



Raptan Gyatso, owner of Tibet Shop in Adams Morgan.

How a local business owner in Adams Morgan is dealing with the community's recent rise in vandalism and theft

--Inshara Ali

Photos by Isabel Bozarth

Tibet Shop, owned by Raptan Gyatso, a Tibetan immigrant who bought the store in 2019, sells a variety of handmade Himalayan clothing, jewelry, and artifacts and has been open since 2007 in Adams Morgan. To this day, Gyatso sources every product from khata scarves to traditional face masks to intricate earrings from small Tibetan and Indian communities in the Himalayas. He refuses to buy from big businesses, as he believes his way is more authentic. To everyone who entered his shop. Gyatso had story upon story to tell his customers—possibly the most shocking one being his approach to an uptick in theft in this store and community.

In the past three weeks, the Adams Morgan community has seen a [significant rise in vandalism and robbery](#), which has affected Gyatso's business and safety.^[JH1] But when a shoplifter comes in, Gyatso calls on his training as a monk in Tibet.

“Stealing is a big issue here in the northeast. People will come in demanding money and I just give it to them. Some people don’t have control, you don’t know if they have a gun or knife,” Gyatso said.



Tibet Shop’s security cameras installed in recent years. Photo by Isabel Bozarth

Small businesses in Adams Morgan like Tibet Shop are not the only ones concerned.

“I wasn't personally affected by the recent robberies, but my neighbors have been,” said Stephanie Jacek, owner of Le Bustiere Boutique, a small business in Adams Morgan.

“All we can really do is strengthen security and work with the D.C. police.”

D.C. Mayor Muriel Bowser visited Adams Morgan earlier this week.

“I remain committed to ensuring MPD has the officers the Chief needs to make these types of strategic deployments and have a strong presence in our community,” she said.



Gyatso and DC Mayor Muriel Bowser, who paid Tibet Shop a visit earlier that week in response to the recent robberies in the area.

Although Gyatso remains concerned about theft in his store, he keeps an open heart –even for shoplifters.

“If someone comes and tries to steal a coat, I’ll give it to them. Some will come in asking for money and I know they’re hungry, so I’ll give it. As a monk, you learn both the teachings from the Dalai Lama on compassion, but also business, the community, and the congregation. I keep that here in the U.S.” Gyatso said.

Gyatso was a monk in Tibet for nearly twenty years and was responsible for creating some of the very pieces he sells at Tibet Shop today. Since moving to America, he has made it a point to uphold the teachings of the Dalai Lama and Buddhism in his business, for which he credits his compassion for shoplifters. Gyatso holds his culture very close to his heart, adding that the people of Tibet and its independence from Chinese occupation are causes he considers important to his business.

“Ninety-nine percent of the people who come into my shop are not from Tibet, but they support and love us. Tibet is not free, but people here do know about Chinese (occupation).” Gyatso said.

“The Tibetan community and diaspora displaced by colonialism and settler violence often form very strong communities. So, I think it’s so good to support small Tibetan businesses like Tibet Shop,” said Lance Lokas, founder of GW Students Against Chinese Occupation and customer of Tibet Shop.