

Tibet Oral History Project

Interview #73 – Lhundup Dorjee (alias)
July 4, 2007

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TIBET ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

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INTERVIEW SUMMARY SHEET

1. Interview Number: #73
2. Interviewee: Lhundup Dorjee (alias)
3. Age: 78
4. Date of Birth: 1929
5. Sex: Male
6. Birthplace: Menjay
7. Province: Utsang
8. Year of leaving Tibet: 1960
9. Date of Interview: July 4, 2007
10. Place of Interview: Interviewee's Residence, New Camp No. 3, Dickey Larsoe Settlement, Bylakuppe, Mysore District, Karnataka, India
11. Length of Interview: 2 hr 33 min
12. Interviewer: Rebecca Novick
13. Interpreter: Tsering Dorjee
14. Videographer: Ronny Novick
15. Transcriber: Tenzin Yangchen



Biographical Information:

Lhundup Dorjee describes how his family gave him away in marriage to a woman whose family lived as tenants of Dechen Sangakha Monastery. This family acted as the *ngotsap* 'representative' of the monastery and performed various functions for it, including collecting butter and grain taxes. Lhundup Dorjee explains the roles played by *genpo* 'leaders' and *ngotsap* in collecting taxes on behalf of the government and private estates, in settling disputes, and in looking after villagers' welfare.

Lhundup Dorjee provides an account of increasing Chinese oppression after the occupation of his region, including the tactics the Chinese used to force Tibetans into conducting *thamzin* 'struggle sessions.' The person subjected to *thamzin* had his hands tied behind him and was ordered to kneel in front of a huge gathering of people, some who participated in the beating of the accused.

Lhundup Dorjee also describes the difficulties he and hundreds of other fleeing Tibetans faced when they reached Bhutan, including food shortages and death from heat exhaustion. Upon reaching India, he worked on road construction for eight years before moving to Bylakuppe.

Topics Discussed:

Childhood memories, local governance in Tibet, taxes, first appearance of Chinese, life under Chinese rule, Chinese oppression, *thamzin*, escape experiences, life as a refugee in India.

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Interview # 73

Interviewee: Lhundup Dorjee [alias]

Age: 73, Sex: Male

Interviewer: Rebecca Novick

Interview Date: July 4, 2007

[Questions are asked by either interviewer or interpreter. In Interview #73, the interviewer directs questions to the interpreter, who then asks the questions of the interviewee.]

Question: What was his life like growing up in Tibet? Describe the life you led as a child?

Interviewee #73: To tell you my story as a young child, I was born in the village of Menjay in the district of Yamdok Lingzong. When I fled [Tibet] both my parents were alive. We were three sons and four daughters. I had two brothers and three sisters from the same set of parents. A son and a daughter were from my mother's previous marriage. I have not seen their father. The name of the village where I lived was called Menjay.

Q: Please continue.

#73: In those days my father was the *genpo* 'leader' of the village. My mother worked on the farm. When I was young there were no schools in our region. To tell you the truth, under the old system, except in the bigger towns, there were no schools. There was no school in my village.

However, since my parents were literate, I learned from my parents and also went to graze the animals. I went out to the forest and I also knew how to do field works. I studied a little. One of my older brothers, who was from a different parent, was engaged in practicing the dharma. Another brother, who was two years older than me and from the same set of parents, went to school and continued the leadership in the village. My older brother lived with his wife in our home in Menjay while I was given away in marriage at a village called Zi.

I lived in a different place [later] and I will continue to tell my story from then. In the earlier village where I lived with my parents, we were three sisters and two brothers from the same set of parents. The story about my older brother will unfold as we go along. Before I escaped, he was the leader in the village and the Chinese captured him and he finally passed away while in prison. He was arrested before I made my escape and I heard about his death after I reached here [India].

Q: Which brother was it?

#73: That was my older brother. He was the oldest and living with our parents. I was given away in marriage and he stayed home taking care of the family. Finally, when the Chinese arrived—they treated the leader particularly terribly—along with two others, the three of them were taken to prisons at Lhakhangzong, Dhuwazong and finally to Tsethang. My oldest brother died in the prison at Tsethang. I was sent in marriage to Zi before that happened, so the main part of my story starts from the other village. While I lived in my parents' home, I went to graze the animals and I learned some reading and writing from my parents. That was how I lived when I was younger in my village. I will continue to tell my life story after I arrived at the other village.

Q: He said his father was a group leader and what did that actually mean? Was that like an elected position within the village or was it because he was a natural leader that people turned to him for advice? How did he assume this position, first of all?

#73: We did not have the custom of electing a leader in my village. However, the people followed the tradition of unanimously appointing a person who was capable and reliable as the leader of the village. At times some other person might also be appointed; leaders changed. Most of the time, the people held a meeting and unanimously appointed the best person as their leader. The old custom was to appoint a capable person who could talk to others and listen well. There was no practice of electing a leader by casting votes. It was by unanimous agreement.

Q: Is this how it would work in every village?

#73: Everybody followed the practice of unanimous agreement. Certain villages had permanent *genpo*. It was not so in my village. An outstanding person might be the leader for a year or two and at times continue [to hold office] for two or three years; he could also be replaced by another person in a year as leader. Whoever it was, his appointment was through unanimous agreement of the people.

Q: His father would arbitrate disputes and things like that?

#73: Whatever disputes took place in a village, the case was first taken to the *genpo*. He called some of the outstanding members of the village and they tried to reach a verdict. If that did not come about, the case was forwarded to the *Lingzong*, the district office. If the district office was unable to reach a verdict, the case was further forwarded to the government. That was the system.

Q: Was there any crime in his village?

#73: Murders happened sometimes. When such things occurred, the district office had to be informed, as the local leader could not settle such cases.

Q: He said his story really started when he got to Zi. What happened when he got to Zi?

#73: I married into the family named Dongthon in Zi. The Dongthon family was the tenant of Dechen Sa-ngnakha. The Dechen Sa-ngnakha Monastery was located between Lhasa and Gaden Monastery. They [the Dongthon family] lived on the estate of the monastery. The estate was close to the village of my birth. It was just a mountain pass away. They were the tenants of that monastery. Since the monastery was located far away, the family Dongthon was the local representative of the monastery. The area came under the district of Lhopra Senge Zong. In case of legal matters, they approached the Lhopra Senge Zong, but their leader was the Dechen Sa-ngnakha Monastery.

There were two leaders in the village, a *genpo* and a *ngotsap* ‘representative.’ The *ngotsap* of the Dechen Sa-ngnakha Monastery was the family [I married into]. Since the Monastery was situated far away, the family acted as the local representative of the monastery. The district office informed the *genpo* of any orders that came from the Tibetan government. If the *genpo* could not reach a decision in certain matters, the district officer called both the *genpo* and the *ngotsap*. The *genpo* did all the work concerned with the district office. For orders that came from the monastery, the monastery's *ngotsap* took the responsibility.

My [wife's] family was the *ngotsap*, and that position was permanent. They were entitled to lands as their remuneration. The *ngotsap* performed the duties, but there was no salary that he could draw every month. They were provided with lands. They were entitled to extra lands in addition to their own as remuneration and they continued to work for the monastery. That was how it was.

The butter tax to the Dechen Sa-ngnakha Monastery in Lhasa was very heavy. Twice a year, a summer tax and a winter tax had to be taken to Lhasa. As the *ngotsap* of the village, it was my duty to collect all the taxes in the village. There were people who transported the tax [butter] to Lhasa, but my family was responsible for it. Therefore, I had to go to the monastery to give an account. Many years passed in this way.

Q: Was that a difficult job to do?

#73: That was how it was under the old system. We received orders [for taxes] from the [Tibetan] government through the district of Sengezung like serving in the army, labor tax as agricultural land tenants as well as payment of taxes to private [organization] like the monastery.

As I told you earlier there was the *genpo* named Zi Ushoe, a government official who was a permanent *genpo*. The Zi Dongthon was the monastery's permanent *ngotsap*. Those two people worked together to look after the welfare of the village and to collect taxes and bare all the responsibilities of the village. That was very difficult.

Q: The taxes that he collected didn't go directly to the monastery? It went to the Tibetan government in Lhasa?

#73: The [butter tax] was taken to the Dechen Sa-ngnakha Monastery in Lhasa. The journey took about ten days with animals from my village to reach there. I heard that now-

a-days it is just a day's drive from Lhasa to my village. Motor roads are constructed now, but in the olden days we transported the goods on horses, donkeys and mules and the distance was great. The tax [in the form of butter or grains] had to be taken directly to Lhasa.

Q: What happened if people couldn't pay?

#73: There were many instances of people being unable to pay the annual taxes due to poor harvest. They might be granted a year or two extension, but if they couldn't pay gradually, they would face difficulties.

Q: Were most people able to pay quite easily or was it difficult for people to pay this tax?

#73: It was simpler for the tenants of the government lands since they had to remit [tax] only to the government. All the monasteries were considered private. The tenants of their lands were taxed by them as well as by the government who was the highest authority. The government taxes for the people involved serving as a soldier or constructing roads and other duties as proclaimed through the *genpo* and the district office. Therefore, the tenants of the government's agricultural land had it easier. The tenants of the private estates, were taxed by the government and the private leasers. The people faced a lot of difficulties.

Q: Did he think it was a fair system or did he ever question it?

#73: His Holiness the Dalai Lama knew that the people faced such problems. At the young age of 16, His Holiness took spiritual and temporal responsibilities. After he took the great responsibility at a tender age in the administration of the Tibetan government, His Holiness understood the difficulties of the people and so in 1951, the Tibetan government set up a committee called *Lekchoe Legung* 'Amendment Office.' They were to look into the source of the problems faced by the people and His Holiness tried the procedures of democracy but that could not be implemented. I feel very sorry about that. His Holiness has mentioned this in his speeches.

Q: Had there ever been any popular resistance to this system of tax paying before the Chinese came? Had there ever been any popular resistance or organized resistance?

#73: There were people in difficulties who owed taxes or were unable to repay their loans. In such cases, prominent people of the village sent an application to the government highlighting the hardships faced by the people and requested for an inquiry. Such customs used to be followed. As per the grievances of the people, investigations would be carried out in the village and a rebate on loans or changes in the taxes might be granted.

Q: This office that His Holiness set up in 1951 that he said didn't work, what was the exact purpose of the office? Was it to investigate the fairness of the system?

#73: There were citizens in many regions who could not pay their labor and other taxes. Some had huge debts with compound interests, while some taxpayers could not pay their

taxes at all. People were facing many difficulties and the office was specially set up to investigate into those matters. Had the office carried out an in-depth investigation, to put it in a nutshell, the monasteries that owned estate would be affected. Since they would be affected, the monasteries sort of obstructed it and the Lekchoe Legung was not able to perform its full duties in the local areas. That was how I saw it.

Q: What did the monasteries actually do to stop it from working? Why were they able to?

#73: The tenants of the government received orders from the government. However, the majority of the people lived as tenants of the private estates and monasteries. The lands and people [who tilled the lands] belonged to them. The monasteries had high amounts of loans to receive back from the people and if the government transformed the system and wrote off the debts, they would be put to a lot of difficulties. So because of that, the monasteries sort of blocked it [the special office] from bringing about a complete change.

Q: How were the monasteries able to block them?

#73: For example, if a family takes a loan from a monastery, in this way a lot of the monasteries' capital was dispersed among its tenants. People took a lot of credit from the monasteries and the money lay with the people. If the government brought a change by writing off the debts of the people, the monasteries would not be able to get back their dues.

Q: How were the monasteries able to block them?

#73: Each monastery sent an application with the explanation about how important it was for the monastery to have those tenants, how the tenants were not facing any hardships from the monastery and how the monastery needed to develop. If the government amended [the law] in regard to the recovery of loans that lay with the people, the monasteries held the government responsible in the event the monasteries were not able to continue due to bankruptcy. So in that way, the path was sort of obstructed.

Q: Tell him this is really interesting to learn about. He has so much knowledge about how this is set out. It is unusual for us to hear this level of detail.

#73: [Nods]

Q: How old was he at this time?

#73: I was 30 years old when I left Tibet.

Q: When did he notice the Chinese coming into his area? Maybe he just wants to tell the story of what happened?

#73: There is a long story about my travel to Lhasa and other stories after I came to the village [Zi] in marriage. In 1959, we lost Tibet. It [the arrival of the Chinese] was almost immediate after Tibet was defeated. Around the time His Holiness the Dalai Lama left

[Tibet], the Chinese swarmed all over the country. The Chinese first came to my region in the district of Lhopra Lhakang Zong. My area came under the district of Senge Zong, but we were closer to Lhakang Zong. Several thousand Chinese arrived at Lhakang Zong. Tibet was completely routed then. Actually it was sort of gradual because they couldn't come to my region before occupying other parts, so quite a lot of time elapsed.

After the Chinese arrived at Lhakang, we received a message that everyone was to come there to attend a meeting. My family possessed two guns, a *bora* and a *sakji*. We sold the *sakji* gun earlier, but the *bora* gun was in the house. After receiving the message, we went to Lhakang to attend the meeting. There was a big meeting at Lhakang and we were told to spend the night there. The next day, first they put many people in a large hall saying that they were going to impart some education. I was also put in the house. The large house was filled with prominent people of the region and the abbots of the monasteries. They said we were to study and they provided us with books.

After a while I was called out and told, "We have made a mistake. You should not have been in there." I wondered why. Once a person was put in that house, it was for good. The education part was a ruse and the people were imprisoned. I was left there for quite a while and then taken out. They said, "Come out. You should not have been in there." I said yes and then went back home.

As I neared my village, I saw that it was filled with Chinese. My house was located on the other side of a hill and there were a few houses on this side. Several Chinese sat there and they had my gun with them. They [the Chinese] dreaded guns. In my village I was the only one who owned a gun. There was Oshoe, the *genpo* of the village, but he didn't possess a gun. If they [the Chinese] knew about the existence of a gun, they were very cautious. In order to take possession of the gun, I was called away to the meeting. Then they sent some people [to the house to remove the gun] and when I reached there, the gun was with them! I could see Chinese moving down the hills. They questioned me, "Whose gun is this?" We were many people returning from the meeting. I replied, "The gun is mine. If you are taking my gun, you have to give me a receipt for it. Who should I say I handed the gun over to?" They said, "You don't need a gun anymore. The great Chinese system is here and you don't need a gun." I said, "But I need a receipt for the gun." They conferred for sometime and gave me a letter. When I reached home, I heard that they had given my family a lot of trouble looking for the gun. They [the Chinese] entered the house and pointed a machine gun to the roof. Chinese soldiers were stationed around the hills. After they found the gun, they yelled to those on the hills, probably to say that they'd got the gun, and the Chinese came down the hills. The reason they suddenly appeared in our village was to get the gun.

Q: Please carry on.

#73: After they took away the gun, not even one Chinese remained in our village. After they occupied the whole country by violence, they began the "Liberation through Peaceful Way." There were no more Chinese military leaders or officials. Everybody was dressed in blue; the leaders were in blue and the servants were in blue. The *sishung* [non-military Chinese] arrived and we lived that way. They transformed everything. Our household

articles and whatever we possessed were to be divided as were the lands, which were given away to whomever they [the Chinese] wished. They allotted our family a share of land, one small piece from one end [of our earlier land] and another small piece from another end. That was how they did it and we continued to live.

Q: How did the Tibetan people respond to this? Did they try to resist?

#73: There was no resistance. Whatever they [the Chinese] told us to give, we had to give. They said, "You are not among the reactionaries. You are recognized as a *tsap* 'representative.' If you change your mind positively, in seven years you will receive your payment. The lands, farm tools and everything must be divided." They carried out the distributions. They added, "You will receive a payment called *lubyon*. If you are termed a rebel you will not receive anything. However, you are not a reactionary, only a *tsap*, so you will receive compensation later. If you have complete faith in the Chinese system, in six or seven years you will receive your money." They told me that, but I did not receive anything. [Laughs]

Q: Did he believe them?

#73: There was no way I could believe them at all. Tibet was lost in 1959 and I endured everything until the seventh Tibetan lunar month of 1960. Prior to the seventh month, we accepted all that they said we had to accept, but then they changed their policy. What was there to be divided was divided and we [people from the ruling class] were not even allowed to attend meetings with the common people. We were banned from mixing with the common people. That was to indicate that earlier we were the *ngotsap* and leaders of the village.

Then later the [Chinese] government changed their policy to *kyarlok shiptsa* 're-investigation.' When the change was implemented, they said "Earlier we have cut the branches of the trees. We have not uprooted the tree. Underneath the sky and above the ground is a bird called a raven. All the ravens are black in color; there are no white ravens. The people of your village and your servants all say, 'My employers are good. We do not want to *thamzin* 'subject to a struggle session' them.' There are such stories and that is a mistake on your part. All the ravens are black. There are no white ravens. Now the *kyarlok shiptsa* means that the trees must be uprooted." Thus they began the *kyarlok shiptsa*.

During that period all the officials dressed in blue were replaced. Military rule was back. The leaders were dressed in yellow [khaki] and officials were dressed in yellow [khaki]. The change was back to worse than it had been and the [new] policy indicated that all the earlier leaders in the village were to be uprooted like trees. Now I have come to the part where I am on the verge of escape.

[Tape change]

Q: I want to ask about the people in the blue uniforms and who came before the soldiers came. Did they have any weapons at all or were they completely unarmed?

#73: I think they probably did not need weapons. They were all common citizens and were called *sishung*. They were dressed in blue and did not have a hint of military. They lived in my home in the village. Higher up on the hill was a family called Tsiworshoe and they [the Chinese] later moved there and opened two offices. The Chinese lived in the homes of two families, one was the Oshoe family who was the permanent *genpo* and the other was Dongthoe, the *ngotsap* of the monastery.

Q: How were they able to persuade the richer people to give up their property without the threat of violence?

#73: There was no escape whatsoever once they started extolling the Chinese system, the greatness of Mao Tse Tung and organized day and night meetings. In the daytime we went to work and at around four in the evening, after drinking some tea, we assembled. There were discussions regarding the day's [activities] and continuous suggestions and no way to avoid it.

Q: So it was a process of gradual persuasion?

#73: Yes.

Q: Were people afraid of the Chinese? Was there a lot of fear? Or did they sort of think that this was maybe like a good idea?

#73: Among the people, majority of them supported us, irrespective of what it had been under the earlier leaders, saying that during our tenure as leaders they had not been ill-treated. However, they [the Chinese] kept urging them [the common Tibetan people] day and night that they were in the wrong and said, "You must oppose these people [the ruling class]. It is impossible for these people not to be in the wrong. You are making a mistake." They kept saying that to the people day and night until finally it was our people who executed the beatings while none of them [the Chinese] did it. That was their policy. They kept urging our people day and night and appointed the silly ones to positions of power and in that way, they created problems.

Q: So the poor people who were appointed leaders participated in the organized *thamzin*?

#73: Yes, they were the people. There were no prominent people [in power]. They [the Chinese] appointed the poor to positions of power, gave them food and so it was our people who destroyed the country.

Q: Did he ever witness any *thamzin* sessions himself?

#73: I have seen many.

Q: Can he describe to us what it was like and what happened?

#73: When they subjected people to *thamzin*, for example in my village, during the first *thamzin* there were two people called Topgyal-la and Dorjee. When they were to undergo *thamzin*, first a message was sent to people living far and wide that if they did not assemble the next day at such and such a time and at such and such a place, they would be beheaded. The message was exceedingly urgent, so a huge number of people from every direction gathered at the appointed place. Soldiers stood with machine guns on rooftops surrounding the place of the gathering.

Posters written in Tibetan against them [the people to undergo *thamzin*] were pasted at the site of the *thamzin*. People were made to assemble at the ground. Then the person was led in. The person who brought him in was a Chinese soldier with a gun. Another soldier led him on a rope with his [the victim] hands tied at the back. The one with a gun accompanied them. He [the victim] was ordered to kneel down in front of the people. Once he knelt down, those that beat him were people of our village. People like the *U-yon* Tsukdang [poor people appointed as leaders by the Chinese] and the poor people were instructed to accuse the man [the victim] of having ill-treated and done things to them that he had never done.

They were made to say such things. They said that they were going to kill this man. When the shout went up, "Are we going to kill this man or not?" everyone had to raise their fists in unison and say, "Yes, we are going to kill him." There were [Chinese] people watching from behind in case someone failed to raise his fist. His name was noted and later he would be questioned as to why he did not raise his fist. So even if you did not want to say that the man should be killed, you were forced to agree. If they asked if we wanted that man to be driven out from the village, they forced everyone to say that they wanted it.

Our hearts were filled with sadness when the two persons underwent *thamzin*. Once beaten, the person fell there and the hairs on his head were gone. However, the man didn't die. He didn't die at all. At some point the Chinese themselves put a stop to it. Our people [the *thamzin* executors] were in a frenzy—those unfortunate people who were given positions. That was how we suffered. There were cases of people killed [during *thamzin*]; some who were almost dead and thrown in the waters.

In our village no one was actually killed. They were beaten in every way and finally imprisoned. They received medical treatment and I believe they were made to become well. They were subjected to suffering and then made to recover from that. They were not left to die at once. *Thamzin* was carried out at Lhakhang, *thamzin* was carried out at Dhuwazong and similarly *thamzin* was carried out at my village Menjay. There were cases of death during *thamzin* and cases of death by being shot on purpose by the Chinese.

Q: Did he know these people personally, Togyal and Dorjee?

#73: Yes, I knew them.

Q: Were they trying to say anything in their defense? Were they speaking? How were they responding to this experience?

#73: There was no way to say that. When a small mistake was made into an issue, there was no way to clear that.

Q: He said he saw a lot of struggle sessions. Are there others that he can describe to us?

#73: The actual beatings that I saw were on those two persons. Besides that at Khanyungsera—I wasn't there—which comes under Lhakhangzong and was very close [to my village], two people were subjected to *thamzin* and killed that very day. One was the *nyepa* 'shopkeeper' of Dharmazong and the other was named Khamtu. Those two people were beaten, killed that very day and thrown into the waters.

Q: What happened to the monks of the monastery, his local monastery?

#73: The nearest monasteries from my village were Dhang Gonpa and Khachu Gonpa. There was a small monastery in my original village called Lhatu Gonpa. Besides that there was a monastery in Dhuwazong. In particular, the monastery at Dhuwazong faced a lot of hardships.

In 1956, a large number of Chinese arrived at Dhuwazong and said that a *U-yon* Lhenkhang [office of leaders appointed by the Chinese] should be established there. After they [the Chinese] opened the *U-yon* Lhenkhang, they started screening various movies in the night. During a screening, some monks spitefully cut off the cables and some trouble arose. Finally the Ku-ngo [a respected person] of Bandhi, one of the two noble families who headed the monastery at Dhuwazong, was killed by the Chinese as were some monks. That was around 1956, before the invasion of Tibet. Much later the case came to the notice of the government and since Tibet was not lost yet, the Chinese *U-yon* Lhenkhang at Dhuwazong was packed up.

However, finally when Tibet was lost, they [the Chinese] were very hostile towards that monastery on account of the previous experience. There was nothing left of the monastery to be seen. At Khachu, the *Lhopon, omze* 'chant master' and other office holders of the Khachu Gonpa were subjected to *thamzin* and the monastery was destroyed. I heard that some renovations have been carried out to the monastery lately, though I haven't seen it. In monasteries like Dhang Gonpa, some [monks] fled. There was a lama who had a large nose and bushy eyebrows, which they [the Chinese] pulled at. The next day the lama passed away. There were many such stories that happened when the Chinese arrived. The monasteries faced a lot of hardships.

Q: These films that they were showing earlier, before the invasion of Tibet, they were like propaganda films?

#73: The films were about wars in China. They illustrated how wonderful China was. It was about how China would control all other countries and about its greatness. When such films were screened everyday, the monks did not like it and they cut the cables [of the projector]. They [the Chinese] clashed with the monks. They [the monks] couldn't kill any Chinese because they didn't own guns. However, they [the Chinese] had guns and killed the

Ku-ngo and five or six monks. That was big trouble in 1956. At that time the Chinese were stationed in Lhasa, but nowhere else in Tibet was a *U-yon* Lhenkhang established. They opened one in Dhuwazong.

Q: The *sishung* left his area and then the Chinese army soldiers came in. What happened then?

#73: The *kyarlok shiptsa* ‘re-investigation committee’ arrived. When they came, all the influential people, whom they had earlier been in contact with established an army [resistance force] at Chatsa Digu called Defend Tibet Volunteer Force. We were able to send grains, firewood and hay for the animals of the army. Each village had to follow the orders that were received. Preparations for an army were on at Dhuwazong too and we collected firewood and fodder and sent them there. We were said to have been in contact with the reactionaries and supported the army. So in this way our “crimes” became more and more serious.

It was not just our having been leaders of the village, but supporting the army [resistance] that was opposing China by providing them with grains and hay for the animals. So during the daily meetings, it was mentioned that we should be arrested. The time for our capture had arrived. We were not allowed to attend the meetings along with the other people. Some people told us that guards were stationed around our house at night without our knowledge. They said, "You are being watched. At night they [the Chinese] are keeping watch over you without your knowledge to see if you will escape." During the daytime, of course, they could see. It came to such a pass that we could hardly move about.

Now the time had come when they would subject us to *thamzin* and imprison us. However, we could not leave as we were being watched. My wife and I possessed jewelry like gold earrings, *soji* [long dangling earring worn by wealthy men], *tapo*, women's *buku khapshu* [ornamental needle and thread case], *gawu* [type of necklace], *a-long* ‘earrings,’ etc., which rich families in Tibet owned. We offered all the gold and silver ornaments, including women's *patu* ‘headdress’ to their [the Chinese] office, as did the Oshoe family. The family of Oshoe was also to undergo *thamzin*, captured and beaten as well as mine.

We both discussed and planned to tell the Chinese. "We do not have any thoughts about escaping. If we have plans of fleeing, taking the gold and silver with us would feed us. Until now, we have had faith in the Chinese system. The army arrived; ‘Liberation through Peaceful Way’ was implemented. We never spoke whether in favor or against when you distributed the lands and properties. Still you do not trust us and instead make things worse and worse for us. We feel very sorry about this. If you still doubt us, please accept this gold and silver. If we were planning to escape, these would definitely bring us money and feed us. His Holiness the Dalai Lama and many people have fled successfully and we could certainly manage the same too. However, we have no wish to go."

Then both of us gave our gold and silver ornaments to their office. They discussed among themselves. Before them we made the firm decision that we had no plans to escape. So for a few days the guards around our houses were called off. After the surveillance was called off, on the night of the 17th day of the seventh Tibetan lunar month we made our escape.

Had we left on the 15th night, the moon rose at the same time night fell. It was almost similar with the night of the 16th, so on the night of the 17th, before the moonlight fell on the ground, both [the families] fled.

Q: Was that the reason the day was chosen just because of the dark moon or was anybody consulted? Was there a *mo* 'divination/fortune telling' thrown or any kind of consultation about astrology to determine the date to leave?

#73: There was no *mo* consultation or anything. We had people looking after our animals at a nomadic camp. I discussed with the other family and we directly left for the [nomadic] place from our homes. We could not escape [towards India] immediately, as the Chinese guarded the bridge at Thing, near Yanjula. If we turned towards Dhang, the Chinese were also there. We had discussed that we would move up the rocky mountain and emerge only when things calmed down in the village. The other family had children and two women.

It's a long story that the man was delayed in the house that night. My two children and my wife were with me. We had a man, his wife and daughter at the nomadic camp. They loved their employers. I told them that they could leave the animals behind and escape with us and they were able to come to India. That's how we fled and there's still a long story left to tell.

Q: How long did he stay there for?

#73: We brought food with us and planned to stay there for a few days. However, that night Oshoe had not come along with the wives and children. One of their children was sleeping at home and they could not carry him. Two other children were with them but a young one was left at home. They had many relatives living in the house. The child was left there.

When the women and all of us arrived at the mountaintop, the man did not reach there. I asked them what had happened and they said, "We don't know. We started from the house [together] when he said that the doors were open and went back. He hasn't come still." That whole night he didn't join us and the next morning too he hadn't arrived. Though we planned to spend a few days at that place, we feared that he might have been captured by the Chinese. If he was, he knew our appointed place and would bring the Chinese with him. So the next night we moved to another place.

First, we were hiding up in the rocky mountains. We then moved lower into a forest and spend a night there. Then we fled towards Zakarla. As we were walking in the night, I could see a man coming towards us. It was a main road and many Chinese passed on that road which led to Lhaxhang and Dharmazong. A man was approaching and I said [to my companions], "None of us must talk to him. If he asks us anything, we must kill him. He is alone and we must jointly try and kill him." In case the person saw us fleeing and if he reported it to the Chinese, we would be captured immediately. So we lay in wait for him armed with stones. However the man was the father of the other family! He was able to escape. He had been in a very difficult situation. When he walked back into his house, the

child was crying. As he sat with the child, the doors were opened and the Chinese whose office was on the upper floor of his house came down. They found the child crying and asked him where the wives were. He replied that he didn't know where they'd gone. They insisted he tell them where the women were and he replied that he didn't know.

My house was a little further away. A group of Chinese immediately rushed to my house. I had already left the house by then. They searched the house and then yelled that the residents of my house had fled. They spoke among themselves and then they moved about with lamps and flashlights. The night passed that way. The man [Oshoe] told us this entire story.

There was a girl in his [Oshoe's] family who was of the same father as his wives, but from a different mother. Considering her like the child of a servant, the Chinese had promoted her to a *U-yon* Tsukdang. The girl thought of a plan and gave him [Oshoe] a bag of *tsampa* 'flour made from roasted barley' and telling him to go and feed the dogs, she sent him away. So in this way he was able to escape from their clutches. Many soldiers and officials were sent out in different directions to look for us, but none could locate us. That is the story. Thankfully, he was able to escape and we met up on the road. He passed away in Dharamsala. We were together up until Bhutan. There are still a lot more stories.

Q: How did they get out of Tibet? What country did they end up then? What part of the world did they end up then?

#73: We arrived at Kurdhoe in Bhutan. From our region, there were two mountain passes called Gangla and Bhoela. After crossing over the Bhoela [mountain pass on the Tibet side], one reached Gangla, the Bhutanese pass. Between the Gangla and Bhoela, we found about 500 to 600 Tibetan escapees stranded. We also reached there. We heard that the Bhutanese had blocked the way. Some people had something to eat. We had moved many places.

The bridge on the main road was flooded by the river, and we had to take a long detour. It took us 13 days from our village to reach Bhutan. We had nothing left to eat. They [Oshoe's family] had two small children and I had two with me. There were many people between Gangla and Bhoela. Some people had animals like goats, sheep and yaks. The Bhutanese did not permit the people to go further. They [the Bhutanese soldiers at the border] said that they had informed the Bhutanese government and if the Bhutanese government granted permission, we would be allowed to go and if not, we could not. Many people had escaped [from Tibet] and were camped between Gangla and Bhoela. We also reached there.

Q: Between Gangla and Bhoela?

#73: Yes, a huge empty spot between them [the two mountain passes] consisted of woods, pastures and water. There were Minduma, huge open grounds like Lhakang Kyirap where the nomads lived. We arrived at such a vacant spot. Once one reached there, it was considered simple to go into Bhutan, but no, the Bhutanese had blocked the way. They said

the Bhutanese government had been informed and unless they received an order from the Bhutanese government, we could not come there. So we had to stay right there.

Q: Then what happened?

#73: Some people stranded there had things to eat. However, the other family and mine, we didn't have anything to eat. Although the Bhutanese soldiers ordered us that we couldn't come across, there was no way we could remain there. We heard that on the other side of the mountain pass were Bhutanese and also Tibetans that'd crossed over the Gangla earlier. They were in Bhutanese territory and we would surely find something to eat there.

Since we couldn't survive living where we were, we climbed over the mountain pass not heeding them [the soldiers]. Even though they said we were not permitted to come, the next day we crossed the Gangla pass. Over the mountain, we saw that the Bhutanese soldiers had put up tents. The army leader was called Lupon. We found that we could buy things to eat. We were forced to come here because we had nothing to eat [on the other side].

Just as we settled down, a leader arrived and said, "You were ordered not to cross the mountain pass. It is a very serious mistake on your part to do so." He scolded us very much. We replied, "We were told that we could not come, but we did not have anything to eat. We have children with us and there was no one who would help us with food. Once we are in this area, there is food we can purchase. We came here because we had nothing to eat." He said, "Tonight you can stay here, but come [to the office] tomorrow morning."

They made every preparation to beat us the next day. The Bhutanese leader was not moved by pleadings. His orders had to be followed and there was nothing else to do. That night we pleaded, "We are sorry. We came because we have nothing to eat. We fled from the Chinese due to fear for our lives. If we died here from starvation, that would be very pathetic. So we have come here as food is available on purchase and we may also receive alms. So we have come. We are very sorry. Please forgive us." He was very adamant and said a decision would be taken the next day.

Fortunately, before they came to a decision the next day, the order came from the Bhutanese government permitting the people [the Tibetans] to enter. Around 18 Bhutanese soldiers bearing guns and bags came yelling. The soldiers were very frank, "The order has come from the leader. You are permitted to proceed to Bhutan." If the entry permission had not arrived, they were going to hand us over to the Chinese. We faced a dilemma then. Just before we could receive the lashings, the order arrived and people could proceed.

Q: I wanted to ask when he said that they didn't listen to the Bhutanese Border Police, did they actually force their way in? Was there physical altercation with the Border Police?

#73: We did not pay heed to the order, which said that we could not cross the mountain pass. The officer was furious and he made big plans to punish us. However, he didn't do it immediately and set a time. Within that period the order [from the Bhutanese government]

arrived and that was a way paved by the Gods, for we would have been lashed extensively. Such beatings had taken place earlier.

[Question is repeated]

#73: They [Bhutanese Border Police/soldiers] came to the area where the Tibetans were stranded and announced, "You cannot cross the mountain pass and enter [Bhutan]." They [the Bhutanese police/soldiers] were living in the tents on the other side and we found no soldiers blocking our way on the top of the mountain pass. They came and announced to all the Tibetans who were stranded there, "We have written to the Bhutanese government if you can be allowed to enter Bhutan or not. If the permission comes, you can enter and until then you cannot cross the Gangla mountain pass. You have to remain in the area between Gangla and Bhoela." However if we remained there, we had nothing to eat. So once they [Bhutanese Border Police/soldiers] left, the next day we crossed the mountain pass and climbed down into Bhutan where the soldiers were camped.

Q: Was it shocking for them to get to the border and not to be allowed in? Were they amazed that they weren't allowed to enter?

#73: We were able to escape from the control of the Chinese, but the Bhutanese, as an evidence of their being an independent country, blocked our way and did not allow us to enter. If the order didn't arrive from their government, we were to be returned [to the Chinese]. The mountain passes we came through are called Gangla and Bhoela, however, there was another route through La Gong from Lhopra Senga Guthok. I heard no stories about the Bhutanese soldiers blocking that route. We did not take that route, but came through Gangla and Bhoela and reached Kurdhoe in Bhutan. The route through Senga Guthok led one to the main area of Bhutan. There were two routes from Tibet to Bhutan. We were the unfortunate ones at the Bhutanese border.

Q: I'd like to ask him what happened when they got permission. They were still with this very large group I understand like 400–500 Tibetans. What happened after they got permission from the Bhutanese government?

#73: We received the permission and preceded on and reached Kurdhoe in Bhutan. We were told to come to receive aid at Lhonzizong. The message came from the district office. We were many people camped in a vacant area beside a bridge at Khomazong and it was very hot. The district office called us to receive aid. Some people went to get the aid while some didn't. "We have enough to eat now but surely one day they [the Bhutanese] will charge the Tibetan government for things that they haven't given us. That is very dangerous. Let's not go to get the aid," said some people foolishly. [Laughs] One country providing aid to another in times of need is customary and a very grateful thing. I told them, "I don't think there is any accounts record. We are on the verge of starvation and this is help from one government to another. If one does not need it, it's another matter. Let's go and get it." So at Lhonzizing, we were given rice and other provisions. We rested for around 11 days at a place called Mengay near Kurdhoe.

Q: What does he feel that would have happened to him and his family had he remained in Tibet?

#73: My older brother died in prison and my parents were old even at that time. I had sisters and the one younger to me died around a year back, though not from Chinese persecution. [Had I remained] someone like me would be no more at this time. In whatever way they [the Chinese] looked at it, I would be in the wrong. They would either create it through the people, or it could be because of the way I functioned during the old system. Whatever it was, like leading the village under the old system, though I had done it in accordance with the custom and not something that I created. At that time when provisions were asked to be given to the resistance fighters, I had to do so, whether it was grains or firewood or fodder for the animals. I could not but collect the things and send them for the army. We had no idea what was going to happen. Had I been left in Tibet, even my rusted bones would not be there. That is what I think.

Q: How did he find out that his brother had died in prison?

#73: He died in the Tsethang prison. I heard the news a year after I arrived in India. My brother was in prison even before I escaped from Tibet. Initially I was in a more dangerous situation than my brother. Later my older brother found himself in a more dangerous situation while I found some respite. Ultimately they wanted to *thamzin* me and the result would be imprisonment. And then there never was any way of escape. Finally, with the grace of God, I told them [the Chinese] that I did not have any plans to go abroad, surrendered my gold and silver ornaments and pretended complete faith in the Chinese government, which made them relaxed and I managed to escape.

Q: How long did they stay in Bhutan for?

#73: Many Tibetans who'd escaped earlier had settled at Kurdhoe. Our group arrived during the summer heat, around the seventh and eighth Tibetan lunar months. We were terrified of the Indian heat and thought that we'd die if we went there. Even though His Holiness the Dalai Lama was in India, we approached the Bhutanese leader several times requesting him to allow us to remain in Bhutan and not go to India for the time being. We offered presents and requested that we be permitted to stay on in Kurdhoe and that we would obey the laws of Bhutan. Initially he said we might stay, but after 15-16 days, he ordered that we could not remain there and everyone must leave. Some [Tibetan refugees] refused to leave, but the [Bhutanese] soldiers arrived and cut off the ropes of the tents. The Bhutanese soldiers were very arrogant. Then we were not allowed to stay at Kurdhoe. Our pleas were in vain.

The Bhutanese then escorted us to Mongazong. We begged for food and stayed at Mongazong for 11 or 12 days. The district office of Mongazong ordered repeatedly that we leave and we prepared to do so. However, we were a large group of people, around 800 many of whom were old and sick. They were in no position to travel when asked to leave. The problem faced by the sick and the old was reported to the Bhutanese leaders, but permission was never granted. The people urged me to once again approach the leader, so about 40 of us went to Mongazong to request the leader. However, the Mongazong leader

said, "This is the fourth time that you have come here. If 700-800 of you disturb us so much, it seems to me that you will destroy the country of Bhutan. Everyone must leave. You seem to be the chief person." Saying so, they caught me from the group of 40 people who had come to voice our grievance and tied me up behind their house with a grass rope. We were about 40 people and they said everyone was to leave the next day. We faced such hardships.

An officer came where I was tied and said, "What do you have to say now?" I said, "I do not have anything to say. Our country was invaded by the Chinese. Since the Bhutanese and the Tibetans share the same religion, many Tibetans escaped to Bhutan and so did we. We requested that we be not ordered to go to a hot country and be allowed to stay here temporarily. We did not say that we will not obey the laws of Bhutan nor did we say that we will not pay taxes. In this hot season, the sick and the old are not able to travel and everybody asked me to make our grievance felt and that is what I did. Other than this I do not have anything to say whether you tie me or punish me in any way." There was much discussion while I was tied behind the office of the district at 10 o'clock.

The rest of our group was also questioned and they replied, "We will leave tomorrow or the day after whenever you tell us to. However, please take care of our sick and the aged. Those of us who are able-bodied will leave either today or tomorrow but you have to release our man with us." They [the Bhutanese] said, "He will not be let off. You can go either today or tomorrow. We will hand him over to the Bhutanese government who will then hand him over to the Indian government. He is the main culprit who has come here four times." There was such a lot of trouble.

Q: Then what happened?

#73: There were many sick people and some who were unable to walk. The next day the Bhutanese brought some doctors who checked the fever of the sick by placing [the thermometer] under their tongues and arms. Then they allowed those that could not go, to remain there and said, "Attendants whether spouses or children can stay back to care for the sick. All those that are able, should leave." So we decided to leave. Finally I was released. The next day we were escorted by their soldiers and reached Gyagodham. The sick and those who could not walk were allowed to remain for some more time. Gradually some of them left [Bhutan], while some stayed back and some went to Bomdila.

Q: How were they received in India?

#73: When we arrived at Gyagodham, the border area between Bhutan and India, the Bhutanese had constructed many huts for the Tibetans. There was quite a number of Tibetans staying at Dhungsam, an area at a mountain pass. We were made to stay at the huts, which were built near a river on the border. There was a Bhutanese border officer called Babu who gave us enough provisions. He said we had to construct roads as per order from the Bhutanese government. The river water was not good. It was said that something occurred there during the Second World War and the water was greasy. Then the weather

turned hotter. We were given enough to eat, but perhaps it was the water; daily one or more people died. Though we had food to eat, we could not taste it.

The Bhutanese told us to construct roads. Some groups had built roads. There were more than 800 people. Those of us at Gyagodham did not plan to work on road construction. We said, "We cannot construct roads. We want to go to where His Holiness the Dalai Lama is. We want to go to Dharamsala." The Bhutanese spoke very rudely, "The Dalai Lama cannot take care of himself. Where will you go?" "That is not a matter of taking care of oneself. We are going with hope from country to country. We cannot stay here because daily someone is dying." Though we spoke thus, the Bhutanese were adamant and said we must construct roads.

Some people had worked for about a month. But they did not receive the promised wages with the excuse that the money was lost. People were not given the full salary. Probably the Tibetans did not work hard as there were instances of them being beaten by the Bhutanese. We did not have any wish to work there. People were dying and so we held a discussion. Then there was a meeting at Gyagodham between the Bhutanese and the Indians. Many Tibetan businessmen called Gyakar Khampa who lived in Kalimpong and Darjeeling for many years attended the meeting. They were thus consulted, "Many people [Tibetans] have arrived here and many are dying. His Holiness the Dalai Lama is so far away. What can we do? What is there for us to do?" They advised us, "There are representatives of the Tibetan government in Darjeeling and Kalimpong. It would be helpful if you go with your grievance there."

So we decided to do that. They said it was easier to go to Kalimpong than Darjeeling. We held a meeting and drafted a petition. Each one declined to go to put up the petition. Then they asked me to go to submit the letter. I told them, "I will go to submit the petition. However, I do not know a word of the language and have no knowledge how to travel from one place to the other. I need an interpreter." A person called Chodak who had lived for a long time in Kalimpong knew the Indian language. During the time we were living there, he [Chodak] would fetch the doctor if someone fell ill. He was a very helpful person, so he was sent as my interpreter. In the trains and buses, he spoke the language while I just pretended to be an Indian as I did not have any papers on me. At Kalimpong, in a small bungalow below a road, were the Chief Representative of the Tibetan government Mr. Namshel, some noblemen and representatives of the three provinces of Tibet. I went there to submit the petition.

Q: And then what happened?

#73: The Chief person Mr. Namshel and some government noblemen were there in Kalimpong. The petition said, "We are about 700 people who have arrived at Gyagodham. Though the Bhutanese are providing us with provisions, at least one person is dying everyday due to the heat. The weather is still turning hotter. Please advise us where we can go." I added, "The people's request to you is to help them go wherever His Holiness the Dalai Lama is, but I don't know if that is possible or not. The people asked me to take our grievance to His Holiness, but I do not have the necessary papers to go. This is our

petition." Then they said, "It is neither possible for you to go to His Holiness the Dalai Lama nor is it necessary. We will get in touch with him. At the moment the Bhutanese government and the Nepali government are facing difficulties because of the many Tibetans who are arriving there. The governments are in discussion. You two should wait here for a few days. We will direct your petition to Dharamsala and you can take back the reply with you if you wait a few days."

So we waited for 12 days in Kalimpong. The reply arrived on the 12th day. The message said, "It is very good of you to follow His Holiness the Dalai Lama. However, you should maintain cleanliness and take care of your health. You should obey the laws of the land and be cordial to its citizens. You must and should help each other. We will maintain contact." Together with the reply were bunches of copies of His Holiness' speech given at Dalhousie and *Dhuntsik Monlam* prayers. After 12 days in Kalimpong, we both went back to Gyagodham.

Q: Did he read the speech?

#73: After that we did not hear for a very long time. Unable to bear the heat, most of the people fled to Darjeeling. It was once again a getaway. Some went towards Bomdila. I, along with a group of people stayed put at Gyagodham hoping that a message would arrive. The number of people became less and less and the message did not arrive. I had two children with me when I left Tibet. One was quite small, having been born when the Chinese were staying at my home.

The Chinese had named her. She was born during the days of "Liberation through Peaceful Way." They [the Chinese] asked me if the child was a boy or a girl and when I said it was a girl, she was named Shiwa Methok 'Peaceful Flower.' The Chinese leader named her so. She died in Bhutan due to malnutrition. The older one was a toddler. As we waited at Gyagodham hoping for the message, the older one also died. The child's mother was also ill and she turned insane [with grief]. So one night we left for Darjeeling.

There was a Representative of the [Tibetan] Government at Darjeeling also. He was Tsendon Yeshe Lhundupa and he took care of the people and issued permits. We were given two *rupees* every two weeks and some milk. Besides that we did not receive any provisions, so we begged in the villages of Darjeeling. We stayed in Darjeeling for sometime in this condition. Then a message came from the [Tibetan] government, which said that we were to go to Dhakla in Bhutan for road construction. It further mentioned that the message was delayed. We said, "We will never go to Dhakla as we have faced extreme hardships in Bhutan. We will never go to work in Bhutan. If possible, please send us to the settlement in Mysore [Bylakuppe]."

When we [along with interpreter Chodak] had gone to Kalimpong, we saw people being sent to Mysore Settlement. Those who had fled in 1959 were already in Kalimpong. The Mysore Settlement had started by then. We were the ones who escaped in 1960. In the morning on a slope in Kalimpong, we saw crowded busses going away and people wearing *khata* 'ceremonial scarves.' When I asked where they were going, I was told that they were

leaving for the Mysore Settlement. Later we asked to be sent to the Mysore Settlement, but they said that the Mysore Settlement was full and if we didn't go to Dhakla in Bhutan, we were to go to Kulu [Himachal Pradesh in India] for road construction. Then we left to Kulu as road crew and lived there for eight years.

Q: And then what happened?

#73: We lived as road crew in Kulu Manali for eight years. Earlier there were about 15 Tibetan groups and later it rose to 35 or 36. In summer we had to go over the mountain pass and in winter we came back. We lived in this way for eight years. His Holiness the Dalai Lama visited often and said, "It is no use living as road crew. You must go to a settlement. It is very important to send your children to school. Crossing the mountain pass and moving every two or three months is very difficult for the elders. You must enlist to go to a settlement." After eight years, I came to the settlement in Mysore. I came here in 1969.

Q: What an exhausting journey. Is his wife still alive?

#73: Yes, she is.

Q: She got better?

#73: She became better at a hospital in Darjeeling. She is here with me and we have more children.

Q: Has Lhundup-*la* been back to Tibet since?

#73: My relatives in Tibet have written asking me to come to Tibet, but my family does not want me to go. The escape has not left a good impression on them and they say, "Father, if you go back and if you start rambling after drinking some *chang* 'home-brewed beer,' your relatives and you will be in trouble." They never wish to send me there, so I have not been back. I thought I would go back to Tibet with one of my children, so that I could introduce them. However, that is difficult.

Q: If the young Tibetans in exile would listen to him, what advice would he have for them?

#73: On my side, I have struggled a lot in Tibet as such was my livelihood. After arriving in India, I worked at road construction, and though I did not know the language, interpreters were appointed who were paid by the government. I was a group leader and I was entitled to an interpreter. In this way I worked for eight years as a group leader of the road crew.

Similarly after coming to the settlement, first I was named as *Chukpon* 'leader of ten' and then *Gyapon* 'leader of a hundred.' Whatever the position was, I served the people. In the same way I served as a Director of the Co-Operative Society, President of the Milk Producers' Co-Operative Society, Camp Leader, Office of the Tibetan Freedom Movement. Whatever office I was elected to by the people, I considered it an opportunity for a person

living in a [free] country, so whether I was capable or not, I took it as my responsibility and performed my duty with pride. In the future, the younger generation must do more than we have done under the old system. Here a child's education is taken care of from the age of two years onwards when he is admitted into the kindergarten. Such is the opportunity for education and I deem the government as most important and I say this all the time.

Q: It is very good advice. Thank you so much for sharing all his fascinating experiences with us.

#73: Thank you.

END OF INTERVIEW