

Tibet Oral History Project

Interview #36M – Dhondup
April 10, 2010

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INTERVIEW SUMMARY SHEET

1. Interview Number: #36M
2. Interviewee: Dhondup
3. Age: 80
4. Date of Birth: 1930
5. Sex: Male
6. Birthplace: Dhobi
7. Province: Dhoday (Amdo)
8. Year of leaving Tibet: 1959
9. Date of Interview: April 10, 2010
10. Place of Interview: Kalachakra Hall, Camp #3, Doeguling Settlement, Mundgod, Karwar District, Karnataka, India
11. Length of Interview: 1 hr 10 min
12. Interviewer: Rebecca Novick
13. Interpreter: Namgyal Tsering
14. Videographer: Ronny Novick
15. Translator: Tenzin Yangchen

Biographical Information:

Dhondup became a monk at the young age of 7 at the Tashi Gomang Monastery in Amdo and does not remember much about his family since he left home so early. When he was 21 years old he travelled to Lhasa, journeying for three months and 21 days to join Drepung Monastery.

After three years in Drepung Monastery, Dhondup went to Tashi Lhunpo Monastery, the seat of His Holiness the Panchen Lama, on a pilgrimage. He decided to join this monastery as many monks of his village resided there. He recalls his life at the Tashi Lhunpo Monastery, seeing the the Panchen Lama and the presence of the Chinese in the region.

Dhondup vividly recalls his personal experience of the capture of the Khadhang Unit of the Tibetan Army, which served as the bodyguards of the Panchen Lama. He explains the role played by the Commander of the Unit, who acted as an informer for the Chinese and facilitated the capture. The Panchen Lama was taken away to China and Dhondup stayed in his monastery until June of 1959 when he escaped through Sikkim. He left the monkhood while working on road construction in Simla, Himachal Pradesh, India.

Topics Discussed:

Childhood memories, monastic life, first appearance of Chinese, invasion by Chinese army, Panchen Lama.

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Interview #36M

Interviewee: Dhondup

Age: 80, Sex: Male

Interviewer: Rebecca Novick

Interview Date: April 10, 2010

Question: *Pa-la* 'respectful term for father,' first of all could you please tell us your name?

00.00.22

Interviewee #36M: The name is Dhondup.

Q: His Holiness the Dalai Lama asked us to record the experiences of older Tibetans for the future generation of Tibetans, for the Chinese people to learn about Tibet and for the people in the outside world, so to record the true experience and history of the Tibetan people.

#36M: Okay.

Q: Do you give permission for the Tibet Oral History Project to use your interview?

#36M: Yes.

Q: Thank you very much.

#36M: [Nods]

Q: During the interview if you want to take a break at anytime, just let us know.

00:01:59

#36M: Okay.

Q: If there's a question that you'd rather not answer, just tell us "I'd rather not answer that."

#36M: Okay.

Q: *Pa-la*, if this interview was shown in Tibet or China, would this make any kind of problem for you?

00:02:30

#36M: There will not be.

Q: We very much appreciate your coming here to share your story with us here today.

#36M: Yes.

Q: First of all, can you tell us a little bit about some of your early memories back in Tibet?

00:03:15

#36M: In my home were my parents, my brother and two sisters. I became a monk at the age of 7 at the monastery, which means I do not know the story of my family.

Q: Whose decision was that for you to become a monk?

#36M: There was a relative of my father who was a monk and he called me to the monastery and that's how I joined the monastery.

Q: Do you have other brothers? Did you have other brothers?

00:04:11

#36M: There is another brother.

Q: Older or younger?

#36M: He is younger than me.

Q: Was it more common for the older brother in the family to become a monk?

00:04:24

#36M: [I have] one brother and two sisters.

Q: There are two brothers, right?

#36M: [I have] one brother and two sisters.

Q: There are two brothers including you...

00:04:33

#36M: I have one brother and two sisters.

Q: There are two sons in the family, right?

#36M: Yes, that is right. There are two sons including me.

Q: You are the older one and was it necessary for the older one to become a monk?

00:04:59

#36M: It was not mandatory to become a monk. It was one's wish.

Q: Do you remember anything about becoming a monk at such a young age? Do you remember anything about it?

#36M: I do not remember about when I was small, but as I grew older I studied the scriptures and participated in the prayer assemblies. That's how I spent my time studying. Then I served in the capacity of a store manager of the monastery.

Q: How old were you when you were given that responsibility?

00:06:12

#36M: I was 19 years old when I took responsibility as an manager.

Q: In your early years in the monastery, did you miss your family very much?

#36M: I did not have such feelings because my parents lived very near. I used to get vacations and went back home.

Q: Of all the different kinds of studying and lessons that you were learning at the monastery, was there something that you were particularly interested in?

00:07:17

#36M: I liked reciting the texts but I did not know how to write.

Q: Tell us about your pilgrimage to Lhasa in 1951 when you were 21 years old?

#36M: When I was 21 years old, I joined the Tashi Gomang, which is a large monastery in Amdo. From there I went to Lhasa at the age of 21.

Q: Can you tell us anything about the journey to Lhasa?

00:08:23

#36M: [I] journeyed carrying a bundle. At that time there were no vehicles. I reached Lhasa after traveling for three months and 21 days.

Q: How many people were with you?

#36M: There were 12 people who embarked on the pilgrimage. There were 12 monks.

Q: And which monastery were you going to?

00:09:01

#36M: We came to the Drepung [Monastery]. It was to the Gomang Datsang [division] of Drepung.

Q: And then?

#36M: We went on pilgrimage to Gaden, Sera, Samye, Reting and many other monasteries.

Q: To visit, but you were going to study at a particular monastery, right? Drepung?

00:09:39

#36M: I came with the intention of joining the Drepung Monastery. There was no freedom to practice religion in my village because of the Chinese. Due to that I wished to join Drepung and study the scriptures.

Q: So it wasn't just a pilgrimage. You weren't going and coming back. You were planning to... you were going there to stay in Lhasa, right?

#36M: When I left my region of Amdo, I thought I would return. However, since the Chinese were causing suffering, [I] did not go back.

Q: You said there was no freedom of religion in Amdo. Can you describe what you mean by that?

00:10:55

#36M: There was no religious freedom because the Chinese barred the monks from living in the monastery. [They] were not allowed to live there and study the scriptures. We have faith in His Holiness the Dalai Lama and made prostrations to him. They [the Chinese] banned prostrations and having faith. When we cannot do that, there is no freedom of religion.

Q: What would happen if it was discovered that you had a photo of Gyalwa Rinpoche, His Holiness the Dalai Lama? If the Chinese discovered a photograph, what would happen?

#36M: [The Chinese] would seize and take away the photograph. Then they would burn it, the photograph.

Q: Was this the Nationalists or the Communists who were doing this?

00:12:28

#36M: They were the Communists Chinese. The earlier Chinese were not like that. The earlier Chinese were true Buddhists. The earlier Chinese called the Kuomintang were true Buddhists. The Kuomintang now live in Taiwan these days. They are real Buddhists but the Communists...

Q: Those earlier Chinese, the Kuomintang, did they not restrict religious practice?

#36M: No, not at all. There was freedom of religion.

Q: Were they Buddhists?

00:13:23

#36M: They were Buddhists. The Kuomintang were real Buddhists. It was the Communists that came and brought communism. The earlier Chinese were real Buddhists.

Q: The Nationalists would they attend prayers? Would they participate in any of the prayers and religious practices?

#36M: They practiced separately and did not come to our monasteries. They recited the *mani* ‘mantra of Avalokiteshvara’ like us. Those earlier Chinese, the Kuomintang, were Buddhists and true practitioners of the Buddha’s dharma. If they visited our monastery, they only looked at the Buddha image and not Je Rinpoche or others.

Q: Apart from taking away and burning photographs of Gyalwa Rinpoche, His Holiness the Dalai Lama, what other things were the Communist Chinese doing to stop the practice of religion in your area?

00:15:24

#36M: Basically they did not like religion. They considered religion as poison. So they went to the homes of the lamas and since they did not like religion, brought communism for good. There was nothing else.

Q: So they would come to the monastery and say these things?

#36M: They did not say ‘Do not practice religion’ but subjected the monks to suffering. The Chinese normally say something about religion but I cannot remember that. They called all the monks for a meeting and said, “[You] must become lay people and work. It is not right to remain as monks.” They said that every day.

Q: How far from the Chinese border did you live?

00:17:17

#36M: China was far away. We did not have vehicles in those days. It took 15 days to go to Siling in China.

Q: On horseback or foot?

#36M: By walk. Walking for 15 days brought you to Siling in China.

[Interviewer to interpreter]: They called it Siling, China? It’s the Amdo name for China.

[Interpreter to interviewer]: Not Amdo name for China. It’s near China.

[Interviewer to interpreter]: I think it’s something that Amdoans say. The other guy from Amdo also called it Siling. It’s a word for China.

[Interpreter to interviewer]: It’s a word for a Chinese place, called Siling.

Q: Can you tell us anything else that the Chinese were doing in your area that you noticed before you left for Lhasa?

00:18:29

#36M: At that time the Chinese were treating us well. They came to assist the people during harvest time and if anyone was constructing a house, they came to lend help. They said that they were going to bring a lot of progress. Later, they gradually became worse

and worse and then started socialism. When socialism was implemented, the rich people's properties were given to the poor. That's how socialism was implemented. When they appeared initially, they were very good.

Q: So was it your decision to leave the monastery to go to Lhasa or was it under the advice of senior monks?

#36M: There was a relative of my father who had visited Lhasa long ago. He said that it was good to go to Lhasa as one can view Sera, Drepung and the Jowo 'statue of Buddha Sakyamuni' He recommended it and then we fled.

Q: When you arrived in Lhasa, what was your impression of Lhasa? What did you think? What did you see when you walked into Lhasa for the first time? What did you see? What did you notice?

00:21:00

#36M: The language of Lhasa and Amdo are different. [We] had a difficult time in understanding each other.

Q: Did you have to find an interpreter? How did this work?

#36M: There were many Amdo monks we knew who were living in Drepung and they helped us.

Q: What did the city look like to you?

00:21:48

#36M: Lhasa was really big and the right place to practice dharma. It was a good place to come on pilgrimage. In Amdo, take Dhobi for example, there were not many [holy places] unless one went to Labrang Tashikyid or to Kumbum. There were no pilgrim sites in Dhobi. I felt very happy on reaching Lhasa.

Q: You visited many holy sites in Lhasa. Was there one particular holy site that made a big impression on you, made a big effect on you?

#36M: There was no particular place as I had equal faith in all, whether [I] visited Gaden, Drepung or Sera. All were the same. I stayed for three years in Drepung and then moved to Tashi Lhunpo in Tsang. Tashi Lhunpo is the monastery of the Panchen Lama.

Q: At Drepung, were you at Loselling or Gomang [Division]?

00:23:50

#36M: At Gomang.

Q: So by this time you were a fully ordained monk? You were a *gelongpa*, yes? You had taken your full ordination at this time?

#36M: I was not a *gelong* ‘ordained monk’ but had taken the *getsul* ‘novice’ vows.

Q: When did you become a *gelong*?

00:24:25

#36M: I had not become a *gelong* as I escaped to India by then. [Laughs]

Q: Oh, you never took your full vows. What were you doing in Drepung for three years?

#36M: I attended the prayer assemblies at Drepung and studied the scriptures. That’s how I spent my time.

Q: Why did you leave to join Tashi Lhunpo?

00:25:05

#36M: Tashi Lhunpo is a big monastery and a pilgrim site. The Amdo say that if one has visited Drepung, Sera and all the rest but omits to visit Tashi Lhunpo, it is akin to a dress without a collar. So I came on pilgrimage to Tashi Lhunpo.

Q: So it was just your complete choice to join Tashi Lhunpo? You decided after three years “Now I want to go and join Tashi Lhunpo,” yes?

#36M: I made that decision. I decided that I wanted to visit Tashi Lhunpo and see the Panchen Lama.

Q: Why did you join the Tashi Lhunpo Monastery?

00:26:28

#36M: There were many people from Amdo at Tashi Lhunpo Monastery. They told me to stay there as it was very good and the Panchen Lama was living there. So I stayed there.

Q: All the monks [were from Amdo]?

#36M: No, they were from Tsang.

Q: Were there many Amdo at that time?

00:27:12

#36M: There might have been 300-400 from Amdo.

Q: Why were there so many Amdo in Tashi Lhunpo?

#36M: The birth place of the Panchen Rinpoche is Amdo.

Q: Gyalwa Rinpoche is also from Amdo.

00:27:39

#36M: There were many Amdo in Drepung, in Gaden and in Sera.

Q: So you could talk very easily.

#36M: There were three people from my village who were also my relatives in Tashi Lhunpo. They asked me to stay and so I did.

Q: Your relatives were in Tashi Lhunpo in Amdo or Tashi Lhunpo in Lhasa?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: In Lhasa.

Q: Because there was also a Tashi Lhunpo in...

00:28:37

#36M: It was 15 days' walk from Lhasa.

Q: It was not in Amdo.

#36M: No, no. In Utsang.

Q: Was there a big difference between Drepung Monastery and Tashi Lhunpo Monastery?

00:29:03

#36M: The monasteries were the same. There was no difference. They were the one and same. There was no difference.

Q: Was there more political awareness at Tashi Lhunpo?

#36M: The Panchen Rinpoche was living there. While I was at Tashi Lhunpo, the Chinese captured all the Khadhang soldiers of Tashi Lhunpo. The Khadhang consisted of the body guards of the Panchen Rinpoche from the Tibetan Government. The army unit called Khadhang was captured by the Chinese. [To the interpreter] You can interpret that.

The unit was called Khadhang. We have the [Tibetan alphabet] called Ka, Kha, Ga, Nga...just like the A, B, C, D...

Q: That was the second unit?

00:30:26

#36M: Yes, Khadhang was the second unit. Kha is like the B.

Q: They were the category in the Tibetan army, was their job particularly to protect Tashi Lhunpo?

#36M: The Khadhang unit of the army was the bodyguards of Panchen Rinpoche. They were Tibetan soldiers and not Chinese.

Q: When you joined Tashi Lhunpo and we're talking...1954 you joined Tashi Lhunpo, is that right?

00:31:23

#36M: It was not '54 then.

Q: When was it?

#36M: It was '55 or '56. Perhaps it was in the year '56. I am not sure.

[Interviewer reading from notes: "I came to Lhasa in 1951 and was three years in Drepung." That takes us to...Oh, we've lost a couple of years. Never mind.]

Q: So in 1956 you joined Tashi Lhunpo. Where was the Panchen Lama at this time?

00:31:59

#36M: He was living in the monastery.

Q: What opportunity did you have to interact with him?

#36M: No, I did not. I did not have the chance.

Q: Did you not see him from afar?

00:32:20

#36M: We did see him. [I] saw him many times and received blessings. I received the Kalachakra initiation and many [teachings].

Q: What was your impression of Panchen Rinpoche?

#36M: Panchen Rinpoche was really Tibet's most popular lama. We refer to them [His Holiness the Dalai Lama and Panchen Lama] as the two Gyalwa Panchen and considered them as the sun and the moon; Gyalwa Rinpoche [His Holiness the Dalai Lama] as the sun and the Panchen Rinpoche as the moon.

Q: How many monks were at Tashi Lhunpo at that time?

00:33:27

#36M: They told me that there were 5,500 monks. As per my estimation, there were more than 5,500.

Q: Was it separated into colleges like Gaden and Drepung and Sera were? Separated into colleges like we have Sera Je, Gaden Shartse, Gaden Jangtse?

[Interviewer to interpreter]: Do you understand the question?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: No.

Q: Tashi Lhunpo, was it separated into different parts? You have Gaden Jangtse and Gaden Shartse. You have Drepung Loselling and Drepung Gomang. So was Tashi Lhunpo also separated into colleges like this?

#36M: There were three *datsang* ‘divisions’: Chikhang Datsang, Shartse Datsang and Thoselling. There were three divisions.

Q: Which one were you in?

00:34:54

#36M: I was in Shartse.

Q: Was there any difference between these three colleges?

#36M: They were the same. There was no difference. [People from] each [region] belonged to a particular [division]. For example, [to the interpreter] Namgyal, you might belong to Loselling or [a certain division] in Gaden. Each one belonged to a certain division and one must join the division you belonged to. One could not join as you wished. It was obligatory for every Amdo to enter Shartse division. They could not join elsewhere.

During my stay at Tashi Lhunpo, the Khadhang army unit was captured by the Chinese. The reason the Chinese captured them was that the Commander of the Khadhang Unit had been bribed by the Chinese. Earlier when I came to Tashi Lhunpo, it [the Commander] was an old man with a goatee who was very good. He was replaced. Why was he replaced? The Chinese paid a bribe and so the Tibetan government had him replaced.

The new person seemed extremely good when you looked at him but he was rotten inside. One day [he] announced that the Khadhang Unit must fight the Chinese and asked them to assemble to recite the Tara prayers. They were made to sit inside the hall and given all the guns, artillery and machine guns. They were told to dismantle them and polish them well in preparation for the fight against the Chinese. Then all the guns were taken to pieces.

He then went and informed the Chinese that they could go [to the Khadhang Unit] and that there would not be a shot fired and that all the guns were in pieces. The Khadhang army could not fire even one shot at the Chinese. They were captured by the Chinese and the weapons taken away.

Q: What was the name of the person?

00:37:10

#36M: I do not know the name of the person.

Q: I really want to go into this in more detail. The Khadhang, does it mean anything? Does it mean mouth something? When you break down the words Kha-dhang, does it mean something in Tibetan?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: It is a category of the...

[Interviewer to interpreter]: I know what it is but does it mean something? Like *kha* is mouth, right? If you break down the word, is there a meaning?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: The meaning is that that is a category of the army, ka, kha.. .1, 2, serial wise.

[Interviewer to interpreter]: Oh, it is like 1, 2, 3.

[Interpreter to interviewer]: Kha is the next...

[Interviewer to interpreter]: So it is second. Oh, A, B, C.

#36M: It is like the English A, B... It is the B.

Q: Oh, the B battalion. I see. They were not monks, right?

00:39:45

#36M: No, no, they were lay people.

Q: Normally how many were posted at Tashi Lhunpo? How many soldiers of the Khadhang, we're just talking about the Khadhang now, were posted, were staying at the...?

#36M: There were 400-500 soldiers posted there.

Q: Always? They were always there?

00:40:24

#36M: [Speaks before question is interpreted] At Shigatse which is a town like Lhasa. Tashi Lhunpo was a monastery and they [the Chinese] had an army camp at Shigatse. They were at the army camp.

Q: Were there 400-500 Tibetan soldiers at the Tashi Lhunpo Monastery?

#36M: There were 400-500.

Q: They were posted around the monastery?

00:41:00

#36M: They surrounded and guarded and followed the Panchen Lama wherever he went as his bodyguards.

Q: Really? That many?

#36M: It was not necessary to guard the monastery.

Q: Was this number of the Khadhang, was this a traditional number to protect Panchen Rinpoche or had this number been increased since the Chinese presence had also increased?

00:41:43

#36M: They were there since long ago.

Q: Was it not because of the Chinese presence?

#36M: No, no.

Q: So there had been no increase?

00:41:53

#36M: [Speaks before question is interpreted] The soldiers were there in Lhasa too. There were many soldiers who were the bodyguards of His Holiness.

Q: The 400-500 bodyguards of the Panchen Rinpoche of the Khadhang Unit, were they there long back before the arrival of the Chinese?

#36M: Yes, they were. They were there since the time of the previous Panchen Rinpoche.

Q: To your knowledge there has been no increase in the number of the Khadhang since the Chinese had arrived in Tibet?

00:42:34

#36M: There had been no increase.

Q: Could you please go back to the incident that you described before about what happened with the weapons and everything and can you describe exactly in as much detail as you can what happened and particularly what you saw with your own eyes about this incident?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: About what?

[Interviewer to interpreter]: The incident of the leader of the Khadhang asking them to bring all the weapons because they were going to fight the Chinese.

#36M: I saw this with my very own eyes. When the unit was captured by the Chinese, there was a district office at Shigatse where the Tibetan government nobles stayed. The Tibetan flag atop the district office was removed and a red flag of the Chinese was raised there. It was done so by that leader and I saw it with my eyes.

Q: Did that happen before the capture or...

00:43:46

#36M: We went there to have a look. When we heard that the Khadhang Unit had been captured, all the monks went to watch. When we reached there, someone was holding a red

flag of the Chinese in a jeep. That was the Commander of the Khadhang Unit. I saw it with my eyes.

Q: Going back a little bit to that incident that he described earlier where the leader of the Khadhang said we should fight the Chinese, can he just go back and tell that in more detail. So the leader of the Khadhang...by the way, do we know his name?

#36M: [I] do not know his name.

Q: He told everybody we should fight the Chinese, right?

00:45:18

#36M: He said that. He said that they must fight the Chinese. He had been given money by the Chinese and instructed to say that and he did so.

Q: He said to the monks, he called a meeting and told them this? How did he give this information?

#36M: When the soldiers had gathered he announced, “The day after tomorrow [you] must fight the Chinese. Each of you must clean your guns well.” He left after making this announcement.

Q: Where did he go?

#36M: He went to the Chinese army camp and told them, “All the guns are dismantled. You can go and there will be no firing.” He stayed in the Chinese army camp.

Q: And then what happened? After he told the Chinese authorities this information, then what happened?

00:48:00

#36M: The Chinese arrived with guns. They [the Khadhang soldiers] raised their hands up and were taken away. The Tibetans wear *chupa* ‘traditional coat’ which are tied at the waist. All the waist bands were untied and with their hands like this [raises hands], they were taken away like this [shows gun shape with fingers].

Q: Wow! So what had they done with their bullet?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: Which bullet?

[Interviewer to interpreter]: He said that they had to take the bullets out of the guns. What had they done with the bullets? Were they sitting next to them or what had they done with them?

#36M: All the arms were taken by the Chinese. [They] took away everything.

[Interviewer to interpreter]: They obviously didn’t have time to reload their guns.

[Interpreter to interviewer]: There's no time. The Chinese came suddenly.

[Interviewer to interpreter]: Suddenly they were surrounded.

Q: The commander told them to clean the weapons. Where were the weapons placed?

00:50:01

#36M: The Chinese took them away.

Q: Where were they kept before the Chinese arrived?

#36M: They were spread out on the ground. There was an army camp and [the weapons] were kept there.

Q: Were they stored in a room?

00:50:08

#36M: Yes.

Q: Were they not with each of them [the soldiers]?

#36M: No, they were not. Those that served as bodyguards to the Panchen Rinpoche carried their guns. Daily five, six or a certain number [accompanied him] and the rest of the guns were kept in the storehouse.

Q: Where were you when this was going on?

00:50:56

#36M: I was at the monastery at that time. When everyone said, "The Khadhang have been captured. The Khadhang have been captured," all the monks went to watch. When we went to watch it, we saw all the Khadhang [soldiers] with hands raised in the air being taken away. They were all in a single line.

Q: Who told [you] to come and watch?

#36M: Nobody called us to come and watch. [When we heard that] the Khadhang had been captured, all the monks went to watch.

Q: Was this 1956 that we are talking about?

00:51:38

#36M: That was 1958. We were almost on the verge of losing Tibet. It was at the end of 1958.

Q: Where was Panchen Rinpoche when this happened?

#36M: Panchen Rinpoche was living at the monastery. Panchen Rinpoche was living at the monastery but he was helpless. All the bodyguards of the Panchen Rinpoche were surrounded by the Chinese. They were said to be the bodyguards of the Panchen Rinpoche but they were imprisoned in the palace.

Q: What happened?

00:52:40

#36M: After the Khadhang soldiers were captured, the Chinese took away Panchen Rinpoche to China.

Q: When you say later, what do you mean later?

#36M: It was at the end of '58 and just before '59.

Q: This happened what month in 1958? What season if he didn't know the month? Spring, summer, autumn, winter?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: When Panchen Rinpoche was taken to China?

[Interviewer to interpreter]: No, when the Khadhang was taken.

00:53:29

#36M: I wonder which month it was. It was around autumn. I do not know the month. It might correspond to August or September.

Q: After that the Khadhangs were taken away in trucks? How were they taken away?

#36M: They were led away walking. The Chinese army camp was close by. The Chinese army camp was close by and they were led there in a row. [Shows gun shape with fingers]

Q: So this is Shigatse we are talking about, right?

00:54:20

#36M: Yes, Shigatse.

Q: After the Khadhang was taken away, what was the atmosphere in the monastery like?

#36M: When I left, [the Chinese] did not do anything to the monastery.

Q: I do not mean the Chinese. What were the monks doing?

00:54:44

#36M: They were helpless. They just stayed there. They could do nothing.

Q: But it must have caused a lot of anxiety.

#36M: [Speaks before question is interpreted] There was panic in the heart. Most of the monks of Tashi Lhunpo liked the Chinese, though it is not good to say that. They liked the Chinese. There were many Khampa, Amdo and Mongolians who did not like the Chinese, but the monks of Tashi Lhunpo did not understand the Chinese's objectives. They did not know about the restriction on freedom of religion and the ways of the Chinese. Since they did not understand, they just followed the Chinese and felt they were good. That was it. They did not know that the Chinese were bad.

Q: Right, but they had just taken away the entire section of the Tibetan army whose main job was to protect Panchen Rinpoche. So there must have been some great concern at that point I would have imagined for the safety of Panchen Rinpoche.

00:56:50

#36M: Two days after the entire Khadhang was captured, Panchen Rinpoche was taken away to China. We sat there agape.

Q: Did you see him leave?

#36M: I did not see the Panchen Rinpoche being taken away. I heard the next day that the Panchen Rinpoche had been taken to China, but I did not witness it.

Q: Was there any discussion amongst the monks after the Khadhang was taken away? Was there any discussion among the monks that perhaps the monks should try to do something to protect the Panchen Rinpoche?

00:58:11

#36M: Even if there was the thought, one could not do it. There were no weapons and it was impossible to overpower [the Chinese]. One just lived with fear and nothing else to do.

Q: Was there any discussion about trying to break into that store where all the guns were?

#36M: Even if one thought about it, one was helpless. Actually one did think of many different things like killing even one Chinese if possible, but one was helpless.

Q: So after the Khadhang was taken away, was the monastery put under guard by the Chinese army?

00:59:36

#36M: The Chinese guarded the monastery. The Chinese arrived and patrolled the area. Other than that there was nothing special happening inside the monastery that required the Chinese to stay there.

Tashi Lhunpo was not strictly supervised like Drepung or Sera [Monasteries]. The Chinese treated Tashi Lhunpo particularly well. Most of the monks liked them and in turn they treated them better. So things were left as they were.

Q: Why is that? Why did the monks from Tashi Lhunpo not be so resistant...

#36M: The monks of Tashi Lhunpo did not oppose them like Drepung and Sera. Tashi Lhunpo stayed calm. Panchen Rinpoche said, “It is useless to oppose them. It is better to stay still. We will be the losers and not the winners.” So the monks stayed calm. Since they did not oppose, they were treated well.

Q: Did you notice more Chinese influence in the day to day running of the monastery at Tashi Lhunpo? Did you notice any Chinese interference in the administration of the monastery?

01:02:32

#36M: I did not notice anything like that. Then we were forced to flee in ‘59. I left for India in June of ‘59.

Q: Where were you during the events of March 1959?

#36M: I was at Tashi Lhunpo at that time.

Q: What did you hear?

01:03:24

#36M: We heard the news in Tashi Lhunpo that His Holiness the Dalai Lama had left for India. We heard that he’d left, but did not see it as [I] was at Tashi Lhunpo then.

Q: So you heard that His Holiness left in March and then you left three months later. Why did you decide to leave?

#36M: I could not find companions [for the escape] at the monastery. It took time that way. The companions had work like packing and clearing stuff in their room. So doing all that took time.

Q: You were already in Shigatse. So did you follow very similar route that His Holiness had gone?

01:05:07

#36M: No, it was another route.

Q: Which route did you take?

#36M: We came through Lachen and Lachung [Sikkim]. It was entirely different. We went walking while His Holiness rode a horse through the direction of Mon Tawang. We escaped in the direction of Thoe through Gerze and Gerge.

Q: Oh, you went all the way to west into Ngari?

01:05:40

#36M: Yes, through Ngari.

Q: What did you see on the way?

#36M: There was nothing to see on the way as it was in the night. We climbed up the hills during the day and at night, there was a person we'd paid to guide us to India and he led us. He was paid and he brought us. During the day we climbed up the hills and came down at night and continued the journey.

Q: Is there anything else you can tell us about the events at Tashi Lhunpo during the time that you were there?

01:06:43

#36M: There was nothing particular that happened at Tashi Lhunpo. I do not know of any suffering perpetrated by the Chinese. In no way was Tashi Lhunpo treated badly until '59. I did not witness any such things.

Q: Is there anything else you'd like to talk about? How do you get married?

#36M: [I] married later. After I reached India, I went to work on road construction and left monkhood. [It was] at Simla [Himachal Pradesh].

Q: Well, thank you very much. It's been so interesting to talk to you. I've never met anybody who was at Tashi Lhunpo during that very, very crucial time in history. So it's very interesting to hear your account.

01:08:29

#36M: [Raises joined palms in thanks]

Q: Thank you so much. I just wanted to ask you, what was it like to talk about this, to talk about your story?

#36M: I feel very happy. I am very happy that I got the chance to talk to somebody about what was there in my heart. And having spoken about it, I feel very happy that you will publicize this in the world.

Q: Have you ever talked to any Tibetan historians about what you experienced at Tashi Lhunpo?

01:09:29

#36M: There are hardly any monks of Tashi Lhunpo here.

Q: No. Have you ever spoken about it to your children or others?

#36M: No, I have not. I have never spoken about it.

Q: You haven't told your children?

01:09:38

#36M: No, I have not told the children. I have spoken about my village but never about Tashi Lhunpo.

Q: We are very honored to hear it today. I need to ask you again, *pa-la*, if this interview was shown in Tibet or China, would it be a problem for you?

#36M: No.

Q: I want to ask you just one more time, can we use your real name? Is that okay?

01:10:18

#36M: Yes, you can use it.

Q: Thank you so much.

#36M: Thank you.

[Interviewee gets up. Interpreter goes to shake hands with him.]

Q: [Presents a gift to interviewee] A small offering for you.

#36M: Thank you.

[Interviewer and interviewee shake hands.]

END OF INTERVIEW