

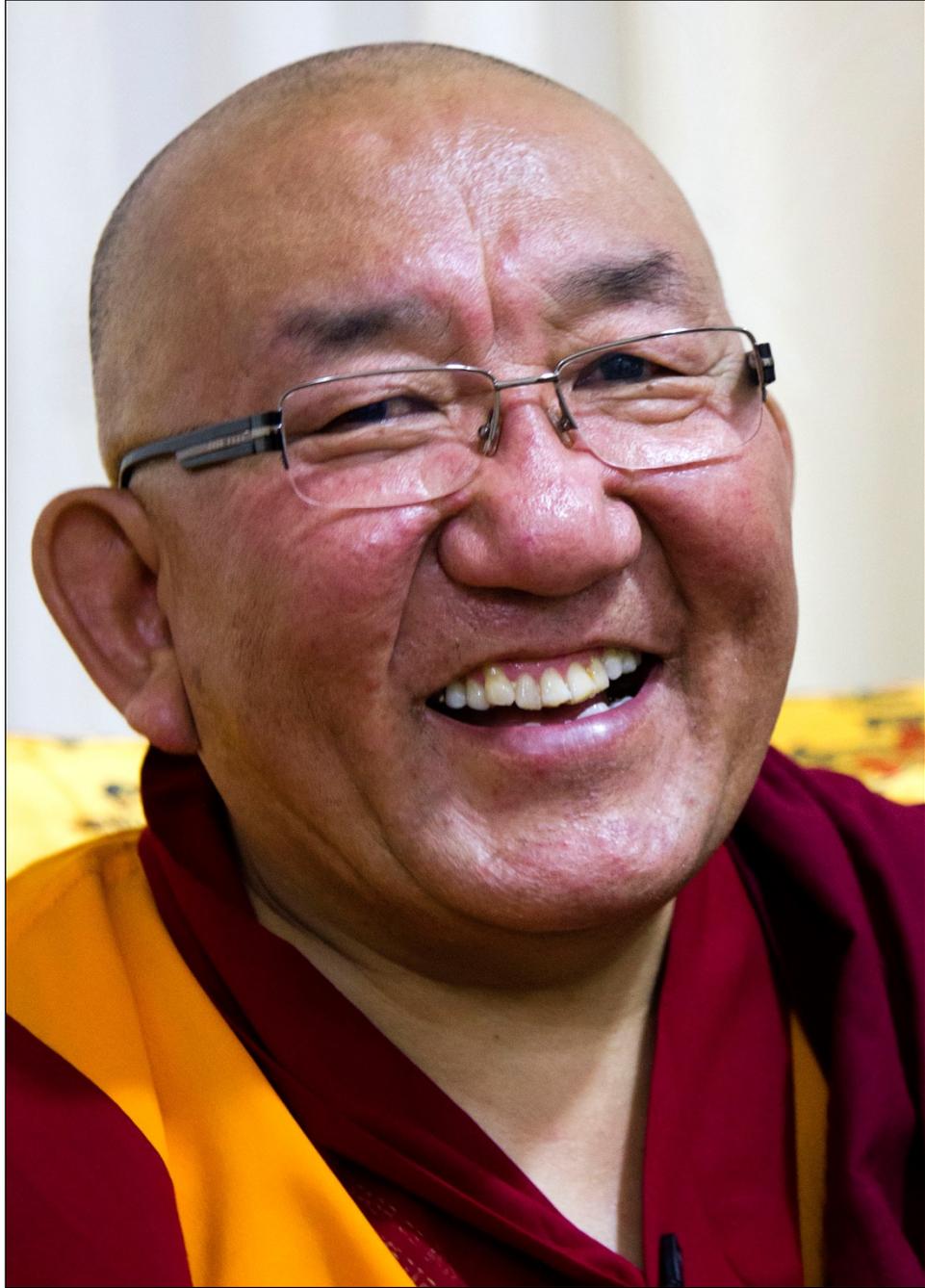
Tibet Oral History Project

Interview #7C/24B, Part 2 – Arjia Rinpoche
December 24, 2013

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INTERVIEW SUMMARY SHEET

1. Interview Number: #7C/24B, Part 2
2. Interviewee: Arjia Rinpoche
3. Age: 62
4. Date of Birth: 1950
5. Sex: Male
6. Birthplace: Dhashae
7. Province: Dhoday (Amdo)
8. Year of leaving Tibet: 1988
9. Date of Interview: December 24, 2014
10. Place of Interview: Samlo Khangtsen, Sera Monastery, Bylakuppe, Mysore District, Karnataka, India
11. Length of Interview: 1 hr 21 min
12. Interviewer: Marcella Adamski
13. Interpreter:
14. Videographer: Pema Tashi
15. Translator: Tenzin Yangchen

Biographical Information:

Arjia Rinpoche explains the selection of His Holiness the 11th Panchen Lama in 1995. The Chinese Government required a group of high Buddhist lamas including Arjia Rinpoche to assemble in Beijing for a meeting. They were intimidated to ensure that they all appeared in agreement with the government. There was going to be a selection ceremony, to “choose” the name of the next Panchen Lama. The government refused to allow Gedhun Choekyi Nyima, selected by the Dalai Lama’s as the Panchen Lama’s reincarnation, to be included in this process.

The same group was then sent to Lhasa for the Golden Urn Ceremony. The government facilitated the ceremony in the middle of the night in order to stage everything. Three names were attached to ivory sticks, inserted into a large urn, and the head of the Buddhist Association of Lhasa pulled one stick out with the name of Gyaltsen Norbu. Arjia Rinpoche later overheard a Chinese official admitting that one stick was longer than the others in order for the pre-determined winner to be easily chosen from the urn.

The Chinese Government later selected Arjia Rinpoche to be the President of the Chinese Buddhist Association and the tutor for the new Panchen Lama. He decided to leave Tibet because he refused to further collaborate with the government. He escaped to Guatemala, and eventually was granted asylum in the United States, where he published his autobiography.

Topics Discussed:

Life under Chinese rule, Panchen Lama, escape experiences.

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Age: 62, Sex: Male

Interviewer: Marcella Adamski

Interview Date: December 24, 2013

[Interviewee speaks in English. No interpreter required.]

[NOTE: This interview is a continuation of the first interview with Arjia Rinpoche conducted in California on June 10, 2013. The first interview is archived as “#7C/24B, Part 1.” When that interview concluded, Arjia Rinpoche was explaining that he had been selected as a member of a team to locate the reincarnation of the Panchen Lama. The Chinese Government was going to allow them to include the opinion of His Holiness the Dalai Lama as part of the search. The protest at Tiananmen Square happened shortly after and liberal leaders were replaced with conservative leaders in the Chinese Government. The new leaders would not allow any input from the Dalai Lama.]

00:00:05

Interviewee #24B: Then they [Chinese Government] started the reincarnation issue [of His Holiness the Panchen Lama] again but now it's totally different than before. So the second time when they started they still have those teams, you know. They usually have two teams. One is the high lama team. So those are the high lamas from Tibet and the Tibetan area or some area influenced by the Tibetan Buddhism, for instance Inner Mongolia, you know. They had the selection for the high lamas from those areas and had a group of people. That's one team.

The other team is pure party members, the Communists, the party members; even the party secretary is the highest official in the convention level. So they have to have those people there. So those two groups had a meeting together, so then finally, you know, it was 19...when was that? I've forgotten; 1995 maybe...'95 or '96, had the emergency meeting. So, which is sometime October 11 or something. So they call... October 9, so that's why they call it the “One, one, nine emergency meeting.”

In the “One, one, nine emergency meeting” they call up us. That's after His Holiness [the Dalai Lama] made that, you know, announcement for Gedhun Choekyi Nyima. After that the Chinese Government [became] very upset. I guess, after five months or something they had the emergency meeting in Beijing. So in this meeting they made three important decisions. The first decision is remove the Chadrel Rinpoche's position because Chadrel Rinpoche from Tashi Lhunpo and he is the head of that team for the searching him, for the reincarnation of His Holiness the Panchen Lama. So, remove his position because they said he is, he is a traitor, you know. He's kind of showing this loyalty to the Dalai Lama not to

the Chinese Government. So they're upset. Removed his position, even arrested him. So that is the first decision: "We have to denounce him."

Question: They arrested him?

00:03:01

#24B: Arrested, yeah. They arrested right away. After His Holiness made the announcement in, sometime May or June, so then right after that they arrested him, right away. So then, in this meeting we have to denounce him. So that's one decision. The second decision is, cancel Gedhun Choekyi Nyima who is His Holiness' version of the Panchen Lama's reincarnation. So that's the second version and the third one is that they decided to make the Golden Urn Ceremony. So those three things we have to have agreement for the common ground for the conference. That's why we had the...we already received the, you know, notes from the Chinese Government that they will have [an] emergency meeting in Beijing. So then, of course, the high lamas they don't want to [be] involved in this one and tried to avoid, myself as well. [But] we can't. So then finally they called up. Then they said, "You'll go to Beijing, have a big meeting. So you have to go there." So we knew there's something happening, you know.

Q: These were the high lamas living in...?

#24B: Living in Tibet, living in Tibet, Amdo, Lhasa, Kham, Inner Mongolia and Siting, Yunan those areas. Then I went to Sining, just myself from our province, Qinghai Province, which is Amdo. Then the secretary of the Party, you know, he's the highest person; he was asked to go. Then we both went to Beijing. When we went to Beijing, then we found out we are in a very special hotel, which is called Qingshi Hotel, which is a military hotel. We had some conference before but that's a very special hotel because the...fully, you know, like loaded armies around the door. So that's why...a big gate, before [it] was, you know like, a soldier there. Now they had doubled. Even four. Both sides of the gate, two of them and inside have two, four of them.

Q: To intimidate...What do you think was the reason to...?

#24B: That means like, that the meeting is very important and something, everyone has to be careful. So that's the sign.

Q: A warning.

00:06:11

#24B: It's a warning, yes. Exactly, thank you. So then we went to the meeting and we find out some delegations from Lhasa, you know some high lamas, some Tibetan officials, all the, you know, from the Tibetan Government. Some of them, they are called the CCPCC members, you know. That means, Chinese...oh, CPPCC or something, Chinese People's Political Consultant Committee member, which means Congressmen, you know. There's no power but the name, you know.

So we're all there and they said, "This time..."—some of our close friends, they're warning us. They said, "This time the meeting is very important. Everybody have to be careful." You know, they said, "You can't go out of the meeting, during the conference. You can't meet people." Even the rooms are bugged, you know. So they're listening and you can't talk. They were saying that. So then we went there and definitely they said, they didn't say that the room was bugged but they said, "You can't go out. It's a 3-day conference but you can't meet people. People can't come in." So that's why we thought, "Oh, the soldiers at the door." Because that means...

Q: Restricted.

#24B: Restricted, yeah. So then before this conference, before this conference they call us, the high lamas individually to the United Friends, you know the Chinese call Thungdangpu, which is the head of the lamas and those people, right? So they individually interviewed us, one by one. It depends, you know. For instance, Jamyang Shepa who is the one of the highest lamas from our Amdo region; he is the abbot of the Labrang Monastery. He was there. He was interviewed by the first leader from the United Friends. So then the second leader interviewed me. I don't know what they said to him but when they interviewed me, he asked me, "Okay, now we're going to do these three things at this conference. We'll make those three decisions. What's your idea? Do you agree?" Like, you have to agree, right? You have to say something, you know, with, stay consistent towards the Chinese Government. So that's the main point.

00:09:16

Then I right away inquired a couple of things. Then the first thing [I] said was, "Please can you release Chadrel Rinpoche because Chadrel Rinpoche is arrested and that's really a big burden for all of us. Because one day we might have some problem and they're going to arrest us. So that's why even we cannot, you know, kind of trust the government. So how come we can cooperate and work together?"

Chadrel Rinpoche may have made a mistake or something wrong but they can, you know, like they can learn, they can change. So how can you arrest him? That's too much. So my request is, can you release him? That's the first thing. The second thing, can you put Gedhun Choekyi Nyima's name in the Golden Urn during the Golden Urn Ceremony? I agree to the Golden Urn Ceremony. I can't totally disagree [to] everything. The Golden Urn Ceremony have to be done, that's fine, but during this time, can you put the name back, you know?" So they had cancelled that one.

Q: The one the Dalai Lama had selected?

#24B: Yes, yes, that's Gedhun Choekyi Nyima. So then the leader, you know, after my kind of request he changed his face. He said...he's a very gentle person, though. He's the second leader of the Bureau. His name is Li Datu. So Li Datu said—he always call me Chairman Arjia—"Chairman Arjia, you said that. I can understand, you know because you're from a different place. You don't know the situation. You're from Qinghai Province not from TAR, Tibet Autonomous Region. You're not from there. So, that's why you don't know the complicated situation there. They said that those people in TAR did a terrible

job. So they're kind of traitors, you know. That's why you don't know the situation [and] you said that. I can understand. However, you can't request this again. When you ask again you might have trouble. So you get in trouble, you know."

That's why, because that frightened me so I can't request that again. Because I tried, you know, I [was] very, kind of brave. I have to ask because I wanted [to] do my kind of effort. Then I can't.

00:12:16

So then finally...then I ask this one. That was very interesting. When I come back from the bureau, I come back to the hotel. Of course, they are sending us. When I come back, our, the Secretary of Party, he's a wonderful man. His name is Ying Kashing. He's passed away, anyway. Personally we're friends. So he was waiting for me there. [He] said, "Oh, I was calling you couple of times you're not in the room. So I was waiting for you." I [replied], "I went to the meeting at Thungdangpu." He said, "Oh, okay. Come. Come. Come."

Then he went to my room and said, "You said something [in] front of that leader. So you have little bit [of] confusion in your mind maybe. You can't do that. Tomorrow is a very important meeting, conference. In this conference, every high lama has to agree with the Chinese decision. On that one you can't say any different words. That'll be a big trouble, okay? That's why I just want to come and talk to you and educate you." [He] then said, "Please." So he pleaded with me, "Please, you have to think about me. We're all friends. So you have to think about our friendship. Please don't say anything [in] disagreement with the Chinese Government like that. Please, please don't say that." Then I said, "Okay, yeah, yeah. Okay, I'll listen to you. So how can I do, you know?" Because that's a pressure I know. I can't win.

The next day [we] had a big conference. On that conference [it's] very serious, I've forgotten...There's a big room, what's the arrangement...I've forgotten. So anyway, the important leaders from the Chinese Government they [were] sitting there [in] a very important position. Then on both sides, one side is the high lamas; the other side is the Secretaries of Party members from different provinces. So almost they made the arrangements like one, you know, one [sitting] across [from] one like that.

For instance, I was sitting here and across [from] me is our leader. So he was watching me. Behind us is the, you know, the United Friends. The leader of that one is sitting [points behind]. They also have different provincial level. So that's [the one] from our province, he was sitting behind me. So that means like, front of us, you know the leaders are watching and behind us, like almost if you say something, they can push you like saying, "Don't say, stop" or something maybe. I have that sort of feeling, you know like that.

00:15:30

So then right in front of me is a big camera there. Then every high lama has to make a very short announcement. Just say, "I agree with the Chinese Government." That's all. Then almost, you know, some of the high lamas before us, they said that and then me, I have to say that. I said, "Yes, I agree." That's the kind, you know of under the power. There's no

choice, very, very difficult. Then afterwards, then all lamas had lots of reason, tried to avoid that meeting.

So then I said...I went to hospital to check. Fortunately, the doctor said, "You have a little bit [of] problem with your heart." Because we're from a high plateau, maybe there might be some problem. So that's a good reason. "Okay, then I have to stay in the hospital to rest a couple of months or something." So then, okay, fine. I stayed in hospital. One of my friends, who's Chushi Rinpoche, he had a problem with his knee. Then he did surgery during that time. I was in the hospital and everybody tried to avoid [the meeting], you know.

Because they said, "In this meeting we already decide to arrest Chadrel Rinpoche. We already cancel the...His Holiness' version of the Panchen Lama. So the third thing, the Golden Urn Ceremony will have to be done." [But] when, we don't know. They said, "Whenever we decide everybody has to go." So, everybody wants to try to avoid that event. So that's why they all went to hospital and so forth.

Q: Explain what that Golden Urn Ceremony is.

00:17:37

#24B: Yes, I will do that; I will do that. So then...even before that, [on] one hand they gave that kind of pressure, political pressure to do that. On the other hand, they're giving us very big gift, money. Everyone has...Oh, I've forgotten, maybe they gave 20,000 Chinese *yuan*. Everyone has a gift because you have to listen to the government. So this is the kind of little bit [of] additional gift for you, besides your salary and everything.

So anyway, then the Golden Urn Ceremony. After one month when I was in hospital, the leaders from the Chinese Government, they come to me and visit me with fruit and everything. They said, "Okay, now we're going to do the Golden Urn Ceremony. You all have to go." Then I said, "Oh, I have a problem with my heart. I'm in the hospital, maybe I can be excused." They were laughing, "You all have some problem. You have heart problem, Chushi Rinpoche has knee problem. Some other people have some different problems. But don't worry. We'll have wonderful doctors with you. You have to go. If you can't go that means that's showing your, you know, like political aversion, you know. You agree with the Chinese Government or not? That's why you have to go." So then I know that finally we're the losers. So we have to go.

00:19:21

So then after we all gathered together in Beijing Hotel, which is very high standard hotel, then after breakfast they have a special jet for, you know sending us to Lhasa. Then we all went to Lhasa. So when we went to Lhasa for the Golden Urn Ceremony, that's a very interesting story. You know, we heard [about] the Golden Urn Ceremony...but Golden Urn, that event, but never seen that; we never experienced. So that would be a very interesting thing, even before that [it was] very interesting.

We landed in Lhasa; we landed in Lhasa. When we landed from the airplane we can see full armies, you know, fully loaded armies, military people, you know, soldiers around the

airport. Almost like a...something [like] war going on, like that feeling, you know. Then they gave name badge and everything for us. They said, “You are going to sit in this car and you are in this room” and so forth. They already made arrangement. You are in such and such number of car and so forth.

When we get in this car, from the airport, Kunga Airport to Lhasa Hotel, maybe 100 kilometers away or something, little bit about one hour or two hours or something like that. On the way almost, you know, both sides of the road has soldiers. So almost each, I don’t know, maybe each 10 meters have one person or something. Then each intersection has a group of soldiers there with machine guns and motorcycles and everything there, you know. So [it was] very, very serious.

Q: Very intimidating.

00:21:30

#24B: Exactly. So when we got to the Hotel, [in] the hotel everywhere, lobby and everywhere has lots of soldiers there. Then we had a meeting right away. On this meeting they said, “Tomorrow we’ll have the Golden Urn Ceremony. So everyone has to participate in the Golden Urn Ceremony. There’s no excuse for everyone. Everyone has to go there.” What time? When? We don’t know. We will kind of stay on tune. “We will let you know right away.”

Then [the Chinese] said, “On this conference, on this event we’ve made wonderful arrangements. You don’t need to worry [about] anything.” They said, “If the Dalai group...” They said, “...separates, the Dalai group. If they do something we will extinguish them right away.” So, very serious. “If you are...You have to be on our side. If you have some problem or something, including you, you all...There’s no excuse for everyone.” So then everybody’s very scared, you know.

So then Chushi Rinpoche was telling me, “Why they said that? They might have the meeting sometime midnight, maybe. We have to be prepared.” So then we come back to the room. We didn’t sleep. We’re just chatting and waiting. So around 2 o’clock morning, 2 o’clock they come and knock [on] the doors like, they said, “Okay, we’re going to...Ready to [do] the Golden Urn Ceremony.” Then we all dressed up and then we went to the lobby. They have doubled the soldiers, more, even more. So then we get in the van to the Jokhang Temple. From the Lhasa Hotel to Jokhang Temple, maybe just 10 minutes drive or something. So both sides of the road, just side-by-side [was] the military with the [touches head] what you call, the helmet, right?

Q: Helmet.

00:23:58

#24B: Helmet, yeah, helmet. With helmets, machine guns. Oh, wow, I wanted to take a picture but I couldn’t. I was so scared that they might say something. That was really an interesting picture, you know. So when we got [to] Lhasa Jokhang Temple, in Jokhang Temple [it’s] already full of people there. I don’t know when they gathered there. There’re all dressed up like [in] very ceremonial clothes, like very nice clothes, monks and lay

people, men and women and everyone there. They were all saying prayers and waiting for us.

When we get in then [it was] very serious. Every corner has some person there. I'm, you know, sure like they are maybe police or soldiers or something, but they don't have guns though, without guns. You can't see guns; maybe they might have handguns somewhere, maybe. But anyway, they're all dressed up and they're like waiting there.

Then we went to the front of the Jokhang, the Jowo Rinpoche, [statue of the] Buddha Sakyamuni, right? So then there are seats. Three seats for the three delegations from Beijing, two delegations from Beijing and one is the Chairman of Tibet Autonomous Region. He's a Tibetan and his name is Gyaltzen Norbu. Okay, so three of them sitting on very important chairs [in] front of the Jokhang, the Buddha Sakyamuni.

So then this side is the high lamas and the other side is the government officials. Then in front of the leaders, there's arrangement for a table. So there's a table; on this table, it has tablecloth and everything and then a big golden urn, a golden *bumpa*. That's big, very big, like this big [indicates one foot].

00:26:10

So then we've never seen this kind of thing before. That's why, how we don't know. In English it's called Golden Urn Ceremony, right? So you can't say the details. Actually in Chinese [they] say *jing ping to chang*, which means like "golden urns have sticks can shake out" something like that. When you go to a Chinese temple there's a stick in some cup or something. Then the fortuneteller can shake out one [stick] and check the signs and like that.

So I have that feeling, the name is same. So then we thought like [they] were going to do that one. Then some monk came and they made arrangement for that. Actually the golden urn, inside [it] has a little golden cup, like this big [indicates six inches] like a golden cup. In this golden cup has three...what do you call...[points to teeth] ivo...? The elephant's teeth, what do you call?

Q: Tusk?

#24B: Tusk? Ivory or something?

Q: Elephant tusk? Ivory?

#24B: Ivory, ivory, yeah. Ivory. They have three ivory sticks this long [indicates eight inches], ivory sticks this long, not really thin but pretty thick, square kind of thick, so three of them. They put them in a golden plate. They have three names there. So the three names are the Panchen Rinpoche's reincarnation's nominees, you know. Of course, Gedhun Choekyi Nyima, the Dalai Lama's version of the Panchen Lama is cancelled. Instead [they] put someone else. There are three names on it, three names on three pieces of paper. They've printed; they're showing it to everyone.

Then they stick on it. They put a little glue and then they put it. After they glued, then they have little covers, like fabric, golden fabric. They cover. The covers are very tight. They just push them; kind of forcefully cover three of them. After covering, they put them in the plate again. And they kind of showed them for the leaders. The leaders, they didn't touch; they just like very gently nod the head like okay, they agree, something like that.

00:28:58

So then they put the three of them back in the Golden Urn, the cup. Because we have some distance we can't see the details. So this side [were] the high lamas. The Karmapa was there. So I remember the Karmapa, the Phakpala, Sangchen, Sangay Dorjee Phagmo and Jamyang. Then [in] the second row I was there. So then we're all there. We're pretty close but not that close. So that's why you can't see.

Then the Golden Urn Ceremony started. Bomi Rinpoche who is the head of the Buddhist Association of Lhasa, Tibet Autonomous Region, he came and did three prostrations to the Buddha Sakyamuni. Then he came to this cup. Because his back [was to us] we can't see him, you know. We can't see him in the front. We're sitting here and he's doing something, you know, facing the Sakyamuni. That's why we can't see him. So finally he gets one and then he put it in the plate and show the leaders again. The leaders like nod the head again. So they open the...uncover the fabric. So then they said the name.

When they made the announcement, the nominee is Gyaltsen Norbu. So Gyaltsen Norbu who is the leader of Tibet Autonomous Region, he made the announcement for Gyaltsen Norbu, like kind of a little joke, you know, like Gyaltsen Norbu making announcement with Gyaltsen Norbu, like that kind of a play with words with, you know, people after. Like they're playing themselves, something like that.

00:30:55

So anyway, then that was, I guess, that was around 4 o'clock maybe in the morning. At 2 o'clock we went to the event. So when they started, you know, there's the preparation and everything. They started maybe around 3 or 3:30, 4. Then after that ceremony—that was pretty quick—we come back. When we come back, then almost, I don't know. I've forgotten, maybe after several hours later...On TV they're already showing that one.

On TV [they] said two things, very obvious. One thing said [was], "Around 10 o'clock we had the Golden Urn Ceremony." That was not true. Why they said that I don't know. Because they think, you know, the Golden Urn Ceremony was too early. So, people might think that's unusual, right? So maybe they said 10, maybe like, "Oh, it's just usual," maybe. That's one reason maybe. The second thing is when on TV they showed very close distance, the Golden Urn Ceremony inside has those three sticks; one of them is slightly higher than the others. Then Bumi Rinpoche kind of intentionally get that one, the long one, you know. He did that couple of times [moves fingers around]. He might [have been] asked, so that's why he intentionally gets this long one and gave to the leaders. The leaders opened and everybody was very happy [indicates clapping of hands], "Oh, very successful" like that kind of thing. Then the Golden Urn Ceremony, after this the Golden Urn Ceremony decided the Panchen Lama's reincarnation.

00:32:46

So then we went to Shigatse from Lhasa. So again that's the same thing. Oh, even more soldiers on the road and even we have, you know, like team, like lots of cars, maybe 80 or 100 cars there. Then the military's in the front and behind, lots of soldiers. We went to Tashi Lhunpo [Monastery]. Then they have, you know, the Enthronement Ceremony. They're just copying the Qing Emperor, you know, like they are giving the Golden Seal and Golden Document and everything.

After that ceremony's over, when we come back, we come back from Beijing, back to... from Lhasa back to Beijing. So on that special jet there are Chinese leaders, that's called the...delegation of Chinese leaders. Li Tiying, he was there. Then the second leader is the leader of the Religious Department. So there's a Religious Department [head, who] is in charge of religion. That person's name is Yi Xiaoyin. So both of them [were] in the jet and then different people, too.

So then myself and Jamyang Shepa, [who] I mentioned before [as] one of the highest lamas from Amdo [were there]. So two of us on this jet went back to Beijing. So then they said the leaders are going to have a special, you know, conversation with you guys and invited us. Then we went there and the leader was sitting there, full of smiles and very happy. They said, "This time was so wonderful [what] we did. Everything was very successful. That'll be in the history and we all became, you know, like on the records and we'll be in history."

They were very happy with that. Then he started to talk about lots of history, of European history and Chinese history and lots of things. Then the other leader was making notes because that's Chinese style. When the high leader is saying something, other leader has to make notes because they study them or later have to, some kind of thing. Anyway, so then after that he might [have become] tired. So he [was] just taking oxygen and a little rest, you know.

00:35:46

Then the second leader Yi Xiaoyin who is the secretary of...you know, the leader of the Religious Department, he was very, you know, pleased as well. Then he started to talk. He said, "Oh, this time was so successful. You know what? Do you know the three sticks? One of them [was] little bit longer? We intentionally put a little cotton under that fabric, that cover." I was shocked! I was shocked! I can't believe I heard that! So then I'm almost, I'm sweating, kind of, you know. I'm saying something; I heard that. So then I can't, you know, directly watch him, look [at] him. So I'm just kind of peeking [at] Jamyang Shepa. Jamyang Shepa was doing something like [makes fidgeting gesture], you know, doodling or something there. I'm watching Li Tiying, the leader. He was like relaxing and taking oxygen and eyes are closed, like that.

Then he [Yi Xiaoyin] had lots of conversation about that, I've forgotten. So then he said, "The three nominees in Tibet region, once His Holiness—they didn't say His Holiness, they said Dalai—when the Dalai made that announcement for Gedhun Choekyi Nyima, then the situation became very tense. So we report to the leaders." The Chinese leaders, the highest leaders, they have like seven people. So seven people [are] the head of the whole of China, the secretary members.

Seven of them have almost seven private jets or private something, you know because for official [purposes]. So they said, “We borrowed three of them.” He was showing like very powerful and very important, directly talk to the Chinese leaders or something. He was showing off, that one. So that’s why he said, “We brought three of them from the seven jets. Then we went to Lhasa and got those three nominees, put them in the three jets, including the Dalai’s, that one. So then we fly to different directions,” he said. Where? We didn’t ask; we can’t ask, you know. So we just listened to his talk, that’s all. Then he said, “We did those things.”

01:38:48

But anyway, that’s so far we know. You know, from that place, from their hometowns, you know get those three nominees, put them in the special three jets and fly to different directions. Of course, two of them were finally in the selection and get the Chinese version of Panchen Lama. But the other one, you know, Gedhun Choekyi Nyima, we call the real Panchen Lama, you know, disappeared that time, that time. He’s saying that...after that I was thinking all the time. I was thinking why they leak that very secret thing.

Q: To you.

#24B: Yeah, to me, to us. So that was...My impression is, you know, the Tibetans believe in three nominees. Those three nominees represent the body, speech and the mind. So they said, “Once we have the selection from His Holiness, that’ll be the representative of the mind. So, that will be the main reincarnation. However, two of them are still there. So the message is, his message, Yi Xiaoyin’s message is, “That one [Dalai Lama’s selection] unfortunately can’t be in that one, but still we find one from the two, you know, left two. So that’s why you should support us. We’re still finding the reincarnation from the three, you know.” So maybe that’s only the message. Other than that, why he was leaking that, you know, top secret, I don’t know. He’s not really crazy or something. No. He’s very...he’s intentionally saying that, yeah. Why? I don’t know. So that was the Golden Urn Ceremony.

00:40:58

So finally my positions are promoted. Then the message, one of the leaders, we had the, we call it the tea party. That tea party is different than the Western tea party, okay? [Laughs] That tea party means like the leaders have a tea party, invite all people and having tea and relax and they will give some message and everybody have to agree. That’s always called tea party. Every New Year, Chinese New Year [they] have a tea party for the New Year to invite those high lamas and religious leaders and professors from universities, famous universities. They will have the tea party.

[At] one of the tea parties one official, he told me, he said, “Oh, congratulations.” Then I said, “Oh, thank you. What’s the...what about?” He said, “You’ll be the...one of the high important lamas, okay? You will be the President of the Chinese Buddhist Association because President Mr. Datu will retire. He’s like almost 90. So he will retire and you’re going to take his place. You’ll be the successor. Then also you can be the General Secretary of the Chinese Peoples Political Consultant Committee member. Why have that important position? Because you’re the right person [to] be the Chinese version of the Panchen

Lama's tutor." Yes, because my uncle was the 10th Panchen Lama's tutor. "So that's why you are the best choice." So then, "Wow." Then I said thank you to them right away. But in my mind [I was] thinking, "Time to leave. There's no choice." [Laughs] So anyway, that was my final decision [that] I have to escape. Then I escaped. [Laughs]

[Discontinuity in interview]

Q: So, we're going to pick up about the four...the three choices. Could you say something about what happened to the Dalai Lama's choice that was...you said was flown away on one of those jets? What happened to him?

00:43:52

#24B: There's no information. So far we know from the three choices, His Holiness' version of the Panchen Lama disappeared. Until now we don't know where's him. The other one became the Chinese version of the Panchen Lama and then the other I don't know. But anyway, so far we don't have any information, yeah.

Q: Perhaps you could help us understand why you think the Chinese picked that particular young boy as a...?

#24B: Yeah, that's [what] I'm thinking, you know, I mentioned that [a] little bit. I'm thinking two things. One thing because the three choices, you know, representing the body, speech and mind, right? And unfortunately, you know, the representation of the mind is disappeared but two of them are still there. They tried to get one from those two. So that's why [it's] still kind of real. So that's showing that one. The other thing is, I guess those three nominees, besides Gedhun Choekyi Nyima, His Holiness', you know, version of the Panchen Lama. I guess he [Dalai Lama] has never seen that person. So he's never seen that person, so that's just from the mind and practice and so forth [that] he decided.

Beside that one, two of them...they put another one and [that's] three. From the three of them, I guess now the Chinese version of the Panchen Lama is one of the person, maybe those are young people but smartest one, maybe. They don't want to have some kind of person, you know, who kind of mentally, maybe little slow or something. They might say, people already, they don't believe, right? Plus somebody like, oh... "Ah," they will say, "that's not the true [Panchen Lama]."

That's why they try to find the, you know, physically, mentally better. Like that they might think. So that's why their message is, "Don't worry, we'll get the best choice from those one and also representative one of them. So that's why we intentionally put the cotton. You have to believe." Or something. That's the message I'm guessing. So beside that I don't know why [Yi Xiaoyin was] saying that top secret.

Q: That it was the best one.

#24B: Yeah, yeah. That was the best, that's the one.

Q: And you were going to be offered a job to train the best one.

00:46:46

#24B: Yeah. [Laughs] Then my position right away became very high. So my personal, my life will be very comfortable, you know. However, that's somebody, you know like me, I'm a practitioner. So I believe [in] the Buddha, dharma and sangha, right? When I practice, I respect my guru, lamas. So somebody I don't believe and I get lots of information from those secret things, then how come I can believe that person, you know. So that's the reason, that's very difficult.

Before, I was in China; I have to work with the Chinese Government. Of course, I [was] kind of a go-between, right? So people...I can try to help our monastery, our local people, you know. Then also talk to government like doing that kind of thing. Now that's the final thing. I can't cooperate; I can't compromise. So that's the reason I decided to leave. So I escaped.

Q: There's too much.

#24B: Yeah, that's too much. I can't do it.

Q: It crossed the boundaries.

#24B: Exactly.

Q: You were helping your people, the Tibetan people, by being a liaison...

#24B: Yes.

Q: But this was colluding with them to actually act as if this was the chosen Panchen Lama and you didn't agree with that.

00:48:24

#24B: I can't compromise, I can't agree with that. Then I have to decide to leave. So then I decide to escape. When I decide to escape, that's a big decision, you know. So, first of all I'm thinking where I should go? Because I remember my teacher Jaya Rinpoche's message, he said...He always called me boy. When I become 30 years even then he called me boy. He said, "Boy, [when] you turn 50, you should step down from the political stage and stay somewhere quiet and practice." So that's always [what] he said. So then I count and I'm already 48, very close to 50. Then the situation is very complicated.

So then I said, "Oh, that is the message from my lama, my guru." So time to leave. Where I should go? I don't know. I have no idea. India? Almost impossible because I have such a high position. If I go to Lhasa [there's a] group of people with me; so I leave them and go somewhere else just by myself, that's impossible. So then where I can go? If I go to China I...Even though have a little bit of chance because, you know, if I went to China and maybe say, "Now I have a private little, you know, kind of little resting couple of days or something, you know." Couple of days, that's okay; day off or something, that's okay. But otherwise, even Lhasa I can't make it. So that's why India, I can't.

So then where I can go? I don't have a place to go. I don't know where I should go. I even though have a passport. The Chinese Government sent me to different countries, like that. But I don't know where I can get the visa. I've never done that because the Chinese officials, they're doing that. The so-called secretaries, they're doing that. [It's] their job, that's not our job. So, once you have your passport, they just take your passport, go somewhere and get the visa and give back to you and say, "Okay. You are in a team of five people," for instance, "going to Japan and have a conference there." Okay? And then when you cross the checkpoint they will get all of them [passports]. They said, "Okay, that's so dangerous, maybe you can lose them. I will take care of them." Then you can't stay there without the passport. After you come back you go through the checkpoint, they will give back to you, then you get in and then you can keep it. You can keep it for the next trip. For the next trip, they're always doing that. That is their system, you know.

00:51:40

So then I have a passport. When I can go? I don't have any visas, you know. So then, I have a friend called Christine. She's my student. Then I said, "Christine, can you help me?" She's from Indonesia. She speaks very good English and so forth. Then I said, "Can you help me? I want to decide to escape." She said, "Really? Rinpoche, are you crazy or you really...? Are you kidding?" "No, no, no. I've really decided." "Really? Where? What's happened?" I said, "The situation is very complicated. So that's why I want to leave." So then she said, "That's very complicated if you go to a different place. First of all, you can make it or not? That'll be a success or not? That's the first thing. That's very dangerous. Once you make it, where are you going to go? Where are you going to stay? New life, you know, so-called the 'cultural shock.' Everything is different. Where?"

Then I said, "Don't worry about those future things. I just leave; I want to leave. That's all. That's the most important thing now." Then finally she did some kind of research and said, "Only one place you can go." "Where?" "Guatemala." "Why Guatemala?" "Because Guatemala and China doesn't have a foreign relationship. So that's why you can go to Guatemala without the passport...oh, without the visa." So then, "Okay, then we go. You just buy the tickets and we'll try to leave." Then I decide to go with five people with me. Including myself, five, you know, four people with me. So myself, I can't share this with my dear friend, my secretary, that's my true secretary, my...also kind of student. Because he is a very gentle person and he's a very "be careful" one, you know. Careful and like a...

Q: Cautious.

00:53:55

#24B: Cautious one. So if I share that one he will definitely stop [me], "That's a ridiculous thing; that's a naïve thing. You can't do it." He's also married. He has two kids or something, family and everything. So then I said, "Okay, I will keep it secret from him." I even still now, I feel like a little bit guilty, you know. He was with me for 25 years but before leaving I [didn't] even tell him. That's China and that's [how] the thing happen that way.

So then I told my student Chonphel. He was with me. Then my nephew was with me, my nephew because my younger brother had a third son. He can't have three sons but...three children but you can't have a third one. So they have to take him out and then I said, "I will adopt him." So then that's why he became my kind of adopted son. So then I have to take care of him. Then my bodyguard, because my bodyguard is the...government want to send a bodyguard with me.

Then I said, "No, no. I have my own bodyguard. He will be the person." They don't agree but then they don't have any choice. They said, "Okay, temporarily you can keep him as a bodyguard." Because the bodyguard from China is watching you, so that's why they could have a person, their person. They have to have somebody, police or something. Then the bodyguard, he just recently married. So that's why [there was] his wife, my bodyguard, myself, Chonphel and Tinlay, who's my nephew. Then five of us decide to escape.

00:55:45

Then I asked Christine, "Please, could you buy tickets?" Then online, you know, you can buy tickets because only one airplane goes there, which is the KLM directly from Beijing to Guatemala. So even the tickets are from Holland, not from Beijing, so that's even safe, more safe. So then she called up and talked to the person in Beijing who said, "Oh, yeah. There are seats but no tickets, stand by, okay? Tomorrow there's choice [if] you can leave. Otherwise, you have to wait for two weeks." Then I said, "Oh, that's too dangerous." Because that time I already made the reason from the conference in Beijing. So remember I said, you know at the conference somebody told me "you'll be promoted and like a big leader" and so forth. Then I said, "I want to take a retreat, you know, doing retreat in southern China." "Oh, okay." Then I left and went to southern China near Hong Kong.

So then I disguised myself. I prepared [a] little moustache. Then I'm wearing civilian clothes like a Chinese or Japanese tour man, [laughs] like that. Then with a hat, with dark glasses, then five of us no more like monks, like business people, okay? Then came back and stayed in Beijing [in a] small hotel, not a big hotel, government hotel. Very, you know, kind of remote area, we stayed in a little hotel.

We contacted only Christine, no one else I can tell. Then Christine was doing that ticket thing for me. Then she said, "Okay, tomorrow is the choice. You can leave." Oh, that whole night I can't sleep. Then I did a kind of research for that, which said when you leave almost 99% [have] no success. They will get them. Some of them, they can make through but you can't. So then I don't know how to make it.

00:58:12

With my lots of prayers [laughs] then the next morning five of us, two of us went to Christine and they went to Beijing city to buy the tickets, the office in the city. So three of us went to the airport. That night there's a big snow. The big snow, because the snow has caused lots of traffic...then we finally barely made it to the airport. Then, oh, because I was so afraid I feel like everybody's watching me. [Laughs] So there's even a cameraman! "Oh," I said, "okay, now it's done! That person already knew me. So that's why they're making the camera, taking the video or something, you know, with the camera." I was so scared. Actually [it was] not, he just went away.

But anyway, we're calling each other, "Did you get the tickets or not?" They said, "No, we're still on the way because of the traffic." They can't make it. So then morning it [airplane] is leaving around 11, it's leaving. At 8:30 or maybe 8 we already get to the airport. So then we're calling each other, "Did you get the tickets or not?" Finally they said, "Oh, we got there and we're buying tickets now." "Okay, great, great." Then we're waiting for them and they said, "Oh, we're still in traffic, still in traffic. They can't make it. Come back" like that. Then at least we have the tickets. We are so happy.

That time already on the loudspeaker there's the announcement. They said, "People going to Guatemala are leaving." So on to board. We all stood up and preparing our luggage and everything but we don't have any tickets. So then finally they came in. They're sweating and said...finally had the tickets. Once you have the tickets, for instance, specially in the West, right? You have the ticket; you have a passport and then you just take off, leave. No, in China there's a big problem behind that. So how to go through the checkpoint without the visa? I was so afraid. That time because of the snow, big snow, fortunately lots of people [are] stuck in the airport, very crowded. That time the Chinese airport, they didn't remodel, so that's why it's pretty small, kind of very crowded. So people don't want to have that big crowded there. So they said, "Go through, quick, quick" like that.

01:01:13

So then five of us...my passport is a very special passport because I have very high position. So I have the diplomatic passport. That's very...the cover is red and so very obvious. So I put my passport behind their passports. We pretended like a small team. [Laughs] Then I gave to the man at the checkpoint. So finally, they didn't discover. They just stamp and "go, go" like that. So we went through the checkpoint. Then finally we got on the airplane.

When we got on the airplane, almost all passengers are there. We're kind of little late but we get there. We sit with the passengers...I never told Tinlay, my nephew; he was 13 at that time because kids can get too excited and they might talk. So I told, "We're going somewhere." "Where? Where?" he was so excited. Then I said, "No, no, just don't worry." Then we all get...We know where we're going, right?

So then with lots of prayers and...then the airplane, they never close the door. They just keep [it] open. The music's on, like that. Then I said, "What's happening? So they already maybe find out?" So in my mind, you know, oh, the police came and with that—what do you call, handcuffs—handcuffs and like that...Then arresting me and lots of terrible pictures in my mind.

I was so scared. So then I checked the *mo* 'divination,' you know; Tibetan monks are always doing the *mo*. I check the *mo* and it said, "Fine, no problem." but I don't know how to, how can I trust [it]? Then finally they said they're waiting for some passengers stuck in the snow. When they come in...they come in, they close the door and the plane takes off. Oh, big sweating!

01:03:34

So then, you know, on one hand...is happy because we left. The other hand is sad. We left [but] when we can go back? So the weather also, everywhere [it's] kind of white, covered by the snow, kind of already homesick, you know, miss home. So two of us already start to cry. They are smiling but, you know, the tears are down, so very, very difficult situation, anyway. After two days we get to Guatemala.

In Guatemala also we had a big kind of strange story happened, too. When we get there, our friend called Peter—I have a friend. When I was with the 10th Panchen Lama I visited Central America and South America. So I met a person called Peter. He has a business in Guatemala, so I asked him and he sent the invitation to us. So that's the reason we went there. Peter was a businessperson and he left and sent somebody else to come and help us. So in Guatemala they all speak Spanish, right? We can't speak English and we've no language, like. [Laughs] So then [it's] very difficult. How?

Some guy there like shake hands [waves right hand]. So that's, we thought, that's Peter's friend, must be, you know. Then we're so happy and he was talking to the immigration office there, officers there. So then finally we get the visa; we get the landing visa, so-called landing visa. Then we're happy, okay. When we try to leave there's a military checkpoint, the soldiers are there. One soldier came and said, "I want to see the passports." We have to show and he takes them away.

Oh, then we're really scared. Instead they send some soldiers that surround us with big dogs. [Laughs] Oh, we're so scared. Then we [were] asking somebody there, Chinese people on the plane we met, "What's going to happen?" "I don't know. They need...They want money." Because of the corruption they want money. "If you don't give money, they might send you back." Oh, no! Oh, so scared! Then I don't know what they're going to do. I can't talk; we can't communicate.

Then they're just running around, running around. After one hour or something they come back. They actually were expecting some money but we don't know how to, even if we want to give some money, I don't know how to give with all soldiers around us. Finally, they gave us, gave back our, you know, passports. So then we finally get to Guatemala.

01:06:51

So in Guatemala we spent two months. Then what are we going to do? So then Peter said, "Don't worry, don't worry. I have lots of friends. Maybe we can send you to, you know, El Salvador or somewhere." I said, "No, even [in] Guatemala, we can't make it. Why we're going there?" So then what are we going to do? We don't know what we're going to do. We just said, "leave" and we escaped.

Where we're going? We try to go to U.S. to ask political asylum but we can't get there. We get to just Guatemala, that's all. So then we contact to Christine. Christine was in Beijing. So then Christine said, "Oh, you should contact His Holiness. His Holiness', you know, representatives are everywhere. Maybe Guatemala has one." Then finally she said, "Unfortunately there's no representative in Guatemala but in Washington D.C."

Then I wrote a letter to His Holiness and send the letter to Dharamsala [Himachal Pradesh, India]. Then right away His Holiness talked to people in ICT, International Campaign for Tibet, yeah, talked to them. And finally we had a visa for U.S. after two months. That [time] then already my visa, you know, has expired. I was holding a diplomatic passport, so that's why they can't give a visa extension for me. If given, they have to talk to the foreign affairs or something, foreign affairs. So that's...then everything will be a very complicated. So I can't make it and so anyway, finally we get the visa and get to the U.S. That was April 28th in 1998.

01:09:14

After 42 years I met His Holiness in New York. I had a little article somewhere I called laughter. His Holiness was laughing, "Ha, ha, ha" like that. I met him and we had a long conversation like almost two hours. "How can you get here and what's your passport look like?" He was interested in everything. We had the conversation and then finally he said, "Okay, you should tell the truth but not like, you know, bad words for the Chinese Government. No, no. I tried to negotiate with the Chinese Government, so if you can do something good for that, that would be good. You might have some good friends in China, for instance, the Chinese President Jiang Zemin, you know. It seemed to me you have good relationship. You might write a letter to him."

Then I said, "Wow. His Holiness said that and I can't say no, but how can I? Now I'm [what] they call traitor, you know. I left. How can I write back?" So then I write the letter to President Jiang Zemin. Of course, I have to say...because of political...I didn't say political thing, I said because of the religious, you know, like desire, I want to practice that's why I left and I'm so sorry.

So anyway, now His Holiness wants to go back. If I can do something for that I want to go between, like that and then I send the letter to him. So when I send the letter to the Chinese President, I send this letter to Beijing [to] one of my friends. Then he gave to...I sent to Christine; Christine gave to my friend in Beijing. So they delivered [it] to the Chinese President. They get it right away. They send me; they said that.

01:11:28

Then the so-called Chinese, they don't want to lose face. So the Chinese President Jiang Zemin, everything made wonderful, wonderful. How come the religious people escape? So that's a big problem, losing face, right? That's why he wanted to make me go back. So then I received the letter right away. Very soon, I don't know, maybe in 2-3 weeks. I received the letter from the Chinese Government. I never told my address, you know. That time I already from New York left and I went to stay in San Francisco in somebody's house.

So I received this letter. On this letter said, "Chairman Arjia: Without permission, how can you leave? That's really a big surprise." Something like that but it didn't say bad things. So anyway it said, "When you leave, is the Dalai Lama going to trust you? You have such high position; you have such important mission in China, now you escaped to the West. Now you lose the comfortable life and position, high position, your monastery, your people, your disciples and everything. Now you're nothing. So the Dalai Lama is going to trust you?"

“So when you come back, when you decide to come back, welcome. Anytime you can come back. So when you come back we’ll think about your position. You might keep your position. You can stay in Beijing.” The letter said that. “If you need money, I’m assuming you have some kind of needs for financial support. So if you need money, wherever you live, wherever you’re staying, you can contact our, you know, consulate or the embassy, the Chinese Embassy. We’ll have money for you.” So the letter said that.

I translated and showed to His Holiness. His Holiness is laughing. Then afterwards, after some time, after a year or something, I received the poem from President Jiang Zemin. The poem was very beautifully done, so in this book [I wrote] I mentioned it, you know. He said, “Kumbum [Monastery] is wonderful, you know. Kumbum is like one hundred thousand Buddhas. So one hundred thousand Buddhas gather there without you. You might go somewhere, interesting place but the family, the hometown is the most important place. You should come back.” That is his message, you know. So anyway, how can I go back? If I’m going back, why [would] I leave [China]?

01:14:43

My main reason is, if His Holiness can go back to China or go back to our hometown Tibet, I can make offer, effort, you know. Then otherwise, for myself, how? Then I stayed in the West. I started a little center in California. Then I started my memoir right away because, you know, I remember all the stories in my mind. Now I can’t remember...I still remember the stories from that time but new things, something happens now, I’ve forgotten. So, before I lose every information, I have to write down. So that’s why I started.

So when I started this book, you know, I’m learning English as well. So, my English tutor—I have some tutors—they’re asking, “What are you writing everyday?” Then I have to struggle lots [to explain] and finally they find out, “Oh, you’re writing your biography! Okay, biography, great! Can we see it?” “Yes.” They see it, “Oh, all in Chinese” because I type in Chinese. Then we asked somebody to translate it. When they read, “Oh, that’s a very fascinating story! Can we write in English?” Then I say, “Can you?”

By that time my English is getting little bit better. So we had a little team of four people or five people together. They interview me again. They use that material. They’re asking me again. Then they describe the people, describe the story, describe the place and everything. So we rewrite this book. Then I publish this, my memoir in 2009. [Laughs] So this is my little story I want to share with you.

Q: It was a wonderful, incredible story, a wonderful book and a great contribution to the history of Tibet.

#24B: Thank you.

Q: From a personal, from an individual’s experience.

#24B: Right, right. [Nods and smiles] That’s great. Thank you.

Q: Rinpoche-*la*, is there anything else you would like to say at this point?

01:17:26

#24B: I don't have anything to say, but the mostly important thing is we Tibetans all have big hope, which is one day we can go back to our hometown, of course, His Holiness, of course, then high lamas and all Tibetan people. Then go back to our town and practice and, you know, preserve our culture and religion and so forth. That is our hope. Sometimes, [it's] almost kind of hopeless but I still have this big hope. The big hope is that China has big change all the time.

So Chinese people are, you know, mostly...Chinese people more and more people are learning lots of things. One day the Chinese people have a desire of a freedom, you know, democracy and everything. So one day China will [be] free and have freedom, so then the Tibetan people's hope will [be a] success. That is only my, you know, kind of optimistic hope we have.

So then I publish my book in English, in Mongolian, in Chinese as well. Then also I'm doing charity work in Mongolia. I'm doing a, building a cancer care hospital there. So all proceeds go to the...when I sell the book, all proceeds go to the charity, you know. So I'm very pleased because, you know, I can share my story, also I can do, make some merits.

01:19:28

Then the biggest hope is one day China will [be] free and Tibet as well. So we can go back to Tibet. So those stories...my story is a little tiny story from the Tibetan history, you know. Those are very important and everybody has to remember. That is my important message, you know, especially to our young generations. You know, they should learn that history. They should remember this history.

Then also I have a big hope for the Chinese people from China, from mainland China, from different places. Lots of people after they read my book they gave me very good review. And they said that they learned lots of things. They learned lots on the new Panchen Lama thing. They learned lots on the Golden Urn Ceremony's information. They said they learned lots of 50 years, you know, hidden story in Tibet, in China even. So they have very good feedback to me. My hope is my little message can help others to learn something. So that'll be really wonderful. Thank you.

Q: Would be. Thank you. Thank you so much.

#24B: You're welcome.

Q: We ask for your blessings and your prayers...

#24B: Sure, sure.

Q: ...on our work and we will certainly keep you in our prayers.

#24B: Thank you. [Smiles]

Q: Thank you Rinpoche-*la*, I appreciate it.

END OF INTERVIEW