

## Brief Information on Labrang

Labrang Tashi Kyil is where the famous Tibetan scholar and artist Gendun Choephel studied before heading to Drepung monastery in Lhasa.

During the wave of protests that engulfed Tibet in 2008, Labrang witnessed massive [demonstrations](#) on 14-15 March spearheaded by the monks of Tashi Kyil monastery against the Chinese government's repression. The [protests](#) were also joined by lay people in the surrounding area. About 180 Tibetans were arbitrarily detained following the peaceful demonstration.

The Tibetans in the region were particularly appalled by the biased reporting of Lhasa protests in the state media that portrayed Tibetans as looters and rioters.

### Tibetan monks defiantly briefed a state managed media tour to reveal the real situation

On 9 April 2008, 15 Tibetan monks defiantly briefed a state managed media tour of foreign reporters organised to show that Tibet was stable and that monks enjoyed the freedom of religion and other human rights.

The protest lasted for about 10 minutes but was quickly suppressed. In the video (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qEWFy7u8Skc>), the monks are seen unfurling handmade Tibetan national flag and banners calling for freedom and human rights, and refuting the tag of being armed and violent. Three of the 15 monks were able to escape to India, Jamyang Jinpa, Jigme Gyatso and Lobsang Gyatso.

One of them is Jamyang Jinpa, seen in the above video at 01:53. In his early 20s at the time, he spent over a year in the mountains trying to escape arrest. He shared his story once in India. This is a direct translation of Jamyang Jinpa's personal [notes](#).

Tsayul Kelsang Gyatso, a 36-year-old monk of the Labrang Tashi Kyil Monastery who took part in the briefing was arrested by the police on 13 April 2009.

### Known Political Prisoners

Thabkey Gyatso (44) and Tsultrim Gyatso (48)

Last month (September 2021), Thabkey Gyatso was released from Chinese prison in a [poor health condition](#). He was released two years before completing his sentence term.

Releasing prisoners in critical health before their scheduled release time is a strategy employed by the Chinese officials to evade the responsibility of custodial death resulting from inhibition, torture and deprivation.

He was arbitrarily detained on 18 March 2008 and sentenced on 19 May 2009 to 15 years in prison along with Tsultrim Gyatso who was sentenced to life and was later commuted to 19 years in prison this year. Tsultrim Gyatso is eligible for [release](#) in November 2026.

Both the monks from Labrang monastery were detained for taking part in the protests that took place in March 13-14 2008. Both the monks were denied access to their family members during their time in prison. It remains a grave concern about the health condition of Tsultrim Gyatso given his lengthy prison term and Chinese government's rampant use of torture in Chinese prison.

### Tsundue Gyatso (47) and Sonam Gyatso (50)

The two monks of Labrang Monastery; Tsundue Gyatso, 35 years old, hailed from Gyengya Village, Labrang County (Ch: Sangchu/Xiahe xian), whereas Sonam Gyatso, 38, was from Sangkok Village, Labrang County, Kanlho "Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture" ('TAP'), Gansu Province.

The two monks were earlier arrested and released thrice by the Chinese security forces for their participations in a series of protests that took place in Labrang in 2008. The latest arrest came when a sudden raid was carried out inside Labrang Monastery monks' residence by a large number of Chinese Public Security Bureau (PSB) officials on 14 May 2009. There is dearth of information on where the duo was taken to.

### Jigme Gyatso or Jigme Guri (50)

**Jigme Guri**, who was first arrested on 22 March 2008, later detained and tortured for two months in the detention centre for his suspected role in 14 March 2008 protest in Labrang. He was later released on medical ground. Jigme was re-arrested on 4 November 2008 for exposing Chinese brutality to the Voice of America (VOA) in a 20-minute interview. He was finally released on 3 May 2009. His [interview](#) with English subtitle.

In the VOA interview, Jigme Gyatso described how he learned that 180 monks, including the most senior monk and the monastery's official lama, had been arrested and forced to stand on the tips of their toes all the night while guards beat them with the butts of their rifles.

In his VOA interview, Jigme Gyatso said his main hope was that the international media and the United Nations come to Tibet and report on what was happening. By November 2012, UN Special Rapporteurs had 12 unanswered requests to visit and assess the situation in Tibet. Despite the People's Republic of China's (PRC) acceptance of the recommendations during October 2013 Universal Periodic Review to facilitate a visit by the High Commissioner for Human Rights, this has not happened.

Jigme Gyatso's arrest on 20th August 2011 was the fourth time he had been arrested in five years. After detaining him for a long time, he was sentenced to five years in Da Xia Ping prison in the city of Lanzhou.

He was [hospitalised](#) six months before his release. He was released in October 2016.

### **Chonjor**

Chonjor was detained by local Public Security Bureau officers in the Labrang area (Chinese: Xiahe) in early December 2011. On 9 December he was handed over to the People's Armed Police. On 10 December, Chonjor's family asked about his whereabouts. They were told he died. Chonjor was from Sangchu County, Gansu Province and in his twenties when he died. A witness said that Chonjor was severely tortured before his death. No reason for his arrest was ever given.<sup>51</sup>

### **Gendun Gyatso (55)**

Sentenced to six years in prison for intentional homicide on 11 December 2013 for protecting the burned body of Sungdu Kyab who self-immolated.

He was arrested along with four other monks whose whereabouts is unknown.

### **Jigme Gyatso (44) and Kalsang Monlam**

Two monks were sentenced on 12 September 2016 to 1.5 years of prison on charges of sharing information. The two were detained on 4 June 2015 in connection with the self-immolation of Sangay Tso.

### **[Student Demonstration in Labrang County](#)**

A group of Tibetan school students staged a demonstration on 24 April 2009 against the authority's false practice of granting reserved seats for higher education meant for the Tibetan students to the Chinese students.

### **[Expulsion order in 2012](#)**

Chinese authorities in Gansu Province last year issued an order to expel monks who had come from Tibetan areas outside Gansu to pursue their religious studies in monasteries (including the famed Labrang Tashikyil Monastery) located in the province.

In the aftermath of the 2008 protests in Tibet, Chinese authorities in Lhasa issued a similar order that led to severe crackdown and expulsion of monks in major monasteries located in the Tibetan capital Lhasa. Monks hailing from Tibetan areas outside Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR) were expelled or returned to their home villages.

## **Self-immolations**

Labrang continued to witness strong defiance from its local people even after the series of peaceful demonstrations in the area. Between 2009 to 2013, Labrang Sangchu (Ch: Xiahe) County saw 13 cases of self-immolations. The most common slogans by the self-immolators called for " Freedom in Tibet" and "Return of His Holiness the Dalai Lama in Tibet".

1. Lhamo Kyab
2. Dhondup
3. Dorje Rinchen
4. Lhamo Tseten
5. Thup Wangkyab
6. Tsering Dhondup
7. Kunchok Tsering
8. Sangay Tashi
9. Sungdu Kyab
10. Tsering Tashi
11. Kunchok Kyab
12. Namlha Tsering
13. Lhamo Kyab

TCHRD Political prisoner's database documented 19 known Tibetans who are currently detained and their whereabouts are unknown. Since 2008, 13 known Tibetans have been released from prison with Tsultrim Gyatso eligible for release in November 2026.

## **Current situation:**

There is a sense of heightened surveillance and censorship in the region with many in exile choosing not to contact their loved ones in Tibet to avoid endangering them.

TCHRD released a special report titled "[Mass surveillance and censorship conceal widespread human rights violations in Tibet](#)" in September 2020 documenting how Tibetans in and out of Tibet are not only censoring themselves, they are censoring each other because Chinese authorities have made censorship the responsibility of the whole populace.