

Tibet Oral History Project

Interview #47 – Tinlay Dorjee
June 27, 2007

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TIBET ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

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INTERVIEW SUMMARY SHEET

1. Interview Number: #47
2. Interviewee: Tinlay Dorjee
3. Age: 73
4. Date of Birth: 1934
5. Sex: Male
6. Birthplace: Lingpar
7. Province: Dhotoe (Kham)
8. Year of leaving Tibet: 1960
9. Date of Interview: June 27, 2007
10. Place of Interview: House No. 37, Old Camp No. 4, Lugsung Samdupling Settlement, Bylakuppe, Mysore District, Karnataka, India
11. Length of Interview: 1 hr 57 min
12. Interviewer: Rebecca Novick
13. Interpreter: Tsering Dorjee
14. Videographer: Ronny Novick
15. Transcriber: Tenzin Yangchen



Biographical Information:

Born in Lingpar village in Gyego District, Tinlay Dorjee spent his early days tending cattle and collecting firewood for his family. Occasionally he had to do field work as a form of paying taxes or penalties to the Tibetan government.

After the Chinese arrived and claimed to be liberating the Tibetans, they ordered the villagers to attend lengthy evening meetings. He describes in detail how the Chinese segregated the Tibetan society and how the *sadhak* 'landlords' and *ngadhak* 'leaders' were subjected to *thamzin* 'struggle sessions.' Tinlay Dorjee was falsely accused of possessing a gun and relentlessly harassed during the night meetings. The Chinese instituted a policy called "Three Oppositions and Two Allowances" in which Tibetans no longer had to pay taxes or repay loans.

Tinlay Dorjee describes in detail the efforts of the *Chushi Gangdrug* guerillas, who were desperately trying to defend the Tibetans against the superior weapons of the Chinese. Both of Tinlay Dorjee's brothers, who were monks, decided to join the *Chushi Gangdrug*. Villagers supported the Resistance Force by offering food and supplies. When the *Chushi Gangdrug* were forced to flee to India, the villagers were left on their own under the Chinese occupation.

Topics Discussed:

Childhood memories, life under Chinese rule, Norbulingka defense, Chinese oppression, Chushi Gangdrug guerrillas, escape experiences, life as a refugee in India.

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Interviewer: Rebecca Novick

Interview Date: June 27, 2007

[Questions are asked by either interviewer or interpreter. In Interview #47, the interviewer directs questions to the interpreter, who then asks the questions of the interviewee.]

Q: So first of all, I'd like to find out more about his village Lingpar and can he describe his life growing up, his family life and what life was like in his village?

#47: The area I lived in Tibet was under Gyego District. The administration of the place where I was born was at Gyego District. There was a large monastery called Chapna Monastery. My village was known as Lingpar.

Q: How would he describe it to somebody who'd never been there? How would he describe it?

#47: First one must go to Chapna Monastery. The area was known by the name Chapna. That was in the early days; now it is different. Now it is called Chapna Chue while earlier it was Chapna Monastery. In Chapna, there were two divisions called Chapna Dhepa and Chapna Datsang. The one appointed by the Tibetan government was Dhepa. The District Administrator was called Dhepa, Chapna Dhepa. Then there was the Chapna Datsang, so there were two officers. The Dhepa was a leader and, along with Chapna [monastery], they had many tenants.

Q: So the place was known as Chapna and in Chapna, there were two divisions?

#47: I am talking about in the olden days. There was the Chapna Monastery, which is the Datsang. Then there was the Dhepa. That was separate and he was called Chapna Dhepa.

Q: Dhepa was the leader?

#47: He was a leader, a nobleman sent by the Tibetan government. My leader was at Gyego District, which I told you about earlier. Lingpar village came under Gyego District. Gyego District had to pay taxes to the Chapna Monastery.

Q: Could he describe the location of his village?

#47: Would you like the description of the present or earlier times?

Q: Of the earlier times.

#47: If one went from Lingpar, there was a place called Se-ngo. That was the estate of the Chapna Dhepa.

Q: Could he describe the area, what it looked like?

#47: The place where I lived was Lingpar. If one went down, there was Gyego District. If one went the other way, it was Se-ngo. That was westward. The other side was Gyego District and other villages like Nyalu and Ganglu. Lower down was Nyalu Shikha.

Q: Can he describe his family life? What was his family life like?

#47: In my family were my parents, elder sister and three brothers. I was the middle brother. My parents had four children.

Q: What was his family life like?

#47: We were farmers [working] for the head family [of the area] under Gyego District. We cultivated the fields. Much later my sister's daughter met a man and went to live separately at Tse, which is about 5 to 6 kilometers away. The place she went to live was Tse. My older brother left to join Gaden Monastery as a monk. Much later the younger one also became a monk at Gaden Monastery. I was the one to look after the home and farm. I married and took care of the house. I was a farmer.

Q: What are some of the strongest memories of his childhood when he thinks about his childhood?

#47: When I was young, I tended the cows, goats and sheep. I still think of those days of my life—where I went and where I lived.

Q: Did anything particular happen that he'd like to share with others?

#47: The Chinese carried out liberation. When I was escaping, a Chinese fired at me.

Q: What are the best memories as a child?

#47: As a child, I was tending the cows, goats and sheep. Other than that there was not much work. Children are children.

Q: Does he remember much from his childhood or does he not?

#47: When I was around the age of 12 or 13, at a time when one is on the border of being able to work or not work, we had to go to Gyego District for the payment of taxes. I have been there to work on many occasions.

Q: To pay off taxes?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: Yes, to pay off taxes.

Q: Through labor?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: Yes, through labor.

Q: To the Tibetan government?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: Yes, to that particular province, the local government.

Q: To the local Tibetan government?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: Yeah.

Q: He went to work for taxes?

#47: Yes, we had to work for taxes at the District. There was a penalty on cows; if a cow stepped on the crops, there was a penalty of one day's labor. One had to carry one's own food.

Q: Was it penalty or tax?

#47: There was a labor tax too.

Q: Why did he have the penalty labor?

#47: You had animals like goats, sheep, pigs or cows. If any of them escaped even for a little while, there was a day's labor penalty.

Q: If they escaped where?

#47: We had to go to work on the estate of the district.

Q: Why the penalty?

#47: We had to go there for the penalty as well as many times for the labor tax to the district. We could not escape that.

Q: I do not understand the penalty. Where if the cows entered were you penalized?

#47: If they entered the farm lands.

Q: Whose farm lands?

#47: Whoever's it may be, whether belonging to the citizens or the district.

Q: If his cow entered someone else's farm land?

#47: Yes, you were penalized by the district. The district has the power to penalize.

Q: What kind of labor?

#47: We had to work in the fields. There was someone there who allotted work. There was a supervisor. He made us work and supervised it.

Q: How old was he when he was doing this?

#47: I was on the borderline when I could work and not work. I was about 12 or 13 years old.

Q: Was it because his parents couldn't afford to pay the required tax?

#47: No, you did not pay in money. It was only through labor and you had to take your own food. We had to work from morning until evening.

Q: [To interpreter]: So let's back up a little bit. What is your understanding of what he is saying? There were some taxes required from the people to the local government?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: Taxes were not necessarily in the form of money. They had to work for it.

Q: They had to work, so they sent one family member?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: Yeah.

Q: So he was the family member designated to work for to pay off what the family owed?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: Yeah.

Q: How did he feel about this? Did he resent it?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: According to my knowledge, in Tibet the taxes will be in both forms. Sometimes you have to work for the local government and sometimes you have to pay some grains.

Q: His working for the taxes and penalties was because his family was poor or did everyone do the same?

#47: Everyone did that. There was a limit for the number of days you had to labor as taxes. As for the penalty, you only had to do it when you were penalized and not otherwise.

Q: Everyone had to do the tax labor?

#47: Everyone had to do the tax labor. There was a certain number of days, since we were not [regular] taxpayers. Those who paid [regular] taxes to the government were known as *telpa* ‘tax payers’ and they had to send one member of the family, either a son or a daughter, permanently to the district.

Q: The *telpa* were the rich people?

#47: The *telpa* had right to lands and houses given by the Tibetan government. On these [lands and houses] they had to pay a lot of taxes. Since they had more taxes to pay, they had to labor for the district. They had to give one person's [labor] to the district.

Q: Did they have an option of paying it in any other way or did they have to send a person? Could they pay it by money or some other way?

#47: That was the tax for the land and house. Since they were using the government land, they had to pay taxes.

Q: Could they pay in money or grains instead of sending a person?

#47: I don't think so. The district needed people to do the work. One had to send a person or if there was no one, one had to hire someone and send him.

Q: It was compulsory. You can't pay the money. They don't want money. Does he remember games he played with his brothers and sisters when he was a small child? What kind of games they played?

#47: When I was a child, during the day we used to go to gather *shingsa* ‘twigs’ in the woods. Our region was covered with forest. [We gathered] small dried sticks. In the morning all the children went to collect it. We took ropes and went into the forest. We carried home as much we were able to. In the evenings, we played. All the boys and girls of the neighborhood gathered and played.

Q: What kind of games did they play?

#47: We played many different games. We brought a stick and half [the children] stood on one side and half on the other side and we pulled at it [the stick] to test our strength. Just like a tug-of-war.

Q: They pulled at the stick?

#47: The game was first started like this. We had two main persons. One would be the gold side and the other the silver. Then all the children came in a line and each was asked whether he wanted to be on the gold side or the silver side. If he said he wanted to be on the

gold side, he would join me [if I was the main gold person] and if he said he wanted to join the silver side, he joined your [opponent's] group. So in this way the children were divided. Now there were two equal sides and so the stick was pulled. We called it the *gyukthengyab*.

Q: Did they hold the tip of the stick?

#47: Those two at the front held the ends of the stick—you on one side and me on the other. The rest held on to the waist bands [of the one in front]. In Tibet everyone wore *chupa* 'Tibetan dress/coat' and it was tied at the waist with *keru* 'a rope belt.' So, each one held the *keru* of the other [in front] and so on. It was the same on the other side and then we pulled. Everyone laughed and waited to see which side won. Children liked this game very much. The healthier among the children held on to it [the stick].

Q: Where was he, in the gold or the silver?

#47: That was at random, but I had stood many times in the gold group.

Q: Did he win or not?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: It kept on changing every day.

Q: Did the children ever sing songs or anything like that?

#47: The little children did not know the whole songs until they were older.

Q: Does he remember any songs?

#47: Songs? I used to sing. Should I say the lyrics?

Q: He can sing it or say the lyrics.

#47: I will sing songs of different regions of Kongpo, not just Kongpo particularly. Is that okay?

Q: Yes.

#47: [Sings a song.] That's one stanza. [Laughs.]

Q: It is very good. That was so good.

#47: Shall I sing a song of the real Kongpo region?

Q: Oh, great!

#47: [Sings a song.] Thank you. That was the first stanza. [Sings the next line.] Thank you. [Laughs.] That was a Kongpo song.

Q: What situation would he sing these songs and what would they be doing when they were singing these songs?

#47: These were sung right from olden times. The first song was like a *chang-shay* [a song sung when people were drinking *chang* 'home-brewed beer']. The later song was sung and danced to in row formations in front of the leaders, who would be sitting there. That was like a [song of] praise.

Q: When he was doing the labor as a young boy, how much was he working? How many hours, how many days?

#47: We had to work very long [hours]. We had to go around 7 o'clock and reach the site when the sun rose. We worked until the sun set in the evening. The time must be around 6 o'clock in the evening. It was just before night fell. When we reached back home, it was night and that was how much we had to work.

Q: No break?

#47: We carried food from our homes. At around 9 o'clock we had breakfast. We called it *shoto* in Kongpo.

Q: Did he work everyday of the week?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: They will call if your turn comes.

Q: So how did he feel about that? Did he feel like he'd rather be a monk like his brothers? How did he feel about working this way?

#47: That was your destiny. You did not think. Whatever tax you had to pay, you had to go pay at whichever district. There was nothing to feel sad about. When two sons of the family were already monks, I could not become a monk. I had to look after the home.

Q: How many years did he do that for? How long did he do that for?

#47: I did that until 1959. Until 1959, until Lhasa was lost.

Q: What happened then? He can keep going. Can he describe what happened in 1959? How did his life change?

#47: Until 1959, the power was with the Tibetan government. We [the Tibetan army] had fought the Chinese and the Tibetan government lost the war. When the war was lost, they [the Chinese] started the liberation. After the liberation, they segregated the [Tibetan community/society] into different classes. When they did that, they classified us and three other families of Lingpar in the middle farming class. Those who did not have a good

livelihood were in the *ulpong* 'poor class.' When they carried out the liberation, they did not give us anything; nor did they ask us to give them anything.

The worst was after the liberation, when they called a lot of meetings. Every night there were unending meetings, running into four to five hours. In the day, we went to work and when we returned in the evening, they would sound the conch, which was the call for meeting. When we attended, it was the Chinese officials who were carrying out the liberation and the meeting went on and on and on and it was never-ending.

In the meanwhile, my elder brother, who was a monk at Gaden Monastery, used to come to trade in Kongpo during the better times. He had a pistol with him. His companion had a rifle. In the summer they came to Kongpo to trade and in winter, just before the Gaden Ngamchoe Festival, they went back [to the Ganden Monastery in Lhasa]. They [the Chinese] told me that one of the guns was left behind with me. The Chinese officials forcefully said that. I replied, "My elder brother has taken his gun with him. He did not leave it with me. I do not have a gun." However much I tried to clear myself, it was not possible. Again during the next meetings, they brought up the matter. They said, "Where is the gun? You have to hand it over to the government." So in this way, I was put in a dangerous situation. During the segregation I was classified in the middle farming class. I thought that they would do no good in the long run and I did not like the Chinese.

Now the times were chaotic. From Kham, Khampas [people from Kham] who had fought in Dhoday and were unable to resist the Chinese were escaping into Kongpo. Many had arrived in Kongpo. They stayed with us and I helped them. In Camp Number 4 [in Bylakuppe, India], there are many people of Dhege I had helped. They did not have houses and had set up tents in open grounds. They had come driving along many *dzomo* 'female animal bred from a yak and a cow,' *dri* 'femal yak' and horses. We were settled there and owned houses and lands. We had plenty of vegetables and grains. I formed contacts with them. Then the Chinese came to know that those were people who had fought them [the Chinese] in Kham and escaped. They [the Chinese] wanted to capture them. At that time, the Chinese had not done anything [bad] to the locals, except for the liberation. When they first started the liberation they had what was called "Three Oppositions and Two Allowances." That was how they did it.

Q: What was the liberation? Did they say that they didn't have to work for the taxes?

#47: They banned the labor tax and repayment of loans. The name was "Three Oppositions and Two Allowances."

Q: What was the "Three Oppositions"?

#47: We were to subject them to *thamzin* 'struggle sessions.'

Q: Who, the officials?

#47: Yes, them and the *sadhak* ‘landowners’ and *ngadhak* ‘leaders’ of the earlier times. That was called the "Three Oppositions." The "Two Allowances" were that one did not have to repay old loans—either money, grains or whatever you had to repay could be stopped. The Chinese gave it the name "Three Oppositions and Two Allowances" during the liberation.

Q: What else would happen during these meetings?

#47: There was this thing called the "Three Oppositions and the Two Allowances" during the liberation. There were people prior to 1959 who were paupers and did not possess anything. They had all become leaders, those beggars. They made complaints against the [people who were] earlier *sadhak* and *ngadhak*. They [the beggars] complained how bad they were and how the time had come to oppose them, and from that day, their [the beggars’] “iron hat” was removed. They [the beggars] opposed them [the rich and influential class].

Q: Did the Chinese say that?

#47: It was the Chinese officials and our people who had joined the Chinese, those beggars.

Q: The beggars were appointed as leaders?

#47: They were appointed as leaders and they inflicted sufferings on us. The meetings were unending and they [the beggars] were very voluble. The meetings were very long. First they would say, "I do not have much to say, just a little bit" and when they started talking, it was unending. They spoke for hours on end about how good the Chinese were, how bad the old system was and how the *sadhak* and *ngadhak* had made them suffer.

Q: How did he feel about what was going on? How did he feel about what they were saying against the landlords?

#47: I was helpless though I was angry. Even I was falsely accused—they were saying that I owned a gun when I did not. My older brother was a trader though he was a monk of the Gaden Monastery. The monks of the monasteries did a lot of trading. In summer they came to Kongpo bringing goods from Lhasa and Kalimpong. They transported the goods on two to three horses and traded in Kongpo in the summer, spending four to five months there.

When Gaden Ngamcho [a religious festival] was nearing in around the start of winter, they returned to Gaden Monastery. It was similar with [monks of] Sera and Drepung Monasteries. They [the Chinese] claimed that my brother's gun was with me and that I had to hand it over to the government. I had replied, “I told you during the evening meeting that I do not have the gun. He has taken his gun with him. It is not in my hands. He did not leave it with me.” But by explaining like so, I could not convince them. Again during the next meeting, the same thing would be brought up. And again the following meeting and in the end they would have captured me. They were preparing for that.

Q: Did they beat him?

#47: They did not beat me but they said it very forcefully. It was like I was not allowed to say that I did not have it [the gun]. That was how it was. Shall I narrate about how the *sadhak* and *ngadhak* were captured by the Chinese in Kongpo?

Q: What happened to his parents?

#47: They did not do anything to my parents. When the meetings were going on there [in our village], Lhasa was lost. My two brothers were at Gaden Monastery and they had gone to Norbulingka to fight the Chinese. They said that the Chinese were moving in tanks and there was no way the monks could fight them. Except for a few guns, most of the monks had only knives. They went to help at the Norbulingka in Lhasa, but the Chinese moved in tanks and there was no way they could fight the Chinese. There no way even to escape because if they ran in the open ground, they were pursued.

Behind the Norbulingka there was a swamp. They jumped into that and the tanks did not follow them. They couldn't fight the Chinese and in desperation, the monks returned to Gaden Monastery. They went back, packed—at that time the Chinese and Tibetans were fighting—and went towards Lhoka. My brothers reached India.

Q: When the Chinese first came and said, "You don't have to pay back the loans, you don't have to work for the rich people," people must have been happy at first. Were they? Were they happy when the Chinese told them that they did not have to pay back their loans...they did not have to work?

#47: Those paupers who had debts to pay were very happy. They would say, "Everyone must come tonight and dance in grateful thanks." That was like an opposition [to the rich class].

Q: The landlords and the tax collectors, were they abused at all?

#47: They were subjected to *thamzin*. There was a person called Thamnyen Sangay Dorji at Thamnyen. He was from a very rich family in lower Kongpo. The *Chushi Gangdrug* Volunteer Force arrived to fight the Chinese. The *Chushi Gangdrug* were at Kongpo Baka. There was a wealthy family named Baka Chungdhak. The Baka Chungdhak family members had surrendered to the Chinese and all of them had left for the Chinese office at Phu. Their servants, house and estate were there. The *Chushi Gangdrug* came there and since the family had left to join the Chinese, they were angry. So they stayed at their house. It was a very wealthy family, the Baka Chungdhaks. They [the *Chushi Gangdrug*] did quite well in the war. If not for the Chinese entering the belly of the hill and under the ground, they succeeded in not showing themselves out in the open.

Q: The *Chushi Gangdrug*?

#47: Yes, the *Chushi Gangdrug* made the Chinese fear to venture out.

Q: Were the *ngadhak* and *sadhak* subjected to *thamzin*?

#47: Yes, they were. I thought I would gradually relate that. It happened that the *Chushi Gangdrug* had partly harmed them. The *Chushi Gangdrug* arrived and we had received them. After the fighting was over, they would leave. [However] the *sadhak* and *ngadhak* of the region had to live there. Then they were really constricted [by the Chinese]. It was partly because they were rich, which brought on punishment, and partly because of their contact with the *Chushi Gangdrug*.

[Tape change]

Q: So it wasn't really that hard then, if it was just once or twice a month.

[Interpreter to interviewer]: Yeah.

Q: For the labor tax, did you have to go everyday?

#47: We didn't have to go everyday. It was only occasionally. There was a particular time according to the custom. We were a poor family. In Lhasa you had something called the *moyen* where a small family lived under a wealthy family. We were like that. I told you that the *telpa* had to go everyday.

Q: *Telpa* were those who had houses and lands given by the government.

#47: Yes, those who had houses and lands. They had to go everyday to the district. Even among them, there were different kinds of families.

Q: Did he have any personal dealings with the members of *Chushi Gangdrug*?

#47: I did not join the Force. A group of families had to send one man and so we collected money and hired someone to go. We readied a horse, a man, and clothes for him, and we sent him.

Q: Did any come into his house? Did his parents have to look after them?

#47: That applied to the whole of Kongpo, not just us. Every region had to send someone to the force. If you were a Khampa, there were different regions. Those who lived in Kongpo also had to adhere to that. If one was able to go oneself that was best. If not, you had to hire someone and send him.

Q: One had to hire someone from the home?

#47: No, you had to look for a bachelor who was willing to go. You had to search for someone who said he was willing to go. We had to make preparations for him. The *Chushi*

Gangdrug were building an army camp at Kongpo Baka and the person had to be sent there. You would call it “defense” in India.

Q: They would come and stay in their house or they would just bring them?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: They paid the supplies and everything and then they joined the *Chushi Gangdrug*.

Q: Then they would join? He is talking about people he knows?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: If somebody wanted to join the *Chushi Gangdrug*...

Q: My question actually was: did they come to his house? Did they stay in his parents' house?

#47: No, we made preparation of a horse, a man and everything, and then we had to offer them at the army camp at Baka. It applied to the whole of Kongpo and not just us alone. We had to send a soldier.

Q: Did people think the *Chushi Gangdrug* were heroes or were they afraid of them like they were afraid of the Chinese?

#47: The *Chushi Gangdrug* were considered very courageous at that time. The *Chushi Gangdrug* were considered like the men of Ling [legendary figure in Tibetan history]. If the Chinese were on the ground [meaning, if they came face to face with the *Chushi Gangdrug* men] the *Chushi Gangdrug* were thought to be invincible. They could kill the Chinese with swords and guns. Stories were told about them being like the Ling. The *Chushi Gangdrug* commander was Andrug Gonpo Tashi. He was the main person of the *Chushi Gangdrug*. Then there were leaders in different areas but the main person, as a sponsor and commander, was him, Andrug Gonpo Tashi.

Q: Can he try to describe what happened to him and maybe if can just start talking, like doesn't wait for me to ask questions, from then until he left. If he could just—I just wonder if he can get into more of a rhythm and just tell us what happened to his life from this point to when he left Tibet, and don't wait for me to ask questions. Just try and tell the story.

#47: Andrug Gonpo Tashi was the commander of the *Chushi Gangdrug*. At Baka the main leader was Bachung Pon. The one who came to that area was Bachung Pon. The other leaders who were in Kongpo were Lama Chodak Gyatso, Nyitri Adha Lhawang and Gaeshingkhong Jola Pema Tsewang. Those were the higher-ups in the *Chushi Gangdrug* at Kongpo.

There was this rich man called Thamnyen Sangay Dorji. At that time the *Chushi Gangdrug* were very famous and did not let the Chinese live above ground. They had to enter into the belly of the hill. Thinking that they [the *Chushi Gangdrug*] would be able to continue this until the end, Thamnyen Sangay Dorji, the sponsor, said, "For three years you must defend this region. If you can do that I will provide for you." He committed to being the sponsor to

the *Chushi Gangdrug* for three years; but the Chinese, at first when they could not defeat the *Chushi Gangdrug*, they entered into the belly of the hill. They had dug into the depth of the hills. All the Chinese went in there and did not venture out. The *Chushi Gangdrug* went to every place where there were Chinese army camps, even to the ones in the nearby villages, but there were no Chinese to be seen.

At one point, the *Chushi Gangdrug* were very powerful. People thought they would achieve something. The Kongpos had hopes and requested them to stay for three years and they would be provided for. Likewise there was Dekyi Khangsar and many wealthy families in Kongpo.

When the Chinese readied a huge army, Lhasa was defeated. When Lhasa was lost, all the [Chinese] army got together and struck Kongpo. Then they [the *Chushi Gangdrug*] were not able to withstand it. There was a large river in the front [of the village], called Yagyab Tsangpo, and a boat. We took away the boat to a distance of two days' journey and made it impossible for the Chinese to come. However, the Chinese, those who defeated Lhasa, arrived in Kongpo to strike at the *Chushi Gangdrug* army camp at Baka. When they came to the river, they used rubber boats; they did not need the boat [which the local people had taken away]. A whole lot of Chinese troops arrived on the other side of the river!

Q: Rubber boats?

#47: Rubber boats which could hold eight to nine people. Everyone was equipped with one. They used that on the water and crossed into Chapna. The [*Chushi Gangdrug*] army at Baka retreated. A little away from Chapna was Thekchenling on a hill top. The *Chushi Gangdrug* fired from this side, and the Chinese army from the other, and they fought for quite a while. Cavalries from the *Chushi Gangdrug* force at Baka arrived and while the army fought, the horses were held at a place called Thagashuno. There was a large river running in the center and the Chinese fired from one side and the *Chushi Gangdrug* from the other as they fought.

At first, when the Chinese arrived, there were no *Chushi Gangdrug* men in sight. So they relaxed and unsaddled. The Chinese troops were very tired, having fought many days and nights in Lhasa. They kept away their things and started washing their clothes as there was water nearby. At that point the *Chushi Gangdrug* moved in stealthily and killed 30-40 Chinese who were washing clothes there. Then the Chinese army readied themselves and fought. We were in Chapna. There was shelling and firing. The Gyego District leader sounded the conch for us. After fighting for sometime the *Chushi Gangdrug* could not hold on and they escaped on horseback. Then we [the villagers] had to ready ourselves for the Chinese. The *Chushi Gangdrug* were gone. To prepare for the Chinese, the regional leader sounded the conch for us to assemble. He said we had to ready grass and such for the Chinese.

Q: What happened to him?

#47: I was on the way to the field to plough. It was around eight in the morning. I had my two oxen and plough as was the custom in Kongpo. I was walking towards my field and as I came close to it, I could hear someone from my home calling out, Tinlay, Tinlay—my name is Tinlay Dorjee. I looked back and he said, "Come back. The Chinese are coming." The Chinese had crossed the river in rubber boats. On our side were sandy grounds. They were coming like ants on the sandy area. I was called back and there was no thought of ploughing. I went home.

Some of us families went to the hills. We carried a pot of *chang* and some *tsampa* 'flour made from roasted barley,' and we fled into the woods. We stayed for sometime in the woods and then we heard the sound of conch by the Gyego District asking us to return and assemble. When we went down, we learned that the *Chushi Gangdrug* had lost the war. The area was full of Chinese troops. Now we had to prepare to serve the Chinese. Earlier we were doing it for the *Chushi Gangdrug*, whether they asked for grass, men or whatever. The *Chushi Gangdrug* couldn't withstand the Chinese and had left the place. The place was full of Chinese troops. The Chinese troops were followed by their officials, the peaceful ones.

The *sadhak*, *ngadhak* and district officers had to hand over guns, knives or whatever weapons they possessed. They [the Chinese] said, "Nothing will be done to you. Are there any rebels here? If there are, tell us. We will not do anything to the farmers. So stay quietly in your own homes. If you have knives or guns, bring them to us." That's what they said.

Q: You came down from the hill?

#47: Yes, we came down from the hill because the district officer sounded the conch. We had to come down when the conch was sounded. They [the Chinese] didn't do anything to us. They were asking if there were rebels. The *Chushi Gangdrug* were called that, in Tibetan. They asked us to reveal if there were rebels. We told them that the rebels were gone and there were none.

Now Thamnyen Sangay Dorji and those who helped the *Chushi Gangdrug* were in serious trouble. For one, they were *sadhak*, and besides that, they had contacts with the *Chushi Gangdrug* and had said that they would bear their expenses. When the Chinese carried out the liberation, gradually the *sadhak* and *ngadhak* of Kongpo were told to attend meetings at the Chinese army camp at Phu. Initially the meetings were genuine. They [*sadhak* and *ngadhak*] went to attend the meetings and after a few days they could come home. Later they were told that they couldn't go back home, that they had to stay with the host family [in Phu] and that they were not allowed to return to their homes. Their wives and family members had to take food to them. So whether it was the family's father or son, whoever was the more capable one was detained there by the Chinese. They were not allowed to come back and were kept at Phu.

Q: Were they detained at the Chinese army camp?

#47: They were not imprisoned in the Chinese army camp, but they could seek a host family to stay with in that area. They had to stay with the host family and attend meetings during the day. In the evening they had to return to the host family. They were not allowed to return to their homes. That was how they conducted the meetings at first. Then later, they gradually tightened the noose and segregated the community. They differentiated on the basis of offense. They asked, "What did you do for the *Chushi Gangdrug*? What help did you extend to the *Chushi Gangdrug*? Which person did you send?" They didn't ask such questions to the poor people; it was to the *sadhak* and *ngadhak* of Kongpo. Thamnyen Sangay Dorji suffered a lot then. He had declared that he would provide [for the *Chushi Gangdrug*] for three years.

Q: Did he ever consider joining *Chushi Gangdrug*?

#47: No, I did not. My two brothers had joined the *Chushi Gangdrug* from Gaden Monastery. There was nobody in the family and I was the only one to take care of the house.

Q: So then what happened? Can he please continue to tell us?

#47: Then the Kongpo nobles were made to admit to their crimes. "What did you do for the *Chushi Gangdrug*?" Meetings were held in huge houses. Then they had to admit "I did this and that for the *Chushi Gangdrug*." They had to speak truthfully for there was no way you could succeed if you did not speak the truth. You were punished accordingly. Thamnyen Sangay Dorji had declared that he would provide for the *Chushi Gangdrug* for three years. He was fined 2,000 *khel* of grains. They told him, "For what you have done, your penalty is 2,000 *khel* of grains." He was let off; he was not put in prison. He was very rich. He held the estates of Thamnyen and Lusha.

Q: How much is a *khel* of grains? How much is it compared to the kilogram?

#47: A horse load is three *khel* of grains; it must be about 50 kilograms. A *khel* might be 10 kilograms. So 2,000 *khel* was the penalty for declaring he would feed the *Chushi Gangdrug* for three years. So he believed [the Chinese]. He was rich and 20 mules were loaded and driven by his men. The grains were to be delivered to the Chinese army camp. It was two days' journey from his home. He delivered it there. Once the 2,000 *khel* of grains were delivered, once the penalty they [the Chinese] had imposed was met, they captured him. What was the benefit? Then he was put in prison.

Q: What happened to his brothers?

#47: They are dead. They passed away after coming to India.

Q: In India, after coming into exile?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: Yeah.

Q: What happened to him then at that point? What did he experience?

#47: After Lhasa was defeated, my brothers went to Lhoka from Gaden Monastery. From Lhoka, they went to India with the *Chushi Gangdrug* Force. My brother's roommate at Gaden Monastery returned to Chapna in Kongpo. When we asked what had happened, he said that he was not taken along with them [my brothers] and that he was left behind at the Monastery. He said that they had gone to India along with the *Chushi Gangdrug* force from Lhoka. We were living in Kongpo and my brothers had gone away. The Chinese were accusing me of having a gun. So I didn't want to live under the Chinese.

Once I went on *tha-wu* for the Chinese. To go on *tha-wu* meant that all the villagers who owned horses had to provide them to the Chinese officials who were traveling to upper Kongpo. *Tha-wu* meant providing horses for the Chinese officials to ride. So I took my horse as well as some belonging to two or three other families of my village. They [the Chinese officials] had to reach Miling. We dropped them off at the place they had to reach in Miling and we were about to return home with the bare horses.

A Chinese woman asked me to come to the office. There were many of us there who had come with horses and from the group, I was told to come. I was taken into the office and poured a cup of *chintang* 'Chinese black tea.' They sweetly told me, "The horses of Miling are not available now as they have gone somewhere else. The officials you have brought along [on horses] must be dropped off at Tashi Rabten from here. You must lead [the villagers with horses] and drop them off at Tashi Rabten," a large monastery at upper Kongpo.

Q: Were the horses given to them or just hired?

#47: It was *tha-wu*. Our horses were lent to them. They rode our horses and we had to drop them off at their destination. Then we could return with the bare horses. However, we were not allowed to return and I heard the official, the woman who was a Chinese *dheetang*, call me inside. I was spoken to sweetly and given a cup of tea. I was shocked because it was a long distance [from Miling to Tashi Rabten]. I said, "That cannot be done because I have only one horse and all the rest are sent by others. My companions will not agree to it. Our horses have no grass and grains. We have to return. Please do not be angry. We cannot continue."

She became furious. There was a Chinese interpreter, a Bapa [person from the region of Ba], who said, "You should be imprisoned. Looking at you and at the way you talk, you seem like a *sadhak*. When we first reached there [Miling], we took our food sitting in the yard. The Chinese interpreter had been watching what we were eating. He said, "What food did you eat earlier? You ate the food of a *sadhak*. You have the shade of a *sadhak*. You refused our request of dropping us at Tashi Rabten."

I became extremely angry. I thought I must never live under the Chinese. For one, my brothers had already reached India. Secondly they were causing me trouble. He [the interpreter] had implied that I should be imprisoned. Where we were, at some distance

away were a stone fence and a dilapidated house. In it were 15-16 prisoners. I saw them being led out to go to work. Two soldiers with guns went along with them. I was shocked. I thought they would do that to me too. They were angry at me and said that I should be imprisoned like them. I pleaded with them and we were let off to go back grudgingly. We could go back. Then I handed over the horses to the owners and went to my home. I have done such things.

Q: Which direction [was Tashi Rabten Monastery]?

#47: It was at upper Kongpo, towards Chapka. There were three large monasteries in Kongpo: Dimo Monastery, Chapna Monastery and Tashi Rabten.

Q: What was the journey like? Did he have dangerous moments escaping?

#47: I went back [home], where we were farmers. Much later all the farmers of Lingpar were formed into a cooperative by the Chinese. We lived in the cooperative system in accordance with the Chinese way. There was a Chinese song, “*She ko du yu ha, she ko du yu ha;*” we always sang “*She ku du yu.*”

Q: You were made to work in a commune?

#47: Yes, they made us work in a commune, one whole village; like if it is Camp Number 3 [in Bylakuppe, India], the people had to work in the fields in a commune. All the people had to gather and work together at one place.

About five families had a talk about escaping to India. Before we could escape, the Chinese were gradually increasing their cruelty. I don't know whether our secret leaked out, but we thought we were going to be captured. We could not leave at the appointed time. So we fled into the hills. The wives and children were left at home and we were in the hills. Our area was towards Lhoka. If we went a little further, there were [more] hills and forests about a 100 or 200 meters away. We climbed up there, leaving our family there [in the village]. We went in search for a way to go to India.

One had to go through Loyul. We thought of escaping but that day we couldn't carry the provisions. We had made preparations for escaping. We had readied the provisions but we hadn't had time to take those. We came down [to the village] from the forest at night. My late father was with us at that time. I went to my home and took all the provisions. My mother was there at home. I send those [provisions] with my father to our colleagues in the forest. I told him to go there. I and my companion went to another family; we had to go to two families [to get provisions]. One family had known about it [our coming] and came to deliver the provisions for us to take. The other family didn't bring it. I requested that they [those who came to deliver the provisions] tell them [the family who didn't bring the provisions] to hurry up with it. I don't know why, but the dogs were barking around that part. They were barking as if people were moving about, but I didn't pay attention. The dogs were barking a lot but we didn't take notice.

The family who didn't come to deliver it caused us some harm. I thought, "Perhaps they went to deliver it from behind my house. Why haven't they brought it?" I told my companion to wait near the provisions [of the first family]. It was night and the moon was very bright. As I was walking by, from atop a mound someone said, "Hey, Sangay Dorji, where are you going?" He stopped me. It was a Chinese official [Tibetan appointed as a leader by the Chinese]. Earlier we were friends and he was a pauper. Later he was given a gun and became a Chinese official. His name was Tsewang.

When he asked where I was going, I looked up and saw that it was him. He had with him an English-made short barrel rifle. He was said to have a very good aim. I thought, "Now things have gone awry." I had with me a sword. For protection I had worn a *kadam choten* 'holy stupa' and a talisman. I hoped that they would protect me. The bad part was I had drunk some *chang* with a family earlier as we hadn't had tea the whole day. I drank it with the first family where I went [to get the provisions] for I was thirsty. I had mixed *tsampa* in it and drank and I was tipsy. I thought, "Now this is not good. He is a good shot." He said, "Will you surrender or not?" I didn't say anything. There was another man who took a few steps forward.

He [Tsewang] came towards me from one side. I was determined all along that I would not surrender to them even if I was killed. I thought, "Now is the time." I wet my palm by spitting into it and drew my sword. Just as I drew my sword, he fired at me. We were very close, like the distance between the cameraman and I. After the shot, I couldn't walk. I was sort of feeling light. I felt certain brightness. I didn't feel that I took the shot. I wondered why it was that I could not walk. All was quiet.

After firing the shot, he had run away. The other person also was not to be seen. The shot didn't hit me. Then I went down to where my companion was. He was sitting there beside the *tsampa* and a *khel* of butter. Then we both went up [the hill]. I was not hit and I thought that was it. The next day in the daylight, I saw that the shot had hit the empty scabbard after I had drawn my sword. The scabbard had a hole in the center. My colleagues said, "What happened to your scabbard?" I asked what it was. They said, "There's a hole in it."

He must have aimed at my middle but I had moved a little to the side. I was fortunate. The scabbard had a hole in the center. I thought, "Last night he fired his gun here." It was said that if the sword was not drawn, I would have been hurt. I had already drawn my sword with full determination. I thought, "Let him shoot or do whatever," and drew my sword. I was determined never to surrender to the Chinese. I was a young man then. I was 25 years old.

Q: That was very good karma.

#47: I think my time to die had not come then. He had shot right at my chest. He was a very good shot. I was fortunate.

Q: What happened to his finger of his left hand?

#47: Nothing happened to it.

Q: Where did he go first of all when he came to India? Where did he first come to?

#47: First we came to Tuting. We came through Ushala, which was near Thamnyen Sangay Dorji's estate. There was this mountain pass we had to cross from Lhoka. We came to Tuting. Tuting has an airport; Tuting in Assam.

Q: Did he join his brothers in India?

#47: First, we reached Tuting, and at Tuting there was an Indian reception center. There was an Indian office and they made documents for us. They took us to the Monbari airport by flight. The capital was called Dibrugarh and the airport, Monbari. And then we came to Balingpong, Assam.

Q: Did he reunite with his brothers? Yes or no?

#47: When we came to Balimpong, we met many people [Tibetans] who had come a year or a few months earlier. There were monks from Gaden and Drepung Monasteries. I looked for my brothers who were monks of the Nyara House of Gaden Monastery. I looked for the Gaden Nyara monks. They said that first they [the monks] were all at Missamari, but after the division they did not know where they [the brothers] had gone. It was difficult for me to find them. My younger brother was small. Later I came to know that he had gone to Mandi, near Lake Rewalsar [in Himachal Pradesh]. He was sent to an iron factory.

Q: How did you meet?

#47: Some said that people were sent there. My older brother had joined the army [*Chushi Gangdrug* volunteers] at Mustang. It is in Nepali territory and towards Tibet. He had gone there. My two brothers were separated. The monks said the younger one might be at Mandi, but I couldn't locate him when I was in Balingpong for six to seven months. Then I came to Mysore [Bylakuppe]. I had enlisted in the settlement group. Officials from the [Tibetan] government came to make a list. His Holiness the Penor Rinpoche and his people had heard that the Bylakuppe settlement was good. So where they enlisted, I did. Then I reached the Bylakuppe settlement. So here I am living like this.

Q: How did you meet your brothers?

#47: As soon as I reached Bylakuppe—at that time I did not know how to write Tibetan—I asked someone to write [letters] for me. I sent the letters to different places because some said he might be at Dalhousie and some said he might be at Mandi. I sent [letters] to Dalhousie and to Mandi. One was received by my younger brother in Mandi. I couldn't write to the older one because it [*Chushi Gangdrug* movement] was a secret. The younger one received the letter wherein I had mentioned that his parents and relatives had reached India. He was very happy.

My father became ill at Balingpong, I don't know why. He had problems with his legs in the Indian heat. My mother too became ill. They were brought in the bus to the Bylakuppe settlement when they were ill. I was also sick; I was not healthy. Many Tibetans were sick. When we reached the city of Mysore, the authorities said that all the sick should stay in the hospital and that they shouldn't go further. My father was left at the K.R. Hospital in Mysore. My niece, mother and I came here [to Bylakuppe]. We lived in tents and went to see our father at the hospital from time to time.

At that time, my brother in Mandi had received the letter. I wrote to him saying that [our] father was dead and that [our] mother was dying. I wrote that in the letter. He came. He was young at that time. He arrived but there was nothing to do. He sat crying for about half an hour and we were also crying. We had faced so many problems in trying to meet each other.

He was in an iron fabrication school. He was not accepted into the regular school because he was over the age limit. He was admitted into the iron fabrication school, which he joined. He brought some papers with designs of iron fabrications. We stayed together in the tent for two to three weeks and then I sent him back.

A few years later, the Chakrata army unit was established. I wrote to him saying that he should continue with his training at the school and that he should not join the army, and that I too would not join it. But the next year we received a letter from him saying that he was in the army. So since he was in the army, I too joined the army at Chakrata.

I stayed in the army and there was an Intelligence Bureau unit. A person from Dayab [a region in eastern Tibet] named Lobsangla was working at the Intelligence Bureau. They [army colleagues] said he could get a letter to my older brother. He had some relatives, and four of us took a photograph together and along with a letter, we gave it to the Intelligence Bureau secretary, Lobsangla. It reached my older brother correctly at Mustang.

Q: That was in Nepal? Was he a *Chushi Gangdrug* guerrilla?

#47: That [Mustang] was in Nepali territory and, yes, he was a *Chushi Gangdrug* guerrilla. That was the main *Chushi Gangdrug* army camp. A few years back they [the ex-guerrillas] had high hopes that they would be rehabilitated in the United States. He was among them and it was said that they would be taken there [to the USA] first, those guerillas of Mustang.

Q: Did he ever find out anything about his sister?

#47: My sister is living here in Camp Number 3. She is the one I told you lived separately from us. She was living with us at that time.

Q: Tell him we are really happy that he was able to reunite with his family.

#47: [Nods.]

Q: Did he mention Penor Rinpoche?

[Interpreter translates some of the earlier statements he'd left out.]

Q: So how long did he spent in the army?

#47: I was in the army for eight years.

Q: Did they fight at all? Did he see any action?

#47: We were sent to Tuting in Assam to fight. After we had trained for about two years, it was in the year '65 that we were sent to fight the Chinese. In '62 the Chinese attacked India, which suffered heavy losses. In '65 they [India and China] were almost at war and we were sent to the border urgently. We went to Tuting, from where we had come earlier [during our flight from Tibet].

Q: He didn't get to fight?

#47: The war was about to begin at Tuting, either the next day or the day after. But when we reached there, gradually it died down because the Chinese did not fight.

Q: In Nepal?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: In Assam, Tuting. They were sent to [the place] from where they had come earlier.

Q: How does he feel about the Chinese now all these years later?

#47: The Chinese are not doing it [giving freedom to the Tibetans]. His Holiness the Dalai Lama is seeking freedom through non-violence but they are not giving it. What can we do? I am angry but helpless.

Q: What advice does he have for the new generation of Tibetans who have never seen Tibet? All they know about Tibet is what the elders tell them. What advice does he have for them?

#47: What can I say? It is for certain that we cannot defeat the Chinese through war, whether in terms of population or arms. So we have to seek help from the world and wage an oral war. We have to try to wage an oral war against the Chinese. The younger generation must try to get the education that the Chinese have, whether it is the Chinese, Tibetan or English languages. They must be highly educated. So whether it is necessary to seek help from the United Nations Organization or seek a way out ourselves, the children must study hard. We cannot face the Chinese with arms. They possess very good modern weapons.

END OF INTERVIEW