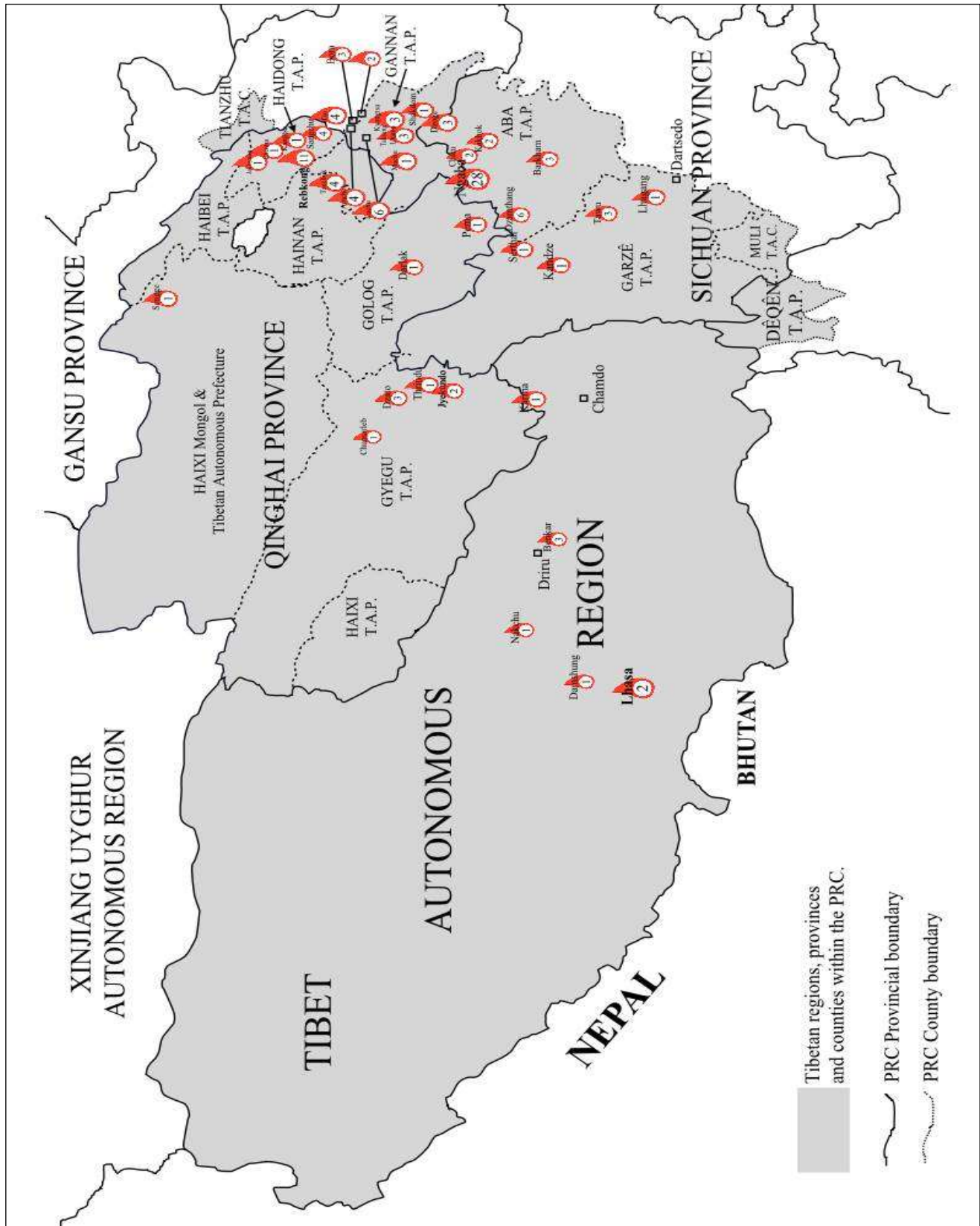


*Scottish Parliament's Cross-Party Group on Tibet,
Briefing Paper No.5:*

Self-Immolations in Tibet and China – 2013 Update

Executive Summary

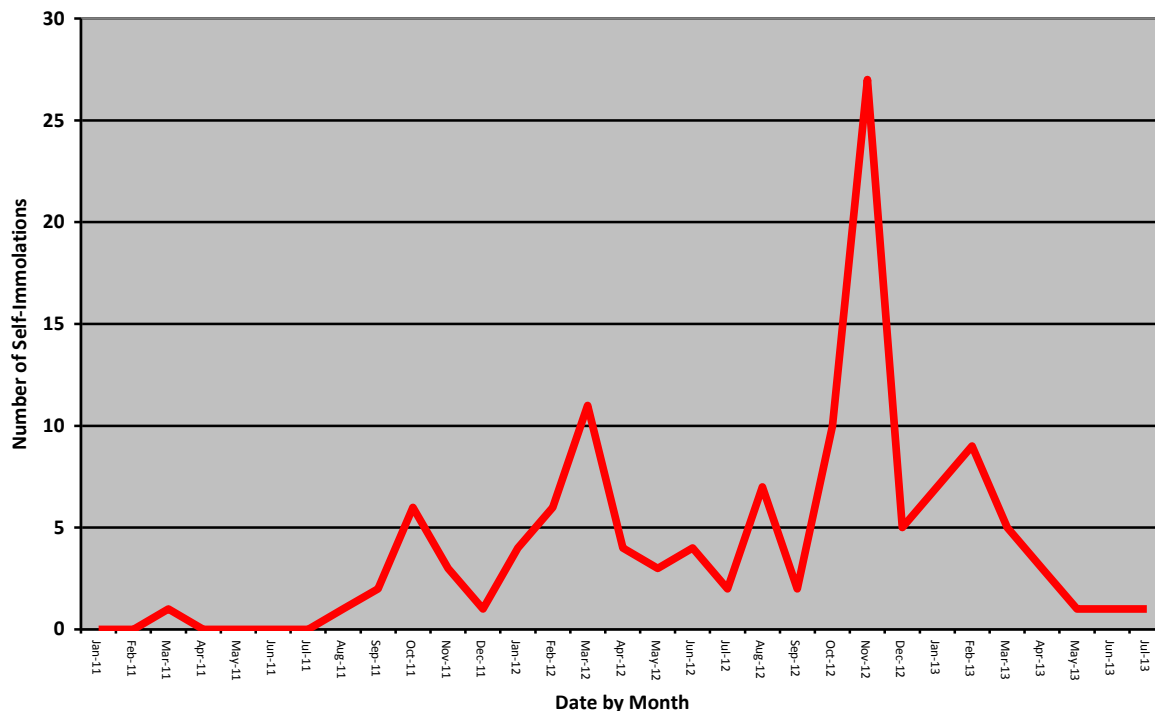
- Since 2009, Tibetan regions of the People's Republic of China (see map) have witnessed a wave of self-immolations by Tibetans in protest against Chinese policies in the region. At the time of writing, 127 Tibetans have self-immolated in protest against Chinese policies in Tibet. While most of the early self-immolators were Buddhist monks, during 2012 the weight of self-immolators were nomads, farmers, students and schoolchildren.
- Self-immolations in Tibetan areas have overwhelmingly been in Eastern Tibet, in the traditional Tibetan areas of Kham and Amdo outside the Tibetan Autonomous Region. They began in 2009 with the self-immolation of monks at Kirti Monastery in Ngaba, and reached a peak in November 2012 during the Chinese Communist Party's 18th National Party Congress in Beijing, during which almost one Tibetan a day was self-immolating.
- The self-immolation movement in Tibet does not appear to follow the contours of the Sino-Tibetan dispute over sovereignty: it is not about issues of 'independence' or 'autonomy' but rather a response to everyday restrictions placed on religious freedoms, language rights and access to employment, and destruction of water resources and grazing lands by large scale mining and airport projects.
- In this sense, while there is a growing cultural nationalism that attends self-immolations in Tibet, they are nonetheless part of a wider and escalating pattern of protest and public suicide in the People's Republic of China. These are generally in response to the human costs of the country's massive economic boom: the forced demolition of houses and neighbourhoods; the wholesale relocation of populations; and the pollution of communally-used natural resources. Most particularly, they are in response to the perceived and actual erosion of tenants' and citizens' rights under law.
- Nonetheless, the response by the Chinese authorities to self-immolations by Tibetans has been extremely draconian, largely because of an assumption that all protest by Tibetans must be intrinsically "splittist" (that is, secessionist). In particular, it has involved the formulation of new laws that seem to target Tibetans specifically, and the imposition of collective punishments, and the application of the crime of "intentional homicide" to all those aiding, abetting, encouraging or even photographing self-immolations.
- Information on self-immolations and other protests in Tibet has now become extremely difficult to obtain as a consequence of a widespread communications blackout by authorities and the imposition of prison sentences for disseminating information on such protests.



Map of Self-immolations in Tibetan areas of the PRC to July 2013

Tibetan Self-Immolations, 2012-13

At the time of the last briefing in June 2012, there had been over forty self-immolations. Since that time, the number has nearly tripled, bringing the total to 127 by late August 2013. In the wake of the November 2012 wave of self-immolations amongst Tibetans, severe crackdowns have been put in place, with widespread arrests and information blackouts. Almost certainly as a consequence, reports of self-immolations within Tibetan areas have dwindled to a handful throughout 2013.



Self-Immolations in Tibet, Jan 2011-July 2013

The precise number of self-immolators is a subject of some debate. Certain organisations, such as the Central Tibetan Administration, concentrate solely on the political centrality of those self-immolations that have actually occurred in Tibet itself, and not counting those that occurred in exile locations such as India and Nepal (five at the time of writing). This excludes such individuals as Thubten Ngodup, the first Tibetan self-immolator in 1998, and Jampal Yeshe, who left behind one of the most influential testaments when he self-immolated in New Delhi in March 2012. Similarly, few listings include those who sought self-immolation but died through other, connected means. Thus, for example, on January 19th 2013, the 17 year old Jigmé Kyab attempted self-immolation having first swallowed poison to forestall possible arrest and hospitalisation; the poison, however, overcame him before he could initiate his self-immolationⁱ. Similarly, in December 2012 in Driru County, TAR, five Tibetans are reported to have leapt into a river and drowned after being pursued by Chinese police who were trying to prevent their self-immolation on the eve of the World Human Rights Dayⁱⁱ. In a broader sense, it is clear that government and police authorities across the Tibetan Plateau have sought to suppress information and communications regarding self-immolations, including wholesale destruction of household satellite dishes, strict control of internet access and confiscation of passportsⁱⁱⁱ.

Amongst those self-immolations that have been recorded and confirmed, the last year has seen several important shifts in both demography and behaviour which give insight into the reasons and causes behind the self-immolations:

The November 2012 Spike in Self-Immolations: Self-immolations in Tibet saw a progressive rise during the early autumn of 2012, leading to a dramatic spike in November 2012, coinciding with the Chinese Communist Party's 18th National Party Congress in Beijing, which saw the stepping down of Hu Jintao as General Secretary of the CCP, and the handover of power to a new generation of party officials. During this period, twenty-seven Tibetans self-immolated, almost one a day. There had been an early, smaller peak in self-immolations in early October, when there were rumours that the Party Congress would be held. The previous peak in self-immolations had been in March 2012, around the commemoration of the 1959 Tibetan Uprising.

Since the November 2012 peak, numbers of recorded self-immolations have fallen dramatically, averaging around one per month at the time of writing. There are probably several reasons for this: Firstly, that many of the eastern regions of the Tibetan Plateau in which the self-immolations have been concentrated are now under the strictest police and para-military control. Secondly, that information coming out of Tibet has been severely curtailed following new restrictions on telecommunications equipment, in combination with severe penalties being applied to those that broadcast information about or images of self-immolations. Thirdly, that the Chinese legal authorities have engaged in the systematic arrest and imprisonment of many of those linked to self-immolations and self-immolators, particularly under new regulations pertaining to "intentional homicide". Finally, and perhaps not least, it is wholly possible that, as a tool of protest, self-immolation is now seen by many Tibetans as having brought peculiarly harsh and negative consequences, especially in legal terms, and has not had the desired effect of changing Beijing's various Tibet policies, but of exacerbating them.

The Changing Demography of Self-Immolation: Across 2012, there were several dramatic shifts in the demography of those committing self-immolation, suggesting important social and political developments. The first of these was a shift from members of the Buddhist monastic community (both monks and nuns) to a predominance of self-immolations amongst the Buddhist laity. Traditionally, members of the Buddhist Sangha (monastic community) have led protest in Tibetan areas, usually in response to the pervasive restrictions laid by the state on religious practice amongst Tibetans. While the general religious tenor of such protests remains (including most particularly statements of loyalty to the Dalai Lama), the testaments of self-immolators - especially amongst the laity - speak to a concern with the general condition of Tibetans as a whole, whether in terms of religion, language, employment, mobility and other basic freedoms, or indeed status as citizens within the People's Republic. While there is a wide variation in the ages and background of self-immolators - who are now divided amongst monastics, farmers, nomads and students - certain patterns are clear. The majority of self-immolators - around two-thirds - are young (usually in their late teens and early twenties) and male, either from the monastic or student population. Only around 13% have been female, one third of whom were Buddhist nuns. Older self-immolators tend to be laity, from the farming and nomadic communities, and to be the heads of families; the oldest have been in their early sixties. The complexity of this picture implies that, while there are certain issues at the heart of self-immolators' reasoning, such as restrictions on Tibetan religion and language - the broader issue is more complex and multivariant, speaking to the *general condition* of Tibetans in the modern PRC.

The Growing Synergy between Self-Immolations: While the early self-immolations in 2009-2011 seem to have been strongly individually motivated, there is now a growing local synergy between such acts. The general concentration is in the traditional Tibetan regions of Kham and Amdo in eastern Tibet, regions which have under PRC administration been broken up into the various Tibetan Autonomous

Prefectures of Qinghai, Gansu and Sichuan (see map); by contrast, there have been comparatively few self-immolations within the Tibetan Autonomous Region itself, and many of these have been carried out by people from Amdo and Kham. Within Kham and Amdo, certain sites have become centres of self-immolation, such as the township of Rebkong in northern Qinghai and most particularly "Martyr's Street" in Ngaba township just outside Kirti monastery, where the first self-immolation in Tibet, by the monk Tapey, occurred in 2009.

The funerals of self-immolators have attracted thousands of mourners almost from the beginning, and have often become centres of confrontation between Tibetans and police authorities. It is known that many self-immolators, such as Tamdin Thar, have toured and made prayers at the sites of previous self-immolators before carrying out their own acts^{iv} or, like Tamdin tso^v and Wangchen Norbu^{vi}, personally attended funerals and prayers for self-immolators in the preceding weeks.

The Causes of Self-Immolation in Tibet

Since the beginning of the modern era of Tibetan protest in late 1987, local responses to Chinese rule in the Tibetan Autonomous Region and surrounding Tibetan Autonomous Prefectures - that is, in which we may call "cultural Tibet" - have undergone many shifts and transformations. The timing, location and associated testaments of self-immolations within Tibet imply a major shift in the purpose of such protests from the Tibetan dissent of the late 1980s in Central Tibet, when protests were usually attended by petitions to the international community in general and the United Nations and human rights organisations in particular. This emphasis on "international consciousness-raising" has very much been the mainstay of exiled organisations and international Tibet support groups since that time, and is generally read by the media and activists as the central goal of Tibet campaigning.

By contrast, the recent self-immolation movement and its associated protests seem to address primarily:

- (i) the Chinese government (whether at a local, regional or national level), and;
- (ii) Tibetans themselves, in particular those living in the Tibetan Autonomous Region and surrounding Tibetan Autonomous Prefectures.

The growing focus on the Chinese state is most clearly signalled by the dramatic peak in self-immolations in November 2012, during the days of the 18th National Party Congress in Beijing. It seems clear, as the Chinese dissident writer Wang Lioxing concluded, that these self-immolations were aimed at "inducing the new generation of Chinese leaders to change its policy on Tibet, making self-immolations as actions to push for change"^{vii} but also in the degree to which many self-immolations respond directly to local government initiatives and policies designed at punishing, suppressing or belittling Tibetan dissent¹.

¹ Particular examples of these include: Tapey's self-immolation in 2009 in response to restrictions on religious ceremonies in Kirti Monastery, Ngaba; self-immolations (such as that by Tamdin Tso) in response to Chinese government posters reiterating the ban on pictures of the Dalai Lama and calling on Tibetans to publicly protest separatist forces and their activities; those protests and self-immolations in Gansu province following publication of *10 Real Views of Tsoilho Area*, an official booklet which branded the Tibetan language as irrelevant and ridiculed self-immolations as acts of "stupidity"; or Sangdag Tsering's self-immolation in front of a local Chinese government office in Dokarmo town, Rebkong county following a public announcement by Chinese officials

These are less appeals to the outside world than direct moral confrontations with and petitions to the Chinese state, whether at a local, regional, or central government level. At the heart of this confrontation is the call for the return of the Dalai Lama to Tibet. Importantly, the precise vocabulary of such requests is generally not aimed at the Dalai Lama himself, but at the government of the PRC, to allow for such a possibility.

At the same time, the available testaments of Tibetan self-immolators are overwhelmingly addressed at fellow Tibetans. Here, the central message is straightforward: that they take pride in their Tibetan nationality; and that they maintain Tibetan cultural values through the study of its language, traditions and religion; that they eat, dress and speak Tibetan regularly; and that they support one another and not engage in internal disputes. In certain important and influential cases, testaments have evoked strong notions of Tibetan unity and national patriotism. This last is an important innovation for Tibetans, for whom political solidarity traditionally involved loyalty to the Dalai Lama and other religious figures, or to their local region, rather than to a larger Tibetan national solidarity.

In neither of these senses can self-immolations within Tibet be understood as any kind of international consciousness-raising, nor indeed demands for political secession (what Beijing calls "splittism"). Indeed, a dwindling minority of self-immolators even mention the matter, a fact which reflects an increasing cynicism amongst Tibetans regarding the seriousness of international community's will regarding Tibet. Rather, it seems clear that the self-immolations are both a vanguard and an expression of a growing Tibetan nationalism that is local in emphasis and has largely eschewed the internationalism that has characterised the Tibetan cause since 1959.

Indeed, amongst all the Tibetan self-immolators, only one has actually invoked the term independence. In this sense, the often rather automatic claims of "splittism" by the Chinese government are often misplaced^{viii}. This point has been made by the Tibetan monk and writer Gartse Jigme, recently sentenced to seven years imprisonment for drafting a work on self-immolations, in which he asserts this strong distinction:

"Through its official media, and in the eyes of the people, the Chinese government condemns the self-immolators as conspirators who want to destroy the country. This too is an evil talk, because the aspiration of more than 90 self-immolators is to see His Holiness back to Tibet and to restore Tibetan people's legitimate rights to pursue their own language, culture and religion. However, the Chinese government keeps holding its hard line stance, not paying an inch of attention and value to the demands and sacrifice of the self-immolators. Rather the Chinese government responds with severe repression, as it uses guns, authority, law and torture to suppress the demands of the self-immolators." (From *Tsenpo's Valour* by Gartse Jigme^{ix})

In this sense, it is clear that protest within Tibet is not dictated by many of the established debates about independence or the middle way that preoccupy Beijing, Dharamsala and the international media.

Nor is it clear that Chinese sovereignty over Tibetan areas is itself at the heart of the issue, but rather the quality and competence of those policies, and the fairness or otherwise of their application in comparison with majority-Han areas. Most protests are centred on the particular conditions and issues

there, barring Tibetans from visiting the families of self-immolators and threatening to shut down monasteries if prayer services and funerals for self-immolators continued¹.

that arise from national and local government policies on the ground and on the dramatic and rapid interventions that are occurring under the banner of economic development in the region.

Particular objects of contention here have been:

- i) *Recent mining complexes*: The economic requirements of China's boom has encouraged substantial growth in the mining of oil, copper, molybdenum and gold resources in Tibetan areas. Large scale mining projects in areas such as Driru, Gedrong Zatoe and Meldro Gongkar have involved large scale relocation of populations as well as the reported poisoning of local water supplies and pollution of grazing lands. Large scale protests by Tibetans – in many cases involving self-immolations and other forms of public suicide – have occurred in these areas, with many protesters evoking central government guarantees on the protection of the environment.
- ii) *New airport building*: Several new airport projects have been begun in Tibetan areas to integrate transport in the region. The airport building in Sangchu county, Gannan TAP has been contested on the grounds that it has involved building on a mountain sacred to local Tibetans. During October-November 2012, four Sangchu residents self-immolated alongside protests against the airport construction.
- iii) *Language Restrictions*: From 2010 onwards, Tibetan has been increasingly phased out as the language of instruction in Tibetan state schools, to be replaced by Mandarin. In combination with official rhetoric denigrating the Tibetan language, this has been an object of large scale protests and self-immolations, especially by students and, in some cases, schoolchildren.
- iv) *Religious Restrictions*: Restrictions on Buddhist religious life remain one of the dominant bones of contention in Tibetan areas, with day-to-day management of Buddhist monasteries increasingly dominated by party officials, party control of the recognition of incarnate lamas (*tulku*), and restrictions on large religious gatherings. In many respects, the lack of religious freedom clearly remains the linchpin of Tibetan protest, and the central focus of Tibetan self-immolators' grievances.

Tibetan Protest within the Wider Chinese Context

Many of these foci of protest are distinctive to Tibetan regions but, as initially discussed in the 2012 briefing paper, understanding the dramatic emergence of self-immolation as a form of protest in Tibet over the last five years requires considering them within the larger frame of reference of popular protest within the People's Republic of China, where self-immolation in particular and public suicide in general are well-established – and increasingly prevalent – means of protest.

The background of much of this protest lies in the sacrifices made by China's domestic population to make way for the country's economic growth on the international stage. The growth of eastern Chinese cities and factory conurbations over the last twenty years has required huge quantities and both space, raw natural resources and human labour, an extractive economic process which has been both privatised and supported by the Chinese state.

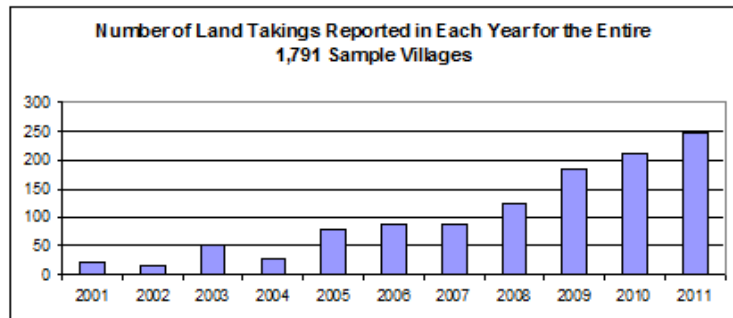
In some cases, such protests are simply linked to the massive pressures that economic growth is putting on workers' lives in China. For example, a spate of 18 protest suicides in 2010 at the Foxconn computer hardware factory in Wuhan – which manufactures parts for Apple, Sony, Nintendo and HP – culminated in 150 workers threatening mass public suicide by throwing themselves off the factory roof. Despite being one of the more “progressive” manufacturers in China's economic boom, protests at

intimidating management styles, poor working conditions and vastly multiplied production demands mean that protests are widespread, with an estimated 24,000 workers per month resigning^x.

Tenants' Rights and Forced Relocation Schemes

However, the requirements of economic growth have had their most substantial impact on tenants' rights across the PRC, where public suicides have become an increasingly prevalent means of protest, as widespread evictions and relocations of families and whole neighbourhoods are required to make way for new private and state-backed construction projects.

The recent *Landesa* survey of seventeen provinces in the PRC showed a twelve-fold rise in compulsory state repossessions between 2001 and 2011, with 43% of the villages surveyed experiencing state land re-acquisition. Of these, almost a fifth were forced evictions, with a quarter of tenants receiving no compensation for the land they have lost, and the average received in compensation a mere 2% of what the state then went on to sell the land for (\$17,850 per acre as opposed to a mean selling price of \$740,000 per acre).



Source: <http://www.landesa.org/china-survey-6/>

Similar processes of population transfer are occurring in Tibetan regions, particularly those traditionally used by nomadic pastoralists. Large scale social relocation projects in Tibetan areas as part of the Build a New Socialist Countryside Project have seen the obligatory relocation and settlement of nearly 300,000 nomads in Qinghai Province alone, with plans to sedentarize 113,000 more by the end of this year.^{xi} Increasingly, those relocated from rural and farmland areas are moved to urban areas, with a concomitant skills dislocation and loss of livelihood, and in many cases a lack of residence registration for the places they are moved to. In the case of Tibetan nomads, most are resettled in housing complexes often long distances from the nearest sources of employment, even if they were qualified for such work.

Many of these events are initiated by economic developments within the private sector, but are brought to a head less by the initial actions of construction and mining companies than by the surrounding context of national, and particularly regional, government and legal organisations which provide for the ordinary citizen little in the way of redress against often quite rapacious land grabs, and in many cases implicit or explicit support for cash-rich companies in opposition to what many Chinese citizens feel are their constitutional or natural rights. Since all land in the PRC is owned by the state, which overwhelmingly supports such economic development, tenants have few if any rights to resist such appropriation. In many cases, CCP officials instruct courts not to address such cases and even in situations where residents have the capacity to make judicial appeals, the demolition of their homes or development of traditional pastoral lands has already gone ahead^{xiii}.

At the heart of these are a series of self-immolations in response to forced eviction, many of which have become the centre of media attention and popular microblogging throughout the PRC. Such public suicides are usually used as a means to signal shortcomings, compromise and in some cases outright corruption within local provincial authorities, and many disenfranchised tenants travel to Beijing either to protest directly to the central government or to commit public suicide in Tiananmen Square – whether by self-immolation, drowning or poisoning. The Chinese authorities have systematically sought to portray such public suicides as the result of personal mental illness or family problems, but

public suicides became so prevalent in state centres such as Tiananmen Square, that the Beijing authorities were forced in 2003 to pass particular byelaws banning the practice^{xiii}.

Protest Events Throughout the PRC

Combined with the clear problems that these issues present for food security and economic stability in the PRC, it has also made tenants' rights one of the defining domestic political issues in modern China. In response to systematic land appropriation, forced and often violent eviction, and persistent administrative and judicial compromise, an escalating pattern of protest has emerged across the PRC. State registered "mass protest events" in the PRC doubled between 2006 and 2010, and the central government has now reached the point where it is spending more on internal surveillance and policing than its total combined military spending^{xiv}. This toxic combination is increasingly seen by local Chinese commentators as compromising the political and constitutional integrity of the country as a whole, with potentially profound consequences for the stability of the international economy.

State Responses to Self-Immolations in Tibet

Despite the larger context of self-immolation throughout the PRC, Chinese state responses to self-immolations amongst Tibetans have, by comparison with those occurring in mainland China, been particularly draconian and collective in nature. Central and provincial governments in the PRC have unanimously treated Tibetan self-immolations as a product of the "Dalai clique" and of "splittist" tendencies amongst Tibetans, and have been dealt with under powerful new laws and state measures.



Satellite dishes and other broadcasting equipment being burnt in Mahlo County. Undated photo. Source: *Radio Free Asia*.

Initial responses to the Tibetan self-immolations involved heavy policing by local Public Security Bureaus and the Peoples Armed Police forces^{xv}, combined in many cases with official denials that self-immolations had occurred. In general, a policy of denial and news blackout has been common, with the large-scale closing down of mobile networks and the destruction of privately owned satellite dishes from late 2012 (see photo). These moves were often linked to new laws prohibiting the owning or distribution of photographs or videos of self-immolations (see below). The Tibetan Centre for Human Rights and Democracy (TCHRD) reported the blocking of internet and phone lines in Kanlho prefecture, Amdo. Local authorities have also closed internet cafes and banned the sale of mobile phone SIM cards. In Rebkong, following the November immolations and protests

reports emerged, that people have been threatened with two years' imprisonment for receiving or making international calls. On 14 May 2013, the Tibetan monk and author Garte Jigme was sentenced to five years imprisonment for drafting a book about the self-immolations^{xvi}.

This general endeavour to conceal the nature and extent of self-immolations whas been attended by numerous allegations that police and local party officials have used both bribery, threats and ultimately the legal system itself to replace narratives of political self-sacrifice with ones of personal weakness and mental illness^{xvii}.

From the middle of 2012, many local authorities reportedly issues threats of collective punishments for those families, villages and monasteries linked to self-immolation events. Chinese government authorities in Malho region issued a five-point notice on November 14, 2012 giving stern orders to local officials "to punish self-immolators and their families; even those who had offered condolences and prayers to the bereaved family members and relatives." The notice further announced the cancellation of government aid to families of self-immolators as well as development projects in villages where similar protests have taken place.^{xviii} In the Rebkong area of Qinghai, there have been reports of threats to cut off state support, electricity and medical aid^{xix}. Regional and local authorities have banned funerals and prayer services for those who die from self-immolation. Even visiting families of the deceased, or expressing condolences, can lead to punishment and arrest.^{xx} At the same time, most areas of Eastern Tibet have seen substantial restrictions on movement for residents^{xxi}. There have been, moreover, widespread reports of arrests amongst those in the immediate social and familial circles of Tibetan self-immolators^{xxii}.

'Intentional Homicide'

The unprecedented peak of Tibetan self-immolations in 2012 led Chinese state media and legal experts to engage thoroughly with the issue, not simply to suppress public sympathy for self-immolators and their cause, but to deal with the peculiar legal nature of the protests. Early endeavours to brand self-immolators as akin to terrorists and suicide-bombers were generally met with derision on the international stage, and presented the deeper problem that the accusation could therefore also be laid at the door of those Han citizens within the Chinese mainland that engaged in similar protests. At the same time, the very esteem in which self-immolators were and still are held in by Tibetans - who regard them as *gyalché pawo*, "patriotic heroes" to the growing movement towards ethnic unification amongst Tibetans in the wake of the 2008 protests - meant that publicly demonizing self-immolators themselves usually backfired, generating more protests and more self-immolators. Perhaps as a consequence, there have so far been no public trials of those self-immolators that have survived their protest.

By contrast, since late 2012, legal and media organizations in the PRC have announced that collusion in self-immolation (however understood) could lead to charges of the "intentional homicide" of the self-immolator, who is thereby presented as the *victim* of the actions of more widely connected others. Op-eds in state-run media organs have persistently portrayed self-immolators as naive, deluded and easily led by senior figures (usually linked to the 'Dalai Clique'), and as subsequently deeply regretting their actions. This is a view which has been replicated at the state law level, asserting that those that aided, abetted or encouraged self-immolation were guilty of "intentional homicide". In December 2012, the English-language *People's Daily* reported:

'China has launched a new regulation to curb self-immolation after several Tibetans burned themselves to death over the past months, Gannan Daily from Northwest China's Gansu Province reported on Monday. The new regulation was said to have been drafted by the Ministry of Public Security, the Supreme People's Court and the Supreme People's Procuratorate, which pointed out that people who in any form plan, organize, incite or help others perform self-immolation will be tried for intentional homicide. The regulation also stipulates that people who burn themselves in public places will be charged with a public security offense and those who parade a corpse through the streets or gather to watch the immolation without actively stopping the suicide will also be subject to criminal prosecution. "To incite and help others commit self-immolation is in essence a criminal act depriving people of their lives," reads the regulation. Xu Zhitao, a director of the United Front Work Department

of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China, told the Global Times on Tuesday that many of the people who perform self immolation have been brainwashed and lack basic judgment.' ("Self-immolation instigators may face homicide charges". (*People's Daily Online*, 7 December 2012)

This principle has been applied to cases of Tibetan self-immolation since at least December, with the suspended death sentence of Lorang Konchok and the sentencing of his nephew Lorang Tsering to 10 years in prison in late January. *Xinhua* reported this case and its verdict as follows:

"The two incited and coerced eight people to self-immolate, resulting in three deaths, the Intermediate People's Court of the Tibetan-Qiang Autonomous Prefecture of Aba found. Of the eight people, three set themselves on fire and died in 2012. They were identified as Lorang Tsedrup, Tsenam and Jokba. The other five people did not self-immolate, after willfully abandoning their plans or after police intervened, the court found. Lorang Konchok, a monk in Aba's Kirti Monastery, maintained long-term and close contact with Samtan, a member of an overseas "Kirti Monastery media liaison team" -- a "Tibet independence" organization, according to the court. After the self-immolation of a Kirti Monastery monk named Tapey in 2009, Samtan asked Lorang Konchok to collect and provide information related to self-immolations in Aba. Lorang Konchok used his status as a "geshe," or a high-level Tibetan religious scholar, to convince monks and others to self-immolate, the court found. Lorang Konchok sent information regarding self-immolations to Samtan. The information was used by some overseas media as a basis for creating secessionist propaganda, according to the court. Lorang Konchok and Lorang Tsering convinced eight people to self-immolate, constituting the crime of intentional homicide, according to the court's verdict." ("China Sentences 2 Tibetans Over Self-Immolations", *Xinhua*, 31 January 2013^{xxiii})

Xinhua's description highlights the equation in Chinese legal thinking between abetting a self-immolation and spreading information about it. This moves the focus to what David Shambaugh has referred to as the "connective tissue"^{xxiv} which elevates protests from "internal" localized complaint to "external" systemic dissent. What for Tibetans are a series of heroic individuals and in some cases intellectuals are for the Chinese authorities a hierarchical web of overseas influence:

"An investigation shows that all the incidents are connected to an overseas Tibetan separatist group. It is a so-called "Tibet independence organization" spearheaded by the so-called Tibetan government-in-exile, with the Dalai Lama as its spiritual leader. The members of the group committed the crime in China under a foreign mastermind, and the information they passed on abroad through overseas media had a negative impact."(Dalai Clique Manipulates Self-Immolation in Gannan. *CRIEnglish.com*, 7 Feb 2013)

This emphasis - on the "connective tissue" that is seen, correctly or incorrectly, to link self-immolations either together or to "secessionist movements" (here meaning the Tibetan Government-in-Exile) and "imperialist forces" (either external governments or increasingly simply the international media) - explains certain rather perplexing features of China's legal responses to the Tibetan self-immolations. The first is that the crime of "intentional homicide" can apparently be committed *after* the event. Thus, the same source above reports how:

"On August 7th, a 26-year-old Tibetan woman named Trakhutso set herself ablaze and rolled on the hillside northwest of the White Tower in Hezuo City, Gannan Prefecture, as she murmured, "Let me die. Let me die." Chopel, a monk from the Hezuo Monastery arrived at

the scene after hearing the news. But he offered no help; instead, he took some pictures of the burning woman. "She was still alive at that time. She could breathe, but couldn't talk. I took some photos with my mobile phone and uploaded four photos to WeChat in total" [he said]. The four pictures were exactly what some foreign media used in their reports on the incident. *Chophel has since been arrested on suspicion of intentional homicide.*"

Chophel's crime thus lay in taking and uploading photographs of Dolkhar Tso's burnt body onto the WeChat server. In other words, he seems to have been charged with intentional homicide for something done *after the self-immolation itself*, or in anticipation of other, later, self-immolations. Similar arrests have been recently made when Tibetans have been caught with photographs of self-immolators on their mobile phones. In other words, it is *connectivity* that renders these events seditious in the eyes of the state.

ⁱ "Teen Tibetan dies before self-immolation protest, Leaves note for the Dalai Lama's return", Phayul. Com, January 24, 2013, <http://www.phayul.com/news/article.aspx?id=32914&t=1>. Accessed 21/05/2013.

ⁱⁱ "Five would-be Tibet self-immolators drowned", *Tibetan Review*. December 16, 2012, <http://www.tibetanreview.net/news.php?showfooter=1&id=11582> Accessed 21/05/2013.

ⁱⁱⁱ<http://www.globalpost.com/dispatches/globalpost-blogs/rights/china-tibet-self-immolations-isolation>, Accessed 11/08/2013; <http://www.rfa.org/english/news/tibet/burn-01122013095415.html>, Accessed 10/08/2013.

^{iv}<http://www.savetibet.org/media-center/ict-news-reports/hundreds-tibetans-face-down-police-gather-cremation-tibetan-who-self-immolated-today>, accessed: 20/1/13

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