

Tibet Oral History Project

**Interview #37D – Phuntsok Tashi (alias)
May 21, 2012**

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[Anonymity Requested]

TIBET ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

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INTERVIEW SUMMARY SHEET

1. Interview Number: #37D
2. Interviewee: Phuntsok Tashi (alias)
3. Age: 81
4. Date of Birth: 1931
5. Sex: Male
6. Birthplace:
7. Province: Utsang
8. Year of leaving Tibet: 1964
9. Date of Interview: May 21, 2012
10. Place of Interview: Hotel Tibet, Mcleod Ganj, Dharamsala, Himachal Pradesh, India
11. Length of Interview: 2 hr 12 min
12. Interviewer: Rebecca Novick
13. Interpreter: Thupten Kelsang Dakpa
14. Videographer: Ronny Novick
15. Translator: Tenzin Yangchen

Biographical Information:

As a child Phuntsok Tashi spent his time playing and grazing animals. When he grew older, he engaged in farming and carried salt to Nepal to barter for rice. He says his mother was extremely compassionate and always took in travelers passing through on pilgrimages to India. He describes important festivals of Nepal when salt and sheep were traded and the custom of animal sacrifice during the festival.

Phuntsok Tashi recounts how some people suffered due to taxes and debts from loans of grain they received in times of poor harvest or heavy debts. He explains about the reformation system introduced by the 14th Dalai Lama to waive old debts accumulated over the years and to seek partnership with the rich aristocrats to build bridges.

Phuntsok Tashi says the Chinese came as early as 1948-49 to his region, first seen was a lone Chinese on horseback who asked many questions and then they gradually increased in numbers. He describes his imprisonment along with many others from the region and the various forms of torture, beating, and harassment methods used by the Chinese on the prisoners. Phuntsok Tashi was fortunate to serve as camp cook and received better treatment than many other prisoners. After his release he returned to his village, but all his family had already escaped. He soon escaped to Nepal where helped to establish houses and a school for the refugees.

Topics Discussed:

Childhood memories, customs/traditions, trade, taxes, first appearance of Chinese, oppression under Chinese, imprisonment, thamzing, brutality/torture, escape experiences.

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Interview #37D

Interviewee: Phuntsok Tashi [alias]

Age: 81, Sex: Male

Interviewer: Rebecca Novick

Interview Date: May 21, 2012

Question: 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 are going to 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 in a way that we agree upon together?

00:00:58

#37D: Who? Me?

Q: Yes.

#37D: Of course, [you] can take pictures.

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

#37D: [Nods]

Q: If there's a question you would rather not answer, that's fine.

Okay, *pa-la* 'respectful term for father,' could you just start off by telling us a little bit about your life growing up in Kyidong?

#37D: During the growing-up years of 4, 5, 6 and 7 while our parents were engaged in working in the field, we spent time playing and wandering. There were no schools to study like in the foreign countries. Secondly, between the ages of 7, 8 and 9, 10 one had to graze animals. One must graze animals. And then between 10, 15 and 20, one did fieldwork in summer and during wintertime carried salt to Nepal to barter for rice. From 20 to 25, 26 one earned a living by cultivating lands and went on salt trade. At 28...from 28...24, 25, 26, 27, 28...from 28...the Chinese appeared in the year '62. When the Chinese appeared I was imprisoned at the age of 28, at the onset of 29.

Q: Okay, all right. So we're going to back up a little bit. When you were very young, you said there was no schooling at all. You said you were just playing around. What kind of playing were you doing? What games were you playing?

#37D: Playing with dust, heaping stones, breaking twigs and eating different kinds of fruits in the hills. [We] played with pebbles and in the dust. [Laughs]

Q: What kind of animals did your family have and how many?

00:05:09

#37D: [We] owned only around seven animals.

Q: What type of animals?

#37D: There were animals like *dzo* ‘animal bred between a yak and a cow’ and *dzomo* ‘female *dzo*,’ and oxen for plowing, for plowing the fields.

Q: Were there only seven animals?

#37D: [Shakes head] [We] were humble. There was an ox for plowing.

Q: Were your parents very religious?

#37D: Oh, [they] had incredible faith in religion. Father had died when [I] was little. Father was not around when I could remember; he had died. Mother was deeply religious and [she] would feed anyone who came home without fail. [She] took great care of others and was also frank. Except for birds, everybody visited our home because our family was hospitable and frank. We were located on the road and provided shelter to those that did not have. It was a main road and travellers from Kham and Amdo received shelter. Everyone came to our home.

Q: So you were always getting different people coming to your home. Did you meet some interesting people coming into your home from the road?

00:07:27

#37D: Who? A Khampa ‘person from Kham’?

Q: Anyone from Kham or Amdo.

#37D: A Khampa I knew came from Nagchu.

Q: What’s Nagchu?

#37D: Nagchu’s in Kham. It is famous these days. Nagchu is where His Holiness the Karmapa was born. People of Nagchu visited Bodh Gaya in India. People from Kham valued pilgrimages. [They] came on pilgrimage and took shelter in our house and even stayed for months when there was heavy snowfall. One even died in our home; a nun died. There were six in the group and one died. [They] took shelter and we provided food.

Q: Did this kind of...having so many different people coming to your home, did you hear like, then you got a lot of news about what was happening in different parts of Tibet? Did you get a lot of news and information?

#37D: Story?

Q: Stories and information.

00:09:07

#37D: [Mistakes *dung* ‘story’ for *dhung* ‘conch shell’] [They] did sound the conch but I have not heard it. Conch shells were blown but we would not hear it. They were from a different region. Kham and Amdo are located at a great distance from us. Conch blowers came but I would not be able to explain that. It is difficult to explain about the conch.

Q: Didn’t they relate information about what had happened?

#37D: The conch blowers?

Q: No, the people.

#37D: Yes?

Q: When the people arrived, didn’t they relate information about Kham and Amdo?

#37D: [They] did not give much information about Kham and Amdo. When asked, “Where have [you] come from?” one from Amdo would say, “Amdo” and one from Nagchu would say, “[I] am from Nagchu.” They were on the way to Bodh Gaya, India on pilgrimage. People from Amdo and Kham loved going on pilgrimage.

During the pilgrimage, when [they] ran out of food [they] came to our home. Though the food was not great—there was no meat, as we did not eat meat—[we] hosted [them]. They tell [us] to visit, “If you visit we will be hospitable” but we could not go because it is far away. The journey took months, so who would go?

Q: Did it seem like somebody coming from another country to you? Did they seem very different, the people coming from Amdo and Kham?

00:11:03

#37D: [They] were different. The difference being that each region spoke differently, ate differently, with different information; each region was different.

Q: When you were a little bit older you started working with the farm animals. Did you...did a lot of responsibilities, since your father had passed away? Did a lot of the responsibilities then fall on you or did you have some older brothers to help or uncles?

#37D: There was my older brother. I was the younger one. My older brother was there. I did whatever tasks my older brother assigned, as there were no schools to attend. One

plowed the fields or whatever task was assigned. The crops had to be harvested several times a year. One harvested the crops, plowed the fields and that's how one spent time. My older brother was present then; he has now passed away.

Q: Did you have to go to the Changthang 'Northern Plateau' to get salt? Did you go and do that?

00:12:43

#37D: Salt is actually found in the saltpans called *tsakha* located at the end of the Changthang. Who goes to the saltpans of Changthang to get the salt? It is not the people of our region. The *dzo* and *dzomo* belonging to the people of our region would die. The nomads...I have not witnessed but experienced it. [Salt] is gathered from the waves of the ocean. [I] heard that animals must journey for weeks without food. We could not reach there.

They [nomads] packed the salt in *gyemo*, like the bags in which rice is packed, and loaded on yaks. [They] brought the laden yaks to acquire grains. Our region gave them grains and took salt from them. We did not produce salt. We produced grains and the nomads produced salt. They did not have grains while we had grains. They had salt and we had grains. Those were bartered.

Q: You did some trade across the Nepal border, is that right?

#37D: Yes.

Q: Can you describe the process of how that worked and in as much detail as you can give us like how that trading system worked?

#37D: To describe that...those with a lot of money traded in sheep. Sheep. Dusse, Tiwar, Purnay and Sangrathi: there were four festivals in Nepal. The first is Dusse, then Tiwar, Sangrathi and Purnay.

Q: Dusse, Tiwar and then?

00:15:30

#37D: Dusse, Tiwar, Sangrathi...

Q: And?

#37D: Purnay. During these times the wealthy people among us traded in sheep. [They] brought sheep from the Changthang and sold in Nepal. That is the first and foremost trade. The second is loading salt on your sheep like [they] do in the north. The sheep were laden with salt. The third is carrying salt on the back of people. [They] carried salt and went to get rice from the district.

Q: The requirement for the sheep in Nepal during these festivals, this was for animal sacrifice?

#37D: [Speaks before translation is complete] Not just four, [we] even went five times. The small and middle traders...you know goatskin...skin of goats...bought goatskin and sheep's wool and went to Nepal to sell them.

Q: What was done to the animals during the four festivals? Were the animals eaten or killed during the four festivals?

00:17:20

#37D: [The animals] were killed.

Q: Were the animals killed as sacrifice?

#37D: Killed as sacrifices. It was like ours and the English's New Year. [The animals] were killed during such times. Each family killed three, four, five or 10 sheep and there were those that killed 15 and 20, too. It used to be said that to feed the army, the king killed 100 buffalos, 100 *khashi* [?], 100 goats, 100 sheep and 100 chickens during the annual Dusse. It was the tradition to kill in Nepal. It was a must to sacrifice, as it was the New Year.

Q: What was your family trading exactly?

#37D: We were not in a position to trade. We carried salt on our back; we were humble. We could not trade in sheep, goatskin or sheep's wool. Skin of goats and sheep's wool were traded in Nepal, but we did not. We engaged only in farming and carried salt on the back to get rice during the New Year. [We] did not produce rice in our region.

Q: Just going back to these travelers who would come and visit your house on the way for pilgrimage, and you said they seemed like they were very different because they had a different culture, different food and way of dressing. Did you feel that they were Tibetans? Did you feel that they were fellow Tibetans or did you feel that they were another nationality almost?

00:19:50

#37D: No, [we] never thought of them as different. Our region was pious and highly compassionate. "Poor thing, [the pilgrim] must be hungry," thinking so, if one had a potato, half of it was given away. [We] did not feel otherwise. The reason our region was pious was because there is not anyone in the world that does not eat meat, but no sheep were slaughtered in our region. We were highly compassionate and devout. The region was pious and highly compassionate.

Q: [You] didn't eat meat?

#37D: We did eat meat but there was no practice of slaughtering. A little was eaten that the nomads brought. [The nomads] did not take any payment.

[Interviewer to interpreter]: So what did you think he meant...the question of whether they thought they were Tibetans or not?

Q: Please describe whether you thought the people of Kham and Amdo were Tibetans or not.

#37D: Yes, [they] were Tibetans. We knew that. [We] considered [them] as fellow Tibetans. [We] were united and not like now. One gave shelter to whomever that came. For instance, whatever one asked for—of course, we did not have gold and silver to give—if one asked for potatoes, [we] gave potatoes; if one wanted radishes, [we] gave radishes. There was no payment. Not a single penny was received. One just gave.

Q: Did you ever have any trouble with any of these visitors? Did they ever kind of try to take advantage of your generosity?

00:21:49

#37D: There could be one or two. Even if there happened to be one or two, we ignored them. There could be one or two bad ones, thieves called *yablung*.

Q: *Yablung*?

#37D: There was one called *yablung* in Tibet. *Yablung* could be beggars or thieves or bandits.

Q: Was *yablung* a type of race?

#37D: We had nicknamed those beggars that begged for *tsampa* ‘flour made from roasted barley’ as *yablung*.

00:22:27

Q: What’s *yablung*?

#37D: The beggars.

Q: Okay. Tell me about the *ani* ‘nun’ who died. You said, you mentioned that there was an *ani* that died in the snow. What happened to her?

#37D: In Tibet they had only three kinds of food: meat, butter and *thue* ‘cheese.’ Once in India [for pilgrimage], one would have to eat rice, wheat flour and drink dirty water. One would be dressed in pelts in the heat. Wearing sheepskin turned up the heat after the cold. It was fever from the heat and cold. Fever. What do you call it in English? It was fever [that killed the nun].

Q: What was the first affect you noticed of the Chinese presence in your village?

#37D: Changes? Do you mean the way in which the Chinese came or the changes after the Chinese arrived? Do you mean how did the Chinese arrive or what do you mean?

Q: Yeah, your first experience of Chinese people? What was that like? Your first experience, yeah. Not what you heard; what you experienced.

00:24:19

#37D: Witnessed, right?

Q: Witnessed.

#37D: The way in which the Chinese appeared...Right in the very beginning, except for the word *Gya* 'Chinese' that we had heard, their country and our country were absolutely distinct. [We] had never seen what food he ate; what clothes he wore; what type of a man he was; [we] had never seen their race. We were poles apart.

It is like the Tibetans and the West; the people are poles apart. How did they appear initially? Right in the very beginning a lone Chinese appeared riding a horse. A lone Chinese on horseback arrived in the very beginning. When he appeared on horseback...the Kyidong people were very kind and provided accommodation. When a traveler arrived home, of course accommodation was given.

And then he started asking questions just like you are doing. He did not know the [Tibetan] language and first asked, "What is a 'house'? What's the word for 'house'? What is the word for 'house'?" We call a house as home. It was called home in Tibet. We call it house. After learning the word "house,"—there were ladders in the homes like the English [homes]—[he] asked, "What is the word for 'ladder'?" He wrote it down. When it rained, [he] asked, "What's the word for 'rain'?" When told it was "rain" he noted the word. He asked and made a list of everything about what [we] ate and drank.

00:26:07

A month or two after he left, two more Chinese on horseback appeared. They were sent in succession, sent in succession. They too asked the same questions. We did not offer any objections though it was easy to have killed [them]. It was easy to have cut [them]. It is not very shocking to kill a man or two. However, no objections were raised. Much later, after five or six months, 10 Chinese arrived riding horses.

Q: Together?

#37D: Together. The 10 Chinese inquired about the border, "Where is the border between Nepal and Tibet? Where is the border between us? Where is your border?" They went and checked the border. No more Chinese arrived after the 10. Then there were talks in Lhasa in 1949. Lhasa was situated at a distance from us, a journey of two months. It was said in Lhasa in 1949 that Chinese were coming. When this was said, His Holiness the Dalai Lama remarked, "If this is the case, the happiness of the Tibetans..."

In the past money loans, and those that did not have grains, borrowed grains for consumption. Do you know what is a loan? One borrowed grains to feed and repaid after the harvest. Traders borrowed money and they [the lenders] recorded everything, charging two [measures] for one [borrowed measure] and three for two. These were recorded and the poor could not progress. Hence, His Holiness the Dalai Lama issued an edict, "The old loans to the poor, except the fresh ones—the old loans must be written off." Such an edict was issued.

00:28:20

And then His Holiness deputed a new leader called Tsidung Phakpa who expired last year or the year earlier. A new leader was deputed. When the new leader was deputed, he passed the new law, “Old loans should not be recovered. Only loans taken in a current year can be recovered. Old loans are written-off.” That was one thing [he] said. The second advice of His Holiness was... We were tenants of the Tibetan Government and there were some private landholders called Samtenling and Dip Tsecholing; there were many others that did not come under the government’s tax system.

Bridges had to be constructed across rivers for animals and people to move. Some of the private landholders did not build bridges. Hence, it was said, “Old loans should not be recovered.” When bridges were constructed, [they] were washed away in floods every year during summer. “Bridges must be constructed jointly by the government tenants and tenants of the private land holders. This is the edict of His Holiness the Dalai Lama.”

So everyone was placed together and then there arose friction among the Tibetans. There were arguments and they [landholders] said, “We possess documents and will not construct the bridge.” There were lashings and punishments. That was the first reformation in Tibet. Do [you] understand? That was the first reformation when His Holiness the Dalai Lama advised that old loans should not be recovered. “Our policy is not right. [We] must make policy changes,” said His Holiness the Dalai Lama when he was at a young age. [To interpreter] Tell this...[not discernible]

00:31:24

Q: Did he say what year this was?

#37D: I wonder what year it was. Perhaps '41 or '42; I am not sure. [The Chinese] started out from China in '46. It might have been '47 or '48.

Q: Forty-seven?

#37D: [I] think it was '47 or '48. This is not exact. It was said that the Chinese were departing [China] in '46. It must have been '47 or '48. I am not sure of the year.

Q: Fifty?

#37D: It is not '50. It is not '50. [The Chinese] came early to our [region]. [They] came to our [region] before '50.

Q: Forty-seven to '48?

#37D: Between '48-'49.

Q: These Chinese who came very early on, what were they wearing?

00:32:45

#37D: [They] were wearing the uniform that they wear now. Some were wearing black. The 10 horsemen were wearing yellow [khaki?]. [They] were wearing yellow clothing.

Q: Yellow?

#37D: [Nods]

Q: The cancellation of the debt, for example. How did you interpret this new directive from the Tibetan Government? How was that interpreted in your village? What did they think it meant?

00:34:50

#37D: There was very good opinion about it. It was a joy not to have to repay old debts. [People] were extremely happy. In comparison 10 percent [of the people] owed debts while 90 percent did not. There was extreme happiness.

Q: These government representatives, did they talk about the Chinese presence in Lhasa and did they give you any advice about how to respond to Chinese who came to your area?

#37D: No, this was nothing to do with the Chinese. That [cancellation of debts] was the word of His Holiness the Dalai Lama and nothing to do with the Chinese, as we did not have a strong relationship with the Chinese then. That was the word of his Holiness the Dalai Lama and the Tibetan Government. It was actually His Holiness the Dalai Lama who said it. The Tibetan Government gave the order and it was followed and debts were cancelled.

What His Holiness thought was this: people were not allowed inside His Holiness' quarters except the aristocrats. His Holiness the 13th Dalai Lama was our lama, our leader, our lama, but we could not see him nor could His Holiness give orders to the subjects. He was kept in his quarters and we knew nothing. As His Holiness [the present] Dalai Lama grew to be around 26 years of age, [he] came to understand the ways and exposed the faults and lapses. [He] issued the order and that was followed.

Q: Did you feel then that the 14th Dalai Lama was trying in some way to enact the reforms that the 13th had planned?

00:37:25

#37D: [Speaks before interpretation is complete] It was not the 14th but the 13th. The present is the 14th.

[Interviewer to interpreter]: He's talking about the 13th?

#37D: The 13th.

Q: Were the orders given by the 14th in effect from the time of the 13th?

#37D: No, no. There had been a succession of the Dalai Lamas. During their time they never knew the problems of the people and what the policies were. There were frictions among themselves. There was trouble in Tseyang Gyatso's [6th Dalai Lama] monastery that almost forced [him] to flee. [He] was escorted back.

During the time of the 14th Dalai Lama, His Holiness pondered and was able to understand, "The mistakes have been committed by the Tibetan Government aristocrats. Laws have not been enacted correctly. Loans to the people should be just that." No schools had been established for the people. They set up schools for themselves and utilized for themselves. We used to just hear the word "Dalai Lama" but nobody saw [him], whatever anybody may say. The aristocrats around [His Holiness] briefed [him] and made the decisions. Because the aristocrats did not think of the interest of the people, His Holiness the Dalai Lama intervened saying, "The people are facing problems. Debts should be cancelled." That was the order.

[Interviewer to interpreter]: But he's actually talking about 1948, right, when the representative from the Tibetan Government came and said that loans were going to be voided and the private and government should collaborate to work on infrastructure, right? So my question has to do as the 13th passed away in 1931, my question has to do with "Did he think then that the Tibetan Government was trying to enact some of the reform ideas that the 13th had had during this time because they saw this threat coming from China?" Do you think they were trying to enact some of the reformist ideas of the 13th? The 13th passed away in 1931, right?

00:40:11

#37D: [The 13th Dalai Lama] had passed away but we were not aware that [he] was a lama. It was during the time of His Holiness the 14th Dalai Lama that orders were issued and a photograph released in proof of the existence of His Holiness. We never knew anything about the 13th Dalai Lama. We knew nothing except hearing the word "Dalai Lama." We lived far away.

Q: Where did you learn so much about the history of the 13th Where... Was that something you learned about later or did you learn it from your village elders, about the reform ideas of the 13th?

#37D: [Speaks before interpretation is complete] Tentative talks in policy reforms have taken place during the time of the 13th. According to His Holiness [the 14th] tentative talks had occurred during the 13th. It took place during the 13th but he did not live long. [He] did not live long and passed away. The present Dalai Lama lives into the 70's but the past Dalai Lamas did not live long. [They] passed away in their 50's and 60's; passed away early. [They] could not do much politically.

Q: How did you hear about these?

#37D: Yes?

Q: How did you know about all these?

00:41:38

#37D: How I came to know of these is—we lived at the border. Taxes to the government passed through our region, as that was the main road. Therefore, we heard the news immediately. Though there were no telephones, letters were brought on horseback. There were two district officers in my region since there were many villages. There were 8-9 villages. The district officers received letters. That is how one came to know of the proclamations.

Q: This directed that the private sector and the government should collaborate more on infrastructure projects...

[Interpreter to interviewer]: Only bridges.

Q: Like bridges. What was your understanding of what this meant of how this would work?

#37D: We thought this was right. We were satisfied with this, were satisfied; not just satisfied but contended. Otherwise, some were paying taxes while others were not. [We] were satisfied on this issue.

Q: And this collaboration on bridges, what did that mean exactly? Did that mean that the government was going to be funding the bridge building? What did that collaboration...I'm not sure what collaboration means like how...What is that? How does that work?

00:43:44

#37D: Governments...For instance, the Indian Government constructs bridges in India. The government constructs bridges and not the people. If people use bridges, so do the government. Everybody use bridges, horses, people, the aged, the young and [people of] various countries. Nobody can travel without using bridges. Therefore, we were satisfied.

Until then they produced a document; produced a document as private landholders. Producing this [exempted them] during the reign of past leaders and the 13th Dalai Lama. It happened during the period of the present Dalai Lama, Tenzin Gyatso. Everybody must use a bridge. Everybody must walk on the bridge to cross a river.

Q: As private landholders, did they ask for money?

#37D: Of course, not. [They] did not provide [funding].

Q: The cancellation of the loans—so we would call those back taxes, right? So those became null and void, but did it mean that you also didn't have to pay any more taxes? Like old taxes were cancelled or was it just the...

[Interpreter to interviewer]: Only the backlog.

[Interviewer to interpreter]: The backlog...

[Interpreter to interviewer]: The forward will just carry as normal.

[Interviewer to interpreter]: The forward carries normal. Okay, fine. Just tell *pa-la* he's very knowledgeable and he has very good memory. This is very helpful information actually for people to understand.

Q: So, and then what did you notice? We got as far as this incident in 1949 when the representative came and cancelled the loans and talked about the collaboration.

00:45:52

#37D: Following that the Chinese appeared. In 8-9 years...the Chinese were there for 12-13 years. The Chinese appeared. The Chinese appeared.

Q: Twelve to 13 years?

#37D: It was nine years...[I] am not exactly sure. It was in 9-10 years that the Chinese appeared. The Chinese launched the Reformation.

[Interviewer to interpreter]: I don't understand.

[Interpreter to interviewer]: The Chinese presence was there and they occupied in 1959. You have to ask specific questions.

Q: So we were up to actually 1949. We were up to 1949...

00:47:00

#37D: [Interrupts] [The Chinese] arrived in the year '59. [They] occupied Lhasa in the year '59. [The Chinese] lived in Lhasa for 5-6 years after signing the 17-Point Agreement.

Q: That's 10 years. We were up to 1949. You just skipped 10 years. So can we go back a little bit, more detail? From 1949 you got the representative from the Tibetan Government who came and said that there was going to be the change in policy, which everyone was very happy about. What was the next change that you noticed?

#37D: From the year '47-'49 there were the years '50, '51, '52, '53, '54, '55, '56, '57, '58, '59. Is not that 4, 8...10 years?

Q: That's 10 years. What happened during the 10 years?

#37D: Yes?

Q: A lot of changes would have taken place in 10 years.

ts00:48:02

#37D: A lot of changes took place in 10 years. The reason changes took place in the 10 years was that firstly, the [construction of] bridges became common during the 10 years. The private landowners and the government were to collaborate [in the construction of]

bridges. And there would be no debts. One need not pay back all the loans. Hence, one was able to consume what one cultivated.

00:48:27

How the second reformation took place was like this—[to interpreter] make a good note of the second reformation. The second reformation occurred in the monasteries. Monasteries used to give loans to us, the farmers. [They] disbursed loans as well as levied taxes. The reason taxes were levied was because they did not have any source of income. Some ordered the payment of three measures of grains for a little amount of tea or four measures of grains for a measure of rice. A great many such things occurred.

The monasteries became aware and then in two, three, four or five years... We faced difficulties in the years '55 and '56. Old loans were demanded to be repaid in cash if one possessed it and if not to give animals. If one did not possess both, one was required to tender ornaments. In this way the rich people oppressed the poor. [To interpreter] Do you understand? Make a note of it.

Q: Which monastery was it?

#37D: It was all the monasteries. There were Kagyu, Nyingma and Gelug [monasteries]. There were Nepalese citizens in our region. When we did not have anything to eat in springtime, they would support us. We paid them back soon after harvest. They recorded the balance payable and were at liberty to record two for one since the old people were not educated and could not understand. [The creditors] could record three for two and charge compound interest. The loans increased and then we faced problems.

Q: Which year was this?

#37D: It was in the year '54, '55 or '56. It took place for 2-3 years. It was in '55 or '56.

Q: The Nepalese?

00:50:35

#37D: They were the Nepalese, the monasteries and a few wealthy people.

00:51:51

Q: Can we just...just because I'm really trying to understand this and this is really interesting. Are we talking about actual loans or are we talking about taxes that were...?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: He said both.

[Interviewer to interpreter]: They were both? He said loans and...

[Interpreter to interviewer]: Loans and taxes. Yeah.

[Interviewer to interpreter]: Okay, to the monasteries.

[Interpreter to interviewer]: And even the Nepalese... When there was sometimes when they had some food problem—when there was no food—and they provided the food.

[Interviewer to interpreter]: So he felt that they were being taken advantage of by the Nepalese neighbors and also by...

[Interpreter to interviewer]: Not neighbors, they used to stay there.

[Interviewer to interpreter]: Oh, they stayed there?

Q: Did the Nepalese live in Kyidong?

00:53:00

#37D: They lived in Kyidong having come from Nepal. [They] were in Lhasa and in Kyidong too.

Q: The Belpo [Nepalese]?

#37D: Nepalese. They were merchants.

Q: The loans that you said that had been voided, these loans were to the monasteries, like who did the people owe the money to? Was it the aristocracy? Was it the monasteries? Was it both? Was it government officials? Who were they borrowing money from, his people?

#37D: I already told you about the loans. In the monasteries were the various *ladang* ‘grand lamas’ residences’ with *nyerpa* ‘store keepers’ and *chazo* ‘business managers.’ Secondly, when people did not have food the monasteries [gave loans] and then received double. [The creditors] gave loans to the poor that must be repaid. Such was the system. It was the custom since long ago... We were poor.

Though we cultivated large areas of land, taxes were severe with the Tibetan Government demanding this and that. There were numerous taxes, many children born and nothing to eat. Therefore, they [the people] borrowed 40-50 kilograms of grains. While repaying, interest must also be paid. If one was unable to clear [the debt] and there was some balance due, he [creditor] was at liberty to record whatever he wished. We had no knowledge. So in this way the poor were not able to make any progress.

Q: So mainly it was the *ladang*?

00:55:00

#37D: Mainly it was the *ladang* and then the Nepalese, and there were several wealthy people.

Q: What forms did these loans take? Was it currency? Was it goods? Like what form was it?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: It was mostly...the problem was like...there was a lot of farming done obviously, but the problem was that whether it was because of taxes because they had to

pay taxes to so many people and some of them had many children. They had no food remaining for themselves. So what they got was grains.

[Interviewer to interpreter]: They got grains from the monastery?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: Even though they themselves were farmers.

[Interviewer to interpreter]: Okay, they didn't have enough.

[Interpreter to interviewer]: They didn't have enough and when they were given the sacks of grains, they always messed up the records.

[Interviewer to interpreter]: Who did? Who messed up the records?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: Whether it was the monastic officials or whether it was the rich people. They added and later when they came to pay, they asked for more.

[Interviewer to interpreter]: Okay.

[Interpreter to interviewer]: Because most of the people were sort of stupid and uneducated.

[Interviewer to interpreter]: I see. So it was a lot of taking advantages.

Q: So the relationship between the people in your village and the monastic officials, it seems there was some tension then, yeah, between them?

00:56:25

#37D: It was a harmonious [relationship]. It was a harmonious [relationship]. They had wealth and we did not. There was interdependency as [we] borrowed from [them] to eat and they received revenue in the form of interest. It was a cordial [relationship], very cordial because one must think of the lama.

Q: Can you just tell us a bit more about the...because this is the first time I heard about the Belpo, Nepalese. These were Nepalese who...they were traders who went back and forth from Nepal through western Tibet to Lhasa and then back and forth? They were traders?

#37D: [They] lived there.

Q: And your relationship with them also was like...Did that change then over this time?

#37D: [The relationship] was harmonious. It was harmonious because...To relate an old story...how did the Nepalese originate? At the time of constructing the Gaden Palace of His Holiness the Dalai Lama in Lhasa, it was only the Nepalese that could accomplish the carvings in His Holiness' quarters. That was the source of origin. Secondly, what happened in the early days was—except for hearing about the Nepalese like the Bamin and Chatri, the Tamang, Sherpa...long ago during the reign of King Zanga Bahadur, there was a war between the Tibetans and the Nepalese. The Nepalese overpowered the Tibetans in the

battle and reached up to Dhingri. And then the war continued until it was fought at Shangpa District near the Nepalese border. Finally the demarcation was decided upon near our region. Some of them escaped around this time [to our region]. The Tamang and the Sherpa escaped and settled. [They] had the same faith, the same faith like Gelug, Kargyu and Nyingma.

00:59:20

That is one and secondly, [I] have forgotten one thing. [I] think it was King Songtsen Gampo [ruler of Tibet 630-649 A.D] who took a Nepalese wife. Was it Songtsen Gampo or someone else? [I] think it was Songtsen Gampo.

[Interpreter to interviewee]: It was Songtsen Gampo.

#37D: Yes?

[Interpreter to interviewee]: It was Songtsen Gampo.

#37D: It was Songtsen Gampo, right? The relationship started from there.

[Interviewer to interpreter]: I think he's referring to the Newars. We would call them the Newars.

Q: When was that?

#37D: [Speaks before interpretation] [The war took place] near the Nepal border, close to TCV [?].

[Interpreter to interviewer]: "I'm talking about back in the day."

Q: What day would that be?

#37D: I do not know the period. [I] do not know who the Tibetan king was but the Nepalese king was Zanga Bahadur. I do not know the king of Tibet.

Q: So going back to this period between 1949 and 1959, these 10 years where you said that the...you were talking about the monasteries, right, wanting the taxes? So I think I did skip over that part. So could you explain then, was it that the monasteries were trying to reverse the order from the government? What was actually happening?

01:01:49

#37D: Though it was ordained that [debts] be made void, it was a case of the powerful and the powerless. The villagers were timid and they still owed parts of the loans. The order did not mean that entire debts were written off, but old loans that came to be on account of the accumulation of interest over many years became void. Fresh loans taken during a particular year must be repaid. The members of the *ladang* and others were aware [of the political situation] and planning to take flight.

For us to escape—we did not have much knowledge about the three classes of leaders until the Chinese made captures and left us wondering. We had not fled at the time His Holiness the Dalai Lama did. We stayed until after His Holiness left. They were recovering the loans early in a hurry to escape. They were ready to escape. The lamas, monasteries and aristocrats dare not stay.

Q: To go to India?

#37D: Yes. Of course, anybody would recover [their] money at the time of escape.

Q: Was there then some argument between your understanding of what the government had told you and what the *kuda* ‘aristocrats’ and monastic officials were telling you? Did some disputes break out about that?

01:04:08

#37D: If you had not paid, little arguments would arise because there was no money. Ours was a poor region and there was no money. There were cases of animals being taken away. They would take animals or whatever ornaments.

Q: And it seems to me that from what you are saying you really just didn’t have enough to eat. I mean because of these loans of food that you were needing just to survive. So why was food so scarce if you were farmers? What was the problem actually? What were the conditions that were creating this scarcity of food and creating this poverty?

#37D: The reason there not being sufficient food was that though there were yields but for one, seeds for the next year must be set aside. The best grains must be set aside to be used as seeds. Secondly, what one owed to other people must be repaid. The third part was for consumption. The third one for consumption...the poor must eat a lot and the yield may or may not be enough with having to go to work for others and also seek workers. Some possessed larger fields that produced enough for consumption while those with lesser areas did not have enough. It was like that.

Q: The taxes that you had to pay...how often did you have to pay these taxes? Was it annual or was it more often?

01:06:53

#37D: [Taxes] must be paid when crops were harvested. When there were no crops to be harvested, one must borrow. This is the spring season and there are no crops to be harvested in spring while one must eat, so one borrowed from others, which must be repaid when the crops were harvested. It was like that.

Q: So it was once a year at springtime?

#37D: It was once a year.

Q: You were paying the monasteries? Were...it just one monastery? Who was your family paying taxes to?

#37D: We paid to Lama Dakpa *ladang*. There is the Samtenling Monastery in Nepal, right?

Q: Sampheling?

#37D: Samtenling Monastery is located at the [Boudha] stupa. Its lama is Kagyu. They [*ladang*] had its *chanzo* and *nyerpa*. Let us take for instance that you are the *ladang* and I am the *chanzo*. You will hand over whatever money you possess to me and I will convert it into grains and loan it to people that do not have food. Those that do not have food own lands while they [the *ladang*] do not. Therefore, the farm owners will repay after the harvest and once the grain stock in the house depletes, [the farmers] will take a loan from them [*ladang*] for consumption. That is how it was.

Q: What was the arrangement, the ratio of what you had to give? What part of your harvest did you have to give to the monastery?

01:09:01

#37D: There was no fixed number of sacks. A large family [may borrow] 50-60 sacks while a poor family 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10 sacks. There were no fixed numbers and it depended on the need of the family. There was not any fixed number. Not everybody owned lands. It was only the taxpayers that were entitled to lands. And one must eat like everybody else.

Q: After 1959, so then what changes did you notice in 1959? What happened in your area?

#37D: In '59?

Q: Yes.

#37D: In the year '59 it happened as though a stone was flung at a chicken coop. What happened was that it was said in the year '59 that Tibet was being conquered and people became chaotic. People became chaotic, "Tibet is lost and there is danger of harm befalling His Holiness the Dalai Lama." Similar to a stone being flung at a chicken coop, people became chaotic and tumultuous and were alarmed thinking, "How to escape? What to eat? Where to go? Having never seen a Chinese, are they man-eaters? Will [they] kill? Will [they] sever? Would falling into their hands mean being killed and eaten? Will [they] chase [us] away?" Everybody became alarmed, chaotic and dazed. That happened in the year '59.

Q: Was there any fighting that happened in your region?

01:11:29

#37D: There was no fighting. There was no one capable of putting up a fight. How can you fight when there was not even a small gun? [People] were just farmers.

Q: The Chinese actually had not come into your region it seems at this point? It seems you were hearing about all these things. It sounds to me like they hadn't actually, you know, come and occupied your region. Is that right?

#37D: [The Chinese] had arrived. A group of 10 Chinese arrived in '59. A group of Chinese arrived in '59. A group of Chinese arrived in '59 and moved towards the Nepalese border. When [they] moved to the Nepalese border, a congress appeared from Nepal. Something called the congress that consisted of around 64 soldiers appeared. I do not know how many Chinese were there. Perhaps 30-40 Chinese were there. They appeared and demarcated the border. That was during the chaotic period.

Q: Chinese soldiers and Nepalese soldiers?

#37D: Chinese soldiers and Nepalese soldiers clashed. It was not congress but *kiwisi* or *kirisi*, a group of soldiers. [I] do not know from where they appeared. These two groups gradually demarcated the border, the border between Nepal and Tibet. The boundary demarcation was on paper. That was the first record of boundary demarcation.

Q: And then what happened?

#37D: What?

Q: What happened after that?

01:13:32

#37D: Then the prominent people of the *ladang* and others prepared to flee in '59. We did not escape. In '59...'60...was not it in the year '60? Did His Holiness not escape at the end of '59?

Q: It was in the 2nd month.

#37D: His Holiness left in the 2nd month. We came to see His Holiness here at the old palace in the year '60 from Tibet. Here [points up] where His Holiness had arrived from Mussoorie [Uttarakhand, India]. We received an audience then. [His Holiness advised], "Do not go back. A school will be established here." We did not have brains and saying that we have parents and relatives, went back. After returning [to Tibet] the bad period of the year '60 was over. Should I talk about what happened after '60 or not? I did speak earlier [during the pre-interview] about the imprisonment. Should I talk about it or not?

Q: It's really up to *pa-la*. It's really up to him. I mean we would like to hear about it, but it's up to him if he wants to talk about it.

#37D: It was chaotic in '59 and '60 and some of the prominent people were leaving while we, the commoners stayed back. And then on the 17th of the year '62, around 4 in the morning influential people of the village...how many was it? From our village, Bhu Tashi, Ngawang Dawa...[counts the number of people but names not discernible]...6, 7, 8, 9,10,11, 12; 12 people were captured at the same time, at 4 in the morning.

Q: You said it was the 17th day.

#37D: [I] think it was the 17th day.

Q: Which month was it?

#37D: The 6th month.

Q: Tibetan lunar month?

01:16:12

#37D: Yes. People were captured. [I] spoke about it earlier, so it must be recorded. Unless [you] want [me] to recount again, it is there in the record. I have already spoken about the Chinese but if [you] want [me] to recount again, I will do so.

Q: Have you brought out a book?

#37D: I have not brought out any book. [Someone] came to me yesterday. See if it is in the file.

[Interpreter to interviewee]: We do not tape the pre-interview. It's to locate who has something to talk about which is why the documentation. However, [the story] must be described again now.

#37D: If it must be described, they were captured. [They] were captured and we were asked to attend a meeting at the district. A meeting.

Q: The public?

#37D: Not the public but nine or 10 of us...12. A meeting was called that [we] attended.

Q: At 4 o'clock?

#37D: The meeting had already taken place by 4 o'clock. The capture at 4'clock occurred later. We attended a meeting earlier; I am forgetting that. Earlier we had attended a meeting in the year '60. We attended a meeting in the year '60 at Zonga. The journey from our region to the district of Zonga took four days. They [the Chinese] called us for a meeting that [we] attended.

On the first day [we] gathered at a place and they provided food. The next day's meeting was called at the home of a person who used to be a wealthy man. A meeting was called there. We were enclosed in a room for the meeting. Zonga, Danak, Lelung, Tango, Hapchen; there were people from five groups from beyond the mountain pass of the district—64 men gathered for the meeting. As soon as [we] entered the house for the meeting, soldiers rushed and surrounded it. The doors were shut immediately.

01:18:35

They [the Chinese] had told us to enter and shut everyone inside. There was a prominent person among us and he was called at once. “What work did you do in the past? What duties did you hold in the three categories of past leadership? What kinds of oppression did you subject the poor to?” [He] was interrogated like that. He answered what he had done in the past. As soon as [he] answered the Chinese said, “Unless you speak the truth, you will be hung up.” He was thus interrogated and intimidated. He was continually interrogated and the day ended.

01:19:17

The next day [we] were taken out and then incarcerated with nine, seven or 10 men in a room. There were 1, 2, 3, 4, 5...five rooms in which the 64 men were locked up...64 were locked up. One was to observe the rules. There was nothing to eat and drink. Some people cried, some fainted and of course, there was no food. Some covered their heads and shed tears; some lay on the floor and wept. The men were in a daze similar to drunks. Everybody was in stupor.

01:20:09

The next day each person was called. Each one was called and asked, “What opinion do [you] have? What opinion do [you] have? What opinion do [you] have?” It took 2-3 days of asking opinions. After all the 64 men’s opinions were collected, a public meeting was called. What happened during the public meeting was that [the prisoners were] told to describe Tibet’s peaceful 17-Point Agreement. “If one can recount it, [he] can get up and walk away. If not, [he] cannot leave.” A person who does not know the alphabet and cannot remember where he had kept his things the night before, such a person would not know Tibet’s peaceful 17-Point Agreement. So they [the Chinese] beat and kicked and beat. [We] bowed [our] heads.

01:21:05

There was one smart person in our village that hailed from a wealthy family. One day he was able to [describe] Tibet’s peaceful 17-Point Agreement in the meeting. Only one person was called at a time. One who was able to describe it could get up and walk away to his sleeping area. The rest did not know [the 17-Point Agreement]. He would go to answer nature’s call and when he did that, we would ask him softly as he answered nature’s call, “What is Tibet’s peaceful 17-Point Agreement?” He would say, “It is the three categories of leaders. It is the three categories of leaders that have oppressed us.” If one was able to mention the three categories of leaders, one could walk away from the meeting. Otherwise, one had to remain for weeks. That was the first question about Tibet’s peaceful 17-Point Agreement. Tibet’s peaceful 17-Point Agreement consisted of the *ladang*, the monasteries and the third was His Holiness the Dalai Lama. These three were the main parts of Tibet’s peaceful 17-Point Agreement and one had to describe that.

01:22:05

After one was able to describe it, [the next questions were], “How did [you] exploit the people? What possessions of the people did [you] seize? What work did you do for the leaders?” For almost 3-4 months this kind of interrogations went on and on. Every three days, we were taught military drill around 6 o’clock in the morning. And then spent the

whole day thinking and using the mind. One spent the whole day thinking. Should one be able to explain Tibet's peaceful 17-Point Agreement, one could leave for home and if not had to remain. One continued to think.

They [the Chinese] visited [our] villages during the time we were incarcerated. They sent men to the villages, be it Kyidong, Danak, Hapchen or Lelung to find out a person's family background, how wealthy he was, the degree of oppression he had subjected the people to, what kind of a man he was, good or bad. They questioned the people.

01:23:18

To the people they [the Chinese] said, "I will pay you money. We will take care of the poor. [We] will bring progress to the poor." People are bad and replied, "Thank you. Thank you." Of course, if there was an offence one must speak about it but even though there was nothing, it was said, "He is atrocious. He exploited and he did this." A lot of complaints were voiced in our village. [The Chinese] were able to collect information in 5-6 months. [The Chinese] were able to collect information about the 64 men from the particular village each one belonged to. These collections separated the men based on wealth and degree of crime. There were three men from our family. Immediately...[not discernible]

Questions were asked. Those that could answer replied to the questions and one that could not was forced upon a high table. [He] stood upon the high table and bowed [bends head] in front of the people and prisoners. [He] was like that on the high table and as [he] oozed sweat [points to forehead] was assaulted like this and this [indicates being slapped left and right]. That was the beginning of the *thamzing* 'struggle session.'

01:24:39

After the start of *thamzing*, they [the Chinese] continued to conduct *thamzing* successively, assaulting and observing what [the victims] spoke about. So, nearly 3, 4, 5...six men were identified, [those] charged with serious crimes. [The Chinese] may have recorded the time and later made changes.

After the *thamzing*, those charged with serious crimes...There was a hook [points to ceiling]. A rope was attached to the hook and a table placed underneath. The rope was positioned on the nape and then wound around here [indicates left arm]. The other [end of the rope] was wound [indicates right arm] and the arms stretched out. Then 3-4 kicks were given here [points to back] and [emits a sound *grrrrk*] both the outstretched hands were shoved to the back and knotted in the center [of the back]. Then [the victim] was suspended but not for more than 15 minutes. In 15 minutes the person went like this [bends head to indicate becoming unconscious]. He was untied and brought down and again suspended. *Thamzing* started then.

Q: Did the person become unconscious in 15 minutes?

#37D: In 15 minutes the person went [bends head].

[Interpreter to interviewee]: Please wait a little. I'll translate.

Q: Okay. Let's hold it right there for a second. When you went and saw His Holiness, can you tell us a little bit more about that meeting with His Holiness? What was the set up and what happened?

[Interpreter begins to interpret: [You] received an audience in 1959 and 1960...]

#37D: [I] think it was in '61.

Q: In '61?

#37D: [I] think it was in '61. [I] was imprisoned in '62. It was in '61.

Q: What was the feeling when [you] received the audience?

#37D: [We] never recognized His Holiness. The reason [we] did not recognize was...[I] had some butter to offer to His Holiness. In the midst of a jungle here [points up], the instructions were, "If you have things, leave them behind and if you have knives, leave them behind." And then someone arrived. "Perhaps he is His Holiness," [we] thought. First Lingsang [Ling Rinpoche, tutor of the Dalai Lama] arrived. [We] prostrated thinking His Holiness had come. "No, no." [Laughs] And then [we] waited. Then Trijang Rinpoche [another tutor] appeared. [We] prostrated thinking His Holiness had arrived. But [he] was not His Holiness. And then a young one appeared and [we] were told that he was His Holiness the Dalai Lama. [We] realized only after seeing the lama. [Laughs] It was very funny.

Q: Where did this happen? I'm sorry, what region?

#37D: In the palace up there [points up]. Earlier [His Holiness] was living there.

Q: You came to Dharamsala?

#37D: I came to Dharamsala.

Q: Wow.

#37D: [Laughs]

Q: How long were you here for?

#37D: How many days...perhaps four, five or six days.

Q: Then you just went back?

01:29:23

#37D: [I went on a pilgrimage in India and] saw Lake Rewalsar [Himachal Pradesh], Amritsar [Punjab], Bodh Gaya [Bihar] and then went back.

Q: At this point, this is 1959...

[Interpreter to interviewer]: 1961.

Q: 1961. 1961. You knew there were many, many Tibetans coming across the border to take refuge in India at that time. Thousands and thousands and thousands of people were fleeing the Chinese occupation. So why did you go back?

#37D: There was nothing to eat. One did not have money. There were farms in the village. There were fields and [your] relatives. Not many people could come out here. It was only the monasteries and big people that managed to escape and not the common people. None of the common people were able to flee. In the year '62 when they [the Chinese] suppressed the people severely, [the people] fled blindly, remarking that it was even fine to starve. [They] drove the animals. Numerous people fled in '62 though people did take flight in '61 but they were the prominent people.

[Interviewer to interpreter]: Let's carry on your translation from at that time, from when he came back from Dharamsala.

[Interviewer to interpreter]: So he was part of the meeting?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: Yes.

[Interviewer to interpreter]: *Pala* was part of the meeting. He was one of the people called.

[Interpreter to interviewer]: Twelve people.

[Interviewer to interpreter]: He was one of the 12 people.

[Interpreter to interviewer]: Twelve people.

01:31:52

Q: Why were you singled out to join that meeting, do you think?

#37D: I had never addressed [a group of even] three people. I went carrying their [people called to the meeting] effects. [I] was the servant to carry their effects. One of the men who was from...my wife was the daughter of a wealthy family. Though I had not committed anything in my village, my forefathers, mother's father had been a leader of the village. So it was incidental, as being young then I had not even addressed [a group of] five people.

Q: Were you one of these people that were undergoing this experience also?

#37D: Yes.

01:36:17

Q: You mentioned that everybody passed out after 15 minutes.

#37D: Yes.

Q: What happened after that?

#37D: Then the men were segregated. For a few months while we were in prison, many kinds of information filtered in, “Today so and so’s family has escaped. This family has fled or that family has fled.” People were leaving quickly. We were left behind. [People] were leaving. All the people [in prison] were dazed like drunks.

One day [the prisoners] were made to remove [waste] from the toilet. “You must remove [waste] from the toilet.” Inside a tall house was excrement, plain excrement that had not been covered with hay or soil. [The other prisoners] were shut in such a house saying, “Today all of you, especially the prominent people must clean out the toilet.” [They] had to clean out the toilet but I was not particularly given the task. I was a cook and not assigned this task.

01:37:44

They were wealthy people and could not hold spades nor could they pull up the rope that was tied to the buckets filled with compost. I felt desperate and offered to do the job. I volunteered. Three of us men volunteered to clear the toilet. For four or [I] think it was three days that we cleared the toilet.

Q: Did three people help [you]?

#37D: We cleared out [the compost]. A person passed out after using the spade 50 times. [The waste] slid down slowly and reached up to here [shows waist level]. It was liquid, a liquid mixture of excrement and urine and slippery. The stink caused men to pass out. They [the Chinese] made us suffer for three days. And then for one month, those charged with graver crimes were taken out and the people forced to assault.

Q: Around how many people?

#37D: What?

Q: Around how many prominent people were there?

#37D: There were [counts] 3, 4...five prominent people that were [assaulted] for three days each.

Q: Was each *thamzing* continued for three days?

01:39:13

#37D: Some for three days and some for a day. If one was assaulted heavily, [a victim] could not withstand it for more than a day...if the beating was severe.

Q: For who [were you the cook]?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: For the camp.

Q: Did you cook for everyone?

#37D: [I] cooked for everyone.

Q: Where the 64 people were being held?

#37D: [Nods] [I] did not have to cook for 64. [I] did not have to cook for the people that belonged to that village, only for those from outside. It was five or six people. The people of the village received food from their homes. [I] had to cook for those people that were from outside.

Q: Did you have to participate in the *thamzing* at all?

01:41:36

#37D: I had to attend but did not participate. In fact, I made a mixture of butter and *tsampa* in the night and gave it to the victim secretly.

Q: Bread?

#37D: Butter and *tsampa*. He had passed out. [I] mixed butter in *tsampa* and went to give it to him. I was free to participate or not in the *thamzing*. I was not forced to do anything, as I was the cook. I would be taken everywhere and to pluck vegetables. The [Chinese] soldiers treated me well. The soldiers especially took me along to gather vegetables from the fields. I did not suffer much except for one day when I made a mistake and was beaten.

Q: What was the mistake that you made that you got beaten for?

#37D: The mistake was this: there was a woman, a wealthy woman. I knew this wealthy [woman]. I went outside to answer nature's call. She was chained at the feet and hands. It seemed she used to get cold food. She was way down there and I was way up answering nature's call. Though I did not have a full bladder yet it gave one pleasure to look out at the mountains. I was pretending to answer nature's call. Looking at me she moved her hands like this [gestures off camera], shook like this. I touched my eyes and made a sign.

01:43:44

Then out of sight of the Chinese I went and asked [whispers], "What do [you] want?" "Please send some hot tea. My food is cold," [she] said. "Okay," [I] replied. After her food—I did not have to serve her, as there was someone else to do that—I delivered hot tea for six or seven days. Somebody had reported—the woman's name was Dawa Yankey-- "[He] is interacting with Dawa Yankey. He had sneaked." Then one day there was a large meeting and it was announced, "Who is the one among you interacting with Dawa Yankey? Who is supplying hot tea to Dawa Yankey?" At once I stood up and said, "I am sorry. It's I who delivered tea to Dawa Yankey." "What is your reason for interacting with Dawa Yankey? What had she given you? Did [she] give you a home, wealth, money? What is it?" "[She] did not give me anything. She said that her food was cold, so I delivered [hot tea]."

One held me here [clasps neck] and dragged [me] to prison. [I] was taken to prison. [Chinese soldiers] held [me] by the neck and hit and hit and hit [indicates on the chest]. [They] pulled [me] forward and smashed blows, pulled [me] back and smashed blows. [My] chest swelled so much [raises hands in front of chest]. That was an offence I was charged with. After being charged with this crime [I] was told, "You do not have to cook from tomorrow." I replied, "Thank you." Without me no one knew how to make a fire and cook. Then they held discussions. For around 10 days I was removed from cooking duty and then was reinstated as cook after all the people filed an application. That was my crime.

Q: How long did this situation go on for? How many months?

01:48:24

#37D: Me? I was in for only nine months.

Q: What happened after the nine months?

#37D: One day after nine months...[I] wondered if [I] was to be beaten. [I] thought [I] would be beaten. I went to the office. There [I] was asked, "What opinions do you have?" "I do not have any opinions," [I] answered. "Did you serve them well?" [I] was asked. [I] said that [I] had served well. "What kinds of work did you do from the age of 6 until 15-20?" [I] was questioned. I described the kinds of work [I] had done. "Did you used to go down the valley carrying salt?" [I] replied that [I] carried salt. [The Chinese] asked, "Did you feel good when you received extra rice from the other person or when [the barter] was done fairly?" [I] replied, "[I] felt happy when [I] received extra." "Your opinion is honest." It was left at that that day.

[I] am not sure if it was a week or three days later that [I] was asked, "Do you wish to return?" [I] replied that [I] wished to go back. "Are you hesitant?" "No, but [I] have work at home and wish to go back. If possible please allow [me] to go." As soon as I uttered this [the authority] said, "Go and tie up your beddings." It was immediate on that very day. [I] tied my beddings and went to a family and requested for some food and ate it. And then [I] walked day and night. A person no longer had any fear or hesitancy. [I] covered the 4-day journey in two days, walking day and night. When I reached home, my family members had escaped.

01:50:46

It is embarrassing to say but in the past...I went home but nobody was there. It was empty. Except for a family or two, everybody had left. It is funny but in the past when I was young, I had relationship with a girl that lived at the top of the valley. She came to give me some food. She asked [me] to join her and [I] did. The Chinese asked me to report when I was living with her. [The Chinese] said, "Should you have any problems, you can tell us." I had absolutely nothing, not even a [monetary note], absolutely nothing and nor did the woman. "Should you have problems you can come to us." I knew my situation in my mind. I thought...[whispers]. Whatever happens I must make my getaway.

There were many young people in our village that wanted someone to lead them whether it was to organize a party or for the youth to move here and there. Everybody relied upon me and asked [me] to become the leader. I was taking that responsibility earlier too. One day I was sent a letter [by the Chinese authority] that said, “Come. All your young men must come. All the young men and women must come.” When [a person is] at death’s door, the quality of food does not matter. [I announced to the group of young men and women,] “[I] have received such a letter. I have received such a message. The outcome could be good or bad for us. Whatever it is let us make merry.”

01:53:00

Saying that [we] should make merry, [we] had a party for a day. [I] organized a party for all the male and female friends. As the party was going on, a horseman came to deliver a letter saying that all young people must report. A letter was sent through the horseman. A person came there. It was around dusk when the person arrived. [I told the group of young men and women,] “Whether it is to face death or birth, you do not have to undergo it. If it is to face death, I shall die and if it is to face birth, I shall take birth.” Whether [the young person asked to report to the Chinese] happened to be your husband or your child, [he] had to go. Everyone cried saying that the children would be taken away. Everyone shed tears and wept a lot. I comforted them, “There is no need for you to cry.” We were living in the hill and they were in the valley, in the town of Kyidong in the valley.

Q: The Chinese?

#37D: Yes, [they] were in the valley. “There is no need for you to cry. You do not have to go up to the sky. You do not have to go into the ground. I shall face death. I shall take birth. I will go with you and just before we reach the valley, hide [you] in the mountain. [I] shall find out the reason for [our requested] presence. If there are vehicles, we should be determined to take flight. If there are vehicles, let us flee at once. If it is just a meeting, I shall come and get you.” I explained that to the people. Therefore, I hid them in a place about a mile away and proceeded. I advanced.

Q: Were [you] alone?

01:54:38

#37D: I went alone. [I] went and found that it was to perform some dances. There were some people from the villages that had come to perform. So I went back and told them, “It is not to take [us] away but to perform some dances. So you can come.” We performed two dances and everybody went back happily. And then the following day at around 5 o’clock [I] fled. [I] could reach the border.

Q: Did you get a vehicle at 5 o’clock?

#37D: Of course, not. How can one get a vehicle? [I] walked. There were no vehicles at all. [I] think [I] stayed for a month or two or three. Once again there was nothing to eat. It was an alien land and [I] lived in braided bamboo [structures] and it was hot. There was no food and then [I] went back once again.

Q: To Tibet?

#37D: [I] returned once again to Tibet.

Q: Did [you] stay in Nepal in the interim?

#37D: [I] stayed at the Nepal border.

Q: At the border?

01:56:06

#37D: Yes. At the border and then went back and stayed for 3-4 years. [I] think it was for a year or two. '61,'62, '63,'64...[I] think it was for over a year. And then [I] fled once again.

Q: [You] went back to Tibet and lived for a year?

#37D: Was it a year? I am not certain. I cannot recall.

Q: And then once again...

#37D: [I] thought whatever happens it is not practical to remain. I did some trading and to be frank, made quite a sum of money. [I] made some money and possessed a few cows and oxen. Nevertheless, [I] was not happy. I did not have any good friends or peace of mind. At every little sound, one had to open the door and look out. Though one had enough to eat, there was never any peace of mind. One day...a person I knew, an army officer asked where I was going.

Q: Chinese?

#37D: Chinese. They [Chinese soldiers] treated me well. One day he arrived at my home, looked around and said, "[Phuntsok Tashi]." [I] replied, "What?" "[The situation] is not stable. What is your opinion?" "Whether it's stable or not...we are friends. Whether it is stable or not, let us both of us eat a tasty meal and then I will take a decision. We are together, so let us eat a tasty meal," [I] said. He did not eat. He must have been aware. We had spent a lot of time together. He left and the next morning [I] drove two animals and fled. [I] made a getaway. Then at the border, [I] was appointed the representative of 501 people.

Q: You?

#37D: Yes, appointed as representative...

Q: Five hundred people?

01:58:23

#37D: Of 501 people. [I] was not only appointed as the representative but when there was no building to establish a school, [I] approached the Government of Nepal for permission

to stay there, to construct houses and to cut logs in the mountains. Orders were received to bring down logs from the mountains, construct houses and a school. Nine to 10 houses were constructed for the settlers. My wife's sibling was a soldier [in India] and he arrived to take us and that is how I came to be in India.

Q: What happened to your mother and your older brother?

02:03:18

#37D: My older sibling had fled when I was in the prison. [He] is in Hunsur [Karnataka, India].

Q: Where?

#37D: Hunsur.

Q: Hunsur?

#37D: Hunsur.

Q: In the south?

#37D: There is [a place] called Hunsur between Mundgod and Bangalore. It is pronounced as Hansur or Hunsur.

Q: There's one called Hunsur.

#37D: Yes, that is the one.

Q: I see. Near Bylakuppe [Tibetan Settlement in Karnataka]?

#37D: Yes, near Bylakuppe, which is near Gyumed Monastery.

Q: Did Mother also go with [your brother]?

02:03:49

#37D: Mother had passed away. Father had passed away. There was not anyone. Except for us siblings, all the older ones had passed away.

Q: Is there anything else you want to tell us about that we haven't covered?

#37D: What do you want?

Q: Is there anything else that you want to...any part of history?

#37D: It is not about what I want to say. I am here to speak about what you want me to talk about and [we] can leave out what is not required.

Q: I heard that you're a really good singer. So it would be really nice if you could share a song with us on camera. We'd really love to hear it if you like.

#37D: If asked to sing a song, there are many types of songs. There is one in praise of lamas, one in praise of leaders, a song of fun and enjoyment, a song of how the universe came into being and a song when you are happy. There are five types of songs.

Q: I think for enjoyment.

#37D: [Silent]

Q: Did they have any songs about the Chinese?

#37D: What?

Q: Were songs sung about the Chinese?

#37D: There were songs about the Chinese but [I] am not clear about them and people will surely tease. [I] am not clear.

Q: So a song for enjoyment? Maybe one of your favorite one?

#37D: I do not have any favorite songs. All the songs are good. What do you [want]? As I mentioned now there is one in praise of the lamas, one in praise of leaders, a song of enjoyment, and song of how the universe came into being long ago—of how the rivers came into being, how the forests came into being, how humans came into being; such a one is there.

Q: I think a love song?

02:07:06

#37D: [Laughs] Yes, there is.

Q: I don't know the love songs, so any one that you would like to...

#37D: The love song is mainly narrative and not tuneful. Among the love songs is one called *lusha* that is sung during weddings. That is a very common one. It is a common song. The love songs are words that are intoned face to face. Among songs there consists only five types, [that are] for lama, leaders, enjoyment, formation of the universe.

Q: So just a song for enjoyment, any one.

#37D: When one is enjoying?

Q: Yes.

#37D: A song of enjoyment is:

02:08:16-02:11:53

[Sings a song but words not discernible]

That is it.

Q: Thank you.

#37D: This is when birds are enjoying. There is another one when humans are enjoying.

Q: Thank you very much. It was really beautiful. Thank you so much for sharing the story. It was really interesting and I learned a lot from it.

END OF INTERVIEW