

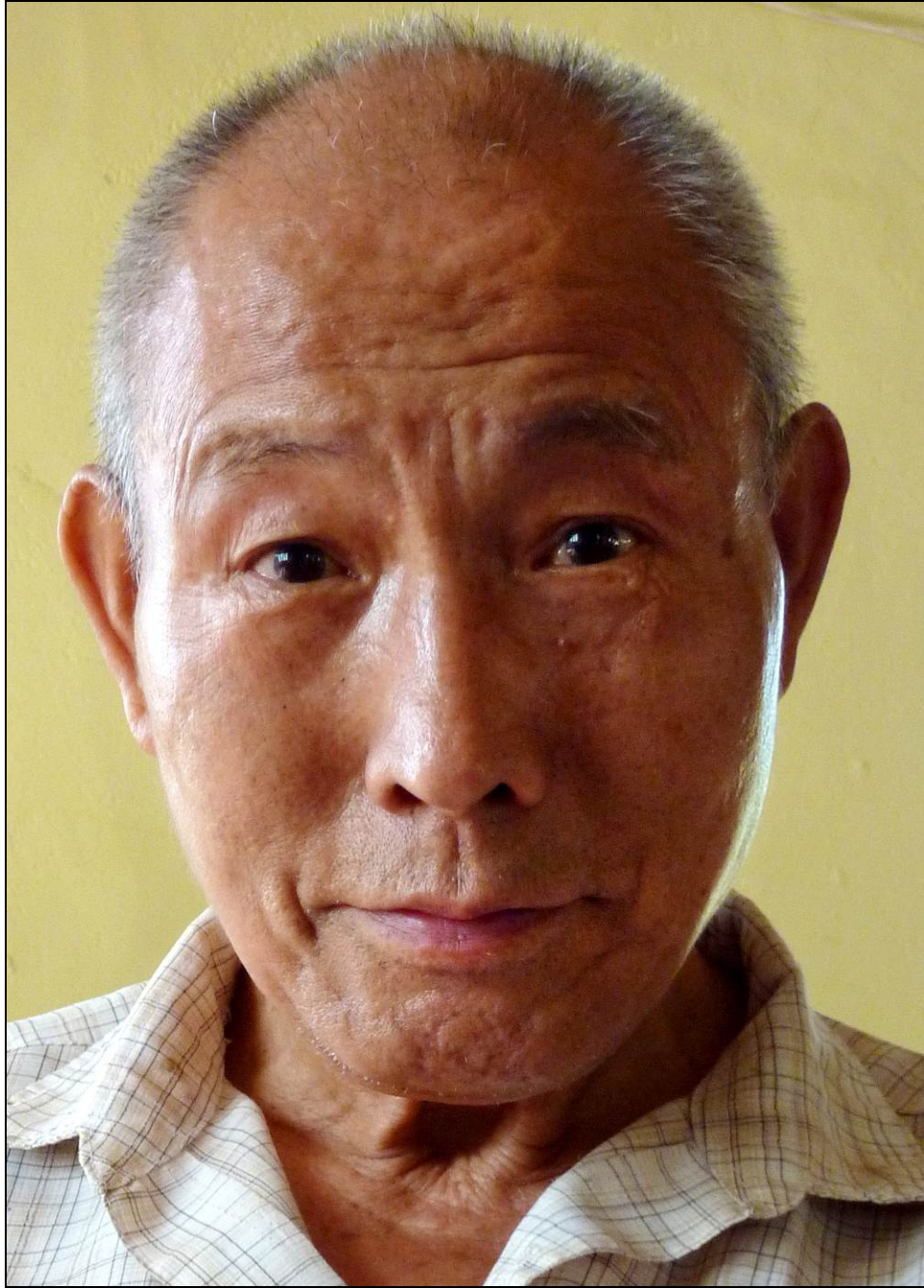
Tibet Oral History Project

**Interview #12M – Lhundup
April 5, 2010**

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TIBET ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

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INTERVIEW SUMMARY SHEET

1. Interview Number: #12M
2. Interviewee: Lhundup
3. Age: 71
4. Date of Birth: 1939
5. Sex: Male
6. Birthplace: Shidong Zong
7. Province: Dhotoe (Kham)
8. Year of leaving Tibet: 1959
9. Date of Interview: April 5, 2010
10. Place of Interview: Home for the Aged, Doeguling Settlement, Mundgod, Karwar District, Karnataka, India
11. Length of Interview: 2 hr 01 min
12. Interviewer: Marcella Adamski
13. Interpreter: Tenzin Yangchen
14. Videographer: Pema Tashi
15. Translator: Tenzin Yangchen

Biographical Information:

Lhundup was the oldest of his parents' six children. Besides farming a plot of fertile land and rearing a small number of animals, Lhundup's father engaged in trading salt. He recalls that his father's almost ruined his family by drinking and gambling away their property. His mother had to work very hard to sustain the family and also pay off the debts incurred by his father.

Lhundup provides a vivid description of his family's three-storied house, explaining the purposes of each room and type of construction. He also talks about religious festivals which were celebrated in the village at the local monastery. Traders passing through the village began spreading news of their trips to China, where they witnessed *thamzing* 'struggle sessions' during which Chinese people were shot and dumped in a large pit. Later Tibetans fleeing from the *thanzing* occurring in the Kham region came to Lhundup's district and many local men joined the resistance movement to fight against Chinese occupation.

Lhundup left his village in 1957 to escort his brother, a monk, to Drepung Monastery near Lhasa. At the advice of a friend he became a muleteer and traveled to India, transporting goods such as wool, flour, sugar and gasoline between Kalimpong [West Bengal, India] and Phari [Tibet]. In March 1959, after one of his trips to India, he could not return to Tibet.

Topics Discussed:

Childhood memories, farm life, trade, religious festivals, first appearance of Chinese, invasion by Chinese army, *thamzing*.

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Interview #12M

Interviewee: Lhundup

Age: 71, Sex: Male

Interviewer: Marcella Adamski

Interview Date: April 5, 2010

Question: *Gen-la* ‘respectful term for teacher,’ please tell us your name.

00.00.24

Interviewee #12M: Lhundup.

Q: His Holiness the Dalai Lama asked us to record your experiences, so that we can share your memories with many generations of Tibetans, the Chinese and the rest of the world. Your memories will help us to document the true history, culture and beliefs of the Tibetan people. Do you give your permission for the Tibet Oral History Project to use this interview?

#12M: Yes, you can use whatever I say.

Q: Thank you for offering to share your story with us.

00:01:46

#12M: Okay. I have to thank you for the trouble you have taken. I am very grateful.

Q: Thank you, *gen-la*. During this interview if you wish to take a break or stop at anytime, please let me know.

#12M: Okay.

Q: If this interview were shown in Tibet or China, would this be a problem for you?

00:02:29

#12M: There will be no problem at all. There will be no problem wherever you show it. I will speak the facts and there will be no problem.

Q: We are honored to record your story and appreciate your participation in this project.

#12M: Okay.

Q: *Gen-la*, let us begin by you telling us what are the major subjects you would like to talk about today?

00:03:17

#12M: I wish to talk about the situation in Tibet before the arrival of the Chinese and the huge changes that occurred after the Chinese arrived.

Q: If we go to before the arrival of the Chinese, we would be talking about your childhood. Is this correct?

00:04:00

#12M: Yes.

Q: So tell me about the life in your village. Let us begin by asking, how large was your village?

#12M: The village was not very large. There were, in total almost 1,000 families.

Q: Yes?

00:04:43

#12M: There were approximately 600-700 families.

Q: And what was the scenery like in your village?

#12M: The place where I lived was very cramped.

Q: So in your district, there were 600 families but in your village, how many families were there?

00:05:46

#12M: There were three families.

Q: And what kind of work did your family do?

#12M: [We] worked in the fields.

Q: Can you describe your village to me? What did it look like?

00:06:17

#12M: There stood a high mountain in the front. It had good grass and thick forest. The sun rose only around 9:30 [in the village] because of the high mountain. There was another mountain at the back, where there was good grass and forest. A small river flowed in front [of the village].

Q: How long had your family lived in that little village?

#12M: I lived there from the time of my birth until I was 18.

Q: Had your parents and their parents lived there for many generations?

00:07:40

#12M: My father was from this village, but my mother came there as a bride.

Q: If we could paint a picture of your house, what did it look like?

#12M: The house was a three-storied structure. One of its sides was raised and filled up [for the third floor]. The house had 30 pillars. It was not exactly square. There were two floors and the third floor was raised on a part of the house.

Q: And where did the family live in that house?

00:09:01

#12M: The animals like cows and such were kept on the ground floor and the family lived above that. There was another room on the top which was for visiting lamas and monks.

Q: How many people were in your family, *gen-la*?

#12M: We were eight members in the family, six children and our parents.

Q: Where does *gen-la* come in that order?

00:10:07

#12M: I was the oldest child in the family. I was the oldest among the six children.

Q: And were the other families in the village, the other two families, were they large families, small families?

#12M: Both [the families] had a small number of children. One of my neighbors had only a son and a daughter when I left. I think they had two more daughters later. The other neighbor had only one child. She could not have had more [later] because the lady was elderly.

Q: So you lived in a very tiny village, and how far was the next village from your home?

00:11:37

#12M: There was another village also called Gutsanang, which was just five minutes away. There were three families and [the village] was called Gutsa. They [the two villages] used to be called Gutsa Yadong ‘Gutsa upper village’ and Gutsang Madong ‘Gutsa lower village.’ If you traveled for 1 hour and 20 minutes or 1 hour and 30 minutes, in whichever direction, wherever you went...

Q: You would meet other families?

#12M: You met other families.

Q: Could you describe the inside of the house a little for us? What was the family area like where you lived?

00:12:53

#12M: The partitions were not very good. In the actual living area, on one side there was a sort of wooden structure for the household items; the house had been built long ago with thick wooden logs and niches to keep the household items. The house was not very nice and the partitions somewhat inferior.

Q: Did the family part of the house, was it one big room or were there a couple of rooms?

#12M: The actual living area for the family was quite large. It was spacious and I think there were 12 pillars. This was not only for our family members, but the place where the hired helps ate and singing and dancing sessions were held. In our region, there was a lot of dancing in the winter.

Q: Inside the house?

00:14:22

#12M: Yes, inside the house. We danced a lot during winter.

Q: And was it the same room you use for sleeping in?

#12M: Yes, that is the very room. The floor was made of wooden panels. We used [the room] to sleep in, to eat and cook food.

Q: What did they use for sleeping on?

00:15:22

#12M: The floor was made entirely of wooden boards, which was common in our region. Upon the wooden boards, some people made mattresses of leather; the richer ones filled it with fur. Then there were mattresses of *chinpa* that was made of wool. Most of the mattresses were of this type. The mattresses were thick, thicker than these [points off camera]. The *chinpa* mattresses were made by using layers of wool. Most of the mattresses were the *chinpa* type.

Q: You were the oldest of six children and were the children in age, were they right below you or were they...can you tell me their ages, generally?

#12M: The three siblings younger to me were boys. There was a gap of three years between us. The next three were girls and except one, where there was a gap of two years, the rest had gaps of three years between them.

Q: What was it like growing up in your family with all of those children and you being the oldest son?

00:17:45

#12M: When we were little children and growing up, we had an aunt, my father's sister, who mainly brought us up. We were little children and did not know it, but I think my aunt who lived in a little room, was the one who brought us up.

Q: What did your mother do during the day?

#12M: My mother worked in the fields and [cared for] the 4-5 cows we had. Including the calves, there might have been 8, 9 or 10 [animals]. She worked in the fields.

Q: Were there any special memories you have of life in your home and growing up with your family? What are some of the memories you have?

00:19:23

#12M: If I recall my childhood, from among the six siblings, [I] miss my little sister because being the oldest, I took care of her a lot. She is the one I remember the most. And in general, when I lived there as a little child, the region was so peaceful and one did not have any worries at all. One was so happy and at peace. One could live with so much happiness in the heart at that time.

Q: During the day, what was your father doing? If your mother was doing fieldwork, where was your father?

#12M: My father did not do much work. He went to trade. He was sort of a naughty man. Ours had been a family who engaged in farming as well as rearing 15-20 *dri* 'female yaks' and yaks. He suffered losses in his trade and all those [animals] had to be given away. My family was rendered somewhat poor by my father. However, our farm land was extremely fertile, which was why we were not entirely ruined. Mother was a good worker and also very amicable with everyone. As I look back, though she was not taught an education, my mother was a good person.

Q: Can you tell us what kind of things made your father a naughty man? What did he do?

00:22:23

#12M: [He] drank alcohol and gambled; did not do well in trade and it so happened that all the animals had to be given away to people [to whom he owed a debt]. There came a time when even that was not enough and a part of our agricultural land was given away to creditors for a period of 12 years. When I was small, the land had been recovered and we were doing well. All the loans had been cleared, and by the time I left home, we were doing very well. Otherwise, my father had ruined the family.

Q: This sister that lived with your family, did she ever marry and have a family of her own?

#12M: [She] did not live with us. She was a nun since her young age and nuns do not marry. [She] had a small house by the side of our house, and for her livelihood she had been given a piece of land by the family.

Q: How did your mother respond to your father's drinking and gambling and spending the family resources?

00:24:48

#12M: Mother would have definitely thought that he was not being good, but at that time we did not notice much because we were small children. My father did not live much at home. [He] was mostly away and spent hardly four months in a year at home.

Q: Does a woman in your village or area have any recourse, any way of handling a difficult husband, for instance, could she get a divorce? Could she choose another husband if there was a family problem like this?

#12M: If [she wished to] take such recourse, [she] could. However, not many did it because it was difficult once you have a home and a large number of children. It was very difficult.

Q: Was drinking a problem among the men in your area? Would this happen to many fathers or husbands?

00:26:57

#12M: I have seen with my very eyes two families like ours being ruined by drinking. They [the men] failed in their trade and did various things.

Q: Did the monks or the religious teachers ever try to give instructions to these fathers to be more responsible?

#12M: There were [religious teachers] but their [the fathers'] problems were not limited to drinking; there were gambling and not being able to do well in trade. The families were ruined by trade and gambling. And in addition to that, they indulged in womanizing and spent on various matters, expenses that could not be recovered. They spent lavishly. So within a few years, a family was ruined.

Q: Where did your father go to gamble and to drink, in his little village or did he go further away?

00:29:01

#12M: [He] did it in the village as well as at the place where we got salt, called Tsakhalowa. That was a place where people gathered from various places to collect salt. [He] went there and indulged [himself].

Q: What kind of alcohol were people drinking in your father's days?

#12M: The alcohol was brewed from [fermented] grains called *chang*. If the *chang* turned out to be sour or even if it was not sour, liquor was prepared from it. The liquor and *chang* were of good quality unlike the fake and adulterated ones you get these days. They were brewed from pure grains and stored to age. Fresh alcohol was not used like it is done here, but aged for at least two to three months. There were some that were aged for a year, which was so good as to be beneficial for your body. They were not harmful at all.

Q: Why were they not harmful to the health?

00:30:50

#12M: It used to be said that drinking the aged ones were beneficial to one's health. I was young and did not drink. [People] said that old *chang* and old liquor are beneficial for the body and the stomach.

Q: How old would a boy have to be before he would be allowed to drink *chang*, or a girl?

#12M: The third *chang* [first and second being the strongest] was allowed to be sipped by boys and girls around the age of 16. It hardly tasted like *chang*. However, very rarely did young ones around the age of 26 drink the strong *chang*. Among the older generation, there were not many people, whether male or female who did not drink. There were some nuns who did not drink.

Q: Do the monks drink *chang* and alcohol?

00:32:43

#12M: Monks are not allowed to drink *chang* and alcohol. Monks are never allowed to drink *chang* and alcohol.

Q: Since your father was away so much and you were the oldest son, what kind of responsibilities fell to you in regard to the family?

#12M: I did not have any responsibilities because our mother was there to bear it. Mother had a maid to help her. When mother who was the main person, was not able to go to the fields, the maid carried out the tasks. Our mother took the entire responsibility. The farm land was fertile, so the yield was good. Helpers were hired and mother was a capable worker. She and the maid worked in the fields. There was no problem of livelihood, never.

Q: You mentioned your memory of your youngest sister. What did you do to keep her entertained or take care of her?

00:34:46

#12M: I took care of the youngest and also the one older to her. Since I was the oldest in the family, [I] took care of them. The other one loved me a lot and [I] took care of her. The youngest was around 3 when I left my village. I cannot recall clearly if she was 3 or 4.

Q: Did you ever keep in touch with her? Where is she now?

#12M: [I] received letters and messages from my village but have not kept contact. If [I] tried, [I] could get their telephone number, but heard that receiving calls from outside is not considered good in my village. [I] never call them. The brother younger to me lives in Lhasa but I did not contact him. Earlier [I] communicated through letters. [I] could get his telephone number but I have never called him. I think instead of helping, there is a great danger of harming them.

Q: Why would it cause a problem? Who would cause a problem for you?

00:36:57

#12M: The Chinese will say that they have contact with [people] outside and endanger them...[I] heard that if they spoke to people from outside, a penalty of 300 *yuan* is levied. I think it is 300 *yuan*. Such a penalty is not too bad, but [the Chinese] might suspect that we have spoken about political matters and some bad things. This might risk imprisonment for them. I never ever telephoned my brother in Lhasa. Even if we did not discuss such matters, they [the Chinese] might imply that [we] did and in the event of a legal situation, there is no way one can say the truth. They [the Chinese] will do as they wish.

Q: That is a big contrast from your peaceful life in your childhood.

#12M: Yes, that is right.

Q: Just a little more about your childhood. Can you please tell me, what was it like in the summertime, if you were maybe 11 years old, 12 years old, what was a typical day like in your family life?

00:39:22

#12M: A day in the summertime would be...I do not know if one was able to take the cows to graze at the age of 11 or 12. Since there was plenty of grass, the animals were just driven to the mountains. The routine was the same everyday. The animals were driven to the mountains and if one was old enough, he worked in the fields. In those days there was no fear, no problems and no suspicions that the government might impose [any problems] on you. When I look back, I realize that was one factor which gave us happiness.

Q: How would your daily life be different in the wintertime? What would you be doing when you were around 12?

#12M: In winter, the water froze and looked like this [points to floor]. The children played in winter. We also made bows and arrows from wood in the region and the children played with that. There were no schools. I planned to go to school while I was in my village and stayed for a short time at the monastery. However, one had to locate a teacher; someone to teach you to read and someone to teach you handwriting, and there was nothing from the government.

Q: How far away was the monastery from your home?

00:42:20

#12M: [I] think it took about two and half hours to reach the monastery. It would take two and half hours by walking.

Q: Is that the monastery you went to?

#12M: Yes. [I] think it would take two and half hours to three hours to get to the monastery from my village.

Q: Can you explain how did the...if you were a family, would you have to have enough money to get an education at the monastery? How did that work?

00:43:08

#12M: There was not much use of money as such. However, if you were not steady in your livelihood, [it would be difficult] to make offerings to the teacher who taught you to read and the teacher who taught you to write. There was no problem with housing at the monastery as one could live with an uncle or some other monk. However, since one must pay the handwriting teacher and the teacher who taught the verses, and if one did not have the means to pay them, it was difficult.

Q: Was your family able to pay for a teacher for you at the monastery?

#12M: Money was not offered. *Tsampa* ‘flour made from roasted barley’—my family had a good [stock of] wheat flour and *tsampa*—and bread were offered to the teachers. However, there was nobody who made demands and one was free to offer what one wished.

Q: How much land did your family own, did your mother and father own?

00:45:12

#12M: Ours was among the best lands in our region. It was not a large tract of land but it was very fertile. If one sowed a *bo* ‘a measuring device’ of seeds, [I] heard [we] could reap 20 *bo*. The land was extremely fertile. The land was good.

Q: And what was your difficulty finding a teacher in the monastery?

#12M: There were no such problems. If you lived in the monastery and if you requested any teacher, he will not spurn you, provided one made the request.

Q: So did you go to school at the monastery?

00:46:36

#12M: I went for a short while. However, [I] could not stay long at the monastery as [I] fell seriously ill and returned home. [I] did not go back later.

Q: I'm sorry. What kind of illness happened to you?

#12M: When [I] look back, [I] wonder what the illness was. It was very sudden and [I] cannot pinpoint what the ailment was. [I] do not remember. It came on very suddenly.

Q: How old were you when you went to the monastery?

00:47:42

#12M: [I] might have been 14, 15, or 16 at that time.

Q: Were you homesick for your family when you went to the monastery?

#12M: [I] did not miss home because it was close by. It was a distance of two to three hours.

Q: In regard to taxes, did your family have to pay taxes to the monastery or to the Tibetan government?

00:48:44

#12M: [We] paid to the Tibetan government and as for the monastery, [we] paid a small amount of grains during the time the monastery distributed grains [to the monks]. [We] paid the main [tax] to the Tibetan government.

Q: Did the taxes feel manageable?

#12M: There were not many difficulties [in meeting the taxes]. It was not in the proportion that we could not pay.

Q: What about special religious celebrations or services? Do you have any memories of things that your family did when you were a child?

00:50:15

#12M: There was one festival at the monastery called *gutor*. This was the most elaborate of all the celebrations at the monastery. The *gutor* took place on the 28th and 29th day of the 10th Tibetan lunar month. There was *cham* ‘religious dance performance by monks’ for two days.

Then on the 15th day of the 1st Tibetan lunar month, many of the older people went to the monastery to see the *monlam* ‘prayer festival.’ This was one of the biggest festivals.

Q: Did your family participate in these religious celebrations at the monastery?

#12M: Not all the family members participated. Only one or two older people from a family participated. My mother stayed at home. That was the custom in our region. Except for one or two adults, most of the people stayed at home.

Q: Did you have an altar in your home because you mentioned that monks would come? Did the family have a prayer altar?

00:52:07

#12M: The altar was placed in the room on the top where the [visiting] monks stayed. The main living area did not have an altar. [We] did light a butter lamp and other offerings but there was no special altar. It was just a crude structure for the offerings.

Q: How frequently were prayers offered by the family?

#12M: [We] said our prayers. [We] made the water offering and lit butter lamps every day.

Q: You mentioned you had three brothers and three sisters, so were the boys treated differently than the girls or the girls differently than the boys and how so?

00:53:48

#12M: There was no such thing. There never was any such thing.

Q: Was life in your family better when your father was away? He would be home only five months of the year, so that meant he was gone for seven months. How was life different when your father was home and when he was away?

#12M: It seemed like there was no difference. When our father came home and if [we] happened to be cooking, he would not even add a piece of wood to the stove. If he was home, he sat relaxing and by 3 or 4 o'clock in the evening, he would drink *chang*. He never did any work. He also did not scold or beat the children. He did not quarrel with my mother.

Q: A little bit about your aunt who took care of you. I'm curious. She was a nun living in the home. Did she have a nunnery somewhere nearby or was she a lay nun? Can you explain?

00:56:08

#12M: There were no nunneries in my region. Though they were nuns, they did not wear the red robes. They only wore a yellow waist band and boot strings and shaved their heads. They did not wear the *pangden* 'striped apron.' Other than that, there were no special nunneries or such.

Q: Why did your aunt become a nun like that?

#12M: To make a guess, by becoming a nun life would be quieter. That could be the reason but I do not know.

Q: But she was a mother to six children for your mother. She helped with all the children.

00:57:49

#12M: She did not help with all the six children. I think my aunt was the sister of my father's father. If she was my father's sister, she would be younger. She was very old. I think it was after the birth of the third child that she passed away.

Q: *Gen-la*, I would like to ask you a little bit more about your childhood home. Can you tell me what was the home actually made of, the roof and the walls?

#12M: Wood was plentiful to make [houses]. Huge logs of wood of this thickness [stretches both arms around] were cut into long planks of this thickness [indicates about six inches]. A foundation was laid and over it two wooden planks were raised on either side at a

distance of so [shows a width of 3 feet]. Then soil was poured [between the planks] and beaten [shows action of beating], which we called *jang-dhung* ‘beat-wall.’

Q: Soil?

00:59:19

#12M: Yes, soil was poured in the center [of the planks]. The soil’s consistency had to be neither too wet nor too dry. If you pressed it in your palm, it should not become solid. It was poured in there and beaten with the wooden tool, which is a special tool for *jang-dhung*. So, most of the houses which were three-storied or two-storied structures were constructed by beating [the walls] in that fashion. There were some which had stone walls. The stone-walled houses were not considered good. Those with beaten walls were good to look at and nice. That was it.

Q: Why were they considered better?

#12M: The stones, unlike the stones here were not made to shape. Those were stones that were found [naturally] and which looked good enough to be used for the construction of the walls. They were not shaped with hammers. Here or in Lhasa, they make the stones into good shapes for the construction. The stone walls in my region were not like that. So, when you looked at the walls, it did not seem fine, which was why it was considered inferior. The *jang* looked very nice. Once the beating was complete, it looked like this wall [points to interview room walls]. It looked similar to walls built with bricks.

Q: Were they painted on the outside or the inside?

01:02:12

#12M: They were not. There was no color on the walls. Do you mean the walls?

Q: Yes.

#12M: The walls did not have color. The monastery painted its walls, but that was not the custom with the farmers.

Q: When you said that you had 30 pillars in your home, would it be the size of the room that we are in now?

01:02:58

#12M: It must be bigger than the room [we] are in and not smaller.

Q: *Gen-la*, your house was bigger than this?

#12M: It was bigger and not smaller than this.

Q: So the room that your family lived in was the size of ... What would you say is the dimension of this room?

01:03:36

#12M: If [I] were to speak in terms of pillars for this house, [I] would say that it would require 16 pillars. Our beams were not that [points to the beam of the interview room] far apart. This [room] does not look big [to me].

Q: What size would people say this room is in feet or meters?

#12M: [Turns around to assess the size of the room] To me it looks like the length is about 44 feet and the width 32 feet. No, [I] think it is more than that. [Calculates] It's about 52 [feet in length].

Q: So in the winter time, did the animals stay, the animals that you placed on the ground floor, were all your animals able to fit into the bottom part of the first floor of your house?

01:06:05

#12M: My family did not own that many animals. [We] owned a few cows and at times there were two *dzo* 'animal bred from a yak and a cow' and at times only one *dzo*, as my father would have sold one. There was a horse which my father—since he did not stay much at home—took with him. He did not leave the horse behind. The cows and oxen, including the calves numbered 8, 9 or 10 and they could fit in easily [in the ground floor]. However, many nomads arrived at our house. During winter time, many nomads lived there. So, animals were kept inside and outside.

Q: Belonging to others?

#12M: Animals belonging to others. [They] arrived because grass was plenty in my region.

Q: Did the snow get deep in your little village because you were between two big mountains?

01:07:38

#12M: There was not much snowfall. If it snowed, [we'd] all be...[not discernible]. In winter, if you crossed the river and reached the other bank, stones of this [points off camera] size would get glued to your feet [due to the intense cold].

Q: One more description of the family room that you lived in, was there any furniture around this room? Can you give me a picture of your family room?

#12M: [We] never had the custom of using a bed. [We] slept right there [on the floor]. Except for the lamas, [we] did not use tables either. [We] placed our things on the wooden floor.

Q: When did your peaceful village life begin to change and how did it change?

01:09:29

#12M: The change started when the Chinese arrived in '51, and by '53 one did not hear good news. [I] would estimate it to be 1953, perhaps '53 or '54, because I do not know the actual year. When [I] look back, I think it was in '53 or '54 that we heard a lot of very bad

news in our region. Then it seemed like the people of the region were afflicted by an illness. Though there was no actual illness to speak of, there was an illness in the heart.

First the liberation was carried out in China. Traders from our region who traveled to China said that they were told to come and witness the *thamzing* ‘struggle session.’ *Thamzing* was conducted and a pit was dug nearby. [The person who was subjected to *thamzing*] was garlanded with documents in Chinese and then he was shot dead. They told us that many people were killed each day. The traders said that they [the Chinese] would gradually come to our region. “We cannot withstand the Chinese as they are extremely strong. Things are not going to be good,” we heard such news. After hearing these, the region ...even the countryside sort of faded in color. When we were not happy in our hearts, the region itself seemed uneasy.

Q: The traders actually were going into China? Is that how they saw the liberation in China?

01:12:35

#12M: Yes, that is right. They saw it and told us.

Q: Were there any particular cities that the traders had gone to in China?

#12M: I do not know which areas they went to. Our traders told us that they were asked to come and watch [the *thamzing*].

Q: If you were on horseback, how long would it take for these traders to go to China from your village?

01:13:37

#12M: To reach China from our village, I am not exactly sure, but it might take a month or a little over a month. [I] think it takes at least a month. If the traders left in autumn, they returned only around spring time. [They] used to travel with horses and mules, as there were no drivable roads then. Driving horses and mules and walking was the only means.

Q: Why do you think the Chinese would want the Tibetan traders to witness the public humiliations of *thamzing*?

#12M: In [my] opinion, the Chinese were trying to indicate that this was what would happen if someone deceived the people and oppressed the poor because of his wealth. That’s what I feel.

Q: And how old were you when you first heard about this *thamzing*? Did you understand the word or what did it mean to you? First of all, how old were you when you heard it?

01:15:59

#12M: When [I] first heard of the *thamzing*, [I] was perhaps...I think I was 12 years old when the Chinese arrived. [I] heard about it when [I] might have been 14-15.

Q: What did you feel when you heard about this kind of treatment?

#12M: My feelings were that we should sell our land, which was very fertile and go to the region called Pema Koe, a place of pilgrimage. [I] wished [my parents] would go and thought about it a lot then. [I had] heard people say that Pema Koe was an abundant and a very peaceful place with many holy sites. [I] wished we would go there. [I] thought about it a lot but dared not say it to my parents. It was not possible for my parents to leave like that. [I] thought that way many times.

Q: Why not [tell your parents]?

01:17:48

#12M: [I] was afraid and knew they could not leave everything behind and they would not listen. This was why [I] could not tell them.

Q: Where was this place Pema Koe that you wanted to go? How far from your home?

#12M: It became apparent that things were not going to be good in the region. [I had] heard about Pema Koe, but did not know which direction to take from my village. [I had] heard that if one could go to Pema Koe, it was a pilgrim site where there was never any war or starvation.

Q: When did the Chinese actually come to your village, at some point?

01:19:17

#12M: The Chinese had not come to our village when I left home; not to the actual village because it was very isolated. The Chinese came many times to the Shidong Monastery, our monastery. When we went to watch the *gutor*, many Chinese came there. During the *torma* ‘dough offerings’ ritual, the Chinese fired innumerable shots from their guns.

Q: Do you remember what year that was or how old you were when you went there?

#12M: I have gone many times to the monastery to watch the *gutor* and the Chinese always came there during the *gutor*. The Chinese fired their guns and presented the *cham* performers with silver coins called *dhayen*. I think they were trying to be good at that time. They dropped countless number of coins from above onto the *cham* performing area. I have seen the Chinese many times at the monastery as I have been to watch the *gutor* on many occasions. [I] have been to watch the *gutor* many times when [I] was 15, 16 and 17 years old.

Q: So it sounds like the Chinese were acting friendly at that time.

01:21:40

#12M: Yes, that is right. By the time I was 17 or 18, the Chinese had changed a great deal. All their actions were very aggressive unlike their previous stance. I left my village in ‘57 when I was 18.

Q: Before you left home and you said their ways slowly changed, what changes did you see with your own eyes?

#12M: I left in '57 and just before I left, the leader of Gyue, the village of Venerable Samdhong Rinpoche and other leaders from Kham escaped to our region, when they could no longer remain in their regions because of *thamzing* by the Chinese. Their regions were defeated and they'd arrived in our village.

In our monastery, there was a monk called Kusho Bagong who, while moving about would hold his gun in his hand and not carry it on his back, even when he was riding on his horse. The situation had become suspicious to such an extent.

Q: So the people who were *thamzinged* in the other village, being *thamzinged*, did you see that or did you hear about it? How did you know?

01:24:45

#12M: They were subjected to *thamzing* in their village and had escaped to our village. We did not see that. Those that had escaped had seen it.

Q: And what did they tell you happened?

#12M: They came to our village but we never asked them anything. [I] heard that they had lost [their villages] to the Chinese and had fled into our village. It used to be said that things would not be good in our village, that on one hand there would be starvation and on the other hand, the Chinese would do such things. Escapees who'd fled from different directions into the small region said there would be problems from every side. Then in '57, I left my village to admit my sibling as a monk.

Q: Was it Lhasa you left for?

01:26:20

#12M: Yes, I left for Lhasa. Just before I left, there were some people in the region who were cunning or should [I] say loved money. There was one such person in our village who was the servant of Khandhatsang [an influential family]. He was given a lot of money by the Chinese and he worked [for them] in our village. Later it became known that he was working for the Chinese and just before I left, he was killed.

Q: What was the name of the person who was killed?

#12M: I do not know his name but he was the servant of the Khandhatsang. Khandhatsang was the business manager of the Gongka Lama and the highest authority in our village.

Q: Did the people in the village kill him or how was he killed?

01:27:28

#12M: Because he acted as an informer for the Chinese in the village, the people [of the village] caught him, tied him with ropes and shot him dead. First he was made completely drunk and then he was shot dead with a gun.

Q: What was he doing that made the village people so angry that they killed him?

#12M: He was relaying all the news of the people to the Chinese. At that time, preparations were being made to start an armed group to revolt against the Chinese. It was becoming more apparent that the Chinese were going to do no good. When the armed group was being readied to revolt, perhaps he gave the news to the Chinese. He was an informer who provided news to them, which was why he was killed.

Q: When you say this village, do you mean your village of just three houses? Do you mean that?

01:29:57

#12M: No, I meant the district of Shidong with over 600 families. Among them, there were over 400 families who were paying taxes and these families were [joining the rebellion]. The monastery was taking the main responsibility. Of course, the older ones [monks] could not take part, but there were the middle and younger ones. The people were also joining in the resistance. It was about to begin. Discussions were on.

Q: It was the 600 families and not 600 villages.

#12M: Yes. Among the 600 families, there were only about 400 who were obliged to send a man to join the armed group. It was not obligatory for every family, like the poor people did not have to go. [I] do not know the exact count, but [I] think there were a little over 400 families.

Q: Initially you heard that there was *thamzing* going on in China because the traders told you. Why was there such a big rebellion? What else were the Chinese doing in Tibet that made 400 families want to rebel?

01:32:25

#12M: People from other Kham areas had fled into our region. The Chinese were tightening their grip in various ways and unlike earlier times, their speech became stronger. I was just a child then, but [I] felt the atmosphere in the region become such that you did not feel easy talking when there were many people around. And when people moved about, [they] did so with their guns. I told you earlier about the Bagong Rinpoche; his assistance carried their guns over their backs, but the Rinpoche carried his gun in his hands even when riding on his horse. [He] did not carry it on his back. Such was the suspicious atmosphere even when I left in '57.

Q: What kind of things did the Chinese do that made everybody anxious and suspicious?

#12M: They had plans to divide the people. They knew that majority of the people were going to revolt against them and were making preparations. So in order to learn about the

developments, they bribed some fickle minded people with large sums of money. Money fooled these people and the few fickle minded people went over to the other side.

Q: Why would some Tibetan people succumb to the bribe?

01:35:34

#12M: There was one person who succumbed before I left and [he] was killed. After that there were doubts that others might be lured, which was why if one wanted to talk about the preparation for the revolt against the Chinese, he did not do so when there was a group of 10 -15 people. It was only spoken among reliable people. There was fear and suspicion that more people would go the same way [as the informer]. Before I left, only one such fickle minded person was identified.

Q: You and your brother decided to leave. What was the reason for wanting to leave and go to Lhasa?

#12M: The reason [we] went to Lhasa was that my younger brother, who is three years younger to me was a monk. It was necessary for monks of our region to go to the great monasteries [Sera, Drepung and Gaden Monasteries] in Lhasa for religious studies. Every monk, unless you were handicapped which earned you a special excuse, must go to Lhasa to one of the three great monasteries. [He] should study as much as he can, take his *gelong* ‘ordained monk’ vows and then return home.

I went to drop him off. I was to send him by a Chinese vehicle from Chamdo, but due to the riots in Kham, none of the Khampas ‘people from Kham’ would be allowed into the Chinese vehicles. Khampas were not allowed to go [to Lhasa]. They were revolting against them [the Chinese] and were stopped from leaving. Not one Khampa was accommodated in the vehicles. So my brother wished for me to accompany him and I did so upon his request. Both of us journeyed together and [I] left him at Drepung Monastery.

01:38:08

Then I lived for sometime in Lhasa but did not have much money for my expenses. [I] met a neighbor who was a monk and had come on trade to Lhasa. He said, “It is better for you to go to India as a muleteer. Do not stay here.” He left me with a person of my region and I went to India as a muleteer.

Q: First I would like to understand the tradition, that in every family, there’s one brother that must join the monastery?

#12M: It depended on one’s wish. In a family of three or four sons, one could become a monk or none at all; or two could become monks and two live at home. It was up to your inclination.

Q: Did your brother want to be a monk?

01:40:49

#12M: Yes, he wanted to be a monk and became one.

Q: If there was no Chinese invasion, were you still planning to take him to join a monastery? Was that just a family plan and the invasion happened to be happening at the same time?

#12M: Once [a son became] a monk, the plan was there all along. It was necessary to send him to Lhasa once he became a monk. My going to Lhasa was a plan that changed half way through the journey. I was to go back home if he could have been accommodated on a Chinese vehicle at Chamdo. I was to send him to Lhasa and go back home. We were many in the group who had come to see them off. When he could not go in a Chinese vehicle, he requested me to accompany him and I did so.

Q: If all the suspicion was going on about the Chinese, why would you want to go in a Chinese vehicle?

01:42:57

#12M: If we did not do that, it was difficult. If one could travel in a Chinese vehicle, one would reach Lhasa, perhaps in two days from Chamdo. It was the easiness with which one could reach there that one wished to travel in a Chinese vehicle. Except for the Chinese vehicles, there were no Tibetan vehicles at that time. Now-a-days, there are many vehicles but in the early days, except for the Chinese government vehicles, no one owned any.

Q: Was there any danger in being seen going with the Chinese? Would you be considered a trader if people saw you get in a Chinese vehicle?

#12M: There were the soldiers that were concerned with...and the Chinese vehicles which transported men and goods and they belonged to different departments. There was no reason for people to think that way. If there were Tibetan vehicles plying and if one took the Chinese vehicle, then people might wonder why they were using the Chinese vehicle instead of the Tibetan vehicle. However, at that time there was not even one Tibetan vehicle. Except for the Chinese, there was no one who owned a vehicle.

Q: I wish to ask a question about the monastery. Why would a Tibetan mother want her son to become a monk when there was so much work to be done around the farm?

01:46:05

#12M: Buddhism flourished strongly in Tibet. If one made [a son] a monk and he became a good monk, he would have a good knowledge of the Buddha dharma. If a person either builds a *stupa* 'shrine' of gold or makes a son a monk who grows up to be well versed in the scriptures, it is considered making the son a monk who becomes well versed in the scriptures more meritorious than building the golden *stupa*. That's how it is said. There were some families with only one son and he would be made a monk.

Q: To go back to your story, you leave your village with your brother, did you have an intention, you said you had an intention of returning after you took your brother halfway to Chamdo. Is that what happened? You got halfway to Chamdo?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: He got halfway to Chamdo but couldn't continue in the Chinese vehicle. Because that was the plan—to send the brother on the Chinese vehicle to Lhasa and himself return home. Since younger brother could not go in the vehicle, he traveled together to Lhasa with the brother.

Q: What was your experience like seeing Lhasa for the first time?

#12M: When I first saw Lhasa, I was overjoyed and thought what a vast place it was. I had a lot of faith because Buddhism was so widespread in Tibet at that time. I did not know much about religion, but I had a lot of faith and felt happy.

Q: Your brother then goes to the monastery, Drepung Monastery in Lhasa, correct? Yes. And then what do you do next?

01:49:27

#12M: I stayed for sometime and then the Pondhatsang [a noble family] was constructing a house. So, just like the coolies you have [in India], I worked on the construction for about a month. Then [I] met the monk from my village who was a trader. He was my neighbor. He belonged to one of the families among the three families in my village. The monk trader told me, “Do not do such work. Go to India as a transporter.” When he gave me this advice, I left for India. We used to be very close in our village and [I] would listen to whatever he said.

Q: Was the monk living at the monastery?

#12M: [He] did not live at the monastery. [He] was a trader and lived in the center of Lhasa. If you take Camp Number 3 here [in Mundgod] as the center of Lhasa, the three great monasteries were located further away like Camp Number 8 and Camp Number 1. They were located further away.

Q: If you went to India as a transporter, did that mean you would not be coming back to Tibet?

01:51:27

#12M: [I] was planning to return from India because at that time we never thought that Tibet would be defeated like this. [I] thought [I] would spend 5-6 months in India and then return to the village.

Q: What were the conditions like in Lhasa at the time especially was there much presence of the Chinese military?

#12M: When I reached Lhasa, the Pondhatsang was preparing to hide their valuable articles under the ground. One could not speak freely in Lhasa regarding our independence. A great change had undergone in Lhasa by then.

Q: The family that lived in Lhasa?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: The Pondhatsang for whom he was constructing a house.

Q: So what happened? Did you become a transporter in India?

01:53:31

#12M: Yes, that is right.

Q: Can you tell me about that experience? What did you do?

#12M: You must know what a mule is. A mule is a load bearing animal. Some [traders] owned eight [mules], some nine and some had 10. One must take care of them. In the morning we got up and saddled them. After putting the saddles, one went to the client for whatever goods [he needed to be transported] and that was loaded [on the mules] and we set off for the destination. The goods from Tibet were delivered in India and the goods from India were taken to Tibet and back and forth. We were just like the coolies who transport goods here. However, we did not have to carry the goods on our backs as the mules carried them. [We] took goods from Tibet to India and goods from India to Tibet and traveled back and forth.

Q: What cities in Tibet did you transport items and what cities in India? What kind of trade route were you on?

01:55:34

#12M: The main city in India where the goods were delivered is called Kalimpong. And from Kalimpong, most of the transporters took the goods to Phari in Tibet. Most people took the goods in vehicles from Phari to Lhasa. In the olden days, when there were no drivable roads, the horses and mules carried the goods. Later, after the roads were constructed, the goods were loaded onto the vehicles at Phari. Indian goods were brought to Phari and wool from Phari in Tibet was delivered at Kalimpong. [The transporters] traveled between Kalimpong and Phari.

Q: Can you give us some ideas of the kinds of goods that you transported? What went from India to Tibet?

#12M: If one possessed a huge capital, there were *therma* ‘woolen cloth,’ *gonam* ‘machine-made woolen cloth,’ brocade and silk. A trader with a smaller capital took different kinds of textile. Then a lot of *maida* ‘white wheat flour’ was transported. Besides that, there was sugar, *bhuram* ‘brown sugar cubes,’ kerosene oil and gasoline. Huge quantities of gasoline were taken as the Chinese bought them. Then there was rice that was transported.

Q: What did you take from Phari to Kalimpong?

01:57:58

#12M: The merchandise that was taken from Phari to Kalimpong was wool. However, wool was not available on every trip, though it was the only item from Tibet.

Q: At what point do you stop coming to Tibet and leave and stay in India? When does that happen?

#12M: I think the final [trip] was in the month of March of 1959. It was around that time that I left Phari to come [to India] and then could not go back.

Q: Thank you for your story. We are going to have to complete now. If this interview were shown in Tibet or China, would this be a problem for you?

01:59:38

#12M: There will be no problems. I have spoken the fact. But even if it's factual, the Chinese will not accept it. However, [I] will have no problems.

Q: Can we use your real name for this project?

#12M: Yes. That is the name [I] have in my passport.

Q: Thank you for sharing your story with us.

#12M: Yes. Is it over now?

Q: Yes.

#12M: Thank you.

[Interviewee gets up to leave but is requested to wait a minute longer.]

Q: What was it like to tell us about your experiences?

#12M: It's been very good and I am very grateful to you. If you would promote our factual eye-witness stories to the people of the world as much as possible, the people of the world will know what the Chinese actually did. [They] will know the real situation. If the real situation is learned by as many people of the world as possible, [I] think that will help the cause of Tibet. That is what [I] think and [with folded hands] I am very grateful.

[Interviewer presents a gift to interviewee]

Q: *Gen-la*, we'd like to give this to you. [Hands gift and envelope to interviewee.]

#12M: [Looks at gift] This is a picture of Buddha. Thank you.

END OF INTERVIEW