


Political Self-Immolation in Tibet: Causes and Influences¹

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uch 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>.

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-01092012160953.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

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 impaired¹¹—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-

⁸ "Thousands attend Rikyö'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 Woenser, "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-

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/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-right-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 Kirti 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

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 Kirti 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

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 Kirti 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

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 Kirti 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.

reduced in the local town as well, but RFA reported that paramilitary posts were re-established around Kirti 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.html, 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

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—

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.

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:

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-

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

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	ཚོས་འཁོར་གླིང།
Chopa Kyap	Chos pa skyabs	ཚོས་པ་སྐྱབས།
Drapchi	Grwa bzhi	གྲ་བཞི།
Drepung	'Bras spungs	འབྲས་སྐུངས།
Dzamthang	'Dzam thang	འཛམ་ཐང།
Jyekundo	Skye rgu mdo	སྐྱེ་དགུ་མདོ།
Kalsang	Skal bzang	སྐལ་བཟང།
Karma Gon	Karma dgon	ཀར་དགོན།

Kharta	Kha rta	ཁ་རྟ།
Kīrti	Kīrti	ཀུརྟི།
Kyichu	Skyid chu	སྐྱིད་ཅུ།
Lhasa	Lha sa	ལྷ་ས།
Ngawa	Rnga ba	རྩ་བ།
Ngawang Changchup	Ngag dbang byang chub	ངག་དབང་བྱང་ཅུབ།
Ngawang Norphel	Ngag dbang nor 'phel	ངག་དབང་ནོར་འཕེལ།
Nyitso	Nyi mtsho / Nya mtsho	ཉི་མཚོ།
		ཉམ་ཚོ།
Phuntsok	Phun tshogs	ཕུན་ཚོགས།
Rikyo	Ri skyo	རི་སྐྱོ།
Sertha	Ser thar	ཤེར་ཐར།
Sobha	Bsod bha	བསོད་ནམ།
Tawu	Rta'u	རྟུ།
Tenzin Khedrup	Bstan 'dzin mkhas grub	བསྟན་འཛིན་མཁས་གྲུབ།
Tenzin Phuntsok	Bstan 'dzin phun tshogs	བསྟན་འཛིན་ཕུན་ཚོགས།
Themchen	Them chen	ཐེམ་ཚེན།
Thubten Ngodup	Thub bstan dngos grub	ཐུབ་བསྟན་དངོས་གྲུབ།
Tingri	Ding ri	དིང་རི།

