhi Kalsang on April 3.[20] But they are so allusive, at least to my understanding, that linking them with immolations could be an over interpretation.

Let's now turn to the poems themselves. I will first look into how they manage to create powerful imagery, and then how they refer to the tragic events that triggered them.

Anthropomorphisation of fire is a literary strategy adopted by several authors. In this instance, it is not a mere rhetoric and literary device, as at some point during the cremation process, the body is fire and fire is the body. In Sangdor's "Mourning," the fire's mouth is moving *('gul)*, the fire's hands are drilling *(gsor)*, the fire's chest is showing itself *(ston)*. Fire, that is, the self-immolator, then turns into a rosary of fire whose beads fall one by one onto the ground. It then turns into smoke *(du ba)*, also anthropomorphised, which gazes into the monastery's roof and every monk's cell.

In the poem "Flames are flying," fire and flames are also animated with life: flames are described as biting humble humans and turbulent dogs, possibly an allusion to Tibetans and Chinese respectively, and smoke is described as licking them.

Another literary tactic consists in establishing parallels with objects and shapes without ever naming the basis of the parallel. The title of Shokjang's poem ("The way a butter lamp burns") subscribes to the often found simile between the body in flame and the butter lamp, but includes other powerful and eloquent similarities: an armor of copper (to defend Tibet?), then a sharp hammer (to strike enemies?), and finally a big bronze bell (to summon Tibetans?). The poem ends with the narrator hearing: "Wake up from your slumber!" a call coming from what has not been and will not be named, but which is obviously the burning body of the self-cremating person.

The poem "Fire is raging again" also relies on strong visual imagery, this time describing crudely the body in flame in its last moment: the flesh and bones, quivering in pain, are struggling to make their very last steps before collapsing. The poem ends with the description of smoke, settling down on the ground, while the last atom of flame is absorbed in the space between the ground and the sky. These last atoms of the charred body are also the focus of another poem: in the final scene of "Offering to the demise of a stranger," "people nearby" are described as gathering atoms or specks of dust in the coat of its owner, obviously the person who has just self-immolated. Images of charred bodies carefully wrapped in coats immediately come to

[20] http://www.sangdhor.com/blog_c.asp?id=6142&a=1988021.

mind, underscoring the respect, care and attention that the self-immolator received from people surrounding him, for his heroic act.

Another poem chooses other senses than the visual: it mentions sounds like the cracking of a match, with "a sharper sound than that of monastery bells in the wind." Obviously this refers to the cracking of bones burning. It also refers crudely to the scorching smell *(gzhob dri)* of a charred body and describes it as dissolving at a crossroads. Shokjang's poem also frames it within a given location: "The blue smoke that swirls from the ashes of your bones, left behind as leftovers, this blue smoke is like a rope tied up between mountains." Contrary to other poems, it gives agency to the self-immolator: "You did not fly a kite, you did not throw stones… You flew your own dust everywhere, as if competing with eagles."

Hints to the background or to the motives of the self-immolators can be found in some poems: Sangdor's "Mourning" poem begins with "Because living felt more hopeless than dying" and it ends with the classical "storm and wind" metaphor, which usually refers to Chinese troops and here can be interpreted as the armed forces swarming on the place as soon as the immolations occurred, as we know happened in most if not all cases. In "Fire is raging again," the image of someone handcuffed and trapped in a cobweb is obviously a reference to Tibetans "caught" helplessly in China polity. The poem "Flames spread in my hometown Darlak," apart from its clear subtitle that reads almost like a newspaper heading ("An accident that occurred at 5AM"), also mentions the way in which the lama committed auto-cremation, although by way of allusion more than directly: "In this quiet environment / A *mani* chanter woke up / He left after having tasted / A mouthful of something close to alcohol."[21] This is in obvious reference to the attested fact that the lama drank kerosene before setting himself on fire, as a way to ensure that he would die for sure.

Other poems, on the whole, are silent about the motives: is it because they are so obvious to readers that they need no explanation, or because too many details would jeopardise their publishing? "Lost lives" by Dremila stands out: rather than resorting to vivid imagery and "fugitive impressions through an artistic medium that best conserves their emotional impact",[22] it asks whether one or two fires (lit. "heaps of fire," *me dpung*) will be able to make "Tibetans break the wrecked chair they are sitting on" (rotten China?), "enable them to use their thin pen" (exerting right to self-expression?), or "make use

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[21] *lhang 'jags kyi khor yug nas / ma ni bzlo mkhan cig sad te / a rag lta bu'i bzzi kha can cig gi / ro myong nas bud song zig /*.

[22] Sarah Kendzior, "Poetry of witness: Uzbek identity and the response to Andijon," *Central Asian Survey*, 26(3), September 2007, p. 331.

of their worn out name card" (restoring Tibetan eroded identity?). It asks whether the bonfires will enable Tibetans "to be the masters of their crooked dogs' legs" (walk on their feet?), to give up their worn out voice (to dare to shout?), to make them give their violent behavior (stop feuding?), and ends with the question: will we be able to strive for perfect action? This is the only poem I have read that questions the benefit of self-immolations: "will these bonfires be able to make up for the leaders that we have lost and the history books that remain?"

Conclusion

Tibetan society today is still highly literary, but is also highly censored, as there is no forum for public discussion of contentious topics, especially those related to ethnicity and the eroding Tibetan cultural identity. The one way out of this "dialectic of disguise and surveillance"[23] is a clever use of literature, the one kind of authorized public activity. Published texts do contradict the official state narrative and, in our case, far from condemning self-immolators as "terrorists," "outcasts," "criminals," and "mentally ill people," they speak of them with respect and empathy.

But one can question doubly the efficiency of this "use of literature:" first, it addresses only Tibetans as almost no Han Chinese can read Tibetan. In this case, it is tantamount to "preaching to the choir." The use of literature resides more here in collective mourning, mutual solace and a reinforcement of an injured Tibetan identity. Secondly, given the necessary self-censorship that Tibetans deploy, these venues cannot act as a medium to develop an "independent exchange of ideas—the very thing that most threatens a state dependent on suppression and censorship."[24] We are a thus long distance from a fully articulated blogosphere where Tibetan netizens would directly vie with state officials and state narrative. Still, one may come occasionally across glimpses of discussion and debates: the poem "Don't say auto-cremation is violence" mentioned above seems to take position in favour of auto-cremation and to defend it as compatible with the non-violent approach put forward by the Dalai-Lama in the Tibetan struggle for freedom. An online Tibetan encyclopedia from Qinghai shows a question asked on November 11 2011 by someone called Gyaltan: he would like website users to share their feelings and opinions about the self-cremation of a Tibetan on No-

[23] James Scott, *op. cit.* p. 4.
[24] Sarah Kendzior, "Poetry of witness," *op. cit.,* p. 332.

vember 11 in Swayambunath (Nepal). It only elicited one reply that tentatively suggests that this person did it "for the sake of religion."[25] Incidentally, no self-immolation was reported as having taken place in Nepal in November. More significantly, one social commentator argued, two days after the first immolation in March 2011, that "taking one's own life is proof of a great courage."[26] The website on which it was published has been a regular target of censorship and has been closed down for two months. In April 2012 came a second commentary to self-immolations: someone wrote a short piece called "Stopping courage" *(Spobs pa 'gog byed)*[27] asking what kind of courage it was to abandon one's own life, which is as precious as gold, rather than facing "spite, bullying, belittling, jail and beating" which affects hundreds of thousands of beings. This is an obvious reference to what the writer perceives as the doomed fate of Tibetans currently living under China. Last, Naktsang Nulo, a retired lawyer from Amdo famous for publishing his uncompromising and unauthorised autobiography in 2005, mentioned the self-immolations twice in an openly sad online lament about the current and overall Tibetan situation, "A sadness that will never clear up."[28] He links these desperate acts to other instances of protest like street demonstrations, and states clearly that these numerous immolations "are done with the higher objective of [benefitting] one's nationality" and indicate "hope [of being heard] and protest towards the authorities in power."

But these web pages are the exception rather than the rule. So far, writers, bloggers and intellectuals, who are the "socially concerned"[29] fringe of the Tibetan society endowed with cultural capital, have had to restrict their use of internet and poetry online as a mere "release [of pent-up] resentment."[30] But, contrary to "scar literature" which was officially allowed in the late 1970s in China as a catharsis to evacuate the trauma of the Cultural Revolution in the present case, the trauma keeps deepening without much hope for an end to it.

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25 ask.bodyig.org/?question/view/2497.html.

26 http://www.rdrol.net/node/252 The topic of courage (*snying stobs*) and strength (*stobs*) is gaining currency on the Tibetan blogosphere.

27 www.tibetcm.com/html/list_03/201204264386.html.

28 http://www.bodrigs.com/literature/prose/2012-05-27/384.html.

29 Perry Links, *The Uses of Literature: Life in the Socialist Chinese Literary System.* Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000, p. 314.

30 Link, *Uses of Literature, op. cit.*, p. 319.

GLOSSARY

Transcription	Transliteration	Tibetan
Dhi Kalsang	Dhi Skal bzang	དཱི་སྐལ་བཟང།
Domepa	Mdo med pa	མདོ་མེད་པ།
Dremila	’Dre mi la	འདྲེ་མི་ལ།
Drigung	’Bri gung	འབྲི་གུང།
Droktruk	’Brog phrug	འབྲོག་ཕྲུག
Durphak	Dur ’phag	དུར་འཕག
Golok	Mgo log	མགོ་ལོག
Gyaltan	Rgyal bstan	རྒྱལ་བསྟན།
Jampel Dorje	’Jam dpal rdo rje	འཇམ་དཔལ་རྡོ་རྗེ།
Jamyang Paldan	’Jam dbyangs dpal ldan	འཇམ་དབྱངས་དཔལ་ལྡན།
Jamyangkyi	’Jam dbyangs skyid	འཇམ་དབྱངས་སྐྱིད།
Kardze	Dkar mdzes	དཀར་མཛེས།
Konchok Tsepel	Dkon mchog tshe ’phel	དཀོན་མཆོག་ཚེ་འཕེལ།
Lama Sobha	Bla ma Bsod bha	བླ་མ་བསོད་བྷ།
Lungbu	Rlung bu	རླུང་བུ།
Lunyon	Klu smyon	ཀླུ་སྨྱོན།
Naktsang Nulo	Nags tshang nus blo	ནགས་ཚང་ནུས་བློ།
Ngawa	Rnga ba	རྔ་བ།
ngonjo rikpa	*mngon brjod rig pa*	མངོན་བརྗོད་རིག་པ།
Rikdzin Wangmo	Rig ’dzin dbang mo	རིག་འཛིན་དབང་མོ།
Rongwo	Rong bo	རོང་མོ།
Sangdor	Seng rdor	སེང་རྡོར།
Shokjang	Zhogs ljang	ཞོག་ལྗང་།
trulku	*sprul sku*	སྤྲུལ་སྐུ།
Tsetan Dorje	Tshe brtan rdo rje	ཚེ་བརྟན་རྡོ་རྗེ།

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Fire and Death in Western Imagination

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I find the themes of self-immolation and fire sacrifice particularly thought-provoking. I am not a sociologist, nor an anthropologist, let alone a specialist of Eastern civilisations. As a historian, when I wrote the daring synthesis *La mort et l'Occident de 1300 à nos jours* ("Death in the Western World from 1300 until today"), I respected the temporal and spatial limits of my area of expertise, and you will not read about self-immolation and fire sacrifice there. But do not believe that these practices that we are discovering today in the West did not raise essential questions in the history of mankind and the connection of man with his body and fire.

I will not try to sum up in a few sentences the thousand-year old history of death, funerals and burials in the West. Let me start with a few images that belong to our cultural background but that are fading into oblivion. Who remembers the phoenix, this mythical bird and unique member of its species which, according to the 19th French dictionary *Le Littré* was said to live in the Arabian deserts for several centuries and only showed itself once, when it came to burn itself and be reborn: "Herodotus is the first writer who talked about the phoenix… Horapollo said that when the Egyptians wanted to represent the soul, they painted a phoenix because, among all animals, this bird was the one that lives the longest." The phoenix, like the unicorn and other mythical animals, still fascinated and maintained its status in the medieval bestiary: "Fenix is a bird in Arabic and there is only one remaining in the world" (Brun Latini, Tres. P. 214). The phoenix went from being represented on knights' coats of arms to the TV commercials of our childhood where it was used to sell frying pans. Now, our children only mention it when referring to La Fontaine's fables, in which Master Crow tells the fox "You are the Phoenix of this forest." What a sad fate!

Greek mythology relates how Heracles, who had been betrayed by his wife Deianira and who wanted to escape the terrible suffering caused by the poisonous tunic of Nessus, had built a funeral pile of trees on Mount Oeta and sacrificed himself in the flames. Through that process, he was able to attain immortality, since Zeus made him marry Hebe—the goddess of peace—and consequently allowed him to escape his mortal condition. Can we consider this legend a found-

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ing myth, just like the myth of the bird that is reborn from its ashes? Heracles was never imitated and his final destiny did not become an example like Prometheus, who did not jump into the fire, but stole it for the benefit of mankind. However, there are examples of funeral pyres in Homer's stories, and they are dedicated to heroes who died in glory—Patrocles and Achilles were burned in a parade bed, surrounded with precious objects, a sacrifice that can include other people, captives, or relatives. This is a practice that is also known in other ancient civilisations, or in some more recent and exotic cultures. It exists in our ancient heritage, and archaeologists are now exploring its remains. However, for ordinary men in our countries, it is the burial of the body that prevailed in Greco-Roman antiquity, as shown by the graveyards of Athens or the tombs at the gates of Rome.

This does not mean that fire is absent from our memories; it is on the contrary recalled by many sources, like in the Bible (i.e. the Hebrew people in the furnace). Is it imprudent or caricatural to consider that Christianity represents an obvious and fundamental change after Nero threw the crucifixes of hundreds of Christians into the fire in Rome? May it be too obvious? This change had already started in the Judaic tradition, which emphasised the respect of the dead (see Tobit under the walls of Babylon who insisted on a burial for his fellow citizens although it was prohibited).

What Christianity essentially added to those traditions is the eschatology of resurrection that entails the integrity of the body. We should not be mistaken: "dust to dust" only refers to ashes when language is being misused. You need bones to conceive the resurrection of the dead at Doomsday. This vision of Ezekiel was reused in medieval iconography and afterwards. In the 15th century, there still were French and English exegetes who debated the possibility of having a crowd of people risen from the dead in the valley of Josaphat–and in what state, young or old? Some think they could be in their thirties, the age of the Christ. Even though they do not represent popular beliefs exactly, those naïve questions did appeal to the masses. The young Maxime Gorki was questioned by a humorous pope: "How does one recognise Adam and Eve in that crowd? Because they won't have a navel."

The integrity of the body, or at least what remains of it after the tribulations of the last passage, still represents a strong aspiration, and the whole history of funeral practices as centuries went by—from the bare shroud to the locked coffin with more and more clothes on—is evidence of its powerful appeal in the West. The images of the good death emphasize it—from the satisfied recumbent effigies in the Middle Ages, to the death of saints in iconographic representations. This is a story that I have told—and I am not the only one—by refer-

ring to the tribulations of the body that is shown or hidden, but in any case preserved. Suicide is however considered a bad death—the bodies of the dead are dragged on the roads; as well as condemnation—their ashes are scattered as nothing must remain.

One should now consider the research of anthropologists and folklorists who describe how suicide practices differ considerably from one area to another. In some places, people hang themselves, in other places, people jump into wells, etc. In this repertoire, self-immolation is not well-represented.

One of the reasons may be that it is associated with hellish punishment. You may say that Christian hell, which replaced the river Styx in Antiquity, is not specific to the Christian faith and you may be thinking about a rich variety of hells from other religions. But in the belief and imagination of Christians, the two places mentioned by Saint Augustine (and there are only two places) are represented on the tympana of churches and cathedrals with the image of the flames of hell contrasting with heaven.

It might not be such an obvious consideration; and without embarking on a story of hellish flames that would lead us too far from the topic, I will allow myself to briefly mention my research on the images of purgatory. Purgatory is this soft substitute for hell (because one can get out of it) and it has constantly been re-invented from the 13th to the 15th century: the purgatory as a prison, the lake purgatory (*de profundo lacu*), the hellish purgatory, whose definition *ne varietur* was given by cardinal Bellarmine at the council of Trent in the 16th century *communis sententia theologorum est vere esse ignem.*

Although purgatory in its representation until recently has been the great vessel of hope for the mourners, as the deceased stay there for some time, death in fire—an anticipation of hell—represents the ultimate torture of the other world. It is the most dreadful ending as it entails the scattering of ashes and therefore the loss of any hope.

It is a punishment in the hands of the mighty, the sovereigns, the monarchs and the churches. I will not give a speech on the comparative history of tortures as this would lead us too far, but one cannot but notice how the fear of fire pervades popular thought.

However, one may have an objection: without using well-worn clichés of a 'popular religion,' as a form of resistance against the violence of the terrorist pressure of the mighty, it is nevertheless possible to refer to fire as a positive symbol in bonfire days, during Saint John's festival or other religious and secular celebrations. This bonfire does not exclude death as revealed by the old woman's pyre at the end of winter in Mediterranean traditions (one can think of Fellini's *Amarcord*). The old woman's dummy that is burned with the remains of winter is the image of the rejected past, of the darkness of winter,

while longing for the light of spring. One can also mention the tradition of executing effigies in front of urban mobs. This special treatment is given to loathed characters, tyrants and ministers, Concini or Mazarin, without taking their high status into consideration. In Paris, during the revolution in 1789, the pope's dummy was burned in the garden of the Palais-Royal as he had condemned the civil constitution of the clergy. After jubilation, loathing is expressed with fire. One cannot deny then that fire, and particularly death in fire, is related to the devil in the collective imagination; a devil that takes in some traditions the shape of a black cat that people burn.

So much so that fire has become the most dreadful form of individual and collective punishment in Western history: from the Albigensian crusade in the 13th c. with the fire of Montségur to the repression of the Waldensians of Luberon in the 16th c. It gives the image of a collective holocaust in which women sometimes jumped away into the fire to escape the worst.

From the Cathars to the heretics at the end of the Middle Ages, with the examples of John Hus, Thomas Münzer during the peasant war, or Michel Servet in Geneva, a figure has materialised, that of a character dead in fire… because of others.

This character is ambivalent. He is on the one hand a subject of loathing because of his devilish acquaintances, but, on the other hand, he is sometimes seen as a martyr. And this leads us to Joan of Arc, burnt as a witch in Rouen by the English and their French allies, but whose demeanour undoubtedly made her a saint and a martyr for a part of the crowd, as well as for some Englishmen who left saying: "We have burnt a saint."

But this is an exception, and not the rule that was to prevail from the end of the Middle Ages to the beginning of the Modern Era. From the 15th century through to the middle of the 17th c. (despite some prior instances) is the period when the witch hunt in Europe and North America developed and became prominent along with phenomena of possession in certain areas—in some nunneries and communities of villagers. Witches were burnt, as well as the sorcerers that bewitched them under the influence of the devil, in all social circles including the elites. Among the magistrates in the houses of parliament that Robert Mandrou studied in a famous thesis, it was decided to stop burning the possessed as they were now considered insane. It took some time before this attitude prevailed among the ruling classes. The image of a pyre would continue to be associated in literature and in popular clichés with the Inquisition as it occurred even at a late period in Spain and Portugal (in the 1780s).

In Voltaire (see *Candide*) and in the work of many authors of the Age of Enlightenment, the march of the sentenced people wearing

the sanbenito, accompanied by penitents, radically deprecates the saving flames while Hell declines (*The decline of Hell*, by Walker). This decline was forecast by the "merciful doctors" (Locke, Newton), who refused to believe in eternal punishment, at the turn of the 17th and 18th c.

As the authors of the Age of Enlightenment condemned the foundations of fanaticism and superstition, a modern reading drew the attention of those that I used to call the "primitives of ethnography." Travellers and philosophers who read them—after Montaigne, who paved the way—discovered the existence of other civilisations. Their interest for those civilisations is ambivalent, somewhere between love, hate and incomprehension, often adopting the 'cold approach' of the man of science, as Stendhal called it. However, following the path of Diderot and of those who popularised Bougainville's and Cook's travels, these discoveries were associated with barbaric practices, tinged with appalling strangeness. Bernardin de Saint Pierre, a native of Bourbon Island in the Indian Ocean, discovered the practice of self-immolation by Indian widows, who threw themselves into the fire so that they would not survive their husbands. Was it a spontaneous act or were they forced by the conventions of their families? People wondered about those practices that seemed barbaric… This theme was re-used by Jules Verne in *Around the World in 80 days*, in which Phileas Fogg became the providential saviour of a woman who was to become his companion, an ecumenical reconciliation between the French and the English and a representation of the superiority of their common civilisation.

In the neoclassical imagery by the end of the 18th c., heroic suicide as it is staged and performed reveals the predominance of standards from the Antiquity, from Socrates to Cato the Younger before being represented in the revolutionary or national acts in the 19th c. When the last Montagnards—the "Crétois"—during the French Revolution were under arrest by decree after Thermidor (eleventh month in the French republican calendar), they gave each other a knife and stabbed themselves as if they felt the need to show that they were still free to choose—a final gesture of freedom that nobody could deny. The same situation occurred with Gracchus Babeuf during the Vendôme trial.

What was the status of self-immolation in the society that was built in the 19th century? Although Marat had prophesied that "Freedom is born from the fires of sedition," it is only metaphoric fires that were seen during the revolutions, in the same way as the repression replaced the pyre by the so-called 'cold' guillotine on the opposite side.

While the hellish fire was slowly losing ground in the people's psyche in a century of mirages, the secularisation of the fear of fire was not a global phenomenon. As long as the traditional society was still alive, fire was feared—at a material level as fires were more common in villages than today—but also in the collective imagination, in which it symbolised latent or hidden subversion. Despite the invention of firework, fire is still frightening. In the villages in Ile-de-France (the Paris region), when a beggar knocks at the door of a rich farmer, if he is rejected, people say that he will "light the fire", and the rich man must understand the threat. That is why in some later texts (Anatole France), policemen were said to confiscate pipes and lighters. Beware of the fire!

The fire of rebellion can be found one last time in a very symbolic fashion during the Paris Commune in 1871. Paris burnt, but who were said to be guilty? The "fire-raisers," significantly—those bad ladies from the common society, as if they were the daughters of the old witches, which shows the recurrent association between women and the dark side of the concept of fire.

People died on barricades, like the deputy Baudin in 1851, after Napoleon III's coup, always remembering Robespierre's words "I am giving you my memory, it is precious and you shall defend it." One can clearly see the difference between this way of giving a testimony to set a good example and call for posterity on the one hand and self-immolations on the other hand. Revolution does not call for suicide, be it heroic or not, and one can remember Lenin's hostile comment on Paul Lafargue and his wife's suicide: "a revolutionary has no right to decide over his life."

The different forms of collective protests, from rioting to the breaking of working tools, demonstrating, barricading or going on strike, do not include the sacrifice of the body in their gesture repertoire, or at least not this kind of sacrifice.

The 20th century was a time of revolutions and wars calling for mass mobilisation and a new awareness of social classes and it not only introduced new ways of thinking but also new practices displaying non-Western influences, although they sometimes spread with some delay. Although Gandhi's doctrine of non-violence was obviously presented as an alternative solution, other ideas were at first dominant in the conflicts and wars of the 20th century, as well as for the long-term social evolutions. Two examples stand out today from that "tragic 20th century" according to Eric Hobsbawm's merciless review.

One is not so dramatic: the increasing popularity of cremation, which started a century and a half ago. One is dreadful: the invention of the crematorium in extermination camps during the Second World

War. The history of cremation is a large subject on its own and from our perspective it can be summarised by the disappearance of this fear of total extermination in fire that had been connected to the Christian belief of the preservation of the remains in the hope of resurrection.

In the 19th c., the concept of 'earth to earth' is rediscovered and illustrated by the very diverse practices of modern cremation, whose popularisation has been spectacular in Europe and in America since the Catholic church stopped prohibiting it.

The crematorium is no longer frightening, maybe a little as the different ways of dealing with the ashes—scattered, kept in an urn, above the fireplace, at home or in a cemetery—may be signs of uneasiness.

The other historical experience is the trauma of the Shoah: it haunts us with its images of horror, kept aside for some time. "Unbelievable", as an American friend of ours said one day. Today that experience is an essential subject in the teaching of memory.

We are living in a transitional period, and people question the forms of both collective and personal protests. One does not need to dwell on the first one, although revolutions that were said to be over yesterday are given a new impetus today. But the helplessness of collective protests, be they revolutionary or institutionalised in our Western societies, leads us to consider individual means of expressing revolt, frustration and despair. This leads us to wonder about suicide and its explosion today, as noticed in certain social circles and professions.

Then one will wonder about the intermediary and substitutive forms of collective protest. Some are "peaceful" like the practice of hostage taking, a non-fatal threat on the others' bodies, and some are violent like terrorism, which attacks those bodies directly.

And then one will reflect on individual or semi-collective forms of protest that go beyond anonymous and obscure suicides such as hunger strikes, suicide threats (running to jump into the void for instance). But just behind those cases, there is, beyond the expression of despair, a sort of call for collective consciousness.

One can feel that self-immolation is on a higher level. It is a testimony with no hidden hope, no explicit call for the world above, be it religious or secular (like in Robespierre's quote: "I am giving you my memory, it is precious and you shall defend it."). But here the specialists of Buddhism will certainly correct my ignorance.

In any case, the paradox for Western societies remains that these new practices, and their specific forms, present a striking contrast with the present mindset that tends to promote the preservation of the remains. One can think about the graveyards of the Spanish and

Kosovo wars where people prospected and searched for human relics, while Hungarians specialise in the practice of reburial.

At the same time and maybe due to these practices, the reading of the body has changed in our Western societies. "Don't touch my body," suggests a whole array of modern attitudes: the refusal of an organ transplant, of intense therapeutic care or even of abortion is puzzling. How in the current context can we understand the appearance and dissemination of self-immolation as an extreme means of individual protest in the West?

As François Furet put it, in a place where the revolution is said to be over, where strike is not getting anywhere at a collective level, when a hunger strike seems to be a last desperate resort, is self-immolation the "final transgression," as I said heedlessly in a recent interview? By its spectacular and disturbing characteristics, does it represent the ultimate call in a situation with no apparent solution?

It is sometimes associated with the discovery and appeal of Far-Eastern spirituality in our societies, and we will have the opportunity to talk about it in this symposium, but this explanation seems too easy, at least phrased in this way. It does not seem to be enough to justify the choice of this practice that is so unfamiliar or even contradictory to the historical legacy of our imagination.

It is now related to the Arab spring and the "historical awakening" that has been taking place for two years. It is true that the isolated epicentre of what is not yet an epidemic was Tunisia—the leader of this movement from the East to the West—but one should not say too much about the meaning of these ongoing episodes of unrest.

After many cautious comments on historical facts, something common when you ask a historian to give a presentation, I am driving myself into a corner: why, after a Tunisian street vendor, did a French teacher of mathematics with a normal profile and no secrets choose self-immolation to express her anguish?[1] People will blame the media. Well, they are an easy target!

This is where my reflections led me and then I went to cinema and had a revelation. An English film is now exploiting a niche market, or rather two of them: exoticism and the end of life. It is the story of English couples who in order to escape the high residential fees for old people's homes on their island, answer an attractive service offer on the Internet from an Indian hotel. It is the guaranteed success of the fanciful encounter of two civilisations, the clichés of today's India and its colourful folklore. Each member of the group reacts to this

[1] On October 13 2011, a mathematics teacher attempted a self-immolation in Béziers (Southern France). See http://ww.lemonde.fr/societe/article/2011/10/13/une-enseignante-essaie-de-s-immoler-a-beziers_1586 885_3224.html.

new experiment differently. One of them is gay and dies of joy after reencountering his Indian partner that he first met in his youth and the latter gives him a thoughtful posthumous reward in return—an Indian style funeral. The English group find themselves meditating with emotion before their friend's pyre. This is some idea: exporting our senior citizens (or at least a happy few) to a place where our trivial cremations can receive some spiritual enhancement via a return to our roots.

Self-Immolation in Context, 1963-2012[1]

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From March 2011 to June 2012, over three dozen Tibetans set themselves on fire to protest against repression in China. Self-immolation, though exceedingly rare, has been part of the global repertoire of protest for half a century. This article places the Tibetan cases within an international context of suicide protest over several decades. Comparison reveals the Tibetan episode to be one of the largest. It fits the general pattern of suicide protest being more prevalent in countries influenced by Indic (Buddhist, Hindu) rather than Semitic (Christian, Islamic) religious traditions. It departs from the general pattern of suicide protest being most prevalent in polities between the poles of autocracy and democracy. The most relevant episodes for comparison are Buddhists in South Vietnam in the 1960s and Falun Gong in China in the 2000s.

1. Numbers

I define 'suicide protest' (or equivalently, 'self-immolation') by criteria. First, an individual intentionally kills herself or himself, or at least inflicts physical injury likely to cause death.[2] Second, the act is not intended to harm anyone else or to cause material damage. Third, the act is 'public' in either of two senses: performed in a public place, or accompanied by a written declaration addressed to political figures or to the general public. Fourth, the act is committed for a collective cause rather than personal or familial grievances. These criteria serve to differentiate suicide protest from suicide terrorism, personal suicide, martyrdom, and cultic suicide. Note that suicide protest im-

[1] My thanks are due to Katia Buffetrille, Françoise Robin, and the other participants in the workshop.

[2] An earlier essay included thwarted acts of suicide protest, when people doused themselves flammable liquid but were physically prevented from ignition by police or their own supporters. I now think such cases should be excluded, because they suggest theatrical performance more than genuine attempt at self-harm. The essay is "Dying without Killing: Self-Immolations, 1963-2002," in Diego Gambetta (ed.), *Making Sense of Suicide Missions*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005.

Michael Biggs, "Self-Immolation in Context, 1963-2012", *Revue d'Etudes Tibétaines*, no. 25, Décembre 2012, pp. 143-150.

plies no particular method of self-killing. It does, however, exclude the hunger strike. Most hunger strikers do not make a commitment to die. Those who do, use the threat of death to bargain with the adversary. Suicide protest, by contrast, is unconditional; no bargaining is involved.

My data on suicide protest span the years 1919 to 2012, though collection is not yet complete for the last decade. The period 1919-1980 uses two newspapers: the *New York Times* and *The Times* of London. The digitized text is searched for keywords like 'immolation' and its variants, the combination of 'suicide' and 'protest', and so forth. The period 1977-2012 uses three newswires: Associated Press, Agence France Presse, and United Press International. A more limited search is undertaken on the keyword 'immolation' and its variants. These searches, along with extensive reading of secondary literature, yields information on 569 individuals who committed suicide protest. Deaths in prison are omitted because it is often impossible to distinguish protest suicide from ordinary suicide, death from natural causes, or murder by the authorities. Conceptually this exclusion has some justification because a prisoner—at least one who faces many years of incarceration—has less to live for.

The data I have collected cannot pretend to be comprehensive. For numerical comparison, therefore, it is more reliable to confine our attention to waves of protest, where multiple individuals commit suicide protest for the same collective cause, separated by intervals of less than ten days. Restricting attention to waves encompassing at least three individuals, Table 1 lists 28 waves, with a subtotal of 279 individuals.[3] By far the largest wave occurred in India, when the government proposed to set aside more state jobs and university places for lower castes in 1990. In the campaign against this policy, over a hundred students set themselves on fire, took poison, or hanged themselves. The recent Tibetan episode provides five distinct waves—including one numbering 11 and another, 10—accounting for 13% of the subtotal.[4] The Tibetan episode stands out still more prominently when we consider these numbers in relation to population. Tibetans in China number around 5-6 million (with about 150,000 in exile). This is far smaller than the populations represented in Table 1.[5]

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[3] Information is still lacking on recent episodes of suicide protest in India for the Telangana cause, and in North-Africa in 2011.

[4] See Katia Buffetrille's article in this issue.

[5] The population of Turkish Kurds is even smaller if we consider only those in Europe, numbering about one million; Olivier Grojean, *La cause kurde, de la Turquie vers l'Europe: contribution à une sociologie de la transnationalisation des mobilizations*, PhD thesis, École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales, 2008. But counting those in Turkey brings the figure to perhaps 15 million. See Olivier Grojean's article in this issue.

To understand where suicide protest is more prevalent, we need to systematically examine all countries and years—including places where it has never happened. We also need to investigate several factors simultaneously. My analysis considers the country's political system and religious heritage, controlling for population. Statistical analysis reveals that both have an effect. Political system is measured on a spectrum, with democracy at one end and autocracy at the other. Suicide protest is least likely at both ends of the spectrum, and most likely in the middle (e.g. South Vietnam in the 1960s or South Korea in the 1990s). The Tibetan episode diverges from this tendency, of course, because contemporary China is extremely autocratic. For religious heritage, suicide protest is less likely in countries with a Christian or Muslim religious heritage, compared to others. Differentiating this residual category by religion is problematic: which countries, for example, should be classified as Buddhist (what about Japan or South Korea)?[6] An alternative is to examine the declared religion of individuals rather than their country's heritage. Out of 569 individuals who committed suicide protest, almost three quarters had no apparent religious affiliation. About a quarter were Buddhists, almost entirely Tibetan and Vietnamese. Other religious traditions are represented in trifling numbers (six Christians, for example).

2. Comparison: Buddhists in South Vietnam

The common Buddhist environment and within it, the Mahāyana tradition—makes South Vietnam in the 1960s an appropriate comparison. In Saigon in 1963, an elderly monk called Thích Quảng Đức set himself on fire to protest against religious persecution; the government of President Ngô Đình Diệm was dominated by Catholics. Quảng Đức drew on ancient tradition. Chinese Buddhist texts from the fourth century onwards describe monks choosing death—often but not always by fire—to manifest their transcendence of physical existence, to demonstrate the power of Buddhist practice, or to elicit benefits for their monastic community.[7] Similar suicides by fire occurred in French Indochina in the 1920s and 1930s, after Quảng Đức had entered monastic life. This ancient tradition was transformed into a contemporary media spectacle: American journalists were in-

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[6] 'To ask a census-taker how many Chinese are Buddhist is rather like asking how many Westerners are Aristotelian or pragmatist'. See Wilfred Cantwell Smith, *The Meaning and End of Religion*. San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1962, p. 69.

[7] James A. Benn, *Burning for the Buddha: Self-immolation in Chinese Buddhism*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2007. Also see James Benn's article in this issue.

vited to watch the immolation, and indeed the assembled monks chanted slogans in English for their benefit.

Quảng Đức's sacrifice had a tremendous impact within South Vietnam. Suicide protest continued throughout the 1960s and 1970s, until the monasteries were completely suppressed after unification. Beyond Vietnam, the event introduced self-immolation into the global repertoire of protest. The photograph of Quảng Đức seated in the lotus position, consumed by flames, was seen all around the world. Compared to the period 1919-1962, the annual rate of suicide protest was seventeen times higher in the period 1963-1970. Even excluding South Vietnam, the annual rate was eight times higher. Furthermore, suicide protest was now indelibly associated with burning. Suicide protests before 1963 had not used fire, but other means of death. Since 1963, 85% of individuals have chosen burning. The imprint of Quảng Đức's action endures.

The main similarity with Tibet is the link between Buddhism and national identity. In South Vietnam, Buddhism (like communism) was a vehicle for nationalism, defined first against French colonial rule and then against American domination. Monks obviously played a leading role in the struggle against religious persecution in 1963. The Buddhist movement subsequently came to oppose the government's prosecution of the war against communist insurgency. The majority of immolators were monks, with a few nuns, rather than laypeople. The parallels with the recent episode in Tibet are clear. One difference is worth mentioning. Quảng Đức and several other Vietnamese monks who set themselves alight had devoted many decades to monastic practice: they demonstrated almost superhuman self-control by sitting motionless while burning to death. The Tibetan monks, by contrast, are generally young, though Lama Sonam was in his forties. There have been no equivalent demonstrations of physical mastery, to my knowledge.

The differences with South Vietnam should also be noted. Most obviously, many of the immolations—like Quảng Đức's—were intended to address audiences in the United States as well as at home. This international appeal explains the extraordinary success in 1963: after nine suicide protests in five months, the Diệm government was overthrown. The coup was instigated by the United States. "We cannot stand any more burnings," explained the Secretary of State.[8] The causal connection was complex. The success of the Buddhist movement depended partly on the irrational reaction of Diệm, who began to disobey American orders; his successors were more careful. The

[8] Howard Jones, *Death of a Generation: How the Assassinations of Diem and JFK Prolonged the Vietnam War*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003, p. 317.

United States viewed Diệm's repression of the Buddhist movement as a distraction from fighting communism. In later years, as the Buddhist movement came to oppose the war itself, the United States treated it with hostility.

This complex political configuration has no direct parallel in the recent Tibetan episode. One might expect the immolations to appeal to international opinion, but the messages known to us are addressed to the Tibetan people. Jamphel Yeshe, who set himself on fire in Delhi in March 2012, is exceptional for also addressing a wider audience. "The fact that Tibetan people are setting themselves on fire in this 21st century is to let the world know about their suffering, and to tell the world about the denial of basic human rights."[9] While the immolations attract sympathetic media coverage in the West, there is no leverage for Western states to exercise over China: its growing power is the very opposite of South Vietnam's dependence. American domination also had a paradoxically beneficial effect on the Buddhist movement: repression was hindered by the presence of American journalists. When one journalist filmed a monk's immolation, the police assaulted him and seized his camera—but the U.S. ambassador publicly criticized this attack on an American citizen.[10] Moreover, American newspapers and magazines circulated freely within South Vietnam. Therefore the government of South Vietnam was unable to suppress information about suicide protest. Contemporary China, by contrast, has considerable control over information within its boundaries, albeit somewhat impeded by mobile telephones and internet connections. Certainly news can be censored from the majority Han Chinese public, who are unsympathetic to Tibetan claims.

3. Comparison: Falun Gong in China

Considering the Chinese state leads to another comparison: Falun Gong. This movement, based on the qigong healing tradition, was banned in 1999. In January 2001, on the eve of Chinese New Year, five followers set themselves alight in the Tiananmen Square and two more were thwarted. The government initially tried to suppress news of the event, even though Western journalists had witnessed the scene. Then it was realised how this could be turned against the movement. A week later, state television broadcast a gruesome film of the incident, including images of a 12-year-old girl (daughter of one of the practitioners) writhing in agony. The official leadership of Falun

[9] Associated Press, March 29 2012.
[10] *New York Times*, October 6 1963, p. 20.

Gong, exiled in America, immediately denied any connection with the movement; it released its own video accusing the government of concocting the incident. While there is no reason to believe that the leadership sanctioned the suicides, it seems unnecessary to resort to any conspiracy theory. Some of the adults had taken part in previous protests. In addition, two more individuals set fire to themselves in the following months.

Self-immolation became the centrepiece of the government's continuing propaganda campaign. This framed the deaths as cultic suicide rather than political protest. "Nirvana means slaughter" was one headline in the *People's Daily*.[11] By all accounts this had a major impact on Chinese public opinion. "Previously, most Chinese thought the crackdown [on Falun Gong] was stupid, like a dog catching a mouse," admitted an anonymous official. "After those people burned themselves and the party broadcast that little girl's face on TV for almost a month straight, people's views here changed."[12] Within weeks, the government ordered a massive increase in repression, including systematic torture. Not only was there a favourable climate of opinion; deaths in custody could now be used as evidence of the cult's deleterious effects. The official news agency boasted that a total of 1,700 had committed suicide. The combination of torture, 're-education,' and propaganda apparently yielded results. Within six months, Falun Gong was effectively eliminated as a movement within China. The maimed survivors were still being paraded before a press conference in the following year. "Falun Gong is indeed an evil cult and it led me to this," said one.[13]

The Chinese state seems to be attempting a similar response to the Tibetan immolations. Tapey was the first Tibetan in China to set himself on fire, in February 2009, and he survived. According to one report, he was brought on local television (in July 2011) to say that he regretted his action.[14] After Lobsang Phuntsok's immolation in March 2011, three monks (including an uncle of his) were charged with assisting his death. One accusation was that the immolation was planned in concert with Tibetans outside China. The evidence was that a photograph of Phuntsok was uploaded to Tibetans in exile, three days before he set himself alight, ready to be used for publicity after his death. A more serious accusation was that Phuntsok could have survived, if monks had allowed the security forces to take him

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11 Agence France Presse, February 17 2001.
12 *Washington Post*, August 5 2001.
13 Xinhua News Agency, April 7 2002.
14 This was reported by http://www.freetibet.org/newsmedia/selfimmolations. Tapey certainly features in recent Chinese propaganda, as the beneficiary of expensive medical care: Xinhua News, June 22 2012.

to hospital; instead, they took the injured man back to their monastery. (In the Tibetan account, they rescued him from the security forces who were beating him after dousing the flames.) All three of the accused were convicted in August 2011, and sentenced to 10-13 years in prison. This incident is featured in China Central Television's film (released in May 2012) entitled "The Dalai clique and self-immolation violent incidents." Convicted monks are interviewed on camera, confessing to their involvement. Although the state is pursuing a similar media strategy, Falun Gong had two peculiar handicaps not found in the Tibetan episode. One was the leadership's attempt to disassociate itself from the act. Another handicap was the involvement of children. Phuntsok was young—the state claims that he was 16, against 20 according to Tibetan sources—but was clearly old enough to exercise individual agency. One final difference is worth noting. The state portrayed Falun Gong as a religious cult. "Let me go to heaven," cried one of the women in Tiananmen Square—according to the official news agency—as police prevented her from igniting herself.[15] But the state does not claim that Tibetan immolations are intended to achieve religious transcendence.

Conclusion

Placing the Tibetan immolations in context may aid in understanding these terrible events. One sombre conclusion is that suicide protest, when it has attracted approbation from others, enters the repertoire of a political movement. The funerals of some of the Tibetan immolators have attracted hundreds or even thousands of mourners.[16] Such numbers—in the face of repression by the authorities—demonstrate the depth of popular approval. Self-immolation therefore becomes a model to be followed. When Lama Sobha set fire to himself in January 2012, he left a tape recording expressing gratitude to "other Tibetan heroes, who have sacrificed their lives for Tibet." His sacrifice in part was intended "to stand in solidarity with them in flesh and blood."[17] We can only expect further immolations for the cause of Tibet.

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[15] Associated Press, January 30 2001.

[16] E.g. Associated Press, March 18 2012.

[17] Transcript translated by Students for a Free Tibet together with Bhuchung D. Sonam, accessed from http://www.savetibet.org/media-center/ict-news-reports/harrowing-images-and-last-message-tibet-first-lama-self-immolate, May 21 2012.

Table 1: Waves involving more than three acts of suicide protest, 1919–2012

Number	*Cause*	*Country*	*Date begun*
3	Nationalist	China	Jul 1919
3	anti-US immigration restriction	Japan	May 1924
5	Celibate v married Buddhist	South Korea	Nov 1960
3	Buddhists v govt	South Vietnam	Aug 1963
3	Tamils v Hindi	India	Jan 1965
13	Buddhists v govt	South Vietnam	May 1966
3	Buddhists v govt	South Vietnam	Oct 1967
5	Buddhists v govt	South Vietnam	Oct 1967
3	Buddhists v govt	South Vietnam	Aug 1970
4	Buddhists v govt	South Vietnam	May 1971
3	Buddhists v govt and anti-govt	South Vietnam	Aug 1971
3	anti-govt	South Vietnam	Aug 1974
12	Buddhists v govt	Vietnam	Nov 1975
3	anti-govt	South Korea	Dec 1987
117	anti-reservations	India	Sep 1990
13	anti-reservations	India	Nov 1990
9	anti-govt	South Korea	Apr 1991
3	anti-govt	South Korea	Apr 1996
5	Kurds v Turkey	Greece, Denmark, Germany, UK	Feb 1999
10	miners v govt	Romania	Mar 2000
5	Falun Gong	China	Jan 2001
9	pro-Mujahedeen	Switzerland, France, UK, Italy	Jun 2003
7	pro-Telangana	India	Jan 2010
10	Tibetan v China	China	Sep 2011
4	Tibetan v China	China	Jan 2012
6	Tibetan v China	China	Feb 2012
11	Tibetan v China	China	Mar 2012
4	Tibetan v China	China	May 2012

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Immolation in a Global Muslim Society Revolt against Authority — Transgression of Strict Religious Laws[1]

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In January 1969, a young man entered Wenceslas Square, doused himself with petrol and set himself on fire.[2] This was a desperate act to dramatise the failure to follow up the momentum of the "Prague Spring" of the previous year. For a whole generation of young Europeans, eastern as well as western, Jan Palach was a symbol, both tragic and heroic. In their eyes, what could be more anthropologically definitive than to give one's life, to die voluntarily—and not slowly?[3] This was a rejection of the idea that suicide is scandalous. The young Czech student had imitated the action of a bonze, Thích Quảng Đức, who had burned himself to death in Saigon in 1963 to protest against the Ngô Đình Diệm regime that was dependant on the United States, which was already engaged in fighting against North Vietnam and its allies in the south. At the end of 2010, the same gesture was made by a Tunisian fruit and vegetable merchant. In this case, Mohamed Bouazizi,[4] in addition to the despair associated with being despised and underprivileged, a condition shared by many of his compatriots, also felt the personal humiliation of having been struck by a woman, who represented the established order. But that was not the crucial factor, because within a month, around thirty people were to repeat this action of self-immolation, in Tunisia, Algeria, Morocco, Mauritania, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, and Yemen. This is a headstrong action, and its effect is even greater

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1 This article has been published under the title: "Suicide, Islam and Politics. On the recent events in Tunisia," *Books & Ideas*, May 6 2011, http://www.booksandideas.net/Suicide-Islam-and-Politics.html. It is reprinted here with minor formal changes.

2 This article was translated into Arabic and published in *Al-Awan*.

3 For a somewhat contrasting view, see Vaclav Havel's letter to Gustav Husak (1975), especially the passage about the "peace of the cemetery," quoted in *Essais politiques*. Paris: Calmann-Lévy, "Liberté d'esprit," 1994, p. 31ff.

4 The author of this article writes Mohammad Al-Bu'azizi, but for the sake of harmonisation, the editors have chosen to use the most common spelling, Mohamed Bouazizi.

Dominique Avon, "Immolation in Global Muslim Society Revolt against Authority — Transgression of Strict Religious Laws", *Revue d'Etudes Tibétaines*, no. 25, Décembre 2012, pp. 151-157.

for being the visible part of an increasingly widespread phenomenon, which breaks with the traditional idea that life is not primarily self-dependence.

Norms and Realities

Researchers know that the 'real' is not the 'norm'; among the duties of a specialist in the study of religion is that of measuring the distance between the 'prescribed' and the 'lived.'[5] Suicide does exist in Muslim-majority societies, as elsewhere, both among women (with more attempts) and men (with more deaths), especially among the unemployed and the generation aged 18 to 30.[6] In the middle of the 2000s, in an article headlined "Every day, an Algerian commits suicide…," *El Watan* reported: "Ending their lives in order to flee a reality too hard to endure: that is how 177 Algerian souls counted by the police were carried off during the past year, in addition to 128 sadly recorded by the national gendarmerie. Is there reason for alarm? The answer is undoubtedly yes, for the curve is going up and the number of suicides is increasing, even if only slightly."[7] The first official figures date from 1993, coming from the security services, who noticed a progression that, according to them, is putting Algeria up near the mean of Arab countries: from 0.94 per 100,000 in 1999 to 2.25 per 100,000 in 2003.[8] These statistics understate the reality, the journalists add. With few or no self-immolations, the methods currently used are barbiturates, jumping, hanging, gas, guns and chemicals. Suicide attempts are made by consuming "spirit of salt," a euphemism for products used to unblock drains. And, since sometimes it is only a short step from misery to humour,[9] here is a short story: A man walks

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5 The author assumes full responsibility for what he has written, including the translations from Arabic. However, he wishes to thank Anaïs-Trissa Khatchadourian, Mouna Mohammed Cherif, Samah Mohammed, Samia al-Mechat, Nahed Caracalla, Amin Elias and Augustin Jomier for their exchanges with him about sources and views, without which this article would never have seen the light of day.

6 According to the *Jeune Indépendant*. Summary by Mourad on the following website: http://www.algerie-dz.com/article18367.html.

7 Nadjia Bouaricha, "Chaque jour, un Algérien se suicide…," *El Watan*, March 27 2008.

8 "Suicide en Algérie: L'une des principales causes de mortalité," *Le Soir d'Algérie*, October 18 2005.

9 See the caricature by Hic published on the website of the daily *El Watan*, "Vent de révolte au Maghreb: Les Tunisiens passent le flambeau" ("Winds of Revolt in the Maghreb: Tunisians Pass the Torch"), one man in flames touches the hand of another, who is overtaking him: http://revolution-tunisie.wifeo.com/caricatures.php.

into a local shop. The shopkeeper asks: "Can I help you, sir?" The man replies: "I would like a bottle of spirit of salt, please." The shopkeeper asks: "To eat here or to take away?"[10]

Suicide has been a taboo subject for ages. The same is true of a number of practices related to customs concerning, for example, sexuality as it is actually experienced rather than as it is idealised in a projected denominational model (e.g. sexual relations before marriage, or homosexuality). Fearing the opprobrium that will descend on the suicide's family, there is a tendency for the cause of death to be hushed up. So in the current state of things, it is not possible for an analysis to be based on reliable statistics. The publicity given to the self-immolations of 2010-2011 has loosened some tongues, but has not removed doubts about the numbers. Thus, the Syrian website *Dpress* contends that countless numbers of self-immolaters have followed in Bouazizi's footsteps.[11] According to some sources, the suicide rate in Tunisia surpasses that of the other Arab countries. The views of psychotherapists (psychoanalysts, psychologists, and psychiatrists) have been sought, and civil associations have set up professional bodies to respond. For example, in Algeria, there is SOS Suicide Phénix and SOS Amitié. Also, imams in charge of Friday prayers constantly deliver messages forbidding suicide.[12]

The ills of the predominantly Muslim Arab world are often understood in geopolitical terms: contemplating its last two centuries, including colonisation and the creation of nation states —Israel among them—conveys the image of recurring humiliation and of being outclassed on the international scene. Recent events have encouraged taking into account the salience of internal causes. Even if religious authorities are quick to see suicide as a sign of mental imbalance, they do not deny that men are willing to give their lives for the immanent—to buy bread and basic food inexpensively, to denounce social injustice (such as denial of housing, losing one's job, divorce and marginalisation because of infertility), to combat dictatorship, and to have freedom of expression. It is possible to see in this an indication of secularisation. In contrast to the South Asian context—or to the secularised European context—and with no explicit wish to rule out religious references, the gesture of self-immolation and of suicide more generally is clearly at odds with a proscription that is rooted in centuries-old traditions, which are based on the belief that fire is an instrument of divine punishment, and are reinforced by legal definitions.

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[10] Reported by Mouna Mohammed Cherif, January 18 2011.

[11] *DPress*, January 17 2011. This is a Syrian news site.

[12] The Grand Mufti of Saudi Arabia condemned self-immolation in his sermon on January 21 2011.

The Divided Counsel of "Men of Religion"

The recent wave of self-immolations has deeply troubled the "men of religion" *(rijâl al-dîn)* and generated disagreements among them. Two questions arise: (1) What is the view of Islamic law *(hukm al-Shari'a al-Islamiyya)* about these men (suicides)? and (2) Would it be right to consider them as martyrs *(shuhada')*? The main line of division among Sunnis runs between the International Union of Muslim Scholars on one side, and the religious authorities connected with the Arab states on the other. For some time, these scholars and other jurists who constitute magisterial authority were careful not to speak up about this matter, to avoid publicising what is described as a "sin."[13] During the last quarter of the century, the only type of suicide that is sometimes justified as "legal" *(mashru'a)* has been the "martyrdom" of the Muslim engaged in a "great mission" of armed *jihad* against the enemy in order to defend "his religion, his country, or his *umma*." That is the position taken by Sheikh Yusuf Al-Qardhawi on the subject of Palestinians who commit suicide attacks against Israelis.[14] As President of the International Union of Muslim Scholars and the host of the program "Sharia and Life" on the Qatar television station *Al Jazeera*, he is heard by tens of millions of viewers. Sheikh Al-Qardhawi has supported the "revolution of the Tunisian people" and viewed the action of Mohamed Bouazizi as a *jihad* against injustice and corruption. After the flight of Ben Ali, he committed himself to continuing the struggle against all the "symbols" of dictatorship, to "bring down the rest of the familiar idols, Alat and Al-Uza,[15] and the other servants associated with the regime that has made the Tunisians suffer all these years."[16] This language sparked vigorous reactions which drove him to explain that he had not issued a *fatwa* but had simply made a comment, explaining: "I call on God Almighty and implore him to pardon this young man, to absolve him, and to ignore the act that has put him at odds with the law *(shar')* that forbids one from ending

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[13] See Abdellatif Idrissi, "La notion de péché, de la période préislamique au début de l'islam, entre récit biblique et représentation locale," in Dominique Avon and Karam Rizk (eds.), *De la faute et du salut dans l'histoire des monothéismes*. Paris: Karthala, "Signes des Temps," 2010, pp. 21-37.

[14] See the justification given in "Le caractère légal des opérations martyres," May 31 2004, referring to his *fatwa*, which, according to Sheikh Al-Qardhawi, was signed by 300 scholars during the twenty preceding years. For a reference to Hamas, see Olivier Danino, *Le Hamas et l'édification de l'Etat palestinien*. Paris: Karthala, "Les terrains du siècle," 2009, pp. 100-109.

[15] A reference to anti-Muslim Meccan deities, alluded to in the so-called "Satanic" Verses.

[16] Talk by Sheikh Yusuf Al-Qardhawi, *Aljazeera* January 16 2011, http://www.aljazeera.net/NR/ exeres/EB34C91D-6206-4EEF-B5F0-BA7B72939E55.htm.

one's life." At the same time, he added that "unjust tyrants" are the ones who ought to be burned.[17] While he justifies using "means of resisting injustice and tyranny," that does not include recourse to things that are "forbidden" *(haram)* such as suicide and "setting one's body on fire."[18]

The position of the Mufti of Tunis is noticeably different. Othman Battikh's reaction was unreserved condemnation of the self-immolation: "Suicide or attempted suicide is one of the greatest crimes. There is no legal difference between trying to kill oneself and someone else." In *Al-Sabah*, he made it clear that the method is unimportant: whether it be by self-immolation, poison, drowning, hanging or anything else, suicide is an "abominable" act that constitutes a "crime" forbidden by the "law" *(shar')*. It results in expulsion from the Muslim community and censure: "the miscreant should not be washed, prayed for, or buried in the Muslims' cemetery."[19] The position of the Mufti of Tunis was reinforced by the declaration of the Al-Azhar Fatwa Committee, formulated by its president, Sheikh Abd al-Hamid al-Atrash: "Whatever the circumstances, it cannot be legal for a man to commit himself to suicide, no matter what means he has used—fire, drowning, or strangulation. Suicide is subject to God's mercy, and only the community of disbelievers despair of God's mercy."[20] Sheikh Al-Atrash made it clear that there was no case in which suicide was justifiable, and consequently that it was impossible to call anyone who has killed himself a "martyr"; it belongs to God alone to pardon this man if he recites the testimony of faith *(shahada)*. The Koranic citation is the verse 195 of Sura Al-Baqara (The Cow): "And spend in the way of Allah. And do not throw yourself into destruction by your own hands. And do good. For Allah loves those who do good."[21] Citing a saying *(hadith)* in which Muhammad is placed in a situation of opposition to his Companions on the question of sharing some plunder, Sheikh Al-Atrash emphasises the fact that "the poor should not be the ones who are most fearful" about the

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[17] *Al Jazeera* news, reprinted in *al-Watan* (Koweit): http://alwatan.kuwait.tt/articledetails.aspx?id=83558.

[18] Talk by Sheikh Yusuf Al-Qardhawi, *Al Jazeeraz*, January 19 2011, http://www.aljazeera.net/NR/exeres/4574D5A4-96DF-4616-829B-D048601B6FFC.htm?GoogleStatID=9.

[19] "The Mufti of Tunis Advises Not Praying for 'Suicides by Fire'," *al-Yawm al-Sâba'*, January 21 2011, http:// www.youm7.com/News.asp?NewsID=333733&SecID=88&IssueID=149.

[20] Declaration reprinted on the site http://hibapress.com/details-1338.html, January 18 2011.

[21] Koran 2, 195. The extract from this verse is repeated over and over again, for example in a *fatwa* by Saudi Sheikh Nasir ibn Sulayman Al-Umar: http://www.almoslim.net/node/140211.

ultimate reward. This reply goes to the heart of the argument about respecting all established authority. Without any consensus, it justifies the terms of a single alternative presented to the Muslim believer: give thanks if he who guides *(imam)* the community is just; be patient if he is not.

Suicide and Jihad

According to the testimony of survivors of suicide attempts by fire, or of those close to victims, if there is indeed an awareness of a religious transgression, suicide is sought not because of but in spite of that fact. In any case, whatever the motive for suicide is, the number signing up for it shows that the ban does not constitute a final, absolute barrier. And it is in this sense that it is possible to talk of it as a symptom of secularisation. Majority Muslim societies are not—and have never been—closed off: their practices and values, norms and behaviour, are as elsewhere the product of a very complex motion of synthesis between "own" and "input" that continues to change over the centuries. Exposed to pressures less controlled today than previously, because of the greater circulation of people (tourism, business, migration) and the asymptotic growth in new means of communication, these societies no longer have the homogeneity that more strongly influenced them at independence.

The challenge to 'unjust' authority is more active among Shiites than among Sunnis. True to its dual struggle—'anti-imperialist' against Israel and in favour of the 'poor' in the world at large[22]—Hezbollah has applauded the revolutionary action against the corrupt Tunisian regime, but without commenting on self-immolation.[23] And for good reason, for the veiled denunciation of an old Mazdean tradition of self-immolation that was introduced into the Arab Sunni majority by Shiites (even though "among the Maghrebian crypto-Shiites, sacrifice by blood, human or animal,"[24] was preferred) is not guileless. Between 1998 and 2003, there were about 100 suicides by fire attempts in Northwestern Iran.[25] Shiite authorities therefore say that the criticism should not be accepted, given the context of accumulating interdenominational tensions: persecutions in Pakistan; the

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[22] Dominique Avon and Anaïs-Trissa Khatchadourian, *Le Hezbolla. De la doctrine à l'action, une histoire du "parti de Dieu."* Paris: Le Seuil, 2010.

[23] Note the silence maintained on the site http://www.moqawama.org/.

[24] Chawki Amari *et al.*, "Immolation: I burn, therefore I am," *El Watan*, January 21 2011.

[25] According to Michael Ayari, interviewed by Perrine Mouterde: "L'immolation, un geste de désespoir à forte charge politique," *France 24*, January 19 2011.

war in Iraq in 2003 and continuing attacks there; blips in the divisions in Lebanon (2005, 2008 and 2011), bringing fears of a new civil war; rivalry between Iran and Saudi Arabia, with effects on the nuclear issue as well as on the Israeli-Palestinian and Lebanese conflicts; political claims of Shiites in the states of the Arabian Peninsula, and of Sunnis in Syria, and so on. The offices of the three main Shiite religious authorities (the schools of Khomeini, Sistani and Fadlallah) were interviewed. Only the first of them responded to the question of how to describe the act of suicide: "killing oneself for an important end or a major interest is not suicide, it is *jihad*."[26] Because of what they reveal about the condition of the societies in the majority Muslim world, the events in Tunisia, followed by those in Egypt, constitute an upheaval comparable in scale to the Iranian revolution of 1979. Overwhelmed by popular initiatives aimed at challenging "injustice," the religious authorities—Sunni as well as Shiite—have revealed internal disagreements. The unease is all the greater because of the fact that since the end of the eighteenth century the elites in these societies, with varying degrees of constraint in the various authoritarian regimes imposed from within or from outside, have vainly sought to agree on the configuration of the desirable polity.[27]

[26] Response sent on January 28 2011 by a representative of the Ghurfa al-islâm al-ʼasîl fî ghurfa al-bâltûq (contact: ahkam@islamasil.com or ahkam@irib.ir).

[27] Dominique Avon and Amin Elias, "Laïcité: Navigation d'un concept autour de la Méditerranée," published on January 3 2011 in the online journal *Droit de cité*.

Self-Immolations by Kurdish Activists in Turkey and Europe

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Although researchers have extensively analysed the guerrilla war launched 25 years ago by the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) against the Turkish state, practices of violence against oneself within the movement are less well understood. Nonetheless, since 1982 more than 200 activists or supporters of the party have tried to immolate themselves or commit suicide attacks (in the Middle-East and in Europe). This does not include the numerous hunger strikes that sometimes resulted in death. Thus, this paper examines the individual recourse to immolation, a singular action mode that could be part of a more general category: "violence against oneself."[1]

To analyse the self-immolations (or attempts at self-immolations) in support of the Kurdish cause, an exhaustive or quasi-exhaustive census of such acts was necessary. Two selective criteria were adopted: claims in support of the Kurdish cause or of the PKK leader, and/or affiliation to the PKK. Self-immolations by Kurdish illegal aliens demanding regularisation in Europe, or by Kurdish or Turkish inmates in Turkey who did not support the Kurdish cause were consequently excluded. We counted as an 'attempt' every action that was prevented by others and did not result in an effective self-immolation (e.g. drinking gasoline, splashing oneself with flammable liquid). All other cases were considered as effective self-immolations, even if the individual did not die. The mere threats of self-immolations were, on the other hand, excluded. In total, we found 183 self-immolations (or attempts) between 1982 and 2007, in 15 countries. Our census was taken from a huge variety of sources: 'independent' press, pro-Kurdish sources in French, German, English and Turkish, and humanitarian sources.

The hypothesis I suggest here is that self-immolation cannot be understood independently from the political culture instituted in the

[1] Olivier Grojean, "Violence Against Oneself," in David A. Snow, D. della Porta, B. Klandermans and D. McAdam (eds.), *The Blackwell Encyclopedia of Social and Political Movements*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2012.

Olivier Grojean, "Self-immolations by Kurdish Activists in Turkey and Europe", *Revue d'Etudes Tibétaines*, no. 25, Décembre 2012, pp. 159-168.

partisan organisation. As with the Tamil Tigers or the People's Mujahidin of Iran, secondary socialisation in protest groups, "organisational modelling,"[2] strength of "role taking"[3] and dependence on the activist group seem to be the main factors explaining the recourse to this practice. But there is no automatic connection between political culture and action (all PKK members are not ready to sacrifice themselves for the party): we will see that biographical and contextual factors play a catalyst role in the decision making. Verifying this hypothesis requires a multi-level analysis.

First, I begin with the history—or genealogy—of self-immolation within PKK circles. This practice first appeared in Turkish jails in 1982 (two years after the Coup), and progressively became less dependent on the prison environment. Some individuals who died because of their action were at the same time raised to the rank of martyrs and integrated in partisan historiography: by their extraordinary commitment to the cause, they showed the way of truth and victory. This permitted to build a "New Man" theory, which enjoins members to play a specific role and to conform to PKK ideals. I will now examine briefly statistical data concerning 183 attempts at self-immolations. Such an analysis can help us identify the social dispositions of those seeking to immolate themselves, and contextual factors that facilitate violent actions against oneself. This data suggests that the meaning of immolation varies significantly depending on where it takes place. However, such a macrological analysis reveals little about the dynamics of the transition to violence. Based on one interview with a survivor, on press reports, martyrs' testimonials concerning dead militants, and other partisan sources, the paper next examines practices of immolation in three activist trajectories, trying to link these actions with the role of secondary socialisation by the PKK.

Foundering sacrificial actions and martyrdom: the weight of the partisan institution

The first self-sacrificial violences appeared in number 5 prison of Diyarbakır, where the imprisonment conditions are especially harsh. Many hunger strikes were organised in 1980 and 1981. On March 4

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[2] See Frédéric Sawicki and Johanna Siméant, "Décloisonner la sociologie de l'engagement militant. Note critique sur quelques tendances récentes des travaux français," *Sociologie du travail*, Vol. 51, n°1, 2009, pp. 97-125.

[3] The term "role" refers to the set of behaviors, attitudes, practices and discourses bound to an institutionnal position, that permits it to exist, to be consolidated, and to be perceived par other people. See Jacques Lagroye, "On ne subit pas son rôle. Entretien avec Jacques Lagroye," *Politix*, 1997, 10(38), p. 8.

(only three days after the beginning of Bobby Sand's strike, but I never found any confirmation of a link between the two events), a first hunger strike until death (*ölüm orucu*) was launched. It stopped after 45 days. On March 21 1982 (day of *Newroz*, the Kurdish spring festival), the PKK executive in charge of propaganda Mazlum Doğan hung himself in his cell, and on May 18 four lone activists of the PKK died after their self-immolation (in PKK historiography, this event is called *Dörtlerin gecesi,* the "Night of the Four"*)*. In September of the same year, four activists (including two from the Central Committee) died after a long hunger strike.

The initial self-immolations took place in prison environment and are thus strongly influenced by this context. But the spreading of this practice outside prison occurred in 1988 with the actions in Diyarbakır, and then İstanbul, of three PKK inmates' mothers, who wanted to protest against the imprisonment conditions of their sons during simultaneous protest action (demonstration or press conference). Thus, on March 21 1990 and March 22 1992, that is, eight and ten years after Mazlum Dogän, two young female PKK supporters set themselves alight in Diyarbakır and İzmir to protest against the Turkish repression of the Kurds. Last, in 1989 and 1992, two young women fighting in PKK guerrilla are said to have committed suicide to escape capture (with grenades for the former, jumping from a mountain for the latter).

Three spreading trends can be noticed here. While the first self-sacrificial actions appeared in a prison environment and concerned the imprisonment conditions, self-immolation was appropriated outside by the inmates' mothers who put forward the same claims, and then by young women with more general and political demands. This phenomenon could also be seen as an empowerment process from the prison space. Second, there is a strong evolution of the action's context. While the first actions occurred in prison, the next ones appeared in a region under special administration (Diyarbakır) and the following ones in far less repressive and ethnically more heterogeneous regions (İstanbul and İzmir, and even Europe, as we will see below). While the first actions were collective but took place without any simultaneous collective action, the next ones were individual ones (after 1988) and are no longer lonely actions. Last, the third trend concerns the social identity of the actors: while the first actions were exclusively launched by young men, self-immolation was soon appropriated by relatively old women and then by young women; while the *Dörtler* were all PKK members, the following activists were members' mothers and then lone supporters.

It is not to say that these three trends will determinate the perspectives, the contexts and the participants of the next sacrificial practices:

most self-immolations will continue to appear in prison, to be committed by men and by young activists (and not supporters). But the foundering actions can be considered as a toolbox from which activists and supporters will choose their tools, according to the circumstances. Because above all, some of these "sacrificial martyrs" (*fedai şehitler*), as witness and examples, help the PKK to build a system in which commitment and readiness to die are the highest values.

After the establishment of a training academy in the Bekaa Valley in Lebanon in 1986, a new model of PKK militant was in fact founded and exported to the guerrilla, to the prisons, and to all the places where the PKK was active (i.e. Middle East and Europe). It concerned the clandestine activists rather than lone supporters, but could be understood as an ideal for the population at large, with a view to creating a "New Kurdish Man." This "New Man" is highly disciplined along the principles of the party, and obedient to his superiors (and ultimately to the leader); he has to love Öcalan and to develop a new personality liberated from Turkish colonialism and domination. The theory of the "Free Woman" is in charge of framing the new behaviour of women in the 'new' Kurdish Society.

These are not merely theoretical principles, but have to be put into practice: the activist has to cut all his earlier relations and forego marriage and sexual relationships, he has to speak well and be normally dressed, and he cannot drink nor smoke. Self-criticism, biographical rewriting and family supervision of the clandestine activists permit to re-normalise the militants. I put forward the hypothesis that this control and supervision had a real impact on PKK activism and on the social representations of PKK supporters.

Nevertheless, the weight of the partisan institution varies according to spaces. The hold of the party over the activists is stronger in the guerrilla and in Turkish jails. On the contrary, the interviews I conducted with ex-activists show that they had more chance to keep their autonomy in the Turkish metropolitan areas on the one hand, and in the Kurdish regions non-controlled by the guerrilla on the other hand. Europe enjoys an intermediate position, with its network of pro-PKK associations in all capitals were Kurds are living, and with regular meetings and mobilisations, which permit to try to control the Kurdish population at large, and not only the PKK members.

A structural analysis of the recourse to self-immolation

In the introduction, I suggested the hypothesis that the socialisation by the PKK, via the theory of the "New Man" and of the "Free Woman," and the rules instituted in the organisation, which enjoins members to play one specific role and to conform to PKK ideals, could help to understand sacrificial actions by PKK members and supporters. This can be first verified by a structural analysis of the recourse to self-immolation.

According to my data, 55% of the self-immolations took place in Turkish prisons, 28% in Europe, 16% in the Middle East and only 1% in the guerrilla. This repartition can of course be explained by the sociological context of the engagement. The action forms are very rare in prison and the very bad imprisonment conditions are the cause of many suicides in Turkey (and elsewhere). In Europe, it is more difficult for the activists to influence directly the course of the conflict. In the Turkish cities or the Kurdish regions on the contrary, there are undoubtedly more possibilities to join the guerrilla, the militia or the political branch of the party. And self-immolation makes probably less sense in the guerrilla where the guerrillas risk constantly their lives and are trained to kill.

But we saw that the hold of the partisan institution over the activists was stronger in the guerrilla and in Turkish jails, intermediate in Europe and weaker in the Turkish metropolitan areas and in the Kurdish regions not controlled by the guerrilla. These different zones of influence intersect with the repartition of the self-immolations in favour of the Kurdish cause—except in the case guerrilla where fighters could after all launch suicide attacks. This leads to think that if the geographical context has an influence on the action repertoire of the party, the organisational variable plays a major role in the explanation of the commitment of the activists.

If we keep in mind that the failure of the military strategy could not be blamed on Öcalan but affected the fighters who lapsed through lack of faith or commitment, the same seems to be true when observing the temporality of the sacrificial actions. Thus, most of the PKK's forms of sacrificial action take place when the party strategy suffers defeat: 4 attempts of self-immolation in Germany just one month after the end of the first unilateral ceasefire on the part of the PKK; 12 self-immolations in several German cities in 1994, a few months after the ban of the PKK in Germany; 3 suicide bombings (and probably 3 attempts) in Turkey and 9 self-immolations between June and October 1996, a few months after the failure of the second unilateral ceasefire; a wave of 92 self-immolations and at least 11 sui-

cide bombings (and probably 4 to 5 attempts) after the PKK's third ceasefire and then Öcalan's arrest and public regrets in 1998–1999.

It is difficult to compare the social characteristics of immolated individual because of lack of information, but my data permit me to compare the gender and age of the activists, and the geographical sites of their self-immolation. First, self-immolation is mainly a male phenomenon (60%). But women constitute a strong minority in the two spaces. How can we explain this ratio? We have to keep in mind that in some rural areas in Turkey self-immolation was and is still a means used by women who are suspected of adultery to restore the honour of the group ("private" or "social" suicide). Additionally, self-immolation outside prison was a female action mode only until 1994 too. But finally this could certainly be explained by the "Free Woman" theory developed by Öcalan and spread within militant circles after 1987. In Turkish prisons, the ratio is lower (23% are females), but given that women are often in mixed dormitories (with the Turkish left), this could consequently be explained by a weaker hold of the institution (competition between PKK and other parties rules and norms). The contrast is important with the guerrilla, where 30% of the fighters are women and where the "Free Woman" theory was first put in practice: two-thirds (65%) of the PKK's 17 suicide attacks incidentally were carried out by women, who were all guerrilla fighters. And apart from one ambivalent case, the 8 suicide attacks between June 30 1996 and March 4 1999 were all carried out by women before the technique came to be appropriated by men.

However, some differences between Europe and the Middle East can be noticed. While the great majority of self-immolations in Europe are committed by young adults between 21 and 30 (59%), self-immolation is practiced mostly by young people under 21 in the Middle East (42%); one could explain this difference by an earlier politicisation process and engagement in the Middle East and notably in Turkey. Another specificity of self-immolation in Europe lies in its agenda. As in the Middle East (36%), most sacrificial actions occurred during the years 1998 and 1999, that is Öcalan's arrest.[4] But 37% of self-immolations took also place in 1993-1994, when the relationships between the PKK and the European governments (and especially Germany) deteriorated. And if most European countries have been affected, more than half of the self-immolations (55%) occurred in Germany and none—apart from one in Denmark in front of German border guards—happened in other European countries before Öcalan's arrest. We have to consider here demographic factors (half of Kurdish migrants in Europe live in Germany), organisational factors

[4] In Turkish jails, 70% of the self-immolations took place in 1998-1999.

(the PKK is more structured there than elsewhere in Europe), and above all political factors and interactions (the ban of the PKK in 1993). This context favoured self-immolations during political demonstrations or occupations: in 1993-1994, only two self-immolations (10%) occurred in a hidden and deserted place; and between 1993 and 2007, only 30% occurred in the same conditions. If we consider that in 1998-1999, *all* self-immolations in Europe took place during a simultaneous collective action, the difference is obvious with the Middle East, where 74% of the self-immolations were lonely acts.

Consequently, while nearly two third of the actors survived in Europe because comrades cried for help and tried to save them, in the Middle East, nearly three quarters died. Even if the activists are certainly not aware of such statistics, the meaning given to these actions doubtless differs between an individual who prepared his or her immolation days or months in advance and an individual who decided on the spot to sacrifice himself or herself during a demonstration. Only a qualitative analysis could help us understand what makes the unity and the diversity of self-immolation within PKK circles.

The practice of self-immolation in activist trajectories

To test the hypothesis of the role of PKK secondary socialisation in self-immolations, one can examine some biographical trajectories and look how activists and supporters concretely take an interest in the Kurdish cause, commit themselves for the party, handle their role in the PKK system, and finally decide to set themselves alight. But here comes the question of the adequate sources for such an analysis. 'Martyrs' testimonies' are naturally a useful source. But we are faced with at least three problems. First, we saw that more than half activists and supporters survive their immolation; but the testimonies concern only individuals who died, and this excludes all the actions of those who survived.[5] Moreover, out of 67 cases of death due to self-immolation, I only found 36 testimonies. Last but not least, we only know very little about the conditions under which these testimonies were written: some could be institutional biographies, others are probably institutional autobiographies, and others (from supporters, ex-activists, or members dead before 1994) seem to be real individual testimonies which however could fit into the scheme of "bio-

[5] I never found any testimonial of a survivor.

graphical illusion."[6] So as to explore the social construction of the wish to die for the cause as part of a group, I resorted to testimonies, press reports, other partisan sources and one interview.

In my PhD dissertation,[7] I analysed at length three biographical trajectories (see their very short summary below). I chose them because I thought they represented the diversity of trajectories leading to self-immolations (activists and supporters, men and women, faithfulness to the party and treason, lonely action or self-immolation during simultaneous collective action, death or survival, timing, etc.), and could be seen at the same time as "ideal types" in a Weberian sense, permitting to compare them with other trajectories. The analysis of these trajectories enabled me to discover some 'universal' factors (willingness to fight more effectively, faithfulness to Öcalan, suffering violence or imprisonment, etc.) and more 'individual' factors (willingness to transform their personalities, with or without premeditation, slow process engagement or fast 'conversion' to the cause, etc.).

Berjin

> Born in 1975, Berjin [the name has been changed] comes from Midyat, in the Kurdish region of Mardin (near the Syrian border). Her parents were members of the pro-PKK militia: they were in charge of helping and supplying the guerrilla. From the age of 10-12, she regularly walked around the clash zones to find the wounded and to bury dead fighters and civilians. At the age of 15-16 (1990-1991), she wanted to join the guerrilla but her family was under threat, so she had to leave the region with one of her brothers. She arrived in Germany in 1992 and got involved in the political branch of the PKK, the ERNK. On February 16 1999, during a demonstration against the Greek Embassy in Copenhagen (Greece is said to have helped the arrest), she poured petrol on her head and shoulders and set herself alight. She underwent surgery more than fifty times, but survived and still carries out some responsibilities within the organisation. Nevertheless, she is always criticized by numerous members and supporters of the party, who take her for a backward peasant.[8]

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[6] Pierre Bourdieu, "L'illusion biographique," *Actes de la recherche en sciences sociales*, n°62-63, 1986, pp. 69-72.

[7] Olivier Grojean, *La cause kurde, de la Turquie vers l'Europe. Contribution à une sociologie de la transnationalisation des mobilisations*. Paris: EHESS, PhD Dissertation, 2008.

[8] Interview and observations: Berlin, June 2004.

Eser Altınok

> Eser Altınok was born in 1974 in Berlin. At the age of 17, he was a petty criminal who had already been arrested several times and was treated through group therapy. In 1991, he began to attend the pro-PKK association and joined progressively the political branch of the party, even though he would have preferred to go to the mountains. But his militant work was not very successful and he was constantly criticised for his failures. In October 1995, Eser was arrested for crimes committed before joining the PKK. The police threatened to deport him to Turkey if he refused to become the most important witness in a trial against PKK activists... and he finally accepted to cooperate. But he could not bear that situation. On January 5 1998, he set himself alight in a street of Görlizt near Duisburg in Germany and died one month later. In a letter sent to his mother, he wrote that his treason was the consequence of his refusal to engage himself into the process of building a new personality. He is today cited as a hero in PKK press.

Necla Kanteper

> Necla was born in 1985 in Northern Cyprus. Her (Kurdish) family was repeatedly harassed by (Turkish) police. In 1993, the family took refuge in London. Necla did well at school (she wanted to become a lawyer), but her teachers said that she was very committed to the Kurdish cause. According to her friends, she dedicated all her free time to the local pro-PKK association. On February 15 1999, in the night, the family heard that Öcalan had been arrested. Necla, her brother and father went to the Greek embassy. At 4 AM, demonstrators learned that Öcalan had been transferred to Turkey. She bought a gasoline can and came back to the demonstration site. Suddenly, she saw her brother being manhandled by policemen. She poured gasoline onto her body (not her head) and set herself alight. Seriously burnt, she stayed one month at the hospital and underwent surgery many times. Today, she is married, has a child and is active in (or close to) the political branch of the PKK. Numerous European Kurdish activists have still close contacts with her.

In the three studied cases, individuals consider one precise situation as intolerable and unbearable and have the feeling that they can (or have to) change the course of events, according to the image of the heroic martyrs. All three were willing to join the guerrilla, to fight more effectively for the cause, but were prevented to do so, because of an organisation decision or due to their young age. Here, the fear of not having been able to make a strong enough commitment seems

to motivate the action. Öcalan's arrest is indeed seen as a personal failure too. The socialisation of the young activists and supporters, who can only see the world through the prism of the cause and the party and can only project themselves into a pure, 'true' ideal, tends to produce extremely precarious psychological situations, as soon as doubt arises. If their social identity is absolutely and completely bound up with Abdullah Öcalan and the cause, the young male or female militants or supporters are all the more afraid of survival than of death when all their points of reference collapse. If they have internalised the leader's discourse on personal responsibility and perfection—always sought-after but unattainable—, then only death makes them capable of the commitment required and of the love owed to the leader. This intense feeling of despair—possibly linked with their experience of violence or imprisonment—can also lead to a form of communion with Öcalan and the martyrs, especially for the members of the party.

One has to distinguish between member and lone supporter, who probably do not give the same meaning to their action. Without a doubt, the former has been giving many thoughts to the possibility of his or her self-immolation and has theorised his or her action; the latter has a less intellectualised relationship with the institution and its leader. Similarly, it seems that the militants harbour a stronger feeling of culpability than lone supporters: because they do not succeed in holding their role, because they do not succeed in transforming their personality, they are guilty of the party's failures. Self-immolation can also be occasionally considered as a real purification by fire, which has—in a sense—an emancipatory dimension. But in some other cases, the goal is not to affirm one's individuality as an autonomous subject: the body is only the place of a fight between the enemy and the 'new humanity' advocated by Öcalan.

The Arab Revolutions and Self-Immolation

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Ideological patterns of protest in the Muslim world

In the Muslim world, at least since the 19th century, the dominant model of resistance, uprising, or social protest against the imperialist Europe (from 19th century up to the end of the Second World War), domineering America (from the 1950s onwards) or occupying Russia (in the beginning of the 19th century with the conquest of Caucasus), or the Soviet Union (in Afghanistan, from 1979 to 1989), has been martyrdom, expressed either in the Islamic or the nationalist fashion.

The Islamic Revolution in Iran promotes martyrdom in the name of Shiism,[1] Jihad being played down. In contrast, the Sunni Islamist movements from the 1990s onward, privilege Jihad, martyrdom being the means to achieve it.

Self-immolation, as such, has no Islamic credentials and was not practiced among the people on a large scale, neither in the Arab World, nor in Iran. The Kurds in different countries of the Middle East, in Iran, Iraq, and Turkey were the exception, self-immolation by fire developing there as a strategy by the political parties.[2] This type of suicide developed also among women who protested against their social condition, another case being those women killed (mainly due to 'honor killings') by their relatives, murder being disguised as self-immolation (suicide). Between 2000 and 2007, 3039 such cases were recorded, this figure being under-evaluated, as family members are talked out of publicly declaring these killings due to the government's pressure or to the Islamic norms (where it is qualified as suicide and religiously prohibited).[3]

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1 See Farhad Khosrokhavar, *L'Utopie Sacrifiée, sociologie de la révolution iranienne*. Paris: Presse des Sciences Po, 1993; *L'Islamisme et la Mort, Le Martyre Révolutionnaire en Iran*. Paris: L'Harmattan, 1995; *Anthropologie de la Révolution Iranienne*. Paris: L'Harmattan, 1997.

2 See Olivier Grojean's contribution in this issue.

3 "Self Immolation and Murder Cases of Kurdish Women," Hataw Organization, April 10 2007, http://www.kmewo.org/documents/Assignment.pdf.

Farhad Khosrokhavar, "The Arab Revolutions and self-immolation", *Revue d'Etudes Tibétaines*, no. 25, Décembre 2012, pp. 169-179.

Previous cases in the Muslim world

Looking at self-immolation by fire, one can find in the Muslim world two major models before Bouazizi's suicide. One is by the politically-minded Kurds, the other is by women (including Kurdish women). In Iran's Western Azerbaijan province, more than 150 Kurdish women committed suicide within a few months up to February 2006, the majority setting themselves on fire. This happened also in some other Western provinces in Iran with large Kurdish populations, like Ilam, Kermanshah and Kurdistan. According to observers, domestic violence against women, social injustice and suspicion of adultery were the main causes of this type of suicide or homicide.[4] Between March and May 2012, 11 Kurdish women were recorded as having committed suicide (among which, auto-cremation) in the Kurdish provinces of Iran.[5] In Iraqi Kurdistan, one finds women having committed suicide or being put to death through strangulation or beating as well as burning. The cases are difficult to assess: is it suicide, or sheer homicide by the relatives in order to preserve their honor (a woman can easily be suspected of adultery, of indecent relations with a man or, more simply, she is punished for refusing the arranged marriage).

According to Hataw Organization in Iraqi Kurdistan, in 2007 the molestation of Kurdish women increased between 2003 and 2006 (in 2003, 349 cases, in 2005, 772, in 2006, 812 cases).[6]

In 2007, according to local sources, their number was around 400 deaths by burning. More generally, in Iraq, after the fall of Saddam Hussein in 2003 mainly through American intervention, honor killings increased, in part due to the lack of state authority. In a single month, December 2007, 130 unclaimed bodies of women were found in the Baghdad morgue.[7]

Self-immolation through prolonged hunger strike and auto-cremation has been part of the strategy of the Workers' Party of Kurdistan (PKK). During its struggle against the Turkish army, it com-

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4 Golnaz Esfandiari,"Iran: Self-Immolation Of Kurdish Women Brings Concern," Radio Free Europe Radio Liberty, February 8 2006, http://www.rferl.org/article printview/1065567.html.

5 "A young Kurdish girl sets herself ablaze in Iranian Kurdistan,"May 14 2012, http://www. ekurd. net/mismas/articles/misc2012/5/irankurd852.htm.

6 "Self Immolation and Murder Cases of Kurdish Women," *op.cit.*

7 Mark Lattimer, "Burning and women's self-immolation in Iraqi Kurdistan," *The Guardian*, December 13 2007, http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2007/dec/13/gender.iraq.

bined a three-pronged strategy based on martyrdom in guerilla action, self-immolation by fire, as well as hunger strike. Up to 2006, two cases of auto-cremation were mentioned, against 17 suicide-attacks (and nine other attempts).[8] Out of the 17 suicide attacks, 11 were made by women.

Women are therefore mainly victims of self-immolation: family problems related to imaginary or real adultery, resulting in 'honor killings,' or suicide in order to escape opprobrium or to end an intolerable situation; but they can also be political actors, accepting self-immolation as martyrs (the fight against the enemy) or as persons committing self-immolation, mainly by fire (some of the PKK's members). In the PKK men are activists, committing political suicide by auto-cremation.

The change of the dominant paradigm: from martyrdom to self-immolation

The major transformation in the last few years has been the challenge presented by self-immolation by fire (auto-cremation) to the model of martyrdom, particularly during the Arab Revolutions, beginning at the end of 2010 in Tunisia, the trigger point being the self-immolation of Bouazizi. He spread gasoline on himself on December 17 2010 and set it afire, dying in the hospital on January 4 2011. The impact was immense. It launched the Tunisian Revolution that overthrew the Ben Ali regime 28 days later.

A comparison with the 1979 Islamic Revolution in Iran throws light on the change of paradigm. The Islamic Revolution in Iran and then, in the following decades, the Jihadist movements in the Sunni world, were based on the idea of martyrdom as self-sacrifice in a ruthless struggle against the enemy. Martyrdom was the weapon of the weak against the strong[9] in a merciless war against a foe that was far stronger: either the government, or the West. In both cases, the road to success was self-sacrifice, that is, fighting to death the enemy, being ready, even eager to die by killing the unbelieving adversary. In this view, violence is directed towards the other and the religious justification is that one should fight him or her in order to restore Islamic order worldwide. This paradigm reached its peak during the Jihadist movement that swept across the Muslim world in the years

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[8] See Olivier Grojean, "Investissement militant et violence contre soi au sein du Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan," *Cultures & Conflits* 63, Automne 2006, http://conflits.revues.org/index2108.html.

[9] Diego Gambetta (ed.), *Making Sense of Suicide Missions*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006.

1990s and 2000s. The September 11 2001 terrorist attack, the American invasion of Afghanistan in 2002 (with the assistance of other Western allies), and Iraq in 2003 (in conjunction with Great Britain) resulted in a deep sense of indignation on the part of the Muslim world. Jihadist groups thrived over this wave of humiliation, amplified by the American unwavering support for Israel. Violence was the major keyword in a ruthless war in which no other solution than violence could be imagined.

As a major social and political phenomenon, martyrdom, at the service of Jihad, became the leitmotiv of the radical movements that swept across the Muslim world, seeking to respond to humiliation by defiance and self-sacrifice. In a world where Muslims are technologically inferior, endangering one's life became a sign of moral superiority against a foe that was militarily superior but fearful for his life and therefore, spiritually inferior.

This paradigm ruled supreme (and is still prominent in Jihadist circles) until the self-immolation of Mohamed Bouazizi in Tunisia. Through his example, the dominant style of protest changed radically: instead of directing the violence against the enemy in a crescendo that resulted in an endless fight, self-immolation entirely changed the meaning of sacrifice. The new model is based on putting oneself to death in a manner that can leave no one indifferent, self-suppression being accomplished to denounce the illegitimacy of the political order. This model spread all over the Arab world, and even some countries in the West experienced it exceptionally. Lately, in July and August 2012, even Israel witnessed two self-immolations in protest against economic injustice. In the six months following Bouazizi's self-immolation, at least 107 Tunisians attempted self-immolation.

Self-immolation as a new paradigm in the Arab world

In the Arab world, self-immolation by fire is a daring action, denoting a rupture with the Islamist rhetoric and a high level of secularisation, inducing a rupture with Islamic orthodoxy. Mohamed Bouazizi's setting himself ablaze set the tone for this new style of 'sacred death.' People called it martyrdom, but the Ulamas, with few exceptions,[10] regarded the act as an infringement on God's commandment.

[10] Yusuf al-Qaradawi, head of the World Union of the Islamic Ulama *(rais al itihad al alami li ulama' al muslimin)* and one of the most prominent Ulama in the Sunni world (he is known for his contribution to Islamonline and his broadcast on Aljazeera, Shariah and Life, attracting tens of millions of Muslims) was the notable exception. He refused to condemn the act of Bouazizi as being against Islamic law.

According to that commandment, no one should take his or her own life, and one's death can only be decided by God. From the dominant Islamic perspective, Bouazizi's act could not be qualified as martyrdom but as a desecration of God's commandment stipulated in the Koran: "No person can ever die except by Allah's Leave at an appointed term" (Koran, Surat ImrÁn Family, verse 145), or more explicitly: "Don't kill yourself" (Surat The Women, verse 29) or "Don't throw yourself into destruction" (Surat The Cow, verse 195). In spite of misgiving and even condemnation by some of the Ulamas, people celebrated his heroic death, and songs and videos were created in his honor, calling him a martyr. This situation points to a widening divide between the religious meaning of martyrdom and its secular, popular signification, the latter becoming largely autonomous towards the strictly religious idiom.

Yusuf al-Qaradawi, the only major Ulama who deplored with commiseration Bouazizi's death, said in an interview with Aljazeera that he would not produce a *fatwa* (religious statement) but would simply content himself with a commentary in his TV program on Aljazeera, "Religious law and Life" *(al sharia wal hayat)*, dealing with the immolation and death of the young Tunisian Mohamed Bouazizi: "I implore Allah the Almighty, and pray Him to pardon this young man [Bouazizi] and forgive him and go over his action [self-immolation by fire] that was against the religious law, which forbids killing oneself."[11] Under the pressure of the Arab public opinion, largely created by Aljazeera, that viewed Bouazizi's action as that of a martyr's and therefore, laudable, he softened his former position, explaining on his website that Bouazizi's self-immolation was justifiable (and not having to be pardoned by God) since it was in rejection of humiliation and hunger.[12]

Still, as already mentioned, the Ulama of Al-Azhar, the most prestigious Sunni university in the world, issued a *fatwa* condemning self-immolation.[13] In Saudi Arabia, the grand mufti Shaikh Abdul Aziz Al Shaikh condemned suicide even in response to harsh economic conditions.[14]

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[11] For the Arabic text, see http://www.radiojektiss.com/qaradawi-explique-sa-position-sur-bouazizi/.

[12] "Tunisian Uprising: the Other Martyrs," *New American Media*, January 22 2011, http://newamericamedia.org/2011/01/tunisian-uprising-the-other-martyrs.php.

[13] "Al-Azhar: Self-immolation is a 'sin'," *Al-Ahram Online*, January 19 2011, http://english.ahram.org.eg/News/4310.aspx.

[14] "Man Dies after Setting Himself on Fire," *Gulf News*, January 23 2011, http://gulfnews.com/news/gulf/saudi-arabia/man-dies-after-setting-himself-on-fire-1.750642.

Killing oneself is not traditionally regarded as martyrdom, the more so as Bouazizi's act was not preceded by any call to Jihad or fight against the unbelievers or un-Islamic rulers. Bouazizi's self-immolation had no reference to religion, being a pure act of protest against social injustice and humiliation, with no religious undertone or justification. In his act, secularisation was paramount. The trend, two decades earlier, was toward adherence to the religious meaning of martyrdom, and Islamist would-be martyrs were proud to claim the title and to show their willingness to be categorised as Islamic heroes by sacrificing their lives for the sake of religion. Now, what is regarded by the public opinion as "martyrdom" has become totally secular, an act of protest wrapped up afterwards as martyrdom by others, not by its actor who acted out of anger and a sense of intolerable social iniquity.

In defiance against the Ulama, the Progressive Democratic Party (PDF) in Tunisia considered Bouazizi a martyr.[15] His glorification by the Arab world and the world's celebration of his act overshadowed the Ulama's reluctance to or condemnation of his act. On February 8 2011, a square in Paris was named Place Mohamed Bouazizi.[16] On February 17, the main square in Tunis was renamed after Bouazizi.[17] He was posthumously awarded the 2011 Sakharov Prize.[18] On December 17, a cart statue was unveiled in Sidi Bouzid, Bouazizi's town, in his honor. Tunisia's first elected president Moncef Marzouki attended the ceremony, stating "Thank you to this land, which has been marginalised for centuries, for bringing dignity to the entire Tunisian people."[19] The United Kingdom's newspaper *The Times* named Bouazizi person of the year for 2011.[20]

Bouazizi's auto-cremation triggered a series of imitations in the Arab countries and even in Europe and Israel. In all those cases, the reference was one's desperate situation and despondency, not the will to die for Islam (from the orthodox view, the necessary condition

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15 Yasmine Ryan, "The tragic life of a street vendor," *Al Jazeera English*, January 16 2011, http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/features/2011/01/201111684242518839.html/.

16 Agence France-Presse, "Delanoë veut donner le nom du jeune Tunisien immolé à un lieu parisien," February 4 2011.

17 "Tunis renames square after man who sparked protest," *Reuters*, February 17 2011.

18 "Sakharov Prize for Freedom of Thought 2011," http://www. Euro parl.europa.eu/news/en/headlines/content/20111014FCS29297/html/Sakharov-Prize-for-Freedom-of-Thought-2011.

19 *BBC News*, "Tunisia unveils Bouazizi cart statue in Sidi Bouzid," December 17 2011.

20 *Al Arabiya*, "UK's Times newspaper names Bouazizi person of the year 2011," December 28 2011. For all these details on Mohamed Bouazizi, refer to Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia.

for martyrdom). In Sidi Bouzid, Tunisia, after Bouazizi's death, a second young, unemployed man, Houcine Nejii, committed suicide by jumping from an electricity pylon on December 22 2010. A young Moroccan set himself on fire during a teachers' sit-in in front of the Ministry of Education in Rabat. The demonstration was being held to demand secure jobs for those teachers who were granted only with insecure work contracts. The police intervened and saved his and a bystander's life.

Between January 22 and February 2 2011, Morocco witnessed four suicide attempts by fire, none of them successful.[21] A young, unmarried woman, Fadoua Laouri, a 25-year-old mother of two, set herself on fire after being refused by the authorities social housing, i.e. a flat for her and her children. Her house made of dried mud in which she lived with her parents and children had been demolished by the authorities. She burned herself before the municipality of Souk Sebt in the center of Morocco and died of her wounds in a Casablanca hospital. She was the first woman to commit suicide in the new Arab revolutions.[22] Here too, the act had no religious content and since the protest movement did not succeed in Morocco, it was not widely characterised as martyrdom. The success or failure of the protest and its generalisation to a wide circle of individuals play a role in its being named or not as martyrdom by the public at large. This model was imitated in other countries, as was the case in Mauritania. There, a 43-year-old man tried to burn himself on January 17. In Egypt, Abdou Abdel-Moneim Gaafar, a 49 year-old owner of a small restaurant in the town of Qantara close to Ismailiya, attempted to take his own life by setting himself on fire in front of the Egyptian parliament in Cairo on January 17.[23] Apparently he had not received vouchers to buy bread for his restaurant.[24] Two others attempted suicide, a 25-year-old jobless man with mental problems in Alexandria and another one, in Cairo.[25]

On January 15 in Algiers, a jobless 34-year-old attempted to commit suicide before the city's security building. Another man, Mohsen

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21 "A Moroccan Set Himself Afire," *Aljazeera English*, February 2 2011.

22 "Une jeune mère célibataire s'immole par le feu," *France 24*, February 23 2011, www.france24.com/fr/20110223-maroc-jeune-femme-celibataire-immole-feu-suicide-logement-social-souk-sebt-fadoua-laroui.

23 "In Egypt, Man Sets Himself on Fire, Driven by Economic Woes," *Al-Ahram* Online, January 17 2011, http://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/1/2/4115/Egypt/Society/In-Egypt,-man-sets-himself-on-fire,-driven-by-econ.aspx.

24 "Trois hommes se sont immolés par le feu," *France 2*, January 18 2011, http://info.france2.fr/ monde/trois-hommes-se-sont-immoles-par-le-feu-66885754.html.

25 "Trois hommes se sont immolés par le feu," *op.cit.*

Bouterfif, a 37-year-old father of two, committed suicide by fire.[26] He died on January 24. Maamir Lotfi, a 36-year-old unemployed father of six who was denied a meeting with the governor, burned himself in front of the El Oued town hall on January 17. He died on February 12.[27] Abdelhafid Boudechicha,[28] a 29-year-old day laborer who lived with his parents and five siblings, immolated himself by fire in Medjana on January 28, the mayor having refused to provide him with a job and housing. He died the following day.[29]

In Saudi Arabia, perhaps for the first time in the history of the country, a 65-year-old man died on January 21 2011 after setting himself on fire in the town of Samtah, Jizan.[30]

Europe did not remain immune to the wave of copycat suicides by fire. On February 11 2011 Noureddine Adnane, a 27-year-old Moroccan street vendor, burned himself in Palermo, Sicily, in protest against the confiscation of his wares and harassment by municipal officials. He died five days later.[31] Africa and Israel were affected too: in the same year, Yenesew Gebre, an Ethiopian highschool teacher, committed suicide by fire immolation in protest toward the Zenawe regime and its campaigns of oppression against the Ethiopian population. On July 14 2012, during a rally in Tel-Aviv, a man in Israel set himself on fire in protest against the Israeli government, which, in his words, "constantly humiliates the citizens of Israel who have to endure humiliation on a day-to-day basis. They take from the poor and give to the rich." On July 20 2012, Akiva Mafi, a disabled IDF veteran set himself on fire in Yehud Israel, in protest against economic injustice.[32]

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[26] Mehdi Benslimane and Slim Badaoui, "Le maire à Mohcin Bouterfif: 'Si tu as du courage, fais comme Bouazizi, immole-toi par le feu,'" *DNA-Algérie*, January 24 2011, www.dna-algerie.com /interieure/le-maire-a-mohcin-bouterfif-si-tu-as-du-courage-fais-comme-bouazizi-immole-toi-par-le-feu-2.

[27] "Quatrième décès par immolation en Algérie, à la veille de la marche du 12 février," *Jeune Afrique*, February 12 2011, www.jeuneafrique.com/Article/ARTJAWEB20110212105526.

[28] "L'immolation, ultime acte de désespoir des laissés pour compte," *Le Monde*, January 17 2011.

[29] "Un jeune décède après s'être immolé par le feu à Bordj Bou Arréridj," *El Watan*, January 29 2011.

[30] *Sunday Times* (Sri Lanka), "Man Dies in Possible First Self-Immolation in Saudi," January 22 2011, http://www.sundaytimes.lk/world-news/4231-man-dies-in-possible-first-self-immolation-in-saudi?tmpl=component&layout=default&page=.

[31] "Palermo, Moroccan Street Vendor Dies after Setting Himself on Fire," *Ahora Italia*, February 22 2011, www.ahoraitalia.com/giornale//117595/palermo-dies-after-setting-himself-fire.htm.

[32] See "Man sets himself on fire during TA rally," *ynetnews*, July 14 2012; "Man self-immolates in Israel over cost of living," *Reuters*, July 15 2012.

The effect of Bouazizi's act was tremendous in the Arab world, but also beyond. It made a horrendous suicide an accessible model for others who thought it might initiate a social protest, on parity with the Tunisian Revolution. Consideration of the pain to be endured before death almost disappeared before the earthshaking consequences of the act, bringing postmortem fame to modest individuals who became national heroes and thereby wreak revenge on repressive power holders. Of course, the copycat effect did not have the same impact in other countries. The surprise effect had waned, police forces were now ready to confront demonstrators, and the 'trigger element' of the protest movement had to change in order to succeed. In Egypt, protestors came up with the innovation of tying the project to a place, Tahrir Square. Notwithstanding, Egyptians had their own 'martyrs' (the equivalent of Bouazizi was the Egyptian restaurateur Abdou Abdel-Moneim, who died after suicide by fire on January 17 2011.)

Bouazizi's act promoted him as a national hero in Tunisia, and a hero for the Arab nations that followed suit in their protest movements against their rulers. One YouTube declaration in French called him "the hero of the Tunisian nation and the founder of democracy in Tunisia."[33] In this post, Bouazizi's photo is accompanied with the chanting of a man in Tunisian Arab dialect set to traditional guitar, together with a French translation of the song and words attributed to Bouazizi. Then follows the statement, "The uproar spreads: with a long clamor, the warships of the barbarous soldiers are thrust. Everywhere floats death. And the homicidal sword pierces at the threshold of the altars the bold hero. Mohamed Bouazizi, the eagle who carries fire, the benefactor of humanity, the bird whose omen is happiness!"

Before Bouazizi, self-immolation in the Muslim world was a phenomenon largely confined to women (although men were also present in the attempts by the Kurdish PKK to immolate themselves). The Arab Revolutions opened up a new style of self-sacrifice, this time almost exclusively male, up to this date, with a single case of a woman recorded so far, namely Fadoua Laouri (see above).[34]

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[33] "YouTube Mohamed Bouazizi Héros Tunisian Révolution Tunisie Túnez". www.youtube.com /watch?v=5Nir6FcXDM8.

[34] See Farhad Khosrokhavar, *The New Arab Revolutions that Shook the World*, especially the chapter "Self-Immolation: Bouazizi's Paradigm of Martyrdom." Boulder: Paradigm Publishers, 2012.

Conclusion

Self-immolation by fire refers to different sets of meanings. It can be an act perpetrated by the individual himself, but it can be as well a homicide disguised in suicide, a sheer killing, mainly tied to 'honor killings.' It can as well be an act of despair, mainly by women (and even in a more marked manner, by predominantly Kurdish women), men being a minority (again, with the exception of the male Kurdish members of PKK) before the Arab Revolutions. In the Muslim world, self-immolation by fire existed, mainly among the Kurdish activists, side by side with martyrdom. The latter was the dominant model through which protest movements, mostly political in nature, expressed their content, either in religious terms (martyrdom in the strictly Islamic idiom) or in a metaphoric one (in the nationalist movements).

The Arab Revolutions introduced a rupture in the dominant model of martyrdom. Self-immolation by fire spread all over the Arab world, at least in the months following the suicide of Mohamed Bouazizi in Tunisia, replacing, perhaps momentarily, martyrdom based on an attempt at fighting violently the enemy, killing or getting killed.

The self-immolation pattern underlines the new content of the social movements in the Muslim world, in which violence is denounced and the peaceful activist refuses to engage in it, as was the case with the classical Islamic martyrdom. The non-violent model of self-immolation was in turn put into question by the long civil wars in Libya, Yemen, and Syria. In these countries, the autocratic governments refused to retreat and the result was a military violence that could not be halted through non-violent action symbolised by self-immolation. A new type of social action has surfaced that does not avoid violence but does not espouse the legitimacy of the ideology of violence as such, as was the case with the Jihadist or the authoritarian nationalist ideologies in the past.

It is the first time in the Arab world that a model of action based on non-violence towards the enemy has been inaugurated with a large success in the society, since the second half of the 20th century. In other times, the non-violent action remained marginal.

Self-immolation in the Muslim world points to the large secularisation in many Arab societies. Bouazizi's act could not be religiously justified and his action was not grounded or motivated by Islam. The other cases that followed up (more than a hundred all over the Arab world) did not claim religious vindication either. The people who committed self-cremation were not atheists or against Islam. They simply were secularised enough to restrict the realm of religion to

their spiritual needs, leaving the social sphere to the freedom of human volition. In this respect too, this type of suicide denotes distance towards religion. The case of the Kurds confirms this view, since many of them espoused Marxist ideologies that were not congenial to religion. In its new fashion, free of any explicit ideology, Marxist or else, this type of secularisation marks a step towards a new society where the civil sphere is subjectively grounded in the mindset of the new generations.

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Self-Immolation by Fire versus Legitimate Violence in the Hindu Context

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(CNRS-UPR 299)

In India, the practice of self-immolation by fire as a form of protest has developed to the extent that it now appears to be standard practice in the political realm. Though its present form is new, relying on the presence of the media, self-immolation is also part of a wider cultural heritage related to sacrifice. I will first explore the latter, and highlight the logic behind self-sacrifice and sacrifice, and their interrelations as parallel, complementary or conflicting paths, by basing my reflection on widely known myths.[1] I will then compare this material with modern practices in order to address the question at the origin of this special issue of Revue d'Etudes Tibétaines as to whether self-immolation is of a religious or political nature?

In the Hindu tradition where, as Sylvain Lévi said, "all reality is in the form of sacrifice," mythology attributes the creation of the universe and society to the self-sacrifice of Puruṣa, the primordial being. Brahmanic sacrifice is conceived of as a repetition of Puruṣa's creative action. Yet, since the principle of the sacrificer's self-sacrifice is not literally reproducible in a generalised manner, it gave birth to two surrogate forms: the substitution of the sacrificer by another victim on the one hand, and the substitution of effective killing by a symbolic one, on the other.

The first trend has evolved from animal to vegetal substitutes, and blood sacrifices are now rare in India where many states have banned the practice. The second trend, consisting of substituting actual killing with symbolic death, has given birth to renunciation by which the individual leaves the world, incorporates his sacrificial fire, and ceases any activity.[2] This process nullifies his physical death which, again, is symbolically denied. Yet, as in the case of the first trend where there was a substitution of the substitute, renunciation, which used to be the fourth stage in the life of any Brahmin, has been glob-

[1] The same expression, *balidān*, designates both sacrifice and self-sacrifice throughout northern India and Nepal (in modern Hindi, Bengali and Nepali).

[2] See M. Biardeau and Ch. Malamoud, *Le sacrifice dans l'Inde ancienne*. Paris: PUF, 1976.

Marie Lecomte-Tilouine, "Self-Immolation by fire versus legitimate violence in the Hindu context", *Revue d'Etudes Tibétaines*, no. 25, Décembre 2012, pp. 181-189.

ally replaced by home-based ascetic practices. In many respects, these two trends born from a single model have therefore merged, and led to turning the priests of the sacrifice or the ascetics which the Brahmins initially were, into mundane ritual specialists strictly kept away from blood sacrifice and, more generally, from any killing (of animals, but also of themselves by others and of others by themselves).

Parallel to these two Brahmanic models on which most studies on the Hindu sacrifice are based,[3] radically different forms developed in relation to the Goddess, particularly in Bengal and Nepal. In the *śakta* context,[4] and in whatever form it takes, sacrifice does not obey a reflexive logic, but it is directed against another party. It is conceived of as a circulation of forces aimed at weakening the enemy, and at strengthening one's own camp, which is set in motion by offering *bali* (a term which derives from *bal*, force) in order to receive in return *śakti* (which designates the goddess' divine energy, the power to act, and more specifically, political power). The *bali* force behind *śakti* redistribution is the killing of an animal victim which does not substitute the sacrificer but an opposing party. Cases of self-sacrifice with the same offensive purpose do exist, *but* only in myths relating to hopeless circumstances and as a last resort, when the usual mechanisms are no longer available. Yet, even in these cases, the logic behind self-sacrifice is not reflexive, as it is then conceived of as an offering of oneself to the Goddess.

The offensive *śakta* sacrifice indeed does not reproduce Puruṣa's self-sacrifice but the actions of the Goddess. In Nepal, which represents a particularly interesting context for studying such practices, for the country has never been colonised and mass sacrifices are still performed, the Goddess' deeds are ritually recited every year in public. They exert considerable influence for they are the only texts recited throughout the country. The *Caṇḍī Pāṭh*, which is read during the Dasain festival (the Nepalese name for Durgāpūjā or Dasherah), describes how the warlike goddess Durgā came forth from the anger of the gods who were unable to overcome a buffalo-demon. Each god gave her one of his weapons, turning the Goddess into their destructive instrument. Durgā killed the buffalo-demon, and then turned herself under the effect of her own anger into a more fearsome form, Kālī, in order to destroy another more powerful demon. Following the reading of her deeds, men mimic the Goddess' gesture by sacrificing buffaloes. They then renew all the positions of power among

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[3] See Sylvain Lévi, *La doctrine du sacrifice dans les Brâhmanas*. Paris: Ernest Leroux, 1898; Madeleine Biardeau and Charles Malamoud, 1976, *op. cit.*

[4] *Śakta* religion or Shaktism is a devotional branch of Hinduism that focuses on the Goddess.

themselves with the Goddess' blessings, and thus reinvigorated, they finally enact war.[5]

This festival takes place at temples, the most sacred of which are the *pīṭha*, or places where parts of the goddess' body fell on earth after she set herself on fire in the guise of Satī. The climax of the Dasain festival on the night of the 8th day, when crowds of people are suddenly possessed and a frightening sacrifice takes place by a holy fire burning in a pit, is also associated with Satī's self-immolation, showing the unity of the Goddess in her different forms and the interrelationship between sacrifice and self-sacrifice.

Satī's self-sacrifice forms a second model, incorporated within the sacrificial one. Indeed, her self-immolation took place during the sacrificial ceremony of her own father, Dakṣa. The latter was the father of the thirty-three million goddesses, each married to a god. He invited all his daughters and son-in-laws to a large sacrifice, except for Satī who was married to Śiva, whom Dakṣa disliked. Satī and Śiva learned of the snub, but although Śiva remained indifferent, it deeply affected Satī who made her way to her father's ceremony. In the Nepali version of the myth, found in the *Swasthānīvratakathā*, Satī addresses her father Dakṣa and reproaches him for not having treated her like a daughter. She tells him that without her husband present, his sacrifice will not be complete. Dakṣa tries to comfort Satī, by telling her that he has nothing against her, but only against her husband, whom he finds repugnant, going around naked and covered in ash. At these words, Satī becomes furious: her eyes turn red, she blows out a long breath like that of a snake, she stands up, strikes the ground with her heel, beats her breast, saying, "Śiva, Śiva" and jumps into her father's sacrificial fire. Witnessing the scene, the gods assembled exclaim "What nonsense! (*anartha*)" while a terrible storm brews, destroying everything and plunging the world into darkness. Learning the news of his wife's suicide, Śiva flies into a terrible rage from which Vīrabhadra, a giant monster, is born. Accompanied by the latter, Kālī, and Śiva's horde of demons, set out to the ceremony. They ruin Dakṣa's sacrifice, behead both Dakṣa and the goat he was about to sacrifice, then throw the animal's body and Dakṣa's head into the fire, while the severed head of the sacrificial goat is placed on Dakṣa's body. Śiva finally seizes his wife's corpse and wanders through the world, until, with the gods' intervention, Satī's corpse falls apart, creating the holy *pīṭha* on earth.

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[5] On the Dasain festival, see G. Krauskopff and M. Lecomte-Tilouine (eds), *Célébrer le pouvoir. Dasai, une fête royale au Népal*. Paris: MSH/CNRS, 1996.

These two myths about the Goddess and the sacrifices they depict pervert the Brahmanical sacrificial model, Durgā's sacrifice of the enemy, as it introduces a strict distinction between sacrificer and victim, and Satī's self-immolation, because it fully combines these two functions, without resorting to any substitution. In the first case, the apparent shape of the Brahmanical sacrifice remains intact, except that in involving a female sacrificer and a male victim, a clear distinction between the sacrificer and the victim is introduced. In the second case, the literal treatment of sacrifice as self-sacrifice is fully transgressive and destructive. Like Durgā, Satī challenges the rule that the sacrificer and his substitute, the victim, must be male, because they repeat the sacrifice of Puruṣa, whose name means male human. But, whereas Durgā's sacrifice of the buffalo-demon results from the will of the gods, Satī's self-immolation is her own initiative in reaction to the standard sacrificial order reigning among them. Indeed, Dakṣa's sacrifice which is meant to strengthen their society around a respectable male elder causes its disintegration with Satī's intrusion. She not only challenges the legitimacy of her father's endeavour, but her immolation is such a disruptive action that the elements react to it and the assembly of gods can find no other words but "what nonsense!" Satī's self-sacrifice leads to a perversion of the Brahmanical sacrifice in that it creates a division between two parties, as in the sacrifice of the enemy, yet in a totally different way, which is reminiscent of contemporary political self-immolations and the movement of violence against the government that triggers off such deaths. In a similar way, Satī's self-immolation sparks off mass violence against the very system on which Brahmanical sacrifice is based. Her self-sacrifice leads her party to treat the Brahmanical sacrifice literally,[6] and to unravel its meaning through the horrific half-sacrificer, half-victim chimeras, one of which, the animal body and Dakṣa's head, is thrown into the fire while the other, Dakṣa with his goat head, remains, but essentially as a goat.[7] The reciprocity of the substitution is thus

[6] Analysing this myth, B.K. Smith and W. Doniger ("Sacrifice and Substitution," *Numen*, 36 (2), 1989, pp. 189-224) suggest that it "lifts the curtain of liturgy" and denounces the substitution behind the sacrifice as being a subterfuge (p. 211). The myth may also be read as a reaffirmation that the sacrificial substitution is a bilateral relation, which engages the sacrificer in a dangerous process, likely to affect him in return. Whatever the case, the paternal figure of Dakṣa is also atypical and transgressive: he is inauspicious for having a multitude of daughters but no son and for performing a sacrificial ceremony without the supreme god Śiva. The destruction of his ceremony may thus represent a re-establishment of Dharma.

[7] If we are to believe the *Tales of the Vampire* (Somadeva, *Contes du vampire*, translated from Sanskrit by Louis Renou. Paris: Gallimard-Unesco, 1985) or a folktale from Nepal which also deals with this question. In this collection of enigmatic tales, a woman accidentally connects her brother's head to her husband's body and

stressed by the reversal of its artificial unilateral orientation, which results in the sacrificer being sacrificed and the victim becoming his surrogate.

The prototypical Hindu myth of self-immolation by fire thus depicts the end of the Brahmanical sacrifice, embodied in the end of Dakṣa, while Satī's death is creative with the subsequent *pīṭha*, on the one hand, and her immediate rebirth as Pārvatī, on the other.

Satī's death was also creative in many other ways: it gave birth to numerous rituals and practices, the most famous being the tradition of widow-burning, which derived from this myth while at the same time also perverting it in another way. Her death also seems perpetuated through the frequent use of fire as a method of suicide in India, particularly among young married women.

Committing suicide by setting oneself on fire indeed has represented about 11% of suicides in India over the past fifteen years, which is about 20 times higher than the rates in Western Europe, and the American continent. Remarkably, two thirds of those who choose this method are women, who, for the most part are younger than 30 (53.5% in 1997, 49.75% in 2009) and over 80% of them below 45. Indian statistics, which have been providing accurate figures since 1967, also show that far from being the remnant of an archaic practice on the decline, cases of suicide by fire are on the rise,[8] and today more than 10,000 people set themselves on fire each year in India.[9]

We have no equivalent statistics for Nepal, but a study of 151 cases of self-immolation carried out between 2004 and 2008 at Bir Hospital in Kathmandu shows that they represent one third of patients admitted for burns and that among them, 82.8% are women. The method used in more than 90% of cases is to pour kerosene over the body and set light to it.[10]

The accessibility of such products is obviously essential in the recent development of self-immolation. The fast, yet not instantaneous, and irreversible character of the method, also lends all its power to self-immolation as a form of public protest that even the most authoritarian regimes have no control over. There is reason to believe that the method was already being used in nineteenth-century India and

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vice versa, and the answer to the question as to which of them she shall consider her husband, is the person bearing her husband's head since the head is the essential part.

8 The rate of suicides by fire has more than doubled in the space of fifteen years, from 5.18% of the total number of suicides in 1968 to 11.20% in 1993. National Crime Records Bureau, http://ncrb.gov.in/adsi/main.htm.

9 See National Crime Records Bureau, http://ncrb.gov.in/adsi/main.htm.

10 See Narayan Prasad Sharma, "Case Study on Suicidal Burn Patients at Bir Hospital-Kathmandu." http://tribhuvan.academia.edu/NarayanPrasadSharma/Papers/145949/Case_Study_of_Suicidal_Burnt_Patients_at_Bir_Hospital_Nepal.

became very common in the first half of the twentieth century, as shown, for example, by Alexandra David-Néel: "to saturate one's clothes with oil and set it on fire is in fact, horrible as it is, a suicide method willingly adopted by those Indian women, (...) who want to leave this world."[11]

To my knowledge, the first case of protest self-immolation by fire to have had a strong impact on Indian society occurred in 1914. Yet, perhaps because this mobilisation concerned the women's cause, its example seems to have almost been forgotten. In January 1914, in Calcutta, Snehalatā, a 14-year-old Brahmin girl, on seeing her father ready to sell his house to provide her with a dowry, "having dressed herself in her best… climbed to the roof of the house, soaked her clothes in kerosene, and setting fire to them stood there burning in full view of all the neighbourhood."[12] Her action aroused intense emotion in Bengal and the rest of India and was followed by the self-immolation of other girls for the same cause. This was commented on throughout the Indian press and even the *New York Times* devoted a small article to "the epidemic" it triggered. Many poems and pamphlets glorified Snehalatā as a martyr, *śahīd*, and her action as martyrdom or as "noble sacrifice." Yet a minority condemned the method she used, advocating suffragette activism instead.[13] Snehalatā's biography appeared three weeks after her death and was so successful that it was reprinted two months later. Written by one of Snehalatā's father's relatives, it contains many details showing the religious dimension of her death. Prior to immolating herself, Snehalatā purified her body by drinking water from the Ganges; she then donned a white cloth and had her feet painted red. Surprisingly, it is the priest from the Kālī temple near her home who first saw her in flames and came to her rescue. While en route to the hospital, the girl continued to sing hymns and to invoke the name of Kālī until her death. The movement she started also inspired new kinds of sacrificial forms. Along with ceremonies in which personalities and politicians from Calcutta took part, new rituals were organised at which young men were to publicly vow not to accept a dowry, while standing in front of a fire. James Bissett Pratt also reports that a football championship was launched called "the Snehalatā Cup," on which a picture of Snehalatā in flames as well as a vow not to be party to a

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[11] Quoted from *L'Inde, hier, aujourd'hui, demain*. Paris: Plon, 1951, p. 117 (our translation.)

[12] James Bissett Pratt, *India and its Faiths*. *A Traveller's Record*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1915, p. 176.

[13] See the noteworthy pages devoted to Snehalatā in Rochona Majumdar, *Marriage and Modernity: Family Values in Colonial Bengal*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2009, pp. 70-88.

wedding dowry were engraved. Young men had to take the vow in order to take part in the game. An Anti-Marriage-Dowry league was set up. Globally, as Rochona Majumdar reports,[14] mobilisation against the practice chose the example of Snehalatā in order to stir emotion rather than engaging on a legal path, and not a single voice was raised to defend the dowry after that. In her suicide note addressed to her father,[15] Snehalatā makes use of many registers: she first presents her action as a desperate attempt to defend a cause that no one has embraced. Quoting the many humanitarian movements that have been set up or the boycott of foreign products, she makes the accusation: "But is there no one among them to feel for their own people?" She then shifts to a religious register and explains that she took her resolution in the following circumstances: "Last night I dreamt a dream, father, which made me take my vow. To the enthralling strains of a music unheard before, and amid a blaze of light as never was on land or sea, I saw the Divine Mother Durgā, with benignant smile, beckoning me to the abode of the blest, up above..." She then presents her gesture as a sacrifice aimed at saving her father from ruin, but Snehalatā's intention is ultimately of a particularly offensive and broad nature as indicated by her very last words: "May the conflagration I shall kindle set the whole country on fire."[16]

The case of Snehalatā is interesting in that it lies at the border between tradition and modernity, and that it raises the question as to why this particular case aroused such a strong reaction at the time. The religious setting of her suicide certainly contributed to associating her gesture with godly models. Her visible self-immolation on the rooftop combined with her profession of faith also had the power to move people, in the sense that she accused them all of inaction and therefore made them all guilty of her death. A death which, as a Brahmin girl, was also particularly significant, by combining all the attributes of purity, innocence and sacredness. Indeed, suicide is a powerful weapon when used by Brahmins, the killing of whom is regarded as a great sin. In the case of the abuse of power by someone or by the authorities, Brahmins could make them bear the brunt of the crime of a Brahmin (*brahmahatyā*) by committing suicide. This had the effect of causing the guilty person to commit suicide or of driving them crazy. The spirits of such Brahmins traditionally give birth to evil spirits whose harmful power threatens society at large. The fear of being the indirect cause of a Brahmin's suicide, even unknowingly,

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[14] *Ibid.*

[15] Published in Chinmoy (no first name given) "The Bridegroom's Price," *The Open Court*: Vol. 1914, Iss. 7, Article 5. Available at: http://opensiuc.lib.siu.edu/ocj/vol1914/iss7/5.

[16] James Bissett Pratt 1915, *op. cit.*

was so great for rulers that in some regions of India, officials were sent out to inquire about any Brahmins on a hunger strike in order to remedy their situation before they died. Women and children whose killing is also a sin, used this technique as well, but their power to harm was less developed. Snehalatā, for her part, combined the qualities of all those whom it is traditionally a sacrilege to kill, along with the position of an innocent victim of what was already viewed by many as an evil social practice—the dowry.

This suggests that self-immolation's political effectiveness is related to its setting within a larger pseudo-sacrificial context, in which a person representing the victim's party enacts his or her actual sacrifice and expresses social violence in the most horrific form of physical violence. Yet, self-immolation not only emerges from a sacrificial context, but it also contributes to creating it and to generating new sacrificial forms.

The latest wave of political self-immolations in India, in favour of the creation of the state of Telangana, in Andhra Pradesh, follows the same pattern. In this ongoing movement which finds little echo in the international press, self-sacrifices are said to manifest the fact that Telangana people are sacrificed by authorities, in the same manner that high-caste students saw themselves as the innocent victims of the Indian government during the massive wave of self-immolations which occurred during the anti-Mandal protests in 1990.[17] Political self-immolation altogether highlights and contributes to creating a global sacrificial context which assigns the role of sacrificer to those who act against their cause. In India, where sacrifice is a fundamental idiom expressed in a multitude of ways, sacrifice and self-sacrifice are closely interlinked and used as both destructive and creative power. Their use provokes intense sacrificial activity which spreads in various directions: parallel to the epidemic of protest suicides for Telangana, leaders of the movement organise great fire sacrifices for the creation of the new state and activists display symbolic sacrifices of a very offensive type, by burning realistic effigies of their political

[17] Over two hundred students immolated themselves to protest against the introduction of a higher percentage of reservation for backward castes fixed by the Mandal Commission. In this context, students verbally attacked the Prime Minister VP Singh at the time of their death, while in the ongoing movement the formula used is *Jai Telangana*, "Long Live Telangana." One might consider that the first movement is only directly offensive. However, we have seen that offensive sacrifice sets in motion a circulation of energy, which may have an indirect effect. In the myth, Satī who did not curse Daṣha but invoked Śiva at the time of her death, nevertheless caused his destruction, by mobilising his 'party.' The anti-Mandal immolations also led to the resignation of the Prime Minister, but the Telangana movement has not yet proven effective.

opponents. They then produce images where fiction and reality, self-immolation and immolation are powerfully intertwined.

To conclude, we have seen that while self-immolation in India seems to reconfigure political struggles in religious terms and to mobilise an ancient religious heritage, they also generate new sacrificial forms. These in turn have a direct influence on how ancient heritage is perceived. So, in modern images of Satī's self-immolation, the fire pit, as essential as it is in Brahmanic tradition, is absent, and the flames come straight out of the goddess's body. In this manner, contemporary practices of self-immolation, while largely in keeping with the myth of Satī, have contributed to highlighting a particular aspect of its polysemous content. While, for centuries, it had been turned into the model of a mandatory custom associated with the despair of married women whose lives were considered to have ended with their husband's death, Satī's self-immolation now tends to become an image of an offensive method for rallying action and acquiring power in order to transform the world.[18]

[18] I am grateful to Bernadette Sellers (UPR 299, CNRS), who revised my English.

Immolations in Japan

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When Buddhism arrived in Japan in the 6th c., its influence on Japanese culture was far stronger than in China or Korea, which, paradoxically, had been its vehicles. This pervasiveness of Buddhism was however associated with a substantial cultural adaptation. Although some aspects of Chinese Buddhism were better preserved in Japan than in China and Korea, Japanese Buddhism took on a very distinct local flavour. The adoption of Buddhism by the elites and particularly by the sovereigns until the 19th c. ensured its stability and prosperity. Until 1868 Japanese Buddhism had in fact never been subject to persecution.

Although there had been cases of suicides committed by some monks and followers, they were not forms of protest for the vast majority of them but the extreme expression of their own reflection and ascetic practices. "Abandoning of the body" *shashin* 捨身 is considered one of the most beautiful forms of "gift" *fuse* 布施 of "offering" *kuyô* 供養 to the Buddhas. The Scriptures of the Great Vehicle abound with examples of this "abandoning of the body." The methods described vary: immolation, leaping into emptiness, drowning, fasting. However one has to notice that there is a great discrepancy between the examples given in the scriptures that take place in some remote area in a distant past, and their actual achievement here and now with one's own body.

In Japanese Buddhism, even though the texts explicitly referring to the "abandoning of the body" had been known relatively early, the practice itself started much later. It only spread when the control by the state on the Buddhist community became less severe. Quite logically, when the power of the state had been re-established from the 16th c. onwards, these practices diminished and became restricted to groups at the margins of the great Buddhist institutions. The relative decline of these Buddhist "abandonings" coincides with the promotion of suicide among warriors. More or less imbued with Buddhist beliefs like the rest of the population, warriors gradually established numerous categories of suicide: punishment-suicide, accompaniment-suicide and reproachful suicide.

François Macé, "Immolations in Japan", *Revue d'Etudes Tibétaines*, no. 25, Décembre 2012, pp. 191-201.

Buddhist self-cremation *shôshin* 焼身

Among the different forms of the "abandoning of the body," the most spectacular is undoubtedly self-immolation. One of its sources can be found in one of the most widely read *sūtra*s in Japan, the *Lotus Sūtra (Myôhô renge kyô* 妙法蓮華経*)*, in the book dedicated to the original behaviour of the bodhisattva King of Remedies (Yakuô bosatsu honji hon 薬王菩薩本事品):[1]

> In those times, the bodhisattva expounded the Lotus book for the benefit of the bodhisattva Vision of Joy for All Beings as well as a myriad of bodhisattvas (Issai shujô kiken bosatsu 一切衆生憙見菩薩) and listeners… Once he had made his offerings he [the bodhisattva Vision of Joy for All Beings] awoke from his meditation and he thought: "Indeed I have made my offering to The Awakened One with my miraculous powers, but it cannot compare with the offering of my body (*kuyô* 供養)." He breathed in a variety of perfumes: sandalwood, frankincense, prickly juniper, benzoin, aloe, myrrh; he also drank the oil of scented flowers such as gardenia during one thousand two hundred full years; he rubbed his body with fragrant oils. In front of the Awakened Virtue of Pure Solar and Lunar Clarity (Nichigatsu jômyô toku butsu 日月浄明徳佛), he wrapped his body in a precious divine garment, anointed himself with scented oils and, his resolution reinforced by his miraculous powers, he made his body burn on its own (*mizukara mi wo tomoshite* 而自燃身). Clarity illuminated as many worlds as there is sand in the eighty myriads of Ganges and the bodhisattvas that were there praised him at the same time: "It is good, it is very good, son of good! You have shown authentic zeal, this is what makes the authentic offering of the Law to an Awakened One (*kore wo shin no hô wo motte nyorai wo kuyôsuru to nazuku* 是眞精進。是名眞法。供養如来). Even if you took flowers, incense, garlands, fumigations, powders, ointments, celestial silk, banners, dais, fragrant sandalwood from the Cis-marine bank and you gave this great variety of objects as offerings, it would not equal the Awakened One; even though it was the offering of a kingdom, a city, women and children, this as well would not be equal. Son of good, this constitutes the primordial gift, the most venerable, the most eminent gift, as this is an offering of the Law to the One Who Has Thus Gone (*kore wo daiichi no se to nazuku,*

[1] *Le Sûtra du Lotus*, translated from Chinese to French by Jean-Noël Robert. Paris: Fayard, 1997, pp. 344-348.

> *moromoro no se no naka ni oite saison saijô nari* 是名第一之施。於諸施中。最尊最上).
>
> After saying that, everyone kept silent.
>
> The combustion of his body lasted for one thousand two hundred years, and his body was completely consumed… What do you think? Could the bodhisattva Vision of Joy for All Beings be somebody else? It was him, the current bodhisattva King of Remedies [Bhaisajyarāja]. The offering he made by relinquishing his body (*sono mi wo sutete* 其所捨身), there were innumerable thousands of millions myriads, of billions of comparable ones. Royal Splendour of Constellations, if it happens that someone who, after developing his thought and being eager to reach the full and unsurpassable Enlightenment, is able to burn his finger or toe to make an offering to the pagoda (*yoku te no yubi naishi ashi no isshi wo tomoshite butsutô ni kuyôsuru* 能燃手指。乃至足一指。供養佛塔), he will surpass the one who had given objects as precious as a kingdom or a city, or women or children, even kingdoms, forests, rivers and lakes of the tricosmic world.

Maurice Pinguet wrote about this passage in *La mort volontaire au Japon*[2] [Voluntary Death in Japan]: "Prestigious examples: fire suicides are well-attested in Chinese Buddhism. In Japan, one of the Taihô laws, promulgated in 702, formally forbade monks to practice self-cremation."[3]

Article 27 of the *Code for monks and nuns* specifies:[4] "Monks and nuns cannot burn their bodies or throw their bodies. For those who did not respect these rules, as well as for those who caused it, the offense will be determined according to the penal code (凡僧尼。不得焚身捨身。若違及所由者。並依律科断)."

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[2] Maurice Pinguet, *La mort volontaire au Japon*. Paris: Gallimard, 1984, p. 125 and note 53 p. 324, relates to this passage, and re-explains this ban: "But from the 9th c. onwards in Japan, the *Ryô no gige* has formally warned the monks against the sacrifice of the body in fire, it is a serious violation of the laws. (…) However, the Japanese readers' attention was not drawn to chapter 22 where Bhaisajyarāja's self-immolation is described." Firstly, the *Ryô no gige* 令義解 (early 9th c.) is not a legal text, but a commentary on the codes. It quotes the passage on the *Code for monks and nuns* and mostly comments on the last part of the article on sanctions (p. 89). Secondly, as we will see, self-immolation became fashionable at one point in Japanese history.

[3] See James Benn's article on the subject in this issue.

[4] Inoue Mitsusada 井上光貞, Seki Akira 関晃, Tsuchida Naoshige 土田直鎮, Aoki Kazuo 青木和夫, *Ritsuryô* 律令. Tôkyô: Iwanami shoten, Nihon shisô taikei 3, 1976, p. 223.

The collection of commentaries of codes *Ryô no shûge* 令集解 (end of 9th c.) re-uses an old annotation *Koki* 古記, which glosses the *Codes* of Taihô: "to burn one's body means to burn a finger, to consume the body means to do it entirely. To abandon one's body means to graze it and copy a *sūtra* on one's skin, these two acts being called the offering of the animals, thus savagery dries out by itself (焚身，謂灯指焼身尽身也。捨身、謂剥身皮写経、并称畜 生布施、而自尽山野也)."

The commentary makes a clear distinction between "to burn oneself" *fen*/*fun* 焚, the act described in the *Code*, and "to burn" or "consume" *shao*/*shô* 焼 the body that does not appear in the text but that was perfectly attested and known because of the reading of the *Lotus Sūtra*.

The contemporary editors of the Japanese *Code* mention a former version of this article in Chinese in the format of a decree from the 11th month of year 9 of the Zhen-guan Era 貞観 (635) under the Tang Emperor Taizong 太宗:[5] "It is forbidden to impress common people by cutting one's skin or burning one's fingers (鑽膚焚指驚俗)." It seems obvious that what is forbidden in China and Japan are above all mutilations, the ones that are mentioned in the second passage of the chapter on the King of Remedies in the *Lotus Sūtra*. It was confirmed in a decree in 717 that was aimed at the great monk named Gyôki 行基 (668-749), then called "Little monk," and his fellows:[6] they are blamed for burning themselves and ripping off their own fingers and arms (焚剥指臂).

There is another echo of the *Lotus Sūtra* in which the bodhisattva King of Remedies also pulls his arm out.[7] These forbidden acts seem to show that although mutilations did exist, self-immolation was not practiced in Japan yet.

Japanese *Codes* written in the 8th c. not only repeated entire passages from the Sui and Tang *Codes*, but they also followed their mindsets. For the Confucian men of letters, the mutilation of the body received from the parents was unconceivable. One had to preserve it as a precious inheritance. Furthermore, in the vision of a state that ex-

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5 *Ritsuryô, op.cit.*, p. 548.

6 *Shoku nihongi* 続日本紀, 23th day of the 4th month of year 4 of Yôrô era 養老元年四月壬辰. Tôkyô: Iwanami shoten, Shin Nihon bungaku taikei, vol.2, 1990, pp. 26-27. A similar ban is reported in *Sandai kyaku* (三代格) on the 10th day of the 7th month of year 6 of Yôrô era: "or else in the villages, mutilating one's bodies and burning one's fingers 於坊邑、害身焼指."

7 *Sûtra du Lotus*, *op. cit.*, p. 348.

pected to control the population, those mutilations, not to mention self-immolations, could be seen as a threat to its authority.

But the ideal of a state ruled by the *Codes* in the Chinese way had to deal with the growing influence of Buddhism from the beginning. Gyôki, who had been aimed at by the decree in 717, received the title of *daisôjô* 大僧正, i.e. great monastic chief-officer, in 745. He was also given the responsibility of raising fund for the building of the Great Buddha by Emperor Shômu. The articles of the *Code for monks and nuns* were de facto less and less observed.

From the middle of the Heian era (10th c.), several sources mention a relatively high number of self-immolations. It is the case in the *Hyakurenshô* (*The Mirror Polished a Hundred Times* 百練抄, second half of the 13th c.), which relates that in the 9th month of year 1 of the Chôtoku era (995): "the Venerable one standing on Amida peak burned his body. Hordes of great ones and humble ones assembled to watch, in recent years eleven people have burnt their bodies in different provinces (上人於阿弥陀峰焼身、上下雲集見之、近年 国焼身者十一)."

As is shown in the passage of Amida peak, self-immolation did not refer only to the prestigious example of the *Lotus Sūtra*, but also belonged to extreme devotional practices of Amida Buddha. The abandoning of the body is indeed also mentioned in another *sūtra* that has been known for a long time in Japan: *Konkô myôkyô* 金光明経 (*Suvarnaprabhâsottama sūtra*). A chapter of this *sūtra* is dedicated to the abandoning of the body *shashin hon* 捨身品. This *sūtra*, entitled *Konkômyô saishôô kyô* 金光明最勝王経, was read in all provincial monasteries from the middle of the 8th c.

Collections of Buddhist anecdotes give detailed descriptions of those pious immolations. For instance, in the ninth story narrated in the *Dainihonkoku Hokekyô genki* 大日本国法華経験記 (*An Account of the Wonders of the Lotus Sūtra in Great Japan*, 1040-1044):

> Ôshô , the master of the law from Nachi mountain.
>
> Ôshô was a monk who lived in Nachi mountain in Kumano. He practised spontaneously, without respite. His practice included reading of the *Lotus* and his aim was to follow the Buddha's path. He stayed under the trees of the forest and the mountains. He did not like to mix with humans. When he read the *Lotus* aloud, every time he reached the chapter on the King of Remedies, it became engraved even more deeply into his memory and body and it ran through his veins.

> He was infatuated with the passage in which the bodhisattva Vision of Joy burned his body, burned his arm for all beings. He was filled with joy. Finally he made a vow: "like the bodhisattva King of Remedies, I am going to burn this body as an offering to the Buddhas." He refrained from eating grains and salt; moreover he did not eat any more sweet food. He did the washing-up with pine needles and dressed with wind and water. He thus purified himself both from internal and external impurities. He resorted to the expedient of body cremation. In order to cremate his own body, he put on a robe of law made of new paper. He took a censer in his hand and sat in the meditation posture on bundles of wood. He firmly turned to the West and called forth the different Buddhas. He then made a vow: "I offer this body and this mind to the *Lotus Sūtra*. With my head I make offerings to the Buddhas of higher regions, I offer my feet to the Blessed ones of lower regions. May the Venerable ones of the East receive my back. May the One who possesses correct and universal knowledge take my face in pity. Moreover, I offer my chest to the Great Śākya master, my left and right sides, I give them to the revered Many-Jewels (Taho). I offer my throat to the One Who Has Thus Come, Amida. My five vessels I offer to the Five Knowledgeable Ones Who Have Thus Come. My six organs, I give to the beings of the six paths, etc." He then put his hands in the seal of meditation. In his mouth he recited the wonderful Law, in his heart he believed in the Three Jewels. Then, after his body had turned into ashes, the voice kept reciting the *sūtra* and did not stop. Everything looked impeccable. The smell of smoke was not bad, it smelled like precious incense.
>
> A soft wind kept blowing, it sounded like the harmonious voices of music. After the fire burned out, a glow was still there. The ashes radiated in the sky, illuminating mountains and valleys. Hundreds of beautiful birds, whose names and appearances are unknown, gathered. They flew here and there singing softly and sounding bell-like. This was the first self-immolation in Japan. It cannot be said that the ones who saw it closely or who heard about it, did not feel any intense pleasure.

Since it is a text of religious propaganda, it should not be understood literally. However it shows in what mindset the first immolations occurred in Japan. After the medieval period, the examples are less and less abundant. One of the last examples took place in Edo in 1597. The ascetic jumped into the fire before a crowd of onlookers.[8]

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[8] Takizawa Bakin 滝沢馬琴, 兎園小説, quoted by Saitô Masatoshi, *Miira shinkô no kenkyû*. Tôkyô: Ôwa shoten, 1985, p. 182.

Those immolations were the ultimate expression of extreme practices that aimed at the purification of the body before offering it.[9] The same approach is adopted in the other practices of "abandoning." Moreover, one can notice the place of asceticism of the priest, Nachi in Kumano, which is famous for its waterfall and other kinds of "abandoning."

The fasting period necessary for self-cremation was also preceded by self-mummification. This practice is based on the idea, widespread in Sino-Japanese Mahāyana, of the possibility of becoming a Buddha with this body *sokushin jôbutsu* 即身成仏 in Sino-Japanese. The idea was to make one's body eternal. Some waited for their final moments to prepare themselves for this transformation. That is what Kochi Ho.in 弘智法印 did. He died at the age of 82 in 1363. Before lying down he had told his disciples that they should not bury his body but leave it as it is, because he had made the vow to wait for the dawn of the coming of Maitreya (Miroku no geshô no akatsuki 弥勒の下生の暁).[10] He therefore followed the example of Kûkai 空海 (774-835) who, according to the legend, said that he waited for the coming of Maitreya on Mount Kôya.[11] He also followed the example of Rinken 琳賢 who died in 1150. It is said that he was the first person whose body was revered as a relic *shari* 舎利, although it is hard to know if he had actually planned his own mummification.[12]

The will to transform one's body into a relic is often accompanied with the practice of self-burial. One of the first occurrences of this form of suicide can be found in *Heiji monogatari*. This text talks about a suicide as part of a devotion for the sovereign without any planned mummification but in a context that is clearly Buddhist:[13]

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[9] For an almost complete census of self-immolations in Japan, see Saitô Masatoshi, *op.cit.*, pp. 37-41. He showed that this practice involves mainly monks of low rank whose names and exact dates of self-immolation are not known.

[10] Matsumoto Akira 松本昭, *Nihon no miirabutsu* 日本のミイラ仏. Tôkyô: Rokkô bukkusu, 1985, p. 87.

[11] The legend seems to take shape at the beginning of the 9th c. It is mentioned in *Seijiyôryaku* (政治要略 *Compendium of the administration*), 1002.

[12] Matsumoto Akira, *op. cit.*, pp. 160-164.

[13] *Le Dit de Heiji*, transl. René Sieffert, in *Le Dit de Hôgen – Le Dit de Heiji*. Paris: P.O.F, 1976, pp. 13-14.
Heiji monogatari 平治物語, in *Hôgen monogatari Heiji monogatari* 保元物語. Tôkyô: Iwanami shoten, Koten bungaku taikei 31, 1969, p. 200.
入道に此由申せば、さればこそ。信西がみたらん事はよも違はじ。忠臣君に替たてまつるとは信西なりしが、命を失て御前に替奉らんとおもふぞ。息のかよはむ程は佛の御名をもとなへ参候ばやと思へば、其用意せよ。との給ふ間、穴を深くほりて、四方に板を立並、入道を入たてまつり、四人の侍共もとどりをきり、最

> When he told the monk about the news: "That's what it was! Shinsei's predictions have rarely been incorrect! Shinsei was the devout vassal who was to sacrifice for his Prince; he will then sacrifice for his Majesty! I want to call the blessed name of the Buddha until my last breath; help me prepare myself for it!" Thus he said, and following his instructions they dug a deep grave, put boards on each side, helped the monk to go down; then the four followers cut their quiffs and said: "Please grant us a final favour by giving us religious names!" The master gave the name of Saiko to the Officer of the Guard of the Left Doors Moromitsu, the name of Saikei to the Officer of the Guard of the Right Doors Narikage, the name of Saisei to Morokiyo of the Guard of the Secluded Emperor, and the name of Saijitsu to Kiyosane from the Deparment of Constructions. Then they put the tip of a bamboo tube in the mouth of the master and covered him with earth and their hair. The four disciples stayed for a moment and wept over the grave, but since it was useless, the four of them returned to the City.

The year of Heiji in 1159 was marked by violent unrest, a prelude to the war between the Geijis and the Heikes. The suicide of the monk called Shinsei occurred in an exceptional context. It has to be noticed moreover that he resorted to a very particular method that is self-burial. This method was also adopted later by ascetics *yamabushi* 山伏 of Mount Dewa. The only difference was that they intended to transform their bodies into mummies. After a period of fasting that was more and more severe, they were locked in a basement with only a small opening to let the air in. This is how Honmyôkai 本明海 (1623-1683) did: as a warrior of low rank, he rejected his condition as well as his wife and children, to perform ascetic practices in Yudono mountain in Dewa. In 1673 he refrained from eating five types of grain for a thousand days, then ten types of grain for another thousand days. Then for five months he fed on "alimentation dendrique,"[14] i.e., eating only pine bark *mokujikigyô* 木食行. Finally he asked to be buried and died *dochû nyûjô* 土中入定.[15] A lot of people followed his example.

Apart from individual concerns, Naitô Masatoshi noticed that many ascetics endured extreme fasting during the long years of fam-

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後の御恩には法名を給らむ。と申せば、左衞門尉師光は西光、右衞門尉成景は西景、武者所師清は西清、修理進（清實は）西實とぞ付られける。其後大なる竹のよを通して入道の口にあて、もとどりを具してほりづむ。四人の侍墓の前にてあげきけれども、叶べきあらざれば、皆都へ歸る.

[14] As translated by Paul Demiéville, « Momies d'Extrême-Orient », *Journal des Savants – Troisième centenaire 1665-1965,* janvier-mars 1965, p. 164.

ine of the second half of the Edo period (1600-1868). It was their way of asking for the end of the people's suffering.[16]

There have been other methods to leave this sullied world than self-immolation and self-burial. Drowning *jusui* 入水 became very popular particularly after Kumano. The most famous example can be found in *Heike monogatari* 平家物語. Like Shinsei's self-burial, Koremori 維盛 had also been defeated. He preferred suicide to the shame of being made prisoner. However, the method and the place that he chose clearly show that his act was not only motivated by the warrior's honour. In the *Heike* there is a long description of his hesitations and a monk encouraged him by showing him the right way and gave him some time to think it through:

> "…and provided that you become a Buddha and are liberated, your heart opens to understanding, you will be able to come back to your human motherland and show the path to women and children. Once you are back to this sullied earth, you will offer salvation to men, there is no doubt about it!" he said. As he knocked the bell, he encouraged him to chant. The Commander thought it was time for the ultimate knowledge and as he suddenly became detached of his passions, he called the blessed name of the Buddha a hundred times with a strong voice and jumped into the sea. Monk Byôe and Ishidô-maru also called the Blessed Name and followed him into the sea.[17]

This "immersion in water in order to be reborn in a Pure Land" *jusui ôjô* 入水往生 was not only practiced in Kumano. There had been departures in groups from the South of Shikoku in Tosa province. However it is from Kumano that those departures were the most numerous. They were called "crossing the ocean towards Potalaka" *Fudaraku tokai* 補陀落渡海.[18] The first mention of this "crossing" with no return dates from 686 and the last one from 1722. Most of the times we know the name of the leader and the number of people who followed him—between five and eighteen until the 16th c.[19]

As Potalaka was situated beyond the sea, monks left on boats with a cabin closed with nails for the final "crossing to the Pure Land." Contrary to what Father Charlevoix said, based on missionary ac-

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[16] Naitô Masatoshi, *op.cit.*, pp. 233-249.

[17] René Sieffert (transl.), *Le Dit des Heike*. Paris: P.O.F., 1978, p. 435. *Heike monogatari* 平家物語, vol. 2. Tôkyô: Iwanami shoten, Nihon koten bungaku taikei 33, 1969, p. 284.

[18] Potalaka is Avalokiteśvara's heaven, Kannon bosatsu (観音菩薩).

[19] Hori Ichirô 堀一郎, *Minkan shinkô* 民間信仰. Tôkyô: Iwanami shoten, 1972, pp. 245-246.

counts from the 16th century, this practice has actually never been popular.[20]

At the end of the Edo era, these different forms of Buddhist suicides started declining. There were numerous causes. One of the most obvious is the tougher control of the authorities—the central government and the fiefs—on the population as well as on groups considered deviant. This policy was to be continued and even strengthened during the Meiji era.

It is in this context that an ascetic practised *shashin* (the abandoning of his body) in 1884 by leaping from the top of Nachi waterfall.[21] *Shugendô* 修験道, the way of the *Yamabushi*, includes practices such as the contemplation of the void while one is hanging from a chain above a precipice. Jumping from the top of a waterfall was only the achievement of an act that is normally symbolic. What makes Jitsukaga's suicide special was that it happened while the government of Meiji had forbidden *Shugendô* and the police were chasing the last unwilling ascetics. It is possible that one of the causes of this extreme act was a form of protest against the ban of the ascetic practices of the *Yamabushi*.

From 1868 there was a massive anti-Buddhist movement in Japan. This movement was known by the slogan *haibutsu kishaku* 廃仏毀釈 ("destruction of Buddhism, rejection of Śākyamuni"). This policy led to many destructions and victims, but to my knowledge, Jitsukaga's gesture remained isolated.[22]

It is in another context that a parallel with the self-immolations of Tibetan monks can be found—the reproachful suicide committed by warriors. Instead of burning themselves, they ripped their stomachs open. *Seppuku* 切腹 (commonly called *harakiri*) enjoys an unsound reputation probably due to the fascination for horror, a reputation it shares with self-immolation. One can think of *sati* tradition in India for instance.[23]

Among the many forms that *seppuku* took, the reproachful suicide *kanshi* 諫死 may seem the most unselfish and noble. In front of a superior whom one has to obey and be loyal to, it was the only means for a faithful vassal to show his disagreement without going back on his opinions. In China there are a great number of examples of honest

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[20] *Histoire et description générale du Japon*, Paris, 1736, p. 224, quoted by Maurice Pinguet, *op.cit*., pp. 130-131.

[21] Annu mari Busshii アンヌ・マリ　ブッシイ (Anne-Marie Bouchy), *Shashin gyôja Jitsukaga no shugendô* 捨身行者実利の修験道. Kyôto: Kadokawa shoten, 1977.

[22] On the anti-Buddhist persecutions in Meiji era, see James Edward Ketelaar, *Of Heretics and Martyrs in Meiji Japan*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990, pp. 77-86.

[23] See Marie Lecomte's article in this issue.

ministers who committed suicide to show their disagreement with the sovereign. From the Middle Ages in Japan, warriors used *seppuku* as a preferred form of suicide and made this act of double fidelity to the lord and to a higher standard of morality even more dramatic. One cannot say however that these acts have been more numerous. Maurice Pinguet only mentions two examples: one in the 16th c. and one in 1870 in the Meiji era.[24]

The promotion of suicide among the warrior class in Japan is a complex phenomenon that cannot be explained in a few words, let alone summed up in one or two ideas. It is true however that Buddhism and its vision of life and death may partly explain the phenomenon. The offering of one's life is considered the most beautiful offering in the *Lotus Sūtra* and this idea has an echo in the suicides of warriors who decided to follow their lords in death *junshi* 殉死, a practice which was forbidden in 1663. The theme of sacrifice as an offering had been used with the worst excesses by ultranationalists until the final disaster of 1945.[25] During these tragic years, many Zen monks did not hesitate to re-create the old bond between Zen and the warriors' way.

Iida Tôin wrote in 1934:[26]

> Death is not the end of everything. The non-dispersion of energy and the preservation of matter are a principle of the universe. The stronger ones will ensure the survival of the many. This is something that we must take to heart. Military Zen simply wants the individual to become a warrior. In the present like in the future and beyond, you have to be a warrior. You need a lion heart, move on and never turn back—such is the perfection of military Zen.

This cultural background that is often concealed is what makes Mishima's suicide in 1970 so ambiguous. He staged his *seppuku* as a reproachful suicide against the evolution of contemporary Japanese society as Yokoyama Yasukate had done a hundred years before for the same reasons.

[24] Maurice Pinguet, *op.cit.*, pp. 146, 219.

[25] On relationship between Buddhism and war, see Brian Victoria, *Zen at war*. New York: Weatherhill, 1997.

[26] *Sanzen manroku*, quoted by Brian Victoria, *op. cit.*, pp. 167-168.

Multiple Meanings of Buddhist Self-Immolation in China — A Historical Perspective

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I offer this contribution to the study of the recent wave of self-immolations in Tibet not because I believe that the historical perspective on Buddhist self-immolation is the only useful one, but in the hope that the issues raised below may still be helpful to interpret current events. As a historian of medieval Chinese religions, my own immediate frame of reference is to things that happened well over a thousand years ago. Here, I am only able to condense a few essential points from my recent publications on self-immolation and related issues in Chinese Buddhism.[1]

I will begin with an account of what is probably the earliest recorded case of self-immolation by a Buddhist monk in China. This happened in the year 396:

> Fayu 法羽 was from Jizhou 冀州.[2] At the age of fifteen he left home, and became a disciple of Huishi 慧始 (d. u.). [Hui]shi established a practice of austerities and the cultivation of *dhūta*. [Fa]yu, being energetic and courageous, deeply comprehended this method. He constantly aspired to follow the traces of the

[1] The *Lotus Sūtra* and Self-immolation," in Jacqueline I. Stone and Stephen F. Teiser (eds.), *Readings of the Lotus Sūtra*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2009, pp. 107-131; *Burning for the Buddha: Self-immolation in Chinese Buddhism*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2007; "Spontaneous Human Combustion: Some Remarks on a Phenomenon in Chinese Buddhism," in Phyllis Granoff and Koichi Shinohara (eds.), *Heroes and Saints: The Moment of Death in Cross-cultural Perspectives*. Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Press, 2007, pp.101-133; "Fire and the Sword: Some Connections between Self-immolation and Religious Persecution in the History of Chinese Buddhism," in Bryan Cuevas and Jacqueline Stone (eds.), *The Buddhist Dead*: *Practices, Discourses and Representations*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2007, pp. 234-65; "Self-immolation in the Context of War and Other Natural Disasters," in James Benn and Jinhua Chen (eds.) *Buddhism and Peace*, *Issues of Violence, Wars and Self-sacrifice*. Hualien: Tzu Chi University Press, 2007, pp. 51–83; "Written in Flames: Self-immolation in Sixth-century Sichuan," *T'oung Pao*, 92 no. 4-5 (2006), pp. 410–465; "Where Text Meets Flesh: Burning the Body as an 'Apocryphal Practice.' in Chinese Buddhism," *History of Religions*, 37 no. 4 (May 1998), pp. 295–322.

[2] Jizhou was north-east of present-day Lucheng 潞城 county in Shanxi 山西.

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> Medicine King and to burn his body in homage [to the Buddha]. At that time the illegitimate 'Prince of Jin 晉' Yao Xu 姚緒 (fl. late fourth century) was occupying Puban 蒲坂. [Fa]yu informed Xu of his intention. Xu said: "There are many ways of entering the path, why do you choose only to burn your body? While I dare not firmly oppose it, I would be happier if you would think twice [lit. think thrice]." But [Fa]yu's intention was resolute. Next, he consumed incense and oil; he wrapped his body in cloth, and recited the "Chapter on Abandoning the Body" (*sheshen pin* 捨身品). At its conclusion he set fire to himself. The religious and laity who witnessed this were all full of grief and admiration. At the time he was forty-five years old.

In many ways this account, taken from a medieval hagiographical collection called *Biographies of Eminent Monks*, is rather typical of its kind, but perhaps somewhat different from what we are seeing in Tibet today. Note, for example, the collusion of the monk Fayu with local authorities (the Prince of Jin) rather than any kind of conflict with them.

A history of self-immolation

Acts of self-immolation by Chinese Buddhists are but part of a longer history of the ideals and practices of "abandoning the body" that may be found throughout the Chinese Buddhist tradition from the late fourth century to the present. In my research, I have encountered several hundred accounts of monks, nuns and laypeople who offered up or gave away their own bodies for a variety of reasons, and in multiple different ways. It is impossible to typify self-immolators since they are drawn from across the spectrum of the saṃgha in China: Chan/Zen masters, distinguished scholars, exegetes, proselytisers, wonder-workers, and ascetics as well as otherwise undistinguished and unknown monastics and laypeople. The deeds of self-immolators were usually enacted before large audiences. Government officials and sometimes even rulers themselves often attended their final moments, interred the sacred remains and composed eulogies, verses, and inscriptions that extolled their actions. One form of self-immolation, burning the body, frequently took the form of a dramatically staged spectacle. Overall, the performance and remembrance of self-immolation took a strong hold on the Chinese Buddhist imagination from early medieval times onwards.

When we examine en masse the representations of self-immolators, their motivations, and the literary crafting of their sto-

ries we discover that self-immolation, rather than being an aberrant or deviant practice that was rejected by the Buddhist tradition, may actually be understood to offer a bodily path to attain awakening and ultimately buddhahood. While this path took rather a different form than those soteriologies that stress the mind, such as meditation and learning, it was a path to deliverance that was nonetheless considered valid by many Chinese Buddhists.

The terminology of self-immolation

"Self-immolation" is the term most often used for the range of practices in which we are interested, but we should first pay some attention to our understanding of the word. In its strictest sense self-immolation means "self-sacrifice," derived from the Latin *molare* "to make a sacrifice of grain." It does not mean suicide by fire, although of course the term is commonly used in that sense. While bearing the everyday usages in mind, I employ the term 'auto-cremation' to refer to the practice of burning one's own body, and 'self-immolation' for the broader range of actions which in Chinese Buddhist discourse constituted 'abandoning the body'—such as drowning, death by starvation, feeding the body to animals or insects, etc. Three terms are commonly encountered in the Chinese sources, and they are used more or less interchangeably: *wangshen* 亡身, meaning "to lose, or abandon the body," or perhaps "to be oblivious (*wang* 忘) to the body;" *yishen* 遺身, meaning "to let go of, abandon, or be oblivious to the body;" and *sheshen* 捨身 "to relinquish, or abandon the body." The glyph *shen* (body) that is common to these terms also carries implications of 'self,' or the person as a whole. These three binomes are also used to translate terms found in Indian Buddhist writings such as *ātmabhāva-parityāga*, *ātma-parityāga* (abandoning the self) and *svadeha-parityāga* (abandoning one's own body). So we can say that, at least at the terminological level, self-immolation may be considered (and it was by some Chinese exegetes) as a particular expression of the more generalised ideal of being detached from the deluded notion of a self. Auto-cremation is usually marked with expressions such as *shaoshen* 燒身 (burning the body) and *zifen* 自焚 (self-burning), but these terms are deployed mostly descriptively rather than conceptually. That is to say, in the Chinese sources auto-cremation is understood to be a way of abandoning the self, but auto-cremation is not usually discussed as a separate mode of practice or ideal in its own right.

The concept of abandoning the body, or letting go of the self, manifested in a variety of ways in the history of Chinese religions and not all of them involved death or self-mutilation. For example, in Buddhist and Taoist texts and inscriptions, *sheshen* was paired with the term *shoushen* 受身 ("to receive a body") so as to indicate what happened at the end of one lifetime in the endless round of rebirth—as one relinquishes one body one obtains another one. *Sheshen* could also be employed as an equivalent for the common Buddhist term *chujia* 出家, literally "to leave the household," or to take up the monastic way of life. In a more extreme case of this, the pious emperor Liang Wudi 梁武帝 (464–549) literally offered himself as a slave to the saṃgha on a number of occasions and his ministers were obliged to buy him back with a substantial ransom. But 'abandoning the body' also covers a broad range of more extreme devotions: feeding one's body to insects, slicing off one's flesh, burning one's fingers or arms, burning incense on the skin—not all of which necessarily result in death—and starving, slicing, or drowning oneself, leaping from cliffs or trees, feeding one's body to wild animals, self-mummification (which involves preparing for death so that the resulting corpse is impervious to decay), and of course auto-cremation.

So we cannot understand self-immolation in historical context by looking only at auto-cremation, rather we must consider a broader mode of religious praxis that involved doing things to or with the body. In Chinese Buddhist history this mode was by no means static but was constantly shaped and reformulated by practitioners and those who told their stories. At times, auto-cremation was cast as the dominant form of self-immolation, while at other moments it receded into the background.

Self-immolation in China

The fluid nature of the concept of self-immolation was partly a historical accident—it was not consistently defined or explained in canonical sources available to medieval Chinese Buddhists—but it was also a consequence of the ways in which Chinese Buddhist authors composed their works. Most of what we know, and what Chinese Buddhist practitioners themselves know, about self-immolation in China is presented in the form of biographies or hagiographies of self-immolators. Compilers of exemplary biographies of monks were the most important agents in the invention of self-immolation as a practice of the Chinese saṃgha. By grouping together biographies of exemplary individuals under the rubric of 'self-immolation' they created the appearance of unity from a diversity of practices, but in

their reflections on the category they were often reluctant to draw precise boundaries around the tradition they had thus created. The difficulties of determining what actions constituted self-immolation, what mental attitude was required, and what goals self-immolation aimed at were not only challenges that scholars face now, they also plagued Buddhist authors who were themselves much more closely involved with self-immolators.

To give one pertinent example of the dilemma that faced Chinese Buddhist authors: how could they justify the transmission of biographies of self-immolators as records of eminent monks (that is to say, as models of monastic behaviour), if the monastic regulations found in the *vinaya* condemned suicide and self-harm? There was no simple or single answer to that question. Buddhist authors always struggled to define and endorse self-immolation and were often preoccupied with other concerns that shaped their view of exemplary Buddhist practice. The attitude of the state towards the saṃgha as a whole, or towards certain types of monastic behaviour; orthodoxy as presented in scriptural and commentarial materials; orthopraxy as reported by Chinese pilgrims to India: all these and other factors in addition affected the opinions of those who wrote about self-immolators.

Of all the forms of self-immolation, auto-cremation in particular seems to have been primarily created by medieval Chinese Buddhists. Rather than being a continuation or adaptation of an Indian practice (although there were Indians who burned themselves),[3] as far as we can tell, auto-cremation was constructed on Chinese soil and drew on range of influences such as a particular interpretation of an Indian Buddhist scripture (the *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka* or *Lotus Sūtra*) along with indigenous traditions, such as burning the body to bring rain, that long pre-dated the arrival of Buddhism in China. The practice of auto-cremation was reinforced, vindicated, and embellished by the production of indigenous Chinese scriptures, by the composition of biographies of auto-cremators, and by their inclusion within the Buddhist canon as exemplars of heroic practice. As time went on, more biographies were composed and collected. The increasing number and variety of precedents provided further legitimation for auto-cremation. In China, auto-cremation thus became a mode of practice that was accessible to Buddhists of all kinds.

My studies of auto-cremation have made it apparent to me that the somatic devotions of self-immolators are best understood not as aberrant, heterodox, or anomalous, but were in fact part of a serious attempt to make bodhisattvas on Chinese soil in imitation of models

[3] See Marie Lecomte's article in this issue.

found in scriptures such as the *Lotus Sūtra*. As we have noted, self-immolation resists a single simple explanation or interpretation and accounts of self-immolation were not simply recorded and then consigned to oblivion but continued to inspire and inform readers and listeners through history and down to today. Thích Quảng Đức, the distinguished and scholarly Vietnamese monk who burned himself to death in 1963, was conversant not just with the scriptural sources for self-immolation—he chanted the *Lotus Sūtra* every day—but also with the history of Chinese self-immolators who had gone before him.

Monks and nuns, emperors and officials thought about self-immolation in different ways at different times. On the whole, Chinese Buddhists tended to support their co-religionists who used their bodies as instruments of devotion, whereas the literati (at least in public) often regarded such acts with disdain or disapproval. But conversely, many literati did participate in the cults of self-immolators, and some Buddhist monks were bitterly opposed to it. Self-immolation brought out tensions within the religion, and in society at large. Each case had to be negotiated separately, and there were clearly regional variations and patterns among self-immolators. The cults of self-immolators were both local—celebrated in particular places by the erection of shrines, *stūpa*s, images and stelae—and also made universal through written accounts found in monastic biographies and in collections which celebrated acts of devotion to particular texts such as the *Lotus Sūtra* or which were intended for a more popular audience.

How do we know about the history of self-immolation?

Much of our historical data for understanding self-immolation is preserved in collections of the genre known as *Gaoseng zhuan* 高僧傳 *(Biographies of Eminent Monks)*. Biographies of self-immolators in these sources were, for the most part, based on the funerary inscriptions composed for their subjects rather than on miracle tales or anecdotes. Some of these funerary inscriptions are still preserved in other collections or in the form of the actual stelae themselves. Biographies of eminent monks, especially in the first *Gaoseng zhuan* collection, were largely based on inscriptions written by prominent men of letters (usually aristocrats in the medieval period) and so, not unnaturally, they stress the contacts of monks with the court as in the account of Fayu with which I began.

Self-immolation remains a somewhat nebulous or elastic concept that is not usually very well-articulated in the individual biographies

of self-immolators. The compilers of biographical collections also took a somewhat circumspect approach to the topic in the critical evaluations (*lun* 論) appended to the sections on self-immolation. Our attempts as scholars at defining the meaning (or meanings) of self-immolation must therefore be contingent on a thorough investigation of what at first might appear to be a mass of incidental detail.

Self-immolation in the literature of the Mahāyāna

Biographers often represented individual acts of self-immolation as if they were predicated on a literal reading of certain texts, particularly *jātaka* tales (accounts of the former lives and deeds of the Buddha Śākyamuni) and the *Lotus Sūtra* which contains a famous account of the Bodhisattva Medicine King who makes a fiery offering of his own body to the relics of a Buddha. As we saw in the biography of Fayu, he wished to emulate this particular advanced bodhisattva. But, one may legitimately enquire, how else should we expect Chinese of the medieval period to have taken these heroic tales, other than literally? In the Mahāyāna scriptures and commentaries in particular, the Chinese were presented with the blueprints for making bodhisattvas, and those blueprints said repeatedly and explicitly that acts of extreme generosity (or charity *dāna*) were a necessary part of that process. For example, one of the most influential Mahāyāna texts known to the medieval Chinese, *Dazhidu lun* 大智度論 *(Great Perfection of Wisdom Treatise)* which was attributed to the great Indian thinker Nāgārjuna, says:

> What is to be understood by the fulfilment of the perfection of generosity appertaining to the body which is born from the bonds and karma? Without gaining the *dharmakāya* (dharma body) and without destroying the fetters the bodhisattva is able to give away without reservation all his precious possessions, his head, his eyes, his marrow, his skin, his kingdom, his wealth, his wife, his children and his possessions both inner and outer; all this without experiencing any emotions.[4]

In other words, according to a normative text that was often referred to by medieval Chinese Buddhists, the bodhisattva must dispassionately surrender his own body and even his loved ones long before he reaches awakening ("gaining the *dharmakāya*"). The same text continues by recounting the stories of Prince Viśvantara who famously

[4] *Dazhidu lun*, Taishō 1509.25.149b.

gave away his wife and children, King Sarvada who lost his kingdom to a usurper and then surrendered himself to a poor brahman so that he could collect a reward from the new king, and Prince Candraprabha who gave his blood and marrow to cure a leper. The stories of these mythic Buddhist heroes of the past are presented in a matter-of-fact manner as the paradigms and exemplars of true generosity. Chinese Buddhists were acutely aware that tales of these bodhisattvas and similar teachings that were precious to them had emerged from the golden mouth of the Buddha himself. Indeed, they could point to many places in the scriptures where the Buddha had more or less explicitly instructed them to do extraordinary things with their bodies if they wished to advance on the path to buddhahood.

Over time, the miraculous world described in Buddhist *sūtra*s and represented in Buddhist artworks also took root in Chinese soil. This fact may be seen, for example, in the development from early accounts of monks who emulated or imitated *jātaka* stories and the *Lotus Sūtra*, to later stories of practitioners who had direct and unmediated encounters with the Bodhisattva Mañjuśrī in China or, for example, the increasing prevalence of the spontaneous combustion of eminent monks. We may also trace this process by paying attention to the mention of relics in the biographies. Broadly speaking, while in early accounts relics of any kind are rarely found, later, the relics of the Buddha start to play significant roles, but by the tenth century self-immolators themselves were commonly depicted as being able to produce relics in vast quantities, sometimes spontaneously while still alive. I would see this evolution of relics as part of an on-going process in which Chinese monks grew more confident of their abilities to create bodhisattvas in China and this development was no doubt related to continuing patterns of self-immolation.

Over the years that I have studied and written about self-immolation, the question I have most often been asked is, "why did people do such things to themselves?" There can never be a single answer to that simple question. What I have been able to do, I hope, is to show that in Chinese Buddhist history self-immolation was not a marginal or deviant practice indulged in by a handful of depressives with suicidal tendencies. The evidence I have amassed shows, I believe, that self-immolation was not only relatively common but also enduring and largely respected within the tradition. The sources reveal that self-immolation was not a single phenomenon, but a category that allowed Chinese Buddhists to think about a diverse range of practices, ideals, and aspirations that were open to constant negotiation and interpretation.

Self-immolation was not confined to the Buddhist monastery. It had repercussions for the state and its relations with the saṃgha and it had ramifications for China's intellectual and political history. Modes of 'Confucian' filial piety, for example, were indebted to Buddhist practices such as slicing the thigh to feed one's parents. Auto-cremation was sometimes co-opted by officials in late imperial China: some local magistrates, and even a Song dynasty emperor, threatened to burn themselves to bring rain.

Thus, I stress the need to avoid imposing uniformity on what was always a diverse set of practices and ideals. We should endeavour to seek the deeper meaning in the details, by carefully unravelling the scriptural and historical precedents for apparently bizarre and inexplicable behaviour such as feeding the body to insects or slicing flesh from the thighs. By concentrating on the biographies of self-immolators, their scriptural models and learned defenders, I have aimed to show that the category 'self-immolation' is a virtual one. It was the compliers of biographies who determined what practices should constitute that model.

I have been hesitant to present self-immolation as a subset of some larger interpretive category. For example, I remain to be convinced that in China self-immolation was primarily an ascetic tradition. Despite references to terms such as *dhūta* or *kuxing* (苦行 "austerities") in the biographies, I have not found strong evidence of self-immolation as part of a larger and fully-articulated program of asceticism. On the contrary, often the preparation of the body seems to emphasise its positive aspects—it was not something to be subdued but rather cultivated and transformed. The physical practices of Chinese Buddhists may be said to represent the performative aspect of the religion. These practices manifested distinctive material results; they changed the shape of the body by burning or cutting off fingers or arms; they etched the teachings into the skin by branding the torso, arm or head. They produced relics, mummies, and indestructible tongues. Self-immolators affected the lives of the witnesses, as they saved the lives of humans and animals, cured diseases, or converted people to the vegetarian diet. Self-immolators were said to have preserved the saṃgha in times of persecution, or to have averted the disasters at the end of a *kalpa*, ended warfare, brought rain in times of drought, and turned back floods. Thus, their acts were not simply a departure from the world, but an active involvement in it. While these may have been the acts of extraordinary individuals, they were not considered completely misguided or deluded by the larger community. In fact, I would suggest that they were as solidly grounded in scripture and doctrine as any other Buddhist practice in China, and for the most part were understood as part of a wider pro-

ject designed to make ordinary humans into the heroic and benevolent bodhisattvas celebrated in the literature of the Mahāyāna.

In China, while often controversial, self-immolation was always considered a valid Buddhist practice. It was not pushed to the margins by Chinese Buddhist authors, but was considered seriously as part of the path to buddhahood itself. If we refuse to take self-immolation equally seriously, wherever and whenever it appears, I believe that we can only fail to understand it.