

# **Tibet Oral History Project**

**Interview #34M – Thupten Rangjung (alias)  
April 13, 2010**

The Tibet Oral History Project serves as a repository for the memories, opinions and ideas of elderly Tibetan refugees. The oral history process records the words spoken by interviewees in response to questions from an interviewer. The interviewees' statements should not be considered verified or complete accounts of events and the Tibet Oral History Project expressly disclaims any liability for the inaccuracy of any information provided by the interviewees. The interviewees' statements do not necessarily represent the views of the Tibet Oral History Project or any of its officers, contractors or volunteers.

This translation and transcript is provided for individual research purposes only. For all other uses, including publication, reproduction and quotation beyond fair use, permission must be obtained in writing from: Tibet Oral History Project, P.O. Box 6464, Moraga, CA 94570-6464, United States.

Copyright © 2012 Tibet Oral History Project.



# TIBET ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

www.TibetOralHistory.org

## INTERVIEW SUMMARY SHEET

1. Interview Number: #34M
2. Interviewee: Thupten Rangjung (alias)
3. Age: 74
4. Date of Birth: 1936
5. Sex: Male
6. Birthplace:
7. Province: Dhotoe (Kham)
8. Year of leaving Tibet: 1959
9. Date of Interview: April 13, 2010
10. Place of Interview: H. H. the Dalai Lama's Palace, Camp Number 3, Doeguling Settlement, Mundgod, Karwar District, Karnataka, India
11. Length of Interview: 1 hr 59 min
12. Interviewer: Marcella Adamski
13. Interpreter: Tenzin Yangchen
14. Videographer: Pema Tashi
15. Translator: Tenzin Yangchen

### **Biographical Information:**

Thupten Rangjung remembers going swimming and swinging on the trees as a child. His family engaged in farming as well as rearing animals. Though self-sufficient, his family occasionally took loans from rich families and monasteries if they did not have enough food. He narrates the process of taking a loan, payment of interest and what happens in the event a loan is not repaid.

Thupten Rangjung became a monk at the age of 7, but continued to live at home and help on the farm until the age of 16 when he traveled to Lhasa and enrolled in the Gaden Monastery. He describes in detail the process of becoming a monk, starting from the 'hair-cutting' ceremony and the next two stages of vows a monk undertakes. He spent most of his time studying and was happy at the monastery.

According to Thupten Rangjung, the Chinese first appeared in his birthplace of Ba in the beginning of 1947 and he remembers their clothing and food. He was living at Gaden Monastery when Lhasa was attacked in 1959 after which the monks were told to leave. He talks about joining the *Chushi Gangdrug* [Defend Tibet Volunteer Force] during his escape and the exciting encounters with the Chinese forces.

### **Topics Discussed:**

Childhood memories, monastic life, first appearance of Chinese, religious festivals, Chushi Gangdrug guerrillas, escape experiences.

# TIBET ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

www.TibetOralHistory.org

## **Interview #34M**

**Interviewee: Thupten Rangjung [alias]**

**Age: 74, Sex: Male**

**Interviewer: Marcella Adamski**

**Interview Date: April 13, 2010**

Question: Please tell us your name.

00:00:20

**Interviewee #34M: Thupten Rangjung.**

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?

**#34M: Yes, you can use it.**

Q: Thank you for offering to share your story.

00:01:22

**#34M: Okay.**

Q: During this interview if you wish to take a break or stop at anytime, please let me know.

**#34M: Okay.**

Q: If you do not wish to answer a question or talk about something, let me know.

00:01:46

**#34M: Okay.**

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

**#34M: There will be no problem.**

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

01:02:14

**#34M: Okay.**

Q: *Gen-la* 'respectful term for teacher,' can you please tell us how old you are now and where you were born?

**#34M: I turned 74 this year. During the time Tibet [was independent] it [my birth place] was called Bapa, but after the Chinese took over Tibet they included it in [the region of] Markham.**

Q: What kind of work did your family do for a livelihood, *gen-la*?

00:03:24

**#34M: My family members did farming. There were no industries in those days. Farming was the only work.**

Q: How many people were in your family?

**#34M: There were eight members.**

Q: Can you tell us, do you have any memories when you think of your childhood? Are there any special memories you can see in your mind?

00:04:35

**#34M: I can remember playing at home and when I first became a monk.**

Q: When you were growing up, was there enough food to eat in your family? Were there enough warmth, clothing and shelter in your farm?

**#34M: We had enough. We did not have to go to purchase from outside. We grew our own food. Except for salt and tea, we did not need to buy anything. There was butter, meat and *tsampa* 'flour made from roasted barley.'**

Q: So you said you have some memories when you were a child of the games you played. What were some of the childhood things that you remember?

00:06:14

**#34M: We played games like swimming in the river and swinging on the trees.**

Q: How did you swing?

**#34M: We clung on to the branches of trees and swung ourselves to and fro.**

Q: Where were you in that family of brothers and sisters: older, younger or middle?

00:07:08

**#34M: I was in the middle. There were three siblings older to me and two younger.**

Q: Was that a good place to be a middle child compared to the oldest or the youngest?

**#34M: There was not much difference. When one became able, he did work for the family like herding the animals.**

Q: In your family, at what age did you begin to graze the animals?

00:08:09

**#34M: One started grazing animals at the age of 11 or 12.**

Q: In your home with this many people, was it a large home or small, what size and did you have a prayer room?

**#34M: We were quite a poor family. Ours was a double [?] storied structure with the animals on the ground floor and the family on the upper floor. The harvest was stored on the top floor. In our region, crops used to be stored on the top floor.**

Q: You said you were a poor family, but you also said that you were quite self-sufficient as a family—you had all the food you need and clothing and you only had to buy tea and salt. So what made you a poor family?

00:09:57

**#34M: There might be times when the grain stock did not last until the harvest.**

Q: If you didn't have enough, would that mean you had no food or just less food?

**#34M: We could take loans from others.**

Q: From whom?

00:10:39

**#34M: From the monasteries or richer families. We could request them to give us a loan [of grains].**

Q: Can you tell us a little bit about that process, how you take loans and how you pay them back? What's that process?

**#34M: One must pay a little interest [on the loan]. For every *bo* 'measurement' of grain availed on loan for a year, I think one paid an interest of six *bhay*. One *bo* consisted of 20 *bhay*. So for every 20 *bhay*, the interest paid was six *bhay* for one year.**

Q: Did that seem like a reasonable rate or did that seem too much?

00:12:39

**#34M: The interest was reasonable.**

Q: But I don't understand, what is a *bhay*? Is that money or is that bushels of grain? What is that?

**#34M: That was in the form of grains. When you received in grains, you paid back in grains.**

Q: If you received in grains, when did you pay back the grains?

00:13:27

**#34M: You paid back after the crops were harvested.**

Q: Did you go to the monastery or did somebody come to you to pay that debt?

**#34M: There were some people who went to pay their debts and at times they [the creditors] came to collect. There were different types.**

Q: *Gen-la*, was the land that you were working on, did that belong to you or the monastery?

00:14:31

**#34M: The land belonged to us.**

Q: What would happen if you had a problem and some year the harvest was poor and you couldn't repay it?

**#34M: In that case the interest compounded. You added the interest on the principal and then paid interest [on the whole sum].**

Q: If some illness happened or people got sick in the family or the father had a problem or accident and you could not pay back that loan to the monastery, what would be the consequences?

00:15:53

**#34M: Then gradually it added up and the loan became large. You would have to pay interest on the interest. The previous year's interest was added to the principal and you paid interest on that.**

Q: What would happen finally?

**#34M: Well, the final. [Laughs] The Chinese nullified everything!**

Q: When the Chinese came, were you with your family?

00:16:44

**#34M: [Speaks before question is interpreted] There was another system called *thay* in the event the loan grew to exorbitant quantity. In this case, the interest was waived and [the debtor] repaid a quantity of eight *bo* [of grains] every year until the loan was cleared. This system was called *thay*. In case one owed a 100 *bo* of grains [accumulated over the years], he need not pay any interest on it, but repay the loan at the rate of eight *bo* [of grains] a year. Based on the quantity of loan, you completed your repayment in a particular number of years.**

However, in the event that one could not pay the required eight *bo*, then he was required to give 16 *bo* the following year. If you could pay accordingly, there was no interest and you cleared the loan in a certain number of years. However, the quantity of eight *bo* was not a fixed figure. Some fixed it at five, eight or 10 *bo*, depending upon the number of years you wished the loan to be cleared. There was no interest charged.

Q: You said your second memory of childhood was going to the monastery. Can you tell us how that came about?

00:19:15

**#34M: I became a monk at the age of 7. However, in my region we did not have to always live at the monastery. I went to the monastery when there were prayer assemblies and for the rest of the time, I stayed at home. While at home, I helped graze the goats and sheep.**

Q: Who decided that you would become a monk?

**#34M: My parents decided that I would become a monk.**

Q: Tell us about your memory of that. What was it like to go to the monastery for the first time to become a monk? Did you get robes in that ceremony or some kind of initiation?

00:20:33

**#34M: Yes, you made the hair offering vow during which a tuft of you hair [gestures to center of head] was cut. When your head was shaved, a bit of hair would be left, which was cut by a lama after reciting prayers and then he gave a new name.**

Q: When is the head shaved?

**#34M: The head is shaved before the hair in the center gets cut.**

Q: Who shaves the head? Is it done in the monastery?

00:21:01

**#34M: Anybody can do the shaving. It is all the same whether you get it done in the monastery or at home. However, the tuft of hair in the center was left. This was later cut off by a lama with a pair of scissors, reciting the necessary prayer. Then the lama gave a new name to the monk.**

Q: Is that the name that you keep for the rest of your life as a monk?

**#34M: Yes, that is right, but the lama gave you another name when you took your vows as a *rabjung* 'probationary monk.' There are three stages of vows a monk undertakes. First was the hair offering vow, then the *getsul* 'novice monk' vows and finally it is the *gelong* 'ordained monk' vows.**



Q: If you said three different stages of your life, does that mean ages or your years in the monastery?

00:23:09

**#34M: Once the hair-cutting vow was initiated, one could take the *getsul* vows any time. However, you can take the *gelong* vows only when you reached the age of 20. Until you reached the age of 20, you could not receive the *gelong* vows.**

Q: So what is the hair-cutting vow?

**#34M: That is what I told you now, about going to the lama to have your hair cut. The lama performs a ritual and asks, "*Gyalwe tenpala raptu jung we atolo?*" 'Do you fully accept the Buddha's teachings?' and the reply "*Atolo.*" 'I do.' is given. Then he cuts the hair. That was the hair-cutting vow. Then a name was given.**

Q: Do you take a vow that you will keep your hair cut short?

00:24:27

**#34M: From that time onwards, one must cut the hair. One is not allowed to keep long hair.**

Q: Do you have to verbally say that you will not have long hair?

**#34M: The lama will ask, "*gyalwe tenpala raptu jung we atolo,*" which means "Do you want to embrace monkhood?" And to this, one answers "Yes." Then the lama cuts the hair.**

Q: And then what was the *getsul* vow?

00:25:16

**#34M: After that [the hair-cutting vow] there is the *longden* 36, which is a list of 36 things you are not allowed to do.**

Q: Could you give us a few examples of them?

**#34M: One cannot take life, one cannot steal. Taking life meant killing people, which you cannot do. Then you cannot tell big lies. In lies, there is one called "big lies."**

Q: And what was the third vow?

**#34M: [Speaks without waiting for interpreter] One cannot have a relationship with women.**

Q: Is this included in the *getsul* vows?

00:26:48

**#34M: Yes, that is there in both the *getsul* and *gelong* vows.**

Q: So I understand the first vow, the hair-cutting vow when you were a little boy. How old do you have to be to make the *getsul* vow?

**#34M: After the hair-cutting vow, you are in a position to think. You might be about 15 or 16. The *getsul* vow must be taken when you are less than 19 years old. The *gelong* vow is taken when one is 20 or above.**

Q: And what are the *gelong* vows?

00:28:07

**#34M: The *gelong* vows consist of 253 vows, things one must abstain from.**

Q: What are they?

**#34M: There are the four *phangpa*, the 13 *lhama*...**

Q: What did they mean? What do you have to abstain from?

00:28:34

**#34M: The four *phangpa* are that one cannot kill a human, one cannot tell a big lie, one cannot steal—the kind of theft that is considered against the law of the land. That is three, and the other one being one cannot have contact with a woman. Those are the basic vows a *gelong* has to abstain from.**

Q: That's the same as the *getsul* vows.

**#34M: Yes, it is the same as the *getsul* vows. The *getsul* vow is called *phangden* and has lesser consequences [if broken]. The *gelong* vows are known as *phangpa* and [if broken], one faces the punishment of expulsion from monkhood. In the monasteries of Drepung, Gaden and Sera, if it came to light that someone has broken any of these vows, he would be expelled. If the monastery authorities or other monks came to know of such misdoings, the person would be expelled from the monastery. Once he breaks any of the vows, he can no longer continue to be a monk and is expelled from the monastery.**

Q: Given the fact that there were so many enjoyments with children growing up in your family—you had brothers and sisters and the children are such a good part of Tibetan life—what was it like for a man to consider never having a family, never having a wife? Was that a difficult decision for some young man to make?

00:31:18

**#34M: In the monastery, if a monk needed help, he could keep a student, a novice monk who would serve him. Once a monk became old, they [the younger monks] took care of him. The monk taught the scriptures to the student and in turn, the student looked after him in his old age. The student took care of him in times of sickness.**

Q: So in some ways the students were like your children.

**#34M: Yes, he [the student] was like a child. You teach him the scriptures and later he will look after you. If he does not have sufficient finance, the teacher will lend his support.**

Q: So that addresses the need to parent and to nurture. What about the need to have affection and romantic love in your life? What happens with that need?

00:33:29

**#34M: There is never any thought of taking a wife. When one grows old and does not have a student, the monk community will look after him. In case he passes away and he has possessions, those would be collected by the community.**

Q: Why do you think it was more important for a Tibetan mother to let her son go to the monastery than to have him as her son who marries and has a family and gives her grandchildren?

**#34M: She makes her child into a monk taking into consideration that the child would not have to work much and the dharma helps one in the next life. One can be reborn as a better person and also face fewer problems in this life. A child is made a monk because of the benefits in this life as well as the next.**

Q: Is there any benefits that goes to the mothers, who give a son to the monastery?

00:36:14

**#34M: The mother will benefit because she is the one who made him a monk in the first place. She is the one who showed him the path. So she will earn merit because she has taken into consideration, the progress in her son's life in the next births. The son has benefited a lot as he can lead a good present life and a better next life. She is the one who guided him and so she will benefit greatly.**

Q: *Gen-la*, you had the first vows and when did you take the second set of vows, the *getsul*?

**#34M: I think I was about 18 when I took my *getsul* vows. I took my *getsul* vows after I joined Gaden Monastery [near Lhasa]. I became a monk in my local monastery at the age of 7. I was around 18 when I took my *getsul* vows at Gaden Monastery.**

Q: You joined the local monastery at 7 and you could go back home and help with the farm and then at 18, did you go to Gaden or had you already been there?

00:38:35

**#34M: I arrived at Gaden Monastery when I was 16. I left my village for Gaden when I was 16.**

Q: Tell us about the journey. *gen-la*, who did you go with and what was it like to leave your village?

**#34M: At the time I started my journey, there was no motor road. The Chinese had not yet built roads then. The journey from my village to Gaden Monastery in Lhasa took us two months and 14 days. We traveled carrying our food on our backs.**

Q: Can you tell us some of your experiences on that journey—like were you alone, were there any dangers, was it exciting—what was it like?

00:40:01

**#34M: There were many co-travelers. An older brother was with me. We were five people including my brother and me, who cooked and ate together on the journey. There were two other groups who cooked in two separate groups. Altogether we were 13 people who left the village.**

Q: Did anything scary happen on this trip or worrisome?

**#34M: The dangerous part on the way was crossing the rivers, which were swollen during summer. We faced difficulties trying to ford the rivers. There were no bridges and the rivers were swollen.**

Q: Were there many rivers?

00:41:15

**#34M: There were many rivers on the way as the journey took us two months and 14 days.**

Q: How did you get across the rivers?

**#34M: We had horses and donkeys with us on which we loaded our provisions. Then the people hung on to the tails of the animals.**

Q: *Gen-la*, this is the first time away from the village and you are traveling two months across Tibet to go to Gaden in Lhasa. What was it like? Can you give us a picture in your memory what did you see with your eyes as you went on this long journey?

00:42:55

**#34M: On the journey, I saw the mountains and wild animals. In the pasturelands were Tibetan gazelles and deer.**

Q: Did you run in into any robbers or troublesome people?

**#34M: Yes, we did encounter robbers. However, since we were a large group, they could not do anything to us.**

Q: Were there any Chinese in the land?

00:44:04

**#34M: Yes, there were Chinese. The Chinese were ahead of us. Before we left our village, the Chinese had moved ahead.**

Q: The Chinese had moved ahead?

**#34: Yes. Before we left our village, the Chinese crossed the Drichu [Yangtse] River and had already reached Lhasa.**

Q: Before you left home for Gaden and you were still living at home before 1952, were there any Chinese in your area?

00:45:15

**#34M: When we first left, there were no Chinese in my village. The Tibetan army was there.**

Q: The Tibetan government army?

**#34M: Yes, the Tibetan government's army. The region of Ba is like this [gestures off camera] with the Drichu River flowing [in the center]. On this side is my village and on the other side is Ba. Earlier the whole region was known as Ba. However, the Chinese now called the area on this side of the Drichu River as Markham and the other side remained Ba. In my opinion, it was in '49 that the Chinese arrived across the Drichu. It was 1949 that they came into Tibetan territory from across the Drichu.**

Q: If we move forward again and go to the monastery, was there ever a time when the Tibetan army and the Chinese soldiers clashed?

00:47:14

**#34M: Yes, they clashed. They fought across the Drichu River.**

Q: Where?

**#34M: Across the Drichu. The Chinese fired towards my village and the Tibetans fired back. Finally when they [the Chinese] did arrive, they deceived us by coming from another route.**

Q: That was 1948. Where were you at that time?

00:47:53

**#34M: That was 1948. They invaded in 1949. They came to Ba in the beginning of '47 and stayed there until 1949, living and building boats by the Drichu banks. They made preparations to enter Tibetan territory by making boats to cross the Drichu River. They invaded Tibet in the 9<sup>th</sup> Tibetan lunar month or around November of 1949 by coming across the Drichu.**

Q: The 9<sup>th</sup> lunar month?

**#34M: I think it was the 9<sup>th</sup> month because they arrived just as we completed harvesting the crops.**

Q: Where did they arrive?

00:48:48

**#34M: They came on the Tibetan side of the Drichu. They crossed the boundary into Tibet.**

Q: Did you see any with your own eyes?

**#34M: Yes, I saw. Once you crossed the Drichu, you were in my region, the place where I lived.**

Q: So not just a big region, but right where you lived.

00:49:56

**#34M: Yes, they came into the village and then proceeded towards Dowano. They rested in my village and drank tea. Families took them hot water in tea churners. Interpreters asked the villagers to bring them hot water. They added some tea leaves to the hot water and drank. They'd also brought *tsampa* 'flour made from roasted barley' with them, but they did not seem familiar with eating *tsampa*. They were hungry as they had come down the mountain. They went marching down the forest. The army chiefs were watching over them.**

Q: What were they wearing, this group of soldiers?

**#34M: Their clothes were made of thick cotton material, the usual Chinese type. The color was light [looks around the room to locate a similar color], like light brown. Slung across their shoulders were cookies [gestures a string of cookies hung across both the shoulders]. I believe these small cookies were packed with energy. They were wearing ammunitions across the waist.**

Q: What was it?

00:52:16

**#34M: They were grenades, which they had hung on their waists.**

Q: Guns?

**#34M: They were bombs which you threw after removing the pin with your mouth.**

Q: How did the people react when they saw them?

00:53:02

**#34M: They would have thought that the Chinese were troubling us; that they were forcefully invading our country. Earlier they were driven up to Chamdo. The Tibetan army fought them at Chamdo and drove them towards the other side of the Drichu banks. My older brother told me about it. He is 79 years old now. The Chinese first arrived in Chamdo. At Chamdo, the Tibetan soldiers fought and drove them towards the Drichu**

**River. My brother told me that they were driven to the other side of the Drichu. That was the other Chinese, not the present [Communist] Chinese.**

Q: The Chiang Kai-shek group?

**#34M: The present Chinese of Taiwan. He's called Chiang Kai-shek, right? The Chinese in [Tibet] are the Communist Chinese. They invaded Tibet through help received from Russia. The Russians bore all their expenses to invade Tibet.**

Q: We were talking about your experience. When the Chinese came, you were 11 years old. If you were born in 1936 and the Chinese soldiers came in 1947, you were 11. After age 11, did you have any more experience with the Chinese or did you just do your farming and then go on to the monastery at age 16? So from 11 to 16 did you just do farming and live at the local monastery when there were celebrations?

00:55:28

**#34M: It was only in '49 that the Chinese could enter Tibetan territory. They were making preparations to come into Ba and the Tibetan territory on this side of the Drichu. They could enter only in '49. Then in '49, they arrived and proceeded to Lhasa. It was their initial plan to capture only Chamdo. However, since we Tibetans did not resist them, they marched on to Lhasa. They occupied Chamdo and after three years, they invaded [the other parts] of Tibet. Tibet did not have an army to resist them and so they moved in.**

Q: If we go back to the monastery now, what's happening? You take your vows when you are 16. Tell us what happens in Gaden Monastery? What is your life like after you are 16?

**#34M: Then I lived in the monastery studying the scriptures of philosophical debates. I did not go anywhere besides doing my studies and practicing the dharma.**

Q: Were you learning debating or anything like that?

00:57:35

**#34M: Yes, I was learning the debates.**

Q: What kind of a student were you at the scriptures?

**#34M: I was not very bright.**

Q: Did you have jobs in the monastery?

00:58:09

**#34M: Except for some odd jobs at the *khangtsen* 'a smaller community within a monastery, in which monks of one geographical area live,' I did not have any particular work, but attended the prayer assemblies. I learned the scriptures and recited my prayers. There were no special duties except studying the scriptures. At times when there were prayer gatherings, I attended to some odd jobs but that was it.**

Q: Over all, how did you find monastery life after coming from a farm and working everyday in the fields? How was it to be inside a monastery?

**#34M: Once I joined Gaden Monastery, I did not have to work in the fields. It was solely learning the scriptures. It was like attending school where you have to excel in tests, like oral test, philosophical debate test, written test and recitation test.**

Q: What was your teacher like, *gen-la*?

00:59:54

**34M: There were many teachers who taught the scriptures. Some of the teachers lived in the *khangtsen* and some outside. It was like the different grades in school. We attended the particular scripture lesson of our grade.**

Q: Are there any memories about your days in the monastery that you cherish or think back on very happily?

**#34M: I was happy in the monastery. If one could learn all the scriptures, the monastery was a happy place. If one abided by the rules and could give the tests, one was happy. The monastery had to find means to take care of our food, so there was no need for us to think about anything else. One should learn for the tests, study one's lessons and observe the rules, but if otherwise, there would be certain problems. One could get expelled; one could not do as one wished.**

Q: What would make a monk's life an unhappy life?

01:02:17

**#34M: There are not many times when a monk is not happy. If you could not observe the rules of the monastery and uphold the vows, then that was the time when you became unhappy.**

Q: Did a certain number of percentages of monks realize that they could not keep these vows and they left? Like say out of a hundred monks, how many might make that kind of decision?

**#34M: There were many such monks who left. They would not reveal it [to the monastery authorities] but there were many who would go home, but did not return and instead got married and lived with a wife. There were many such cases.**

Q: So there was no formal exit ceremony; they just left?

01:04:15

**#34M: Actually one must inform that he was leaving. But most of them do not inform and just left. The correct procedure was to inform [the monastery] about leaving monkhood. In my *khangtsen* when a monk left monkhood, he offered tea during an assembly of monks called *kaja*. That was done when one was exiting monkhood, but there were others who left quietly and married. Then it would be said that he was no longer a monk and that was it.**



Q: To whom does he make the tea offering?

**#34M: He has to make the tea offering to the monk congregation. In my *khangtsen*, there are over 100 monks. He has to make the tea offering to them.**

Q: And the house [*khangtsen*] was the area from which the monks from his area came and they stayed in that house?

01:05:50

**#34M: Yes, that is right.**

Q: Just in general, was there any attitude towards monks who have left or was there an acceptance of that choice?

**#34M: No, there is no feeling of animosity towards those who have left monkhood. It would just be said that he was no longer a monk. However, the lay people did not deem him well and it would be said of him that he could not retain his monkhood.**

Q: Would a girl be willing to marry a former monk?

01:07:01

**#34M: Yes, there were girls who married [former monks].**

Q: *Gen-la*, when does your peaceful life in Gaden begin to change?

**#34M: That changed when the Chinese attacked Lhasa.**

Q: Before we get into that, I wanted to ask you, when you first saw Gaden, how did it look to you? Could you describe it because I understand it is a very large monastery?

01:08:14

**#34M: I found Gaden to be a very happy place. I saw that it was a very fine monastery and a happy place.**

Q: But what was the physical appearance like? Can you describe what you saw when you looked at Gaden?

**#34M: The monastery looked bright and good. It appeared as if it was a *thanka* 'traditional scroll painting' displayed on the mountain.**

Q: *Gen-la*, you said your life began to change in 1959 when Lhasa fell. Can you tell us what was happening to you in Gaden Monastery?

01:09:45

**#34M: During the battle? Nothing happened to us then. Two representatives from the Tibetan government came to Gaden and told us that His Holiness the Dalai Lama had left**

towards Lhoka and that we should not stay. So, that very night of the 14<sup>th</sup> we fled. I think it was the 2<sup>nd</sup> Tibetan lunar month and the 14<sup>th</sup> day.

Q: Gaden is outside of Lhasa. How far away on foot is Lhasa from Gaden and by car?

**#34M: In those days it used to take us two days. We journeyed from Gaden to Dechen, spent a night there and then the next day, proceeded onwards to Lhasa. From the hill of Gaden, you could see the Potala Palace. You could view the Potala Palace of Lhasa from atop the Onkori of Gaden. However, that was the route we took in the early days.**

Q: What was the place you would stop for the night?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: Dechen

Q: If Lhasa fell, could you see any smoke, fire...

01:12:02

**#34M: [Interrupts] What I meant was, when one had stuff to carry on the back [it took two days]. Those that did not have anything to carry could reach Lhasa in a day. When one had a load to carry, he stopped the night at Dechen and then started the next day. However, one who had nothing with him could reach Lhasa that day.**

Q: From the top of Gaden, how far could you see [Lhasa] being bombed?

**#4M: When we looked towards Lhasa during the Chinese attack, the city was full of smoke and smog from the shelling. We could not see much of Lhasa. They had fired hundreds of shells and Lhasa was enveloped in smoke. Smog filled the place.**

Q: So the smoke from the shelling obscured your view. Correct?

01:13:56

**#34M: Yes, you could not see.**

Q: You knew that Lhasa was being attacked. What kind of feelings did you have in your mind and in your heart?

**#34M: I believed that we would never win the war because the Chinese had brought sophisticated weapons with them. I wondered what to do and thought of going to [join] the *Chushi Gangdrug* [Defend Tibet Volunteer Force] at Lhoka, which is in the south towards India.**

Q: When the Potala Palace was being shelled, did the monks in the monastery run to the top to see that happening? Were they looking or were they starting to leave?

01:15:24

**#34M: Some of the monks were watching, but not everyone could go up there. There were about 1,500 monks and not every one of them was watching, but some of them were and they saw it.**

Q: Lhasa is being attacked and is that the very day you decide to leave?

**#34M: I did not leave that very day. The attack took place between the early morning of the 11<sup>th</sup> day and the night of the 10<sup>th</sup>. It occurred around dawn of the 11<sup>th</sup> at 3 a.m. It continued on the 11<sup>th</sup>, the 12<sup>th</sup> and by the 13<sup>th</sup>, the Chinese had defeated Lhasa. We fled in the evening of the 14<sup>th</sup>.**

Q: Was there any special ceremony or gesture that the monks did before they left as a group or with the teacher?

01:17:52

**#34M: A prayer assembly was going on at that time. It was a prayer festival called *Sangwa Dhuepa* for the Je Rinpoche that was being held. After the *Sangwa Dhuepa*, we were to perform the fire-offering ceremony on the 14<sup>th</sup>, but before that could be conducted, we fled.**

Q: Was the prayer assembly conducted on the 13<sup>th</sup>?

**#34M: The prayer assembly had been going on since the 5<sup>th</sup>. It continued from the 5<sup>th</sup> to the 13<sup>th</sup>.**

Q: Why couldn't it [the fire-offering ceremony] be?

01:18:57

**#34M: We'd heard that Lhasa was defeated and everybody was disturbed. When we learned that Lhasa was lost, everybody was distressed and nobody could remain unmoved.**

Q: You'd heard that monks had been captured?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: Lhasa was captured.

Q: Lhasa was captured and couldn't do the fire-burning ceremony. What is the fire-burning ceremony?

**#34M: There are many types of *gyansay* 'fire-offering ceremony' like *Sangwa Dhuepa Gyansay*, *Dhuekhor Gyansay*, *Jinjay Gyansay*, *Kunrig Gyansay*, etc. Our *datsang* 'section of a monastery' has 22 *khangtsen*, which were holding individual prayer assemblies.**

Q: *Gen-la*, how many monks were living in the monastery at that time? I don't believe I asked you that.

01:20:22

**#34M: I think there were over 2,000 monks. The actual figure at Gaden is 3,300. There must have been around 2,000 at the time of escape.**

Q: Did you leave with your group or with whom did you leave the monastery?

**#34M: We were 70-80 monks of our *khangtsen*. That was at the time we left. When night fell, we performed our prayer assembly. And as an auspicious sign, we left our cups and *dhaham* at the place of our seats and left.**

Q: What is *dhaham*?

01:21:32

**#34M: It is a piece of cloth monks wear on top. The cups were filled with tea.**

Q: What was the significance of that?

**#34M: That is a sort of auspicious symbol that we would be able to return.**

Q: What were you feeling when you left that day?

01:22:52

**#34M: I was quite young at that time and did not feel too bad.**

Q: *Gen-la*, did you think that you would return to Gaden someday?

**#34M: It was something like that; there was a feeling that I would return. I thought I would return some day though not immediately.**

Q: What do you miss about Gaden Monastery?

01:24:06

**#34M: I miss it a lot. I remember the hill, the surrounding and the place where I lived.**

Q: We have a picture of Gaden here. Maybe you could see it. It is an old picture.

**#34M: Okay.**

Q: Maybe you could turn it around.

[A black and white picture showing a vast number of buildings located on a mountain slope is shown and interviewee points to a building in the center.]

01:25:12

**#34M: That is where the remains of the Je Rinpoche are entombed.**

Q: Who is Je Rinpoche?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: The founder of Gaden.

Q: Can you point to it again?

**#34M: This dark building here. [Points to the building in the picture]**

Q: Can you point to what part of Gaden you lived in?

01:25:43

**#34M: [Points to picture] That is the main hall of Gaden where all the monks congregated.**

Q: What else can you show us?

**#34M: There are two *datsang* in Gaden called Shartse and Jangtse. That [points to picture] is Jangtse Datsang. And lower here is the Shartse Datsang.**

Q: Which one did you live in?

01:26:42

**#34M: I belong to Jangtse Datsang. That [points to picture] is where I lived in Phara Khangtsen, close to the Jangtse Datsang building.**

Q: Can you tell us what some of the other buildings are?

**#34M: That [points to picture] is the Jangtse Datsang's *choera*. That is Tiwu Khangtsen. Do you see this here? [Points to a long building located on the lower portion of the mountain] That is Nari Khangtsen. Altogether there are 23 *khangtsen*.**

Q: Thank you.

[The picture is taken away]

Q: Have you seen pictures of Gaden since it was destroyed?

01:28:11

**#34M: I have been there after it was destroyed. I have been to Gaden.**

Q: What year did you go?

**#34M: I went in 1986.**

Q: What was your reaction when you saw it?

01:28:40

**#34M: When I went back, except for a few buildings, everything was destroyed. All was destroyed. On the upper area, Tiwu Khangtsen was rebuilt to a small extent and below, a**

**part of Nari Khangtsen was standing. All the rest were not there. A little away from Gaden's main hall was the Tithokhang, which was standing and the rest were destroyed.**

Q: What was your reaction when you saw so much destruction of your beloved monastery?

**#34M: I felt extremely sad. I shed tears.**

Q: Could you stay at Gaden now? Would it be possible for you to have stayed at Gaden when you went, *gen-la*?

01:30:12

**#34M: No, it would not be possible. It was not like earlier times in Gaden. Those that could join Gaden were the people of the surrounding villages like Tasktselung, Labam and Tsangcho. No one else could join it. Those monks from distant places could not join it.**

Q: Why is that?

**#34M: That was because they [the Chinese] thought they [the monks] might rebel against them. If monks from various places gathered together, they might rebel. They [the Chinese] think that a large gathering of monks might rebel.**

Q: You mean if it started again; if there was a new large monk population. *Gen-la*, we left you leaving the monastery and leaving tea behind, with the hope of returning. You did return but it was sad.

01:32:05

**#34M: That is right.**

Q: To go back to the story, what do you do when you leave Gaden with your group of people? Where do you go?

**#34M: We went towards Lamo, a place on the route to Kham from Gaden. And from Lamo, we proceeded to Lhoka.**

Q: Did you run into any difficulty?

01:33:09

**#34M: On the journey to Lhoka, we did not particularly face any difficulty, except that we had to travel in the dark and did not get any food or *tsampa* to eat. Most of my Khangtsen monks stayed at Yoka on our way to Lhoka. I and six other monks crossed over a pass into Lhoka.**

Q: You were traveling with 60-70 monks.

**#34M: Yes and most of the monks went to Yoka. En route, the path divided into two and most of the monks took the route they were familiar with, while the six of us continued through the valley.**

Q: What happens when you get to Lhoka?

01:34:52

**#34M: We had to cross the river in a boat from Songrukhabum to reach Lhoka. Here, we met a leader of the *Chushi Gangdrug* along with quite a number of the guerrillas. The leader asked us where the other monks were and we replied that they had gone on to Yoka. Then he said, "They must not remain at Yoka. Tell the monks to cross the river. It is not possible to resist the Chinese at Yoka, as there is a Chinese motor road passing behind Yoka. That's quite close by. You should go to call the monks." This [conversation] took place with the leader of the *Chushi Gangdrug* when we reached Songrukhabum and were on the verge of crossing the river into Lhoka. So I went to Yoka to call them. That was a day's journey.**

Q: Were the monks intending to join the *Chushi Gangdrug* or just passing through?

**#34M: There were different intentions; some wanted to join the force and fight, while others wished to flee.**

Q: And what was your opinion?

01:37:01

**#34M: Initially I wanted to escape. However, after I called the other monks [from Yoka] and we reached Yarlung Phodang 'the palace of Yarlung,' the leaders of the *Chushi Gangdrug* told us, "The young men must fight. You must take part in the fight." We told them that we did not own guns, to which they said that they would provide us with guns. So they gave a gun each to the six of us.**

Q: When they gave you guns, did that change your attitude about staying?

**#34M: One was forced to fight when it came to saving one's life. After receiving the guns, we had to fight, as commanded by the superiors. [Laughs]**

Q: This was a very different life than in the monastery.

01:38:35

**#34M: Yes, now it had become very different.**

Q: Tell us how your story continues.

**#34M: We were sent to the top of a hill, armed with our guns to keep a watch out for the Chinese. While the Generals discussed over a meeting in the [Yarlung] Phodang, two or three of us were up the hill to keep a look-out for the Chinese.**

Q: Then?

01:39:24

**#34M:** We were six of us. Two stood watch while four of us in pairs were sent down on separate routes. By then the Chinese had crossed the river and captured Tandu. It was evening when we left [Yarlung] Phodang. We were sent with these instructions by the general, "There is an army camp near Tandu, where there are 500 Lithang guerrillas. Ask them to put up a good resistance. Tomorrow we will send reinforcements."

Q: What was the message?

**#34M:** Tandu had fallen to the Chinese. We were sent with a message to the *Chushi Gangdrug* camp nearby, "Put up a good resistance tonight. Tomorrow morning we will send reinforcements." So the four of us set forth in pairs but when we reached there, there were no soldiers. They'd all fled.

Q: They'd all fled?

01:40:48

**#34M:** They'd fled. When we reached close to Tandu at a distance of, say from Camp Number 9 to Camp Number 1 [in Mundgod], we could not see any people or animals about. Not a dog emerged from Tandu.

Q: Then?

**#34M:** Then we fled back. However, by the time we reached [Yarlung] Phodang, the *Chushi Gangdrug* guerrillas had left! They had moved on. [Laughs] When we reached the earlier *Chushi Gangdrug* camp, they had all left.

Q: Then?

01:42:18

**#34M:** Then further away we found Amdo Jinpa with about 20 guerrillas. In the house where we'd stayed earlier, there were five or six young men from Chamdo and Dayab. They had saddled their horses and put their things close by, in order to flee at a moment's notice. Amdo Jinpa said, "Let us not go anywhere. The *Chushi Gangdrug* guerrillas will return here. Let's stay here." So we stayed there for the night. It was three days since the Chinese overcame Tandu.

The next morning, no guerrillas of the *Chushi Gangdrug* arrived. It was around this time of the morning that Amdo Jinpa called us, "Come, young monks. It does not seem likely that the *Chushi Gangdrug* guerrillas will arrive. We will not be able to withstand [the Chinese]. Let's go."

One of the Chamdo young men said, "They will return. Let the Amdowa 'people of Amdo region' leave. We would come to no harm by staying here." So we remained there that night while the others left. The next morning we left at around 10 and then met the *Chushi Gangdrug* guerrillas who were returning to Tandu. We joined them.



They [the leaders of the *Chushi Gangdrug*] held meetings in the Phodang again, while the soldiers moved on. Two of us were sent up the hill to keep watch over Chinese movements in the plains. We were instructed to fire twice if we saw them. They said that they would fire twice to indicate us to come down. It was a very high hill and as we neared the top, we could see two people coming our way. We did not know if they were nomads or anyone else.

Just then the *Chushi Gangdrug* fired twice and we went back. They asked us if we saw anyone and we told them about the two people we'd seen. The General called us and pointing to a mountain said, "You should go there." The area was plain with a valley further away. He directed us, "Go into the valley. I shall follow you. Do not stay here. You were here yesterday and the Chinese could have surrounded you in the night. You should go there today." We replied in the affirmative and proceeded.

01:45:40

We came across a wealthy family known as the Samdup Phodang and they made preparation when they heard that the *Chushi Gangdrug* General was due to arrive. They arrived at around twilight. We spent the night there. In the morning, we took tea and breakfast while the leaders met for discussion. There was an elderly person [of the family], who told us to lock the room [where we stayed for the night] and seal the lock.

Then the Chinese started to fire. I could see the bullets flying near two horsemen. They were in a dilemma as to where to run. Then all those who were at the meeting started to flee on their horses. We did not have horses and would stand no chance on the plains. We thought perhaps we should flee up the mountains or back to the place where the *Chushi Gangdrug* spent the night.

However 300-400 people dressed in Khampa 'people from Kham region' attire, who were actually Chinese had converged at last night's resting place. One of our companions ran after them telling us, "Come on. The *Chushi Gangdrug* people are there." There was another companion called Chemi, who had earlier fought in Lhasa and he said, "Do not go. They are not our people, they are Chinese dressed in Khampa attire. Our people would not have such similar dresses. They are Chinese." They were Chinese, dressed in Khampa clothes with *washa* 'fox skin hats' on their heads and wearing *chupa* 'Tibetan traditional coats.' There were about 300 of them who were behind us. Earlier they had fired but this time, they arrived quietly without firing any shots. So we fought for one day at the Phodang.

Q: When you keep saying Phodang, do you mean Yarlung Phodang?

01:48:11

#34M: Yes, Yarlung Phodang. The *Chushi Gangdrug* had set up camp at Yarlung Phodang. We clashed there for one day.

Q: Did you fight with those that were dressed in *chupa*?

#34M: Yes, those in *chupa* as well as those who were pursuing the *Chushi Gangdrug*. The Chinese arrived there in two groups, one group dressed in *chupa* and the other in their

**uniform. We fought each other for one day in that region. Towards evening, the *Chushi Gangdrug* fled and so did we. That was the only encounter.**

Q: Then where did you go?

01:48:50

**#34M: Then we went on to Nyen and to Tsona. The Chinese were already in Tsona when we arrived there. The Chinese had taken another route and reached there. The Chinese' intention was to surround us [makes a circle with arms]. They sent [troops] from Kongpo to Zayul and from Tsang to Nyemo, thus encircling us and preventing our escape to India. Those [Chinese troops] from Tsang reached Tsona and when we fled to Tsona, they were already there. So we retraced our steps and turned towards Jora, where we joined with the rest of the *Chushi Gangdrug*. Then we proceeded to Khata.**

**Tsona, on the other side, had been captured by the Chinese for two days. We fled from Khata where there was a sort of a gate between two rock faces. The *Chushi Gangdrug* guerrillas said at Khata, "It is best to flee now. If we remain here and the gate is blocked, there is no way out. At the moment there are 500 guerrillas armed with artilleries resisting the Chinese. They will be recalled soon."**

Q: Where did you go from Khata?

**#34M: From Khata we reached Mango, which is the territory of the Mon [Mon Tawang, Arunachal Pradesh]. In the olden days, Mon came under Tibet. Mangola 'mountain pass at Mango' came under Tibetan territory; however, it was on the way to India. Those [Chinese troops] in Kongpo could not reach Khata. Had they arrived, we would not have the chance to escape, as they had planned to surround us by sending troops from the directions of Tsang and Kongpo. Due to the bad road, the Chinese from Kongpo could not make it [to Khata].**

Q: When you reached the Mangola Pass, what happened then?

01:52:36

**#34M: From Mangola, we walked onwards to Mon. There is an Indian sentry post at Mangola. They informed their government about our arrival and we waited for around two days. After two days, we were allowed to move on to Mon. We surrendered our guns to the Indians at Mon Tawang.**

Q: How long would you say you were with the fighting forces from the time you left the monastery? Was that a matter of days or weeks or months?

**#34M: I left [Gaden monastery] on the evening of the 14<sup>th</sup> day of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Tibetan lunar month. When we reached Missamari [Assam, India], it was the 15<sup>th</sup> day of the 4<sup>th</sup> month. It was nearly two months.**

Q: That was a very exciting adventure. And it sounds like you and your group survived, *gen-la*? Did most people survive?

01:54:55

**#34M: Yes, they survived.**

Q: *Gen-la*, this is an important part of Tibet's history what you just told us. So one of my questions is, why do you think it is important to record the history of Tibet through the eyes of the people who lived through it? Why do you think it is important?

**#34M: Tibet had all the characteristics of an independent nation and they [the Chinese] forcefully invaded it. Everybody must be aware of this. If truth can triumph in this world, it is clear that earlier Tibet was an independent country. They occupied it by force. If truth can prevail and if there is support for truth and if the United Nations Organization is just, they must realize it and strive for it.**

Q: If the United Nations Organization is fair, then...?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: The story shows that Tibet was a free country.

**#34M: It [Tibet] had all the characteristics of a nation, like currency, border and an army for the security of its nation. They entered forcefully and the world must know of this.**

Q: Because we have covered so much I want to go back to the question and say, if this interview were shown in Tibet or China, would this be a problem for you?

01:57:44

**#34M: There will be no problem because I have spoken the truth.**

Q: *Gen-la*, thank you for sharing your story with us.

**#34M: Okay.**

Q: *Gen-la*, what do you hope will be preserved for the children of Tibet? What do you hope will be saved about the country of Tibet?

01:58:32

**#34M: The Tibetan people must strive for fundamental human rights. We do not have freedom. It is said that fundamental human rights is the law of the world. I hope this will be preserved. I am sure the other countries and the United Nations can help, but I think they do not because if they did, they can surely help. It [China] is a member of the United Nations and it must observe the law of the United Nations. What could be the reason for it not having to observe the law of the United Nations? I do not know.**

Q: Thank you, *gen-la*.

[Interviewer presents a gift to the interviewee and thanks him for his story.]

END OF INTERVIEW