

Tibet Oral History Project

Interview #70 – Tashi Topgyal
July 6, 2007

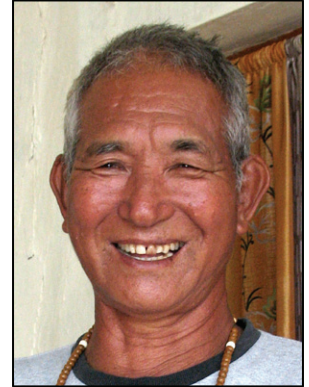
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TIBET ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

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INTERVIEW SUMMARY SHEET

1. Interview Number: #70
2. Interviewee: Tashi Topgyal
3. Age: 70
4. Date of Birth: 1937
5. Sex: Male
6. Birthplace: Shopo
7. Province: Dhotoe (Kham)
8. Year of leaving Tibet: 1962
9. Date of Interview: July 6, 2007
10. Place of Interview: House No. 4, New Camp No. 10, Dickey Larsoe Settlement, Bylakuppe, Mysore District, Karnataka, India
11. Length of Interview: 1 hr 25 min
12. Interviewer: Marcella Adamski
13. Interpreter: Tenzin Yangchen
14. Videographer: Tsewang Dorjee
15. Transcriber: Tenzin Yangchen



Biographical Information:

Born in Shopo in the Ba region, Tashi Topgyal fondly recalls the childhood days he spent with his family there. He became a monk at a very young age and joined Zeze Monastery, a large monastery of 800 monks located 3-hours away from Shopo. He explains that religion was so embedded in the Tibetan way of life that every family sent one son to practice the Buddhist dharma as a monk. Tashi Topgyal describes his monastic life in detail, reporting that it represented an important phase of his life.

At the age of 19, he left his monastery to travel to Lhasa and joined the Drepung Monastery there. He was completely transformed at the age of 22, when he joined the *Chushi Gangdrug* guerrillas to fight against the Chinese army in 1959. Tashi Topgyal says the *Chushi Gangdrug* could not fight the Chinese for long because their stock of arms and ammunition quickly dwindled. That same year, he and many other resistance fighters escaped to India.

In 2007 Tashi Topgyal visited Tibet and spent eight months in his village. He describes his impression that, though Tibet's bigger towns have developed, the isolated regions, such as his native village, remain very poor.

Topics Discussed:

Childhood memories, monastic life, brutality, Chushi Gangdrug guerrillas.

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Interview #70

Interviewee: Tashi Topgyal

Age: 70, Sex: Male

Interviewer: Marcella Adamski

Interview Date: July 6, 2007

Question: Please tell us where is your family from?

Interviewee #70: I was born in Shoepo in the region of Ba.

Q: Were there many families in your village?

#70: There were 35 families then. Now there are more than 160 families.

Q: In your own family, how many children did your parents have?

#70: My parents had three children, two sons and a daughter.

Q: Where were you in that order?

#70: I was the oldest among the three.

Q: What kind of work did your parents do to support the family?

#70: Just as it was in those days, my parents were engaged in agricultural work.

Q: When you were a child, did you help in this work?

#70: Our parents loved and brought us up when we were small, so when we were older we have to serve them. I helped my parents. I worked along with my parents.

Q: Do you have any favorite memories of your childhood when you were growing up on the farm?

#70: I have happy memories of my childhood when I was living with my parents and they taught me about how things should be done and about the situations in those days. My relatives lived close by.

Q: Did your family have their own farm or did they work for somebody else's farm?

#70: The farm was our own. It did not belong to anyone, it was ours. The size of the land was about four acres.

Q: Was this a property that had been in your family for more than one generation?

#70: Yes, it has been more than one generation. The changes that happen these days are a different matter.

Q: A couple of generations?

#70: It was the same land that has been with all the generations, however many there were. The area has neither increased nor lessened. Now it has been divided.

Q: What kind of crops were you growing on your farm?

#70: We grew four types of crops: wheat, barley, *sowa* [type of grain used for making flour or beer] and buckwheat.

Q: What was the nearest temple and how far from your home?

#70: The nearest temple was the Zeze Monastery. It was at a distance of three hours walk from my village.

Q: Did your family have regular spiritual practices in the family or did they go to the temple as well?

#70: Yes, we practiced dharma at home and visited the monastery on special days.

Q: Please tell us what kind of a boy you were growing up? How would you describe yourself?

#70: My parents took care of me when I was young. As I grew up, I was able to think for myself but living in an isolated area, there was not much of a broad thinking [ambition] to do.

Q: What kind of a child were you?

#70: When I was living with my parents in my village, I was good-natured and stable.

Q: Did that ever change?

#70: There have been many changes in life.

Q: What changes?

#70: Like leaving my village.

Q: You were growing up in your village and doing what your parents were doing. Did that change?

#70: Until I was 19 years old, I lived with my parents, doing what my parents did and following their words. When I was 19, I decided to come to Tibet [Lhasa].

Q: Where did you get this idea from?

#70: The reason for my going to Lhasa happened like this. I was a monk and it was a rule in our monastery for every monk to go to Lhasa [on a pilgrimage]. If one didn't make the journey to Lhasa, he would not be considered a senior monk. If one visited Lhasa and saw the Jowo [Rinpoche], he was included among the senior monks.

Q: At what age did you become a monk?

#70: I became a monk when I was very young. I do not know the age. My parents carried me to the monastery and made me a monk.

Q: So were you able to walk at that time?

#70: I think I was not able to walk. I had no knowledge when I was made a monk. My father carried me there.

Q: Why did he take you to the monastery?

#70: In our region, a monk was very holy. If a family had a son, he was made a monk so that he could practice the dharma. A monk was considered the best in our region.

Q: What is your earliest memory of being a monk?

#70: I remember living in the monastery and learning the scriptures when I was around 8 or 9 years old.

Q: Do you have any memories of your parents taking you there and leaving you at the monastery?

#70: I don't remember that incident. I think I was made a monk because I was the oldest child and my parents loved me the most. My parents considered it very good and important.

Q: Did anybody in the monastery become like a father or a mother to you to take special care of you since you were, maybe three or four years old?

#70: Yes, there was my teacher. I lived with him and he taught me the scriptures and advised me just like my parents.

Q: Can you tell us about your teacher? What was he like as a person?

#70: My teacher's name was Tagyu Tashi. He was a good teacher and cared for me like my parents would. He was quite old.

Q: Were there other children as young as you in the monastery?

#70: Yes, there were. The total population of monks in our monastery was about 800. There were over 200 young monks.

Q: When your parents carried you to the monastery, you were 3 years old or 4 years old? What do you think?

#70: In our region monks were considered very holy and parents wrapped children in goat skin and took them to the monastery where they made the hair offering. It was only much later that one knew about being a monk.

Q: How old do you think you were then?

#70: I might have been about 3 years old; perhaps between 3 and 4.

Q: What order of monks was this?

#70: The Gelukpa sect.

Q: Did you ever see your parents again?

#70: When there were prayer assemblies, we couldn't because we had to remain in the monastery. Once the assembly was over, we were given time like, 10 or 15 days to go and visit our parents.

Q: How often was that?

#70: We had about three months break in a year in our monastery.

Q: Did you live three months in the monastery?

#70: We could live for three months at home in one year. If you totaled all the 15 days that we stayed home with our parents, it amounted to three months. The rest of the time was spent at the monastery.

Q: So every year you would spend three months at home?

#70: Yes, that is right.

Q: How did you get from the monastery back to your home?

#70: The monastery would give a break between prayer assemblies. When the assembly ended, I could go home.

Q: How did you go home?

#70: I went home walking. In those days we did not have vehicles in our region, so we walked. I was a child and I walked there and back.

Q: Did other monks accompany you or did your family come and bring you home?

#70: My family did not come for me. I would go along with eight or nine other young monks, playing all the way home.

Q: It sounds like you had a good time.

#70: Yes, those were happy days. I was young and there were no worries. That was it.

Q: What would happen when you got home? Was it a special time for the family? Were you given special treats?

#70: Though they provided me with the best food, my parents considered learning the texts as the most important part. When I came home, my father would check what I had learned from the texts.

Q: Was your father a learned man himself?

#70: My father was literate, though he was not very educated. He knew the Tibetan script well.

Q: Were the trips home in the summer time and were you expected to help with the work on the farm?

#70: Yes, if I was home when there was fieldwork, I helped. I also helped look after the animals.

Q: When you came home, did you ever wish that you didn't have to go back? Or did you look forward to going back to the monastery?

#70: When it was time for the prayer assemblies, I was happy to go back to the monastery.

Q: Was that the Zeze Monastery?

#70: Yes, that is right.

Q: Was that monastery noted for anything special in Tibetan tradition?

#70: The prayer assemblies at the monastery were well held and the discipline was extremely good. The rules prohibited quarrels and all such things at the monastery. The discipline was good and such things were not allowed. All the monks were very knowledgeable about the dharma texts. Since people in our region regarded religion as highly important, the monastery was held in high-esteem by the people.

Q: When you think back now to your childhood as a monk, what do you think were important dharma lessons that you learned? What were the most important teachings that you learned in your development as a monk?

#70: The most important teaching is that one should not harm other people and to be kind hearted. At the same time we are not to harm even animals and to abstain from it. Follow the dharma, which is the best way of life.

Q: Just like you had favorite memories of helping on the farm when you went home, what kind of memories come back when you think of the monastery? What pictures do you see in your mind?

#70: When I look back, I recall my days as a young boy in the monastery and the important thing I feel is if the monastery could be reconstructed, and the monk population restored to its original figure, that would be very fortunate.

Q: You said that when you were 18, you went to Lhasa and you went as a monk. Was there anything happening in Lhasa politically or were things peaceful at that time?

#70: When I went there as a 19-year-old, everything was peaceful. There was no chaos, there was nothing. The Chinese began the war when I was 22 years of age.

Q: Where did you first see or hear about the fighting?

#70: When the fighting began in Lhasa, I was right there in Lhasa where I could see it. The war began, all the monasteries were bombarded and the time came when all the monks had to flee.

Q: You were in Lhasa at age 22?

#70: Yes, that is right.

Q: So at 19 you went to Lhasa and you came back and then you went to Lhasa another time or you stayed in Lhasa?

#70: I stayed right there in Lhasa from the age of 19 to 22 when the Chinese started the war.

Q: The Chinese were in Lhasa and what were they firing on?

#70: The main place they targeted was the Potala Palace. They fired their artillery on the Potala Palace. At that time His Holiness the Dalai Lama left for India. The Chinese army's strength was so great that we could not overcome them, so we had to escape.

Q: Where were you when the Potala was being bombed? Where were you in Lhasa?

#70: I was at Tsethang at that time. I was at the army camp at Tsethang.

Q: At the army camp?

#70: We tried to resist them [the Chinese]. We were living at Tsethang.

Q: The *Chushi Gangdrug* Force?

#70: Yes, the *Chushi Gangdrug* [Resistance Fighters] were in Tsethang.

Q: When did you join the *Chushi Gangdrug* guerrillas? You were a monk then.

#70: By then I was no more a monk. The Chinese began the fight when I was 22 years old. When that happened people talked about joining the *Chushi Gangdrug* Force. So we separated from the other monks. While all the monks assembled for the *Monlam* Prayer Festival, 15 of us monks escaped to join the army at Tsethang.

Q: Which prayer assembly was it?

#70: We were 13 monks. When the Chinese began the fight, we felt that it was futile living in the monastery.

Q: Which monastery?

#70: We were in Drepung Monastery. We left Drepung Monastery and joined the *Chushi Gangdrug* Force. Until the age of 22, I was a monk.

Q: What made you decide to join the *Chushi Gangdrug* instead of remaining a monk?

#70: At that time if one could continue as a monk, it was a happy life. However, the Chinese did not allow us to stay that way. The Chinese had no other thought, but to cause misery for the monks. Therefore, we felt the futility and joined the *Chushi Gangdrug* Force. My village was a great distance away from Lhasa. When I came to Lhasa, it became impossible for me to live in the monastery because of the Chinese suppression.

Q: You joined the *Chushi Gangdrug* in 1959?

#70: That is right. It was in 1959.

Q: Where did you actually go to join them? What city or what place?

#70: After leaving Lhasa we first we went to Chushul. That was in Gongkar District. We were enlisted into the Force and sent to the army camp at Tsethang.

Q: Were you given a fighter's outfit or clothing or guns? What were you given?

#70: When we were first admitted, there was no uniform, no guns, nothing. They put a stamp [gesturing to hand] to show that we were *Chushi Gangdrug* guerrillas. That was it. When it was my turn to keep a lookout, I had to take the gun from a colleague and when it was his turn to go on duty, I passed the gun on to him. Such was the shortage of weapons. Two men had to share a gun.

Q: What did the stamp look like on your arm?

#70: The stamp was round and red. It was a red mark.

Q: What was there on it?

#70: After the stamp was put, we were officially admitted into the force.

Q: What design was there on the stamp?

#70: It was some sort of a triangle. It was similar to the stamps that we have in Tibet.

Q: Would it wash off?

#70: Yes, it washed off. Once we were handed over to the army, we washed it off. It was a symbol to indicate that we joined the force. A sign of admission.

Q: First of all, did you have to get permission from your monastery to leave the monastery and who gave you the permission?

#70: We did not seek permission. I felt that the Chinese were up to no good and I made my own decision. I thought it was better to join the Force and I did as I wished. I did not seek permission, nor was permission given. Such permissions would not be given to monks.

Q: So you escaped?

#70: I sort of escaped to join the force.

Q: That was a very big change in a man's life to go from being a quiet, dedicated spiritual monk to becoming a *Chushi Gangdrug* fighter? How did it feel to you to take up such a change?

#70: From my province of Kham, I came to Tibet [Lhasa]. Then I lived in the monastery observing its rules, when the Chinese oppression forced me to think of resisting them. I went there [Chushi Gangdrug camp] with the hope that we would be able to resist them.

Q: Before you came to Lhasa, did you see any other evidence of Chinese oppression of your people in your village?

#70: Before I came to [Lhasa] Tibet, when I was a monk at the monastery in my village, I actually became a fighter at the age of 16. The Chinese came to Zeze Monastery and did not allow us to live there. I had to flee.

Q: Where did you flee when you were 16 years old?

#70: I fled towards Dhorum. It was terrible the way the Chinese made the people suffer at that time.

Q: What did they do when they came to your monastery?

#70: The first thing they did when they came to our monastery was pull down the religious icons by tying ropes on the necks [of the statues] saying, "Speak up." All the scriptures were thrown on the floor. Then they walked on the Holy Scriptures. That's what they did. All the religious items in the monastery were piled on the floor.

Q: What did the monks do in reaction to this desecration?

#70: The monks were helpless. If we revolted, they would have tied us up and beaten us. So we quietly carried on [with our lives]. Then at certain periods the Chinese left us and then again they returned.

Q: Did they come several times or many times to your monastery?

#70: They came many times. They came at least six times. At one time they came to the monastery and fired artillery shells. Then they left and the reason is best known to them. At another time they arrived at the monastery, captured the monks, tied them up and took them away. Many monks were taken away then.

Q: Were any of the monks killed or very badly injured?

#70: The Chinese captured and took away many monks. While they were being led away, they [the Chinese] plucked dry *bolo* plants from the roadside and slapped the monks with them. They were beaten as they were being led away. In this way they took away many monks.

Q: Were any killed?

#70: Yes, many died. At least 70 monks were killed together at the Dhungku Pang, which lies between Dondhu and Zeze Monastery.

Q: What is a *bolo*?

#70: *Bolo* is not found here. It is a rough plant with thorns. They [the monks] were beaten with them as they were being led away.

Q: Say the name of the place [where the monks were killed].

#70: Dhungku Pang. It was a large area of pastureland. The monks had set up a resistance camp there and the Chinese came from behind them. All but two of the monks were killed there.

Q: Were they killed by shooting them?

#70: They were all killed by shooting. The Chinese shot them. Some were captured, beaten and led away. Some were shot and killed there. Our people had only swords in their hands.

Q: That wasn't his monastery, but it was one he heard about?

#70: That was our monastery. That was our very own monastery.

Q: Zeze Monastery?

#70: Yes, Zeze Monastery.

Q: So you knew many of the people that were killed?

#70: All the bodies of those that were killed at Dhongku Pang were brought on yaks and piled at the monastery's cemetery. The bodies were brought back and cremated.

Q: Did you go there?

#70: I was in the monastery. At that time I was a helper to the monks that read the scriptures. I was engaged in preparing *duchuma* 'ritual offering' and fetching water and helping the monks. When the other monks brought back the bodies, I was in the monastery. I saw it with my own eyes.

Q: So these were monks from the monastery who had gone to the grasslands to resist the Chinese and they only had swords?

#70: They only had swords. There were no [other] weapons.

Q: Were there many monks left? There were then about 200 or 300 monks left?

#70: From the 800 monks, after the killings about 500 were left because many ran away. It was rendered impossible to remain in the monastery.

Q: How was your old lama, your teacher? How was he doing in all this suffering?

#70: At that time my teacher had left to join the army [resistance fighters]. The young monks and the very old were left behind in the monastery to recite prayers while the rest of the monks went to join the fighters. Since then I have never met my teacher.

Q: Was he killed?

#70: I heard much later that he did come home after escaping into the hills. But I never saw him again. Some monks fled and other were killed, so that there were no monks left in the monastery.

Q: How did the monks fight the Chinese if they only had swords and they knew the Chinese had guns?

#70: We were not allowed to live in our own land and they [the Chinese] were forcefully occupying our land. When such a situation arises, you cannot tolerate it and you fight back whether it is with stones or swords. Earlier we were living peacefully and suddenly they forcefully invaded our land. We couldn't tolerate that and resisted them.

Q: With whatever you had?

#70: Yes, whether you had a sword, stone or stick. It wasn't possible to remain without confronting them when they were forcefully overpowering us.

Q: Why do you think the Chinese were trying to take over Tibet at that time? What was your thinking about why they were coming?

#70: I think they had a huge population in their country and perhaps they had internal fights and they were not able to survive. If they could come to Tibet and oppress it—gold, silver, turquoise, coral, pearl—everything was there under the earth. Then they extracted all that and developed their country. Their country progressed only after our country fell into their hands. Otherwise, earlier they were facing difficulties.

Q: After the attack on your monastery and all of those monks that were killed and you cremated them, what happened after that?

#70: A year after the incident happened, I left for Lhasa.

Q: What happened in the monastery?

#70: Whatever things that were inside the monastery were thrown out. The monastery was completely destroyed.

Q: Was the building there?

#70: The building was standing, but it was emptied of everything. All the icons were pulled down with ropes. The scriptures were thrown on the ground. They destroyed the very basis for a person to remain there. Even now I think it is in the same situation. The monastery was burned.

Q: Did you leave because the monastery was destroyed?

#70: When the monastery was destroyed, the monks could not live there. First they [the Chinese] banned anyone from continuing as a monk. At that time I had already left for Lhasa. They forcefully ordered the monks to defrock and live with the laypeople.

Q: Did the monks obey that demand?

#70: Some were forced to obey and they returned to their homes. They [the Chinese] had denuded the monastery for the monks to live there any longer.

Q: What did you do?

#70: I had already reached Lhasa when the monastery was destroyed. When I was 16 years old, such pathetic situations took place. By the age of 19 I was in Lhasa. After that the monastery was in ruins.

Q: What was the attitude of the monks after all this destruction of their monastery and their beautiful scriptures and idols being destroyed? What was the reaction and feeling of the monks?

#70: When the monks' basis for remaining in the monastery was destroyed, all those who had homes to go to went back and those that did not have anyone, just roamed around in the village. That was it. There was no purpose in remaining in the monastery; the idols were not there, the religious objects were not there, the scriptures were not there, the reason for living there was destroyed.

Q: Were they sad to leave the monastery?

#70: Everyone was sad. They couldn't remain there when the monastery was destroyed. Everyone lived sadly as there was nowhere to go.

Q: You went to Lhasa at that time? You were there during the attack, right? Then at 19 you went to Lhasa?

#70: I was already in Lhasa at that time. Later many other monks [from my monastery] also came to Lhasa.

Q: I thought you were there when cremating the 70 bodies?

#70: At that time I was there. I was about 16 or 17 years old then.

Q: Just to go back, you are with the *Chushi Gangdrug*. This is after Lhasa has been attacked, the Dalai Lama has fled and you are in the mountains, right?

#70: We heard that His Holiness the Dalai Lama had gone abroad. Our aim of fighting in Tibet was becoming difficult. It was not easy to resist a powerful country with what scarce arms and ammunitions we had. Though we were air dropped arms and ammunitions, they were not enough. When you fight a war, you can't do that without guns and bullets. Therefore, after His Holiness left for India, the men of *Chushi Gangdrug* also gradually moved to India.

Q: Were you with other people or doing that alone?

#70: There were many soldiers, at least 200 to 400 and it became impossible to stay.

Q: How long did it take you to get to India?

#70: First, we fought at Tsethang and then moved towards Lhoka. The Chinese were pursuing us as we resisted and fled. In this way we reached the Indian territory of Assam.

Q: Did you know at that time how your family was, your parents, brothers and sister?

#70: I never knew what my parents or siblings were doing then. I was alone except for the colleagues.

Q: What happened when you got to Assam?

#70: When we reached Assam, the Indians provided us with food rations because we had nothing with us. Once in Indian Territory, they took care of our food and shelter.

Q: At this point you would have been about 22 years old?

#70: I was almost 23 years old.

Q: Where did you finally settle down in India?

#70: The authorities said that some of the people must go to work on road construction and some to look after goats and sheep. They said some must work as road crew and they would be provided with clothes, shoes and blankets; so half the people were sent as road crew and the other half to the settlements. From Missamari, people dispersed in different directions.

Q: Did you go to Missamari from Assam?

#70: Yes, to Missamari. The main camp was Missamari.

Q: Where were the roads constructed?

#70: Roads were constructed in Bomdila and Ladakh. Another group went to Kulu Manali.

Q: Where did you go?

#70: I went to Bomdila.

Q: Any reason you picked Bomdila?

#70: I went to Bomdila because most of my colleagues were going there.

Q: Did you ever settle down and get married and have a family?

#70: When I reached Bomdila, I met my wife at the road construction. I was 25 years old then.

Q: How many children did you have?

#70: We had a son and three daughters. My oldest son who was a monk in Sera Monastery passed away. The next child is Pasang Lhamo, then Norkyi and then Dawa Lhatso.

Q: Did you ever return to Tibet?

#70: I went back to Tibet last year.

Q: Where did you go?

#70: Last year on the 24th of February I left from Delhi. I stayed in Lhasa for six days and on my return journey I spent five days [in Lhasa]. I went to my village, which is on the other side of the Driчу [Yangtse] River. I went to Ba and spent a few days there. Then I stayed eight months in Shoepo, my village.

Q: Can you describe the changes that you saw first in Lhasa? What were the changes?

#70: The changes that I saw in Lhasa were: unlike earlier times people did not practice the dharma. Compared to the past the houses nearby the Bakor, those surrounding the Jokhang seemed worse because I saw many meat shops. In the early days there were no meat shops there. There was no progress in all the monasteries. The villages seemed better, while the monasteries were still poor with not many monks. The Gomang and Loselling houses of the Drepung Monastery were locked. There were no monks gathering for prayers. I saw only a few monks. It was the same situation in Gaden Monastery. In Gaden

Monastery I saw about 200 monks at a prayer assembly in one of the houses. The other house had its prayer cushions piled and the doors closed.

Q: What kind of progression?

#70: The roads in the villages have progressed. Earlier we did not have electricity and now people have electricity in their homes. They have good clothes, food and electrical items. Other than that, there were no particular developments. Whatever a family possessed [in the early days] was divided. For example, if a family owned 20 to 30 acres of land, each family member was allotted one acre and the rest was divided equally among others [in the village].

Q: What about the presence of the Chinese? What did you notice different?

#70: In Lhasa I heard the sound of the Chinese bugle, but there were no Chinese to be seen. Tibetans who were Chinese government officials were dressed in the Tibetan costume and wore a Chinese cap. The Chinese ask them to wear the Tibetan costume. That's what I heard on inquiry. They were all dressed in the Tibetan costume. They wore pants and shirts and a Chinese cap.

Q: Were there no Chinese to be seen?

#70: There were no Chinese to be seen. I never saw anyone dressed in Chinese clothes. At the border area between Nepal and Tibet called Dam, there were some security officials at a bridge who were dressed like Chinese. Other than that I did not see any Chinese.

Q: You spoke about a bugle?

#70: I heard the sound of bugle in Lhasa. It was sounded in the morning and evening by the army. When I asked where it [the army camp] was, they told me that it was under the ground. I don't know if that is true. There definitely was a camp because I could hear the sound in the morning and evening. However, I didn't see any Chinese in army uniform.

Q: How could you tell they [the Tibetan officials] worked for the Chinese?

#70: I asked and was told that they were working for the Chinese. They were there in the offices and in the monasteries. They were Tibetans, but wore Chinese caps. I didn't see any Chinese. The officers were paid by them.

Q: Did they speak in Tibetan?

#70: Yes, all of them spoke Tibetan.

Q: What about the number of Chinese that sell for people, like stalls and stores? What did you think about that?

#70: There were many [Chinese] traders. The Bakor has four sides and one side consisted of Chinese petty traders. There were some traders who carried their stuff in baskets on their backs. However, the Chinese were all dressed like Tibetans, except they did not speak the language. The majority of the traders are Chinese. I heard that the poorest of the poor and the worst social elements [from China] are sent to Tibet and that seems to be true. All the petty shops belonged to Chinese.

Q: When you went back to your village what did you see?

#70: Take my village for example. There were three officials. The senior official was called Thuetang and the juniors were called something, which I have forgotten. These three were our people. There were no Chinese to be seen. The administration of the village was conducted by the three of them. At times they held meetings and they explained things to the people.

Q: What were the changes you saw in your village?

#70: There was not much change in the village. No one has bothered about those poor people who lived in isolated areas. The cities seem to have progressed and the roads were better, but the situation in the isolated regions was still poor.

Q: Did you see people you knew?

#70: I did meet people I knew and also those who were from my region. However, everyone has changed. In my village I found only two men and three women; five people who were of my age. All the rest were dead.

Q: That had been 48 years since you were home?

#70: It's been more than 48 years. I left home at the age of 19 and I am 70 years old now. I went back a year earlier. I haven't been there before that.

Q: What about the monastery? Did you go and see your old monastery?

#70: I went to the monastery. There was nothing on the hill where the old monastery stood. A new monastery was constructed down in the plains and it has about 200 monks. The expenses of the monastery are met by the villagers. The monastery has a hall and 15-20 poorly constructed rooms for the monks to live in.

Q: What was the feeling of the people, the old people that you knew about what had happened to their village and to Tibet? What was their feeling? What did they talk about? What did they think about the Chinese having come?

#70: They told me that during the period when Mao Tse Tung was in power, they suffered a great deal. The reason was that the food for about a 100 to 200 people was cooked together and each person was ladled out a portion. During that time many people died of

starvation. Innumerable people died from starvation. They had the commune system then. After this period, Deng Xiao Ping came to power and then it became slightly more relaxed and food was a little better. That's what they told me.

Q: When you stayed there for eight months, what did you do during that time?

#70: There was nothing much to do during the eight months. Everybody appreciated me and said, "You are a person of two generations." Then I was called to visit one house after the other. I stayed a day or so at each house and spent the time talking. Since we hadn't met for such a long time, they were very happy to see me. We all gathered together and a video film was made of the event.

Q: Did the people that you visited, did they want to stay in Tibet or did they want to come to India and be with people they knew?

#70: It was like this—the older ones say, "We are too old and the distance too great for us to go," while all the younger people wished to come to India. As His Holiness the Dalai Lama lives here [in India], their hearts lie here.

Q: I want to ask a little bit about how you were a monk and how your Buddhist beliefs in non-violence were affected by the violence that you saw or you endured?

#70: Initially, I wanted to be a monk and practice dharma. When the situation in our country became pitiable, we came to an alien land. It is very sad when one does not have his country. However, I think I should turn to religion as I am old now. One should have faith in God and hope in the dharma. That is what I think.

Q: What do you feel about the Chinese people now?

#70: A part of our people is left behind in Tibet and a part is in India. If all the countries would support us, and we could go back to Tibet, that would be good. Other than that we can do nothing with the majority of our people left there and a part here. It is our hope that we could go back to our country, but we cannot.

Q: What do you feel about the Chinese?

#70: The Chinese should return [to China], but they are not going back. We should oppose them with a war, but that is not within our power. They are carting away all the treasures that are found in our country. The gold, silver, turquoise and corals in the country are mined and taken away. They not only take all the useful resources of our country, but even the wood from our forests are carried to China. We should either drive them away, which we can't, or declare a war on them, which is difficult for us. If possible we should regain our independence, and if not, at least we should have the freedom of religion if we went back to our country.

Q: What advice or message would you like to give the next generation of Tibetans living here in India or living in Tibet?

#70: We have faced so many difficulties in our country and now I am at life's end and living in someone else's land. One should be honest in thought and, since we have to depend on the support from other countries, one should be humble. It is important to be good-natured to people you meet and talk pleasantly.

Q: What do you hope would be preserved about Tibet for future generations?

#70: The Tibetans hope that the foreign countries will support our cause because we cannot achieve anything on account of their [China's] might and our lack of it. We hope that India and the foreign countries will help us in getting back our country. Otherwise, it is very difficult for us. The foreign countries have been of great help in caring for the Tibetans up to now and we are very grateful. However, for the time being it seems very difficult for us to go back to our country. If all the foreign countries would help us, we would be able to go back to our country. Otherwise, it is very difficult for us as they [the Chinese] are powerful.

Q: Is there anything else that you would like to tell us that perhaps we forgot to ask you that you think are important for us to have as a part of this oral history?

#70: There is nothing particularly important. However, our hope is that there will be support forthcoming from the foreign countries for our cause. It [China] is a highly populated nation possessing weapons while we are small in number. Religion has been an integral part of our life and we practiced the dharma with no thought for anything else. If one were to fight an enemy, weapons are needed and we did not have them. However, our refuge is the foreign countries and if they provide us help and we could get back Tibet that would be wonderful.

Q: Do you think the independence would have to come from a military attack against the Chinese?

#70: If it was possible, we should fight them but we are too few in number to fight them. If all the foreign countries would act, I don't think they are invincible. However, the best solution would be if there was no fight and if they [the Chinese] went their way [back to China] and gave us back what is rightfully ours. That is the best solution with no harm to all concerned and each side taking care of its own country. They should go to their country and we should be allowed to live in our country.

Q: I think that is a good place to end our interview. Thank you for participating in the interview. What was it like for you to tell your story?

#70: I feel it is very good and most fortunate that you have listened to what I said. As a refugee when I am asked questions by someone of high-standing, it is my duty to answer and I feel fortunate that you listened. I feel very happy.

Q: Thank you. We are very happy to have your story.

#70: [Nods]

END OF INTERVIEW