



INTERNATIONAL CAMPAIGN FOR TIBET

Death of Tibetan Buddhist leader under unclear circumstances highlights China's repressive policies

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A highly respected Tibetan religious and cultural leader, Trulku Hungkar Dorjee, passed away in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam, on March 29, 2025. Chinese authorities informed his monastery, Lung-ngon Monastery in Gade (Gande) County, Golog (Guoluo) Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, of his death, though his status had remained a mystery since his inaccessibility from July 2024 onwards. Lung-ngon monastery issued a seemingly coerced statement dated April 3 claiming that Trulku Hungkar Dorjee had quietly left for a retreat last year. However, Tibetan followers have rejected the Chinese authorities' narrative issued via the monastery's leadership.

Radio Free Asia Tibetan language service reported on April 8 that a team comprising of five monks of Lung-ngon Monastery and six officials representing Qinghai Province's security, united front work department and religion bureau, arrived in Vietnam on April 5 to collect Trulku's body. Excluding the five monks, the officials held a meeting at the Chinese diplomatic mission in Vietnam. On April 8, the monks were instructed to depart from Vietnam. Despite the earlier assurance that they will be able to see the body, the monks were instructed to sign a document stating Trulku had died. The monks refused to sign the document without seeing the body of Trulku Hungkar Dorjee.

Trulku potentially targeted for his cultural activism and non-adherence to official directives

Trulku Hungkar had faced repercussions from Chinese authorities for his efforts to preserve Tibetan culture. Since June 2024, he had been subjected to intense harassment for not organizing an elaborate reception to the Chinese-appointed Panchen Lama, Gyaltzen Norbu, during his visit to Golog, according to information gathered from the local Tibetans by [Tibet Times](#), a news outlet based in India.

The Chinese Panchen Lama had an unusually extended stay in Tibet in recent years, visiting various regions on government-organized tours to boost his profile and gain legitimacy among Tibetan followers. In some remote areas, authorities [reportedly paid cash](#) to each person who attended his meetings complying with official directives.

In Trulku Hungkar's native hometown, Chinese authorities had instructed local monasteries and Tibetans to attend meetings and receive religious sermons from Gyaltzen Norbu. According to local Tibetans, Trulku Hungkar did not fully comply with these orders, leading to intensified harassment of him by the Chinese officials.

Despite repeated attempts by his students and followers to meet him at his monastery, Trulku Hungkar remained inaccessible, fueling suspicions that he had either been disappeared by Chinese authorities or had escaped into exile. His status remained unclear until recently when Chinese officials informed a small group of key figures at the monastery of his death, without providing further details.

Trulku Hungkar Dorjee, 56, the 10th abbot of Lung-ngon Monastery is a philanthropist and an educator. In 2004, he established the Tsongon Gesar Welfare Foundation in Qinghai Province, dedicating significant efforts to preserving the epic Gesar literature and culture. In 2007, with approval from the Golog Prefecture government and education department, he founded the Hungkar Dorjee National Vocational School, which served approximately 1,000 students and teachers. The goal of the vocational school is to provide free education to thousands of children from nomadic and rural communities in Tibet, he established around 14 primary and middle schools over the years, according to Tibet Times based in India. Additionally, he constructed numerous monasteries and Buddhist academies, making substantial contributions to the revitalization and preservation of Tibetan religion, culture, and language. These activities reportedly led to various political accusations from Chinese authorities.

Pattern of Chinese authorities targeting Tibetan cultural leaders and learning centers

Trulku Hungkar's death under unclear circumstances follows a pattern of Tibetan lamas who have been targeted by the Chinese authorities for their cultural preservation work and for showing non-enthusiasm or non-adherence to the directives of the state authorities in their projects. For instance, in the neighboring Machen County in Golog Prefecture, the Chinese authorities shut down the three-decade-old [Jigme Gyaltzen Nationalities Vocational School](#) on July 12, 2024. The school, which was founded three decades ago, had a successful academic record and a strong focus on Tibetan language and culture. In Dzoge (Ruò'ěrgài) County in Ngaba Prefecture, Sichuan, the Chinese authorities had forcibly removed younger monks from the [Taktsang Lhamo Monastic School](#) and pressed them into state-run schools around November 2024. Similarly, 140 monastic students from Muge monastic school in Muge, Ngaba, were forcibly enrolled in state run boarding schools around October 2024. All these developments and others indicate targeting of Tibetan cultural leaders and authentic traditional Tibetan educational endeavors in favor of state-run boarding schools and CCP ideology and policy adherent leaders.

In parallel with targeting Tibetan Buddhist teachers and authentic cultural preservation centers, Chinese authorities in Tibet have intensified an ideological campaign titled "Send Dharma to the Monasteries" across monastic and civilian communities in recent weeks. This campaign aligns with broader CCP efforts to enforce political compliance and Sinicization policies while requiring monks to serve as government propagandists by following the so-called "four standards".

Appeal

The International Campaign for Tibet together with other concerned Tibet groups urges foreign governments to call on the Vietnamese government to:

- Carry out a full and transparent independent investigation into the circumstances surrounding the detention and death of Tulku Hungkar Dorjee, who died suddenly in late March 2025 in Ho Chi Minh City;

- Ensure Tulku Hungkar Dorjee's bereaved family and next of kin are kept fully informed about all the proceedings, progress and findings of the investigation in a timely and appropriate manner, and that the body of Tulku Hungkar Dorjee to be returned to his family at the earliest possible time (after the investigation) to enable traditional Tibetan burial rites to be carried out.



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