

Tibet Oral History Project

Interview #28B – Dawa Tsering
January 6, 2014

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TIBET ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

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INTERVIEW SUMMARY SHEET

1. Interview Number: #28B
2. Interviewee: Dawa Tsering
3. Age: 77
4. Date of Birth: 1936
5. Sex: Male
6. Birthplace: Jolay Thegulung
7. Province: Dhotoe (Kham)
8. Year of leaving Tibet: 1959
9. Date of Interview: January 6, 2014
10. Place of Interview: Private Home, Old Camp 4, Bylakuppe, Mysore District, Karnataka, India
11. Length of Interview: 1 hr 29 min
12. Interviewer: Marcella Adamski
13. Interpreter: Tenzin Yangchen
14. Videographer: Pema Tashi
15. Translator: Tenzin Yangchen

Biographical Information:

Dawa Tsering began working in the fields and grazing animals at around age 8, as there were no schools. His family grew different types of crops twice a year like grains, corn, rice and peas. He remembers going to graze goats and sheep in the mountains that surrounded his village. Dawa Tsering describes an incident when a leopard killed the flock of sheep he was tending on the mountain. He explains that the regulation against killing wild animals in his region was due to the people's belief in a mountain deity.

Dawa Tsering describes his work as a teenager, which was to cut wood into boards for constructing houses. His life changed at the age of 18 when he began to work as a trader between China and Lhasa, bartering a medicinal plant called *edi bhemu* for tea, brown sugar cubes and noodles. Since the Chinese had occupied Tibet already, there was no official border crossing to be made. Dawa Tsering thought that China appeared more prosperous at that time than Tibet.

At age 20 Dawa Tsering became a transporter, transporting goods on his mules for various merchants between Phari, Tibet and Kalimpong, India. He recounts that in 1958 the Chinese stopped trade movements between India and Tibet. These circumstances led him to join the *Chushi Gangdrug* Defend Tibet Volunteer Force. He stayed 6 months at Namgangtse. A losing battle with the Chinese army forced him to flee onwards to Bhutan and India.

Topics Discussed:

Kham, childhood memories, herding, environment/wildlife, trade, Chushi Gangdrug guerrillas.

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Interview #28B

Interviewee: Dawa Tsering

Age: 77, Sex: Male

Interviewer: Marcella Adamski

Interview Date: January 6, 2014

Question: Please tell us your name.

00:00:29

Interviewee #28B: Dawa Tsering.

Q: His Holiness the Dalai Lama asked us to record your experiences, so that we can share your memories with many generations of Tibetans, the Chinese and the rest of the world. Your memories will help us to document the true history, culture and beliefs of the Tibetan people. Do you give your permission for the Tibet Oral History Project to use this interview?

#28B: Yes.

Q: Thank you for offering to share your story with us. During this interview if you wish to take a break or stop at any time, please let me know. If you do not wish to answer a question or talk about something, let me know.

#28B: Okay.

Q: If this interview was shown in Tibet or China, would this be a problem for you?

#28B: [I] have no problem.

Q: We are honored to record your story and appreciate your participation in this project.

#28B: Okay.

Q: Can you please tell me how old you are and where you were born?

00:02:30

#28B: Seventy-seven years.

Q: What's the name of the birthplace?

#28B: Jolay, Kongra. It is Thegulung. Jolay Thegulung, Kongra.

Q: Is Jolay Thegulung, is that a village, and how many families were living there around the time you were a child?

#28B: It is a village with around a hundred families.

Q: What was the livelihood of your family?

#28B: The livelihood was farming and there were two harvests in a year.

Q: *Pa-la* ‘respectful term for father,’ what kind of harvests did you cultivate? What kind of grains was grown?

00:04:00

#28B: Crops were sown in the 11th lunar month, which was harvested in the 4th lunar month. These were grains and *sowa* ‘coarse and thick-shelled barley.’ Grains and *sowa* were grown. Then another was sown in the 5th lunar month and harvested in the 9th lunar month. These were corn, rice and many others. There were a variety of peas and two types of rice.

Q: *Pa-la*, was the land that your family cultivated, was that your own land and was your family a very wealthy or middle class or were they poor?

#28B: All the land belonged to us.

Q: Was your family among the wealthy, middle-class or poor of the village?

#28B: It was among the middle class.

Q: As a young child or even 8, 9 or 10, what was your daily life like? What kind of chores or activities did you do?

00:06:01

#28B: At ages 8, 9 and 10 you went to the fields. One must work in the fields. Even as a child one was taken to the fields as there were no schools. There were no schools at all.

Q: How many children were in your family and where were you in that order?

#28B: I have three siblings.

Q: Where were you in that order?

#28B: I am the oldest.

Q: From the lot?

#28B: Yes, I am the oldest among all.

Q: Three siblings, so there were four children?

#28B: Yes, four children.

Q: Can you tell us about what kind of work did you do in the fields as a child?

00:07:19

#28B: There was a long metal implement with which you hoe the fields to remove weeds.

Q: Anything else?

#28B: After that was done you would be send to graze goats and sheep.

Q: How many sheep and goats did your family have?

#28B: There was 40-50.

Q: Can you, *pa-la*, describe if you went out your door what would we see? Can you give us a picture of your village and of your home and the scenery around it?

#28B: When one comes out [of the house] there are mountains all around. The mountains are covered in forests; there are *thangshing* 'pine,' *dhabshing* 'silver fir,' *bhushing* [?] and different kind of trees. Then there are pastures and large rivers flowing close to the village.

Q: *Thangshing*?

#28B: *Thangshing*.

Q: Rivers?

#28B: Rivers.

Q: It sounds very beautiful. Did you have time to ever go and play as a youngster or go hiking in the forest?

#28B: [We] went up the mountains a lot. There are pines and pastures in the mountains. [We] took the animals to graze in the mountains.

Q: Didn't one go to play?

00:10:08

#28B: One did not go to play. There was no playing at all. [Laughs]

Q: What kind of animals did you see in the forest that you can remember?

#28B: In the forests were wild animals like deer, musk deer and one called leopard. Leopards killed many goats and sheep.

Q: Leopards?

#28B: Yes, [leopards] killed. Once I went to graze goats in the forest and on the return home there were only three goats and sheep left. A leopard had killed them. It was like that.

Q: How many went with you originally?

#28B: Originally there were 15 sheep that I went to graze. All were killed except for three.

Q: Sheep?

#28B: Yes, sheep.

Q: My goodness! Did you see the leopard killing the sheep?

00:12:18

#28B: I saw the leopard.

Q: On the day of attack?

#28B: Yes, I saw a leopard attacking.

Q: And then?

#28B: It was very fearful and I was crying.

Q: And then?

#28B: And then [I] ran back home. It was far away in the forest.

Q: How old were you when that happened?

#28B: I was around 12 years old.

Q: Was there any way that you could scare off the leopard like with a slingshot or make a noise or anything?

#28B: It is not possible. If one went close, it would attack. It is incredibly fearful.

Q: How far away were you when you saw the leopard killing the sheep?

00:13:48

#28B: [I] was quite far away, perhaps at a distance from here to Camp Number 3 [half a kilometer]. [I] saw it happening on the mountain.

Q: Yes?

#28B: It happened on the mountain. One could see here and there on the mountain. All the goats and sheep had gone up the mountain.

Q: You could see them in the distance?

#28B: Yes, one could see far away.

Q: Why would...was it only one...why would one leopard kill 12 sheep?

[Interpreter interprets as: Did one leopard kill 12 sheep?]

#28B: Yes, it did.

Q: Was it one leopard or...?

#28B: It was one. I saw one. There was only one.

Q: Killing 12...because you said you took 15 and only three came home. So would a leopard kill that many?

00:15:16

#28B: Yes, a single [leopard] did the killing because normally sheep do not run away. So [a leopard] attacks one and leaves it. And then it does it again. It does not eat after killing but continues to kill.

Q: Do you know...the procedure of the leopard? Would he kill many sheep so he could bring maybe his babies to feed or other leopards to feed rather than just for the kill? Usually animals kill what they are going to eat.

#28B: Perhaps it was like that. The next day when [we] went to the place, each had been bitten on the neck and left there.

Q: On the neck?

#28B: Yes, bitten on the neck.

Q: Were the sheep still there when [you] went the next day?

#28B: Only a few pieces remained. The rest had been eaten.

Q: Was this leopard the snow leopard that you read about in Tibet or was there another kind of leopard?

00:17:28

#28B: It is another kind that lives in the forests.

Q: Was it not one that lived in the snow?

#28B: No, no it lived in the forest. It always roamed in the forest.

Q: What color are they?

#28B: The color is reddish yellow and spotted. It looks similar to the tiger skin, like a tiger skin.

Q: Like brown?

#28B: Brownish with circular shaped spots.

Q: Was this a very typical or regular event? Were sheep attacked by leopards maybe once a year or once a month? How frequently would that happen?

#28B: It did not happen all the time, only at times.

Q: Like once in a month or two?

00:18:43

#28B: Like once in a month or a year.

Q: Not at regular times?

#28B: No, it did not happen regularly.

Q: You were understandably very scared. You were about 12 years old and did your parents say not to go back again or did you say, "I don't want to go back."? What happened to you after that very scary experience?

#28B: I was sent to show the place. I was sent with someone. [We] were sent there the next day, a day after it happened.

Q: Two of you?

#28B: Yes. [The leopard] had killed, eaten and hidden some after digging up the earth in the forest. There was not much left to take back. Most had been eaten.

Q: Were you scared to go up and do you care for your sheep in the future?

00:20:43

#28B: No, [I] did not have fear because there were many of us together with huge flocks. [I] went to graze with many other people and did not venture too far.

Q: Along with other people?

#28B: Yes, [I] went to graze with others. There were 5-6 boys like me.

Q: Sounds like a much safer thing to do.

#28B: Yes, there is less danger.

Q: Were adult men, Tibetan men, were they ever allowed to go off and hunt leopards or other wild animals, you know like the deer? Were they allowed to do that by the city or the government or the village?

#28B: One was not allowed to kill, ever. Deer and musk deer were not allowed to be killed. That was banned.

Q: Yes?

#28B: Killing was not allowed. No.

Q: Why do you think they had that regulation?

#28B: There was a law banning the killing of wild animals.

Q: Who passed that law?

#28B: The leaders of our region passed the regulation.

Q: Do you have any idea what would be the reasoning or the belief behind that regulation?

00:23:04

#28B: The reason could be because each area has a deity called *shidhag*. Because of that nobody is allowed to kill any [wild] animals. It was like that.

Q: Can you name some of those natural protective deities of the land?

#28B: We have an area deity called Phisang Shangmo.

Q: Phisang?

#28B: Shangmo.

Q: Phisang Shangmo?

#28B: Shangmo.

Q: Shangmo?

#28B: Yes.

Q: The name of the area deity is Phisang Shangmo?

#28B: Yes. It is Phisang Shangmo.

Q: Only one?

#28B: Only one area deity.

Q: Can you tell me something about Phisang Shangmo?

#28B: There is not anything much to say about Phisang Shangmo. It is the birth and area deity. Each one has a birth deity and an area deity.

00:24:31

On the 15th and 30th days [of each Tibetan lunar month we] went up the mountain to make incense offerings; on the 15th and 30th days [we] made incense offerings.

Q: The importance of having the deity and making offerings was so that the deity would protect the mountain and the animals and the people? Was that the hope of the prayers?

#28B: Yes, that is it.

Q: Did I leave out anything?

#28B: It was like that. Our region was like this. There are mountains everywhere. In the middle of the mountains is level ground. Except for a road in the center of the area, mountains surrounded it. [Our village] is located in such a region. [I] think that is why hunting was banned.

Q: So it would be very important to have protective deities in the mountains because you are very vulnerable and ...

00:26:31

#28B: [Interrupts] The mountains are like this [joins palms at wrist and opens all fingers]. A river flows here [points to base] and a stupa is erected nearby the river. It used to be said that the region is a *khashor*. The *khashor* would be detrimental to the families, so a stupa was constructed in the middle of the path.

Q: A river and a stupa?

#28B: The river flowed close to the stupa.

Q: What does *khashor* mean?

#28B: *Khashor* means the gap between mountains that surround [a region].

Q: The gap in the mountains?

#28B: A gap in the mountains is called *shorto*, like a break.

Q: Here a...

#28B: ...a stupa was erected in place of the [missing] mountain. Thereby making a full circle of mountains.

Q: I would just like to know if you could tell me about the deity of your mountain. Was it a male or female deity? What would it look like if we saw a picture of this deity?

00:28:03

#28B: It must be female.

Q: What would it look like if we saw a picture?

#28B: It is a mountain. It is a huge, high mountain with pine trees and dense forests. It is a huge mountain.

Q: Is this mountain the area deity?

#28B: The mountain is called the area deity. It is a steep, beautifully shaped mountain. That is the area deity.

Q: This was the mountain itself. I see. Do you know when the Chinese came into your area...Do you know what happened to the mountains and the conditions of the animals and the forest?

#28B: It seems the trees in the forests were not cut. They were left standing. However, it seems they [the Chinese] have killed the animals.

Q: I see.

00:29:28

#28B: [The Chinese] seem to have killed [the animals] in the woods, but the forests are left untouched.

Q: You didn't witness that?

#28B: I did not see it but my relatives that came here told me so.

Q: How were they [the animals] killed?

#28B: They must have fired guns. It seems [the Chinese] fired guns.

Q: Did you remain a farmer and shepherd your whole life or was there some changes that happened when you got a little bit older?

#28B: After coming here or in Tibet?

Q: While living in Tibet as a young child [you] herded goats and sheep and did farming with the parents. Then when [you] became older did [you] continue to do farming and herding goats and sheep or did [you] start to do something else?

#28B: Then we must go to cut wood. [We] went up the mountains to cut woods. In India tiles are used as roofing material for houses but we did not use tiles. There is a certain material called *pang* that was used for roofing. They are large wooden boards. *Pang* was used. Around the age of 15-16 one went to cut such. Many people went together.

[Interpreter concludes interpretation as: ...in our region we used bamboo boards.]

Q: Bamboo, so it...?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: Sorry, wooden boards, not bamboo.

Q: What did you do with the wood?

00:32:02

#28B: The wood was cut into boards. It was made like this [gestures off camera].

Q: And then used as roofing?

#28B: To be used as roofing for houses.

Q: Roofing material. That sounds like a task that was given to teenagers to do. Was there any other job that you had to do when you were 15, 16, 17?

#28B: Fieldwork formed the major part of work.

Q: What other work did [you] do?

#28B: There were not many other tasks.

Q: How did you cut those trees down? Could you tell us a little about that process and how many people it took to cut a tree and bring it down and did you make it into boards in the village or work up in the mountains?

00:33:34

#28B: There is this thing called an axe that you also find in India. Initially, the axe is used to cut a tree with one person working from this side and another from the other side and then the tree falls. Then it is measured into four or five feet as the requirement may be. It was cut to the required length. The good ones were cut into boards like this. [The boards] were loaded on horses and mules and transported home. After shaping into boards [they] were left in the forest for around a week. Then one went to bring [them].

Q: What was the point of leaving it there for a week?

#28B: Because there is a little bit of moisture that will evaporate.

Q: When you brought the logs down, what happened to them? Did people buy them or were they for your own family? Where did they use them in building?

#28B: It was for your own use. There was not any selling.

Q: How were they used?

#28B: First a house is constructed. After it is construction, like there are partitions [in the houses] in India, wooden boards are erected as partitions. Wooden boards also formed the roof. Earth is laid on it and then another layer of wooden boards used on top. The flooring is once again wood. Wooden panels that are good and shiny are laid on the floor.

Q: What kind of wood, trees, would you use for this kind of building?

00:36:57

#28B: It was the *thangshing*.

Q: *Thangshing*?

#28B: Yes, *thangshing*.

Q: How long did people live in their houses? Were they rebuilt every few years or every 10 years or 20 because if you weren't selling this wood, it sounds like people needed to have new construction on a regular basis?

#28B: One can live [in a house] for 30-40 years after construction.

Q: Were repairs needed because the wood wasn't meant for sale...?

#28B: No, no it was for construction of houses and firewood. There was no cooking gas like these days. There was also no electricity, so a type of wood called *dolmashing* was used. [Laughs]

Q: What happens next in your life? Do you marry? Do you have children? Do you have another career? What happens as you grow up?

00:39:07

#28B: Then when [I] grew older I left for Lhasa at age 19.

Q: At 19?

#28B: Yes, I left for Lhasa.

Q: [You] went to cut wood at the age of 15-16. Did [you] leave for Lhasa after that or did [you] do some other work in the meanwhile?

#28B: It was just farming. One cultivated large areas in our region.

Q: Besides farming, was there any trading?

#28B: There was not much trading. After arriving in Lhasa I engaged in trading at the age of 20. There were not many families that travelled. In our village were around 100 families and only five had been to Lhasa at that time.

Q: So you went to trade. Why did you pick that profession?

00:40:29

#28B: We mostly dealt in tea and *phing* ‘noodles.’ There is a type of tea called *jaril* ‘round-shaped tea’ that was dealt in.

Q: Traded?

#28B: Yes.

Q: And then?

#28B: Then *buram* ‘brown sugar cubes’ that are found in India was brought and sold in Lhasa.

Q: Lhasa?

#28B: All the items were taken to Lhasa.

Q: From India?

#28B: No, from China.

Q: Can you tell us how did you learn how to do trading? Did you join with other people or with your father and where did you...? First of all, let’s understand that part. How did you learn the trade?

00:41:51

#28B: [I] learned by observing other people. [Laughs]

Q: If you are around 20, you were born in 1936 and you do this around 1920, the year is around 1956 and you live in Kham and you are going to China. How far away from your village is the place you go to do the trade and what is the name of the place?

#28B: The name is Hochin.

Q: How far is Hochin from your village?

#28B: It is four days’ journey.

Q: How many people went with you, and did you take any animals with you, and what did you take there to trade to get the goods you wanted?

#28B: Around five people [journeyed together].

Q: Were animals driven?

#28B: Yes, [we] drove animals.

Q: What animals?

#28B: The animal mule.

Q: What type of goods did you take from your village to Hochin?

#28B: The goods taken were what you call *edi* and *bhemu* these days.

Q: What?

#28B: There is something called *edi bhemu*.

Q: Is that one or two things?

#28B: Not things but plants. A white one called *edi bhemu*.

Q: Is that the name of one item?

#28B: Yes, name of one item.

Q: Is it a plant?

#28B: It is a white plant similar to garlic.

Q: Was this taken [to Hochin]?

00:44:06

#28B: This was taken. If one took two sacks of this on 10 mules, one could get 20 sacks of *jaril* in exchange. It is used in the preparation of medicine. It is a medicinal plant.

Q: What was this medicine used for?

#28B: [I] think the medicine helped urinary tract infection and all such types.

Q: Did the people in your village use this plant for medicinal purposes or only the Chinese knew about it?

#28B: The Chinese used it.

Q: Wasn't it used in your village?

#28B: In the village if one fell ill, a little bit of it was consumed. It resembled garlic [bulbs] that was powdered and consumed.

Q: You said it took to Hochin four days. Can you describe the journey? Was it very difficult or easy? Was there any danger along the way? What was it like for you and your...Four other people that went with you?

#28B: There was no danger.

Q: What was the journey like from your village to Hochin?

00:47:22

#28B: The Chinese had already constructed roads, constructed drivable roads.

Q: However, [you] drove animals.

#28B: [We] drove animals.

Q: You mentioned the Chinese now. Were the Chinese also in your village at the time when you decided to do this trade? Were they in your area? And what were they doing?

#28B: [The Chinese] had not come to our village.

Q: Were there no Chinese?

#28B: There were not.

Q: How did you know about the city and where to do this trade? Can you tell us what the city looked like when you saw it?

#28B: There were the older people, older to me. If I was 20, there were those that were 40-50 year old that used to travel and [I] went with them. They extended help.

Q: Helped them?

#28B: They helped me. They gave instructions in the business and helped in selling.

Q: I see. So you became part of the caravan that went into that area in China?

00:49:30

#28B: Yes, [we] journeyed together.

Q: So could you tell the difference between being in Tibet or Kham and then being in China? Was there any sig...what were the things that seemed different from your village to the place that you traded?

#28B: The difference between the two...

Q: There'd be differences in the size of the places, population and in progress. What differences did you find between the village where you lived in Kham and Hochin where you sold and made purchases?

#28B: The difference was that the Tibetans seemed a little bit poorer. The Chinese did well, did very well. There were very rich families.

Q: What was the town like?

#28B: The town was very big similar to those in India.

Q: What were some of the differences that made it look like a big city in India? Was it the shops or food or clothing? Can you describe because we're talking about 1956 Hochin? What did it look like? I know it's different than your , but was there electricity, cars, trucks? Did you see many poor people? Were there policemen or military there? Paint me a picture.

00:52:14

#28B: There was a lot of difference. The attire was different. For food they ate nothing but Chinese food. Tibetans ate *tsampa* 'flour made from roasted barley' which they do not. [Laughs] It was like that. Then there are no mountains but even ground in the Chinese region while Tibet is mountainous. There were many differences. Living there for long was too hot. It was hot like in India. It was close to the border of Myanmar.

Q: Burma.

[Interpreter to interviewer]: Yes.

Q: You were a foreigner coming into another country. Was there any boundary or border that you had to pass through? Did you have to pay a toll or anything or were you free to come and go as you wanted?

#28B: There were none because we had already become Chinese territory. [We] had already become Chinese territory. Being a part of China one need not pay taxes. However, moving towards Lhasa in Tibet, one had to pay tax once in Jol.

Q: Did you have to pay, if you were considered a part of China, did you have to pay any taxes? Did your family have to, your village?

#28B: One must pay a little bit of tax to China.

Q: Tax?

00:55:31

#28B: Yes, one must pay land tax for the land, a land tax. Here in India we plow using oxen. One must pay an oxen tax. Otherwise, there was no man tax, animal tax or anything, just a land tax.

Q: What did [you] say about the oxen for plowing?

#28B: When we sow here, we use oxen for plowing. One had to pay a tax to China depending upon the number of days it took to plow a family's land. [Some owned land] that required six or seven days of plowing. Compared to the Indian [land measurement], it might be around 5-10 acres.

Q: You mentioned something that if you were from your district, you could come and go very easily. What were the districts in Tibet that were not...that were considered another country other than China and then what was the procedure to go into China from those other areas?

#28B: There were no restrictions. No, there were no restrictions wherever one traveled.

Q: There were no restrictions if you were to go to Tibet?

#28B: No, there were no restrictions. There were no restrictions if one came from Tibet too.

Q: One could travel anywhere?

#28B: Yes.

Q: Your region was considered a part of China. If one went towards Tibet, to Lhasa...

00:58:14

#28B: No, there were no restrictions to Lhasa.

Q: So you could easily go the other way?

#28B: Yes, it was easy both ways. One must pay a tax at a place called Lhozong just before arriving in Lhasa. That was it.

Q: So you could go to Lhasa, but you still had to pay a toll?

#28B: Yes, one must pay a toll. That was the only one. That was supposed to be grass tax for bringing in animals like horses and mules. Because [the animals] fed on grass in the mountains, it was a form of grass tax in Tibet.

Q: What was the place called again?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: Lhozong.

Q: Is that very near Lhasa?

#28B: It is not near Lhasa. You reach Lhozong after passing through Shar Gangla and Nup Gangla. After Kongpo Jamdha, you reach Lhozong.

Q: When you went to do your trade in China in this city, how were you...were you treated like anybody who lived there or were you considered different or was there any friend...were people friendly to you? What was that like?

01:00:41

#28B: [We] were treated equally. [They] did not treat [us] differently. There was not anything other than trade.

Q: And then when you took the plants, the medicinal plants to Hochin, then you got the sugar and the tea and then did you go to Lhasa? How long did that journey take? Did you come home first?

#28B: First you went to the village, reached the village and stayed for 2-3 months. We left for Lhasa in the 5th lunar month, in the 5th lunar month.

Q: Did people in the village want to purchase any of the things that you had brought from Hochin?

#28B: [They] did not buy. [They] did not buy.

Q: Were [the goods] meant only for Lhasa?

#28B: [The goods] were taken to Lhasa and not sold there [in the village]. [The villagers] did not buy. There were some merchants that did not travel to Lhasa but traded only in the village. There were some Chinese merchants who brought tea and others to our region. On the return journey [they] took pig bristles. There are bristles pulled from pigs that the Chinese bartered with tea and took back.

Q: I see.

#28B: Such was done.

Q: What's the pig bristle like?

01:03:44

#28B: Pig bristles are long. Perhaps it was to be used for the manufacture of boots. The Indians do such. Perhaps it was for that purpose.

Q: Was that the only thing they took from your village?

#28B: There was not anything else.

Q: Like what year would you say you started doing the trade? How old were you and what year was that when you started going to Hochin?

#28B: I started at the age of 18, at age 18.

Q: Eighteen to...?

#28B: From 18 to 20 and at 20 [I] stayed back in Lhasa. [I] stayed in Lhasa and then to India.

Q: If you started at 18 that would be...1954 you started trading and you're 18 but then in 1956 you stayed in Lhasa and started trading with India. What things did you take from Lhasa to India?

#28B: It was not necessary to buy goods from Lhasa to India because all the merchants were staying in Kalimpong [West Bengal]. One transported goods for the merchants from Kalimpong and unloaded in Phari.

Q: Yes?

#28B: One must unload the goods in Phari. Mules were hired for transportation.

Q: Goods from Kalimpong were transported on mules and...?

#28B: ...and unloaded in Phari. There were different merchants and they paid us. One mule load would fetch 100 Indian *rupees*. Money was scarce then.

Q: So you were engaged in transportation more than actual trade.

01:07:11

#28B: Yes, it was transportation.

Q: Can you tell us what was, you must have had some idea, what were the things that they were transporting from Kalimpong to Phari and then did you go up to Lhasa or only to Phari?

#28B: They gave all types of goods for transporting [like] shoes, sugar, rice, then milk, petrol. All these were dispatched there.

Q: Was it only up to Phari or Lhasa?

#28B: It was up to Phari. [The merchants] paid 100 *rupees* up to Phari.

Q: And then did you also do any trade from Phari, even as a transporter from Phari to Lhasa?

#28B: [I] went twice and not more.

Q: *Pa-la*, what kind of things... Why did you like being a transporter and moving goods back and forth? Was there something about that job that you liked? Can you tell us about that and can you tell us what was challenging or hard about it? What was rewarding about it?

01:09:26

#28B: [I] did not find it very hard. I liked it and enjoyed transporting goods here and there.

Q: Were there certain months of the year that you did the transporting from Phari to Kalimpong or was it just whenever you got a job?

#28B: One travelled to Phari six times a year, six times.

Q: Was it whenever goods were ready?

#28B: One left immediately after receiving the goods. If [goods] were not available, one waited around a week in Kalimpong.

Q: From Kalimpong to Phari?

#28B: Yes.

Q: What was Kalimpong like in those days? Can you describe that place?

#28B: Business was very good in Kalimpong in those days. The merchants and storeowners were very good unlike these days. These days [they] are very poor and Kalimpong is not nice. I visited sometime back. At that time it was really good with good merchants. [They] carried out business solely in Tibet and the commodities were very fine.

Q: How is it different?

01:11:44

#28B: These days they are very poor because goods cannot be dispatched to Tibet. The shops are poor and not good.

Q: Why can't they do trading in Tibet?

#28B: They cannot travel back and forth these days, cannot travel at all.

Q: Aren't allowed to travel?

#28B: Are not allowed to travel.

Q: The merchants?

#28B: [Nods]

Q: Who stops them?

#28B: It must be both China and India.

Q: Does anything... You're doing these trips back and forth. Does anything change? We're talking about 1956, '57, '58. Does anything change in your activities as a trader?

#28B: In '57 I was engaged in transporting to and from Kalimpong. I joined the *Chushi Gangdrug* [Defend Tibet Volunteer Force] in '58. Then [I] left the business.

Q: What made you join the *Chushi Gangdrug*?

01:14:08

#28B: A letter was received in Kalimpong that asked all merchants to join the *Chushi Gangdrug*. So everyone left.

Q: A letter came?

#28B: Yes, from the office.

Q: Which office?

#28B: From the office of the *Chushi Gangdrug* in Diguthang. [We] were asked to come and [we] did.

Q: Did you want to go?

#28B: Yes, [I] did and left.

Q: Why did you want to go?

#28B: If [we] did not, the Chinese were putting a lot of restriction on the merchants traveling to Tibet from India. [The Chinese] stopped [them] at Dromo and did not allow entry. So, seeing the futility of remaining there [I] left [to join the *Chushi Gangdrug*].

01:15:37

There was a check post at Dromo Chumithang where [traders/transporters] were stopped.

Q: Chumithang?

#28B: Chumithang.

Q: How far was Dromo Chumithang from Kalimpong?

#28B: It is four days' journey from Kalimpong.

Q: So it wouldn't be possible then to go to Kalimpong if you were stopped by the Chinese?

#28B: One could not go [to Kalimpong]...

Q: And if one was in Kalimpong...?

#28B: ...could not go there [to Tibet]. They [the Chinese] put restrictions and did not issue permits. [They] took away the permits.

Q: [The Chinese] didn't issue permits?

#28B: Did not give the permits, did not return them. Earlier [we] possessed travel permits.

Q: Who did?

#28B: We did. [We] had been issued permits to trade and travel to and from Kalimpong.

Q: Who issued this permit?

01:17:14

#28B: This must be applied for at Lhasa.

Q: And then?

#28B: Then one traded and [the permit] must be renewed after a year. Once in India, an Indian permit was issued in Kalimpong. Armed with these two, one arrived in Dromo Chumithang where there was a Chinese office in a corner. One must show the permits there. Then during '58...anticipating an uprising in 1958, they did not return the permits and said, '[You] cannot proceed. Go back.' and send them back. And those that were coming [to Tibet] were instructed to return. There were a lot of problems then.

Q: What do you think was...what was your understanding at that time about why the Chinese were trying to stop that flow of trade between India and Tibet? Why did you think they were trying to do it when you were going through that experience?

#28B: Perhaps they ha heard that the Khampa 'people of Kham Province,' the *Chushi Gangdrug* was doing something in Tibet. That's why the restrictions.

Q: The *Chushi Gangdrug* wanted you to join and all the traders. What were some of the skills or the assets the traders would bring to the *Chushi Gangdrug*?

01:20:36

#28B: Initially a merchant Andrug Gonpo Tashi took the main responsibility. [He] was a merchant and called all the traders together. He thought [he] could gather the traders. That was the reason [he] called every trader.

Q: What skills do you think a trader would bring joining the *Chushi Gangdrug*? What skills did you have?

#28B: One wanted to take back the country from the Chinese. One was barred from trading and one could no longer be a monk in the monastery, so wanting to take our country back [we] joined.

Q: Was it helpful that you spoke Chinese?

#28B: [I] did not know the Chinese language well.

Q: Didn't know Chinese?

#28B: No.

Q: Oh, you didn't know it?

#28B: [Shakes head]

Q: Even though you did many trade missions to China?

#28B: The Chinese spoken there and the other were not the same. The Chinese languages were different.

Q: The Chinese language where [you] went to trade...?

01:22:59

#28B: That is what is called *jau kay*.

Q: And you spoke *jau kay*?

#28B: [I] know a little bit of the basics of *jau kay*.

Q: Can you tell us about your experiences with the *Chushi Gangdrug* when you were enlisted by them?

#28B: There was one encounter with the Chinese while [I] was in the *Chushi Gangdrug*.

Q: And then?

#28B: Our base was at Namgangtse. From Namgangtse [we] went to fight at Ralung. After the encounter in Ralung, [we] could not overcome [the Chinese] as Lhasa had been conquered. [We] fled immediately after Lhasa was lost and reached Lhoda, Lhoda Sangeuthok. [We] then arrived in Bhutan from Sangeuthok. The Bhutanese did not allow passage and stopped us for a month. One day it was said, "His Holiness the Dalai Lama has asked you to be allowed to proceed. [You] are allowed to leave Bhutan." So [we] were allowed to move on. It was like that.

Q: So your career in the *Chushi Gangdrug* was about a year or a few months?

#28B: [I] was there for around six months.

Q: At Namgangtse?

#28B: Yes, at Namgangtse.

Q: How did you feel about leaving Tibet, the Tibet that you knew?

01:26:15

#28B: There was sadness because you had lost your country. Then when [I] heard that His Holiness the Dalai Lama had arrived in India [I] was happy.

Q: *Pa-la*, what kind of wishes do you have for Tibet now? What do you hope will happen?

#28B: We hoped that after 4-5 months in India [we] would be able to return to Tibet.

Q: So what do you hope now?

#28B: In my mind if possible, I wish that His Holiness the Dalai Lama be able to go back before [he] passes away.

Q: Well Dawa, we appreciate your story and thank you for sharing some aspects of Tibetan history and trade experiences that we were interested in learning about. I want to just repeat my final question and ask one more time, if this interview was shown in Tibet or China, would this be a problem for you?

01:28:51

#28B: I have no problems if it is shown in Tibet or China.

Q: We are honored to record your story and appreciate your participation in this project.

#28B: Thank you.

END OF INTERVIEW