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Three more Tibetan writers sentenced to prison

International Campaign for Tibet
21 January, 2011

Three Tibetan writers from the Ngaba Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, Sichuan province, the Tibetan area of Amdo, have been imprisoned for "incitement to split the nation" according to various Tibetan sources. The three Tibetan men – Dhonko, Buddha and Kelsang Jinpa -- were detained last summer after essays they wrote about the March, 2008 protests in Tibet and issues of Tibetan culture and identity were published.

On December 30, 2010, the Ngaba (China: Aba) Intermediate People's Court sentenced Dhonkho and Buddha to four years in prison, and Kelsang Jinpa to three years, according to the same Tibetan sources, including a source cited by Radio Free Asia, <http://www.rfa.org/english/news/tibet/writers-12312010111557.html> [1]). At the sentencing, none of the defendants, families or lawyers were allowed to address the court. (<http://www.rfa.org/english/news/tibet/writers-12312010111557.html> [1]).

During the October 21 trial, there had been moving scenes in the Ngaba courtroom when the Tibetans were allowed a few minutes with their families. For example, Buddha tried to pick up his two year son but failed because his arms were chained. Before he and the two other writers were taken away by security police, he told his wife that she should make every effort to ensure that their son studied Tibetan. (ICT report, <http://www.savetibet.org/media-center/ict-news-reports/three-tibetan-writers-trial-await-verdict-updated-jan-3-2011> [2]).

News of these sentences increases the number of Tibetans imprisoned since March, 2008 for attempting to express their views or share news of the situation in Tibet with the outside world, and provides further evidence of a widespread crackdown against free expression in Tibet.

The three Tibetan writers, Dhonkho (official name on his ID: Rongke, pen name: Nyen), Buddha (pen name: Buddha the Destitute), and Kelsang Jinpa (pen name: Garmi), all in their early thirties, wrote powerful essays in the Tibetan language journal *Shar Dungri* or *Eastern Snow Mountain*. This collection of writings was the first published Tibetan language commentary about the protests and crackdown, and it offered a critical perspective reflecting a prevailing despair, loss and darkness, but also a way forward. The journal was quickly banned by Chinese government authorities, but not before copies had circulated in areas of Qinghai and Gansu provinces and beyond.



Photo: Buddha

Buddha, a doctor by profession, and Kalsang Jinpa, who were close friends, were additionally associated with "I of the Modern Age," a periodical dealing with issues of Tibetan identity and culture. A friend of Buddha's, a Tibetan monk who lives in exile in India, said of Buddha: "He was active establishing connections with different intellectuals in Qinghai and Gansu. There was great interest in his writing and respect for him among educated people in the area."

The 33-year-old Dhonko was detained from his home on June 21, 2010. He is a well-known writer and prize-winning poet, and also the director of the Ngaba county government's local history committee. He is the author of several books including "Red-minded," "Zombie," and "Skill." He was active in his home area of Khyungchu and with several friends established a highly-regarded Tibetan day-care center.

Dhonkho published the essay "What human rights do we have over our bodies?" in Shar Dungri under the pen name Nyen or "the Wild One." (for a translation, see p. 92 of "Great Mountain Burned by Fire," ICT, March, 2009,

http://www.savetibet.org/files/documents/ICT_A_Great_Mountain_Burned_by_Fire.pdf [3]).

Dhonkho explained why he felt compelled to take the risk of speaking out in his essay:

"When the sweet lives of monks, students and ordinary people are dragged from this world into darkness, when those sweet lives which have prayed so hard for the swift fulfillment of their aspirations are confiscated by the state, I for one cannot remain silent, and the connection between their sad fates and my pen is a profound one."



Photo: Dhonkho

According to RFA, during the October 21 trial, the three writers denied the charge of "separatism," with Buddha challenging the notion that their writings provided evidence of the charge, saying: "I don't think this is criminal evidence. Many Chinese writers have written similar articles, like Wang Lixiong and Yu Jie, for example. There are many, but because they are Chinese, there is no punishment. Since we are a minority people, you are considering this a crime. If this is the reason for which we are guilty by law, then we are not treated equally as Chinese citizens and it is a heavy load on our hearts."

Buddha, aged 34, is a medical doctor by profession who works as an editor and writer in his spare time. He was detained on June 26

at the hospital in the county town of Ngaba where he works. Buddha, who graduated from medical college in Chongqing, published the essay 'Hindsight and reflection' under the pen name 'Buddha' in Shar Dungri (for a translation, see p. 83 of 'A Great Mountain Burned by Fire,' ICT, March, 2009,

http://www.savetibet.org/files/documents/ICT_A_Great_Mountain_Burned_by_Fire.pdf [3]). In

his essay Buddha questioned some of the fundamental assumptions being made in China's depiction of the Tibetan protests: "On TV and in the newspapers they say that the

demonstrations were intended to obstruct and oppose China's emergence as a great power and the improvement of the living standards of the Tibetan nationality. Supposing that such things were true, some questions must be asked. If the living standards of Tibetans had really improved so much, why would they feel so unhappy as to try to stop this? If Tibetan living standards are so developed, and the demonstrations were exclusively Tibetan, why should their not enjoying a 'decent standard of living' be greeted with such dismay?"



Photo: Kelsang Jinpa

Kelsang Jinpa, a poet and writer originally from Sangchu county, Gannan Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, Gansu, was detained from his home by the Ngaba Public Security Bureau on July 19. He studied for a short time at Kirti monastery in exile. Kelsang Jinpa, together with Buddha, was an editor of the "I of the Modern Age" periodical. Writing under the pen name 'Garmi' ('the Blacksmith'), Kelsang Jinpa published 'The case for lifeblood and life-force' in Shar Dungri (for a translation, see p. 99 of 'A Great Mountain Burned by Fire,' ICT, March, 2009, http://www.savetibet.org/files/documents/ICT_A_Great_Mountain_Burned_by_Fire.pdf [3]).

Placing the challenges Tibetans face within the broader issue of human rights as well as in relation to what the Chinese themselves have faced in their own history, Kelang Jinpa writes: "Basically, just as all that an individual is ultimately looking for from the time he or she is born is nothing other than happiness, and such terms as democracy, freedom, and equality have themselves become synonymous with human happiness. And the ultimate aim of the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights was to become the fundamental principle promoting the wellbeing of all humans living on the planet.

"However, in the invasions and persecutions seen in human history, wasn't the end result of breaking down people's ability to think, and their hope, just the suffering of becoming subject to a dictatorial power? For instance, in the Chinese students May 4 movement [of 1919], wasn't it because the dictators trampled on democracy, freedom and equality that those young students lost their lives for the common cause? And thus, who would not put the case for these sufferings of lifeblood and life-force before the ears of those who favor honesty and actuality?"

The writers, all from the Ngaba Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture in Sichuan Province, write in the Amdo dialect of Tibetan, which is renowned for its lyricism and eloquent phrasing. In the Shar Dungri collection, a copy of which is now circulating in exile, the poetic language is matched by the substance and analytical nature of the prose, grounded in an understanding of Chinese policies and law as well as knowledge of Tibetan and Chinese culture. Indeed, these writers frequently include in their political arguments compassionate insights into the sufferings of ordinary Chinese people and their own struggles against the Chinese state. The second collection of Shar Dungri has recently been produced and is circulating in Tibet.

There is still no information about charges or a trial of one of the editors of Shar Dungri, Tashi Rabten (pen name: The'urang), who was detained on April 6, 2010 and is still in detention. Tashi Rabten, who was due to graduate this year from the Northwest Nationalities University in Lanzhou, also wrote an unauthorized collection of work on the 2008 Tibetan protests called "Written in Blood."

Both despite of, and because of, the severe crackdown, there has been a literary and cultural resurgence in Tibetan areas since March, 2008, particularly in Amdo, where the three writers are from an area known for its scholars. The Shar Dungri writers are representative of a new

generation of young Tibetan intellectuals who were brought up in a Chinese-ruled Tibet and did not experience the trauma of Tibet's takeover by China or the excesses of the Cultural Revolution. A common theme of their writing is the solidarity of Tibetans across the plateau and a pride in their unique cultural and religious identity. "Eastern Snow Mountain" is produced by a group of Tibetan intellectuals associated with the Northwest Nationalities University in Lanzhou, known for their progressive, secularist and compassionate views.

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