

Tibet Oral History Project

Interview #35U – Wangdak Tashi
April 7, 2017

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TIBET ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

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INTERVIEW SUMMARY SHEET

1. Interview Number: #35U
2. Interviewee: Wangdak Tashi
3. Age: 80
4. Date of Birth: 1937
5. Sex: Male
6. Birthplace: Tsangyue
7. Province: Dhotoe (Kham)
8. Year of leaving Tibet: 1970
9. Date of Interview: April 7, 2017
10. Place of Interview: Minling House, Clement Town, Dehradun, Uttarakhand, India
11. Length of Interview: 1 hr 49 min
12. Interviewer: Marcella Adamski
13. Interpreter: Tenzin Yangchen
14. Videographer: Tenzin Choenyi
15. Translator: Tenzin Yangchen

Biographical Information:

Wangdak Tashi was born in Tsangyue in Kham Province to a wealthy, ruling class family. As a child he collected shells from the lake, rode horses and studied Buddhist scriptures. His family owned thousands of yaks and eight families worked as servants, who grazed the animals. For this reason, his family was targeted by the invading Chinese and their animals and possession were confiscated. His father, grandfather and uncles were arrested and publicly executed.

Under the Chinese occupation Wangdak Tashi witnessed the destruction of monasteries, the mining of precious minerals, and the killing of wild animals. His region was organized into a commune system and he was forced to graze animals. After his father's murder, he escaped with his mother. He then joined a branch of the *Chushi Gangdrug* [Defend Tibet Volunteer Force] in Marpothang, which had 11,000 members, including monks and women.

Wangdak Tashi fought Chinese troops with weapons dropped from American planes, but bombs from enemy planes eventually forced them to flee to the Northern Plateau. Later he was captured and imprisoned for eight years. He was subjected to torture, hard labor and sterilization. After learning that he was to be executed, Wangdak Tashi escaped to Ladakh, India. Inspired by news about the death of his mother and other family members, he began practicing *chod*, a special Buddhist practice to benefit the living and the dead.

Topics Discussed:

Kham, customs/traditions, first appearance of Chinese, oppression under Chinese, imprisonment, commune system, brutality/torture, Chushi Gangdrug guerrillas, sterilization, Buddhist beliefs.

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Interview #35U

Interviewee: Wangdak Tashi

Age: 80, Sex: Male

Interviewer: Marcella Adamski

Interview Date: April 7, 2017

Question: Please tell us your name.

00:00:10

Interviewee #35U: Wangdak Tashi.

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?

#35U: Yes, yes.

Q: Thank you for offering to share your story with us.

#35U: Okay.

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

#35U: Okay.

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

#35U: Okay.

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

00:01:53

#35U: If this were shown to them [the Chinese]...They have announced many a times that they would have killed me, killed Wangdak Tashi, for if he went abroad in the future, he would speak bad things. They released ten thousand prisoners because of this. Later it was said that he was alive. Therefore, it is not just my story, if they hear me talk—the older generation is no more—it will hurt them [the Chinese] greatly.

Q: So we're honored to record your story and appreciate your participation in this project.

#35U: Okay.

Q: *Gen-la* ‘respectful term for teacher,’ can you please tell me how old you are?

#35U: I am 80 years old.

Q: Where were you born?

#35U: I was born in a place called Tsangyue across the Yangtze River.

Q: Is that in Kham?

#35U: It is Golok in Kham.

Q: What did your family do for a livelihood?

#35U: Long back we owned a large number of yaks and kept many servants and earned a living from that.

Q: When you say long back, was that grandfather’s time or great-great-great-grandfather’s time?

00:04:11

#35U: My father, grandfather and great grandfather belonged to the ruling class and owned a large number of yaks. The yaks multiplied in the mountains and there was countless number of yaks.

Q: What was the name of the family of leaders?

#35U: There was my father’s family and mother’s family. The father’s family was called Tsangyue Pon ‘Chieftain’ Wangchuk Dorjee and Pon Tiga.

Q: Tsangyue Pon?

#35U: Pon Wangchuk Dorjee. Pon is a title. [They were my] father and grandfather. Mother’s side is called Rumtha Ladang. All the maternal uncles were lamas.

[Interviewer to interpreter]: They were all lamas?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: From the mother’s side.

Q: So when you were born, *gen-la*, how many people were in your family?

#35U: When I was born, we were three brothers, two sisters, a paternal uncle, Mother’s younger sister...No, it was Mother’s elder sister and maternal uncle who was a monk. In total there were 11-12 members.

Q: Were Father and Mother there?

#35U: In the house.

Q: Were the parents there?

00:06:20

#35U: Yes.

Q: Where were you in the order of children?

#35U: I am the one above the youngest.

Q: Next to the last. What did you do as a child growing up?

#35U: While living in the hometown most of the time we were happy. Being children of royalty, it was playing about and playing *thatse* without any responsibilities. [We] learned the scriptures and the story of Ling Gesar ‘King Gesar, an emanation of Guru Padmasambhava.’ There were no responsibilities besides this for there were many servants and maids.

Q: Playing, and what’s *thatse*?

#35U: Horse riding, riding horses in the summertime, racing and having fun during the birthday of His Holiness the Dalai Lama. It is playing at riding horses. Then there is a large lake from which [I] gathered small shells and played as if they were animals.

Q: What was the name of the lake?

00:08:14

#35U: It is the Lake Kyaring Ngoring. There is a large place called Macha Pomra in the region of Golok and close to this is the Lake Kyaring Ngoring. It is said to be the *lamtso* ‘lake where gods and nagas live’ of Ling Gesar’s wife Dugmo. There is such a huge lake.

Q: When you said...you mentioned the shells, what kind of shapes were these shells? Can you give me an idea and describe them?

#35U: The shells were not large ones, but small ones of this size [gestures off camera, interpreter interprets as an inch] that get washed ashore by the waves. This lake is said to be a treasure trove and during summertime various kinds of animals emerged from it. There were a few hillocks in the middle of the lake and families could live there in the winter.

Q: In the middle of the hillocks?

#35U: Yes, in the middle of the lake were two or three hillocks. Families could live there in the winter. When the ice melted in summer, one could not go and stay there.

Q: Did [the lake] freeze in winter?

#35U: It froze during winter. When it froze people walked across it and lived there in winter.

Q: It wasn't possible in the summer.

#35U: One could not go there in the summer. If one gets stranded there in summer you are finished.

[Interviewer to interpreter]: Hillocks meaning like little islands?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: Islands, and they went in the winter.

Q: *Gen-la*, was your family well off or moderate income, medium income?

00:10:41

#35U: Water?

Q: Among the wealthy or middle class?

#35U: [We] were very wealthy. The Chinese counted and claimed that we owned 8,000 yaks.

Q: How many? 8,000?

#35U: Eight thousand. Though I insisted that there were not that many, [the Chinese] took a count from all the servants and finally it did come to 8,000.

Q: Eight thousand?

#35U: Yes, [my family] was that wealthy.

Q: Why did your father think that there was less than the Chinese numbered?

#35U: I said that.

Q: Yes?

#35U: It was I who said that there were not that many.

Q: Why did you say that?

#35U: I did not think there was that many. We had around eight families that served as servants. Some of them [looked after] 300-400 [yaks and *dri* 'female yaks'] and some 800-900. After totaling the big and small, their [the Chinese] figure was correct.

Q: So these eight families were all helpers or servants of your family, is that correct?

00:12:54

#35U: They took care of groups of our yaks and worked [for us]. They used half of the butter and cheese and gave half to us.

Q: So was the keeping half of the butter and cheese, was that the form of payment that they had?

#35U: No, they were paid wages separately. If an animal died they could eat it. They could eat any number they wished.

Q: In case of death?

#35U: If [an animal] died they could eat it. Then in times of difficulties they could slaughter and eat as well.

Q: Was the relationship between these families and your father a cordial one or was there tension? How did they react to each other?

00:14:34

#35U: The relationship was cordial, cordial to everybody. People came from different places saying it was good to work for us saying, "Let me take care of some animals. Let me take care of some animals." Many came and that was how things worked for us.

Q: Was that...were there many men like your father who owned that many...8,000 yaks in Kham or was he unusual in that kind of prosperity?

#35U: There were—there were many. Those that live in proper Golok of Kham own more animals than us.

When the yaks were being driven there were so many that the area looked black.

Q: So most yak owners of that amount of yaks would have families working for them to care for these animals?

00:16:15

#35U: Without servants one cannot control...

Q: Yes?

#35U: Without servants we cannot manage.

Q: *Gen-la*, why were the Chinese interested or insisting on telling you how many yaks that you owned? Why was that any of their business?

#35U: They seized animals from everyone, counted and kept a record of how many each family owned. Earlier the Chinese stayed a few years and they had taken a count in order to confiscate [the animals later]. They had counted the animals a long time back. We realized it only after [our animals] were taken away.

Q: At what point did they take them away?

#35U: [The animals] were confiscated in the 8th lunar month of '58. In the 7th lunar month, 100,000 Chinese troops arrived and then forcefully took [the animals] away.

Q: '51?

#35U: '51.

Q: '58?

#35U: '58.

Q: '58?

#35U: Yes.

Q: How did they corral that many animals if you had like 8,000? How did they corral them? They were not herders themselves?

00:18:50

#35U: There were our past servants; those servants...We, the owners were given poor food and poor clothing while the past servants were given better food and better clothing. Everybody had to segregate the animals: the yaks were separated into males, females and calves, and the horses were also separated into males and females and [we] had to herd them.

All the belongings...they confiscated all the belonging in the house leaving not even a cup and said, "Until now you have been rich and lived happily and joyfully. That period is over for you. We, the Communist Party will overturn the society. Your fortunes have reversed. If you serve and remain in the white path, it is okay. If you do not remain in the white path and follow the black, you are opposing the Communist Party and there is only one thing to do." That was how it was done.

Q: Did they give the servants, besides the wealth of the owners, did they give the servants the yaks or did they take the yaks to China?

00:20:59

#35U: The yaks were used for the cheese, butter, *tsipa* 'yak hair' and *khulu* 'fur from upper part of yak's body.' These were transported to China while the animals were left in our region, for it was a good place. [The animals] were herded there and a commune was formed. It was called commune. In the Chinese language it is *remekongri* and in Tibetan it is *chitsok ringluk* 'socialism.' That was how it was, like a farm.

Q: How old were you, *gen-la*, when this...I want to know what you saw with your own eyes so that we focus on that because your story is very special because only you saw this. So how old were you when you first saw the Chinese come into your community?

00:22:30

#35U: Long ago when I saw the Chinese I was 15 years old. Many Chinese came to our place and gave many *dhayen* ‘Chinese silver coins’ to the influential people. After destroying the wealth of Peking, after destroying the wealth of the previous Chinese government, it was brought and given to our leaders—given to the leaders. The Chinese said, “There is a form of government called socialism. It is good if you follow it.”

In the beginning [they] pretended to be peaceful like this, but later not only confiscated [our] wealth, but dug the earth for *dzi* ‘special beads made of agate stone’ like these [points to necklace], gold and various kinds of precious stones and killed the different kinds of animals found on the mountains. The Chinese gave such problems in regard to the animals. Moreover, [they] arrested all the lamas and monks of the monasteries and destroyed all the monasteries. I have witnessed this with my eyes and experienced it.

Q: So when they first came, first time you see them...do they come with...they were very friendly in the beginning? What was your contact with the Chinese? How did you meet them or talk to them?

00:24:45

#35U: We did not extend any good contact with the Chinese nor were there any arguments. We went to buy goods at the border of Mongolia and China and besides this did not have any contact whatsoever.

Q: Did the Chinese come to your home and take your valuables and did you see that?

#35U: The leader of the Chinese then was Mao Zedong. As a little child Mao Zedong was a girl that had transformed into a boy. [He] was such a man, a very bad one. He had said, “Tibet has mineral deposits, wealth and possessions. In our past lives and during the time of Ling Gesar there have been conflicts. I am a descendant of Hor and therefore, its [Tibet’s] entire wealth, without leaving anything behind, has to come into the hands of the Communist Party.” This was announced to the world. So the riches were confiscated forcefully.

Q: Mao Zedong was a girl in the beginning and then he became a boy?

#35U: He was a girl until the age of 20 and then became a boy.

Q: What do you mean by Mao Zedong was female until the age of 20 and then became a male? What is that about?

00:27:00

#35U: Long ago Mao Zedong was...A host of soldiers appeared from the ocean and the reason was because of Tibet’s misfortune brought on by the killing of Reting Rinpoche and Khartsa Rinpoche. This was our own creation and I feel embarrassed to talk about it. Because of this soldiers appeared from the ocean, and Mao Zedong’s parents were paupers and he was in a pigsty belonging to Russia that followed the system of Marx’s Leninism.

She was such a girl. After the girl was born Marx-Lenin said, “This girl will be very helpful to me” and bore all the expenses.

Q: Who bore the expenses?

#35U: Russia. There was a Russian king called Marx-Lenin. He brought [the girl] up and armed the tens of thousands of soldiers that appeared from the ocean. From the beginning until the age of 15 she was a girl and then fornicated with a Japanese monk. She said, “This is not right. It is not good to remain in a female body and I have the power to do anything. It is not good for me to be in a female body.”

Then [Mao Zedong] cut off [his] hair that had been this long [gestures off camera]...cut it off. [Mao Zedong] became a boy in winter and in the summer...became a girl in winter and...no, became a girl in summertime. He remained in this way for five years until the age of 20. There was this long-necked Indian animal called zebra...

Q: Giraffe?

00:28:54

#35U: Zebra that can reach the top of a house...the Chinese call this *resen*. It is believed that every stripe on its body represents hell. The neck of one such was cut and [Mao Zedong] washed her face with the blood—washed the face well with the blood. Then she went atop Mount Wutai of China holding a spade and an umbrella. [From the top of Mount Wutai] one could see clearly until Himachal [Pradesh, India] and thought, “I will endeavor to occupy as far as that region.”

Q: Until Himachal?

#35U: [To interpreter] Yes, and I will continue after you have translated.

Q: What we need to do, *gen-la* is go back to you. This is an interesting story, but I need to know what happened to you when you were a teenager. Did you see Chinese in your village with your own eyes?

00:31:27

#35U: Long ago we had connection with the Chinese of the Nationalist Party. There was the connection and they taxed us a little every three years, but apart from this there was nothing. Later when the Communist Party arrived after conquering Nationalist China, they were soft spoken and good in the beginning. Finally, saying that orders had come from Mao Zedong everything was confiscated.

Then the important lamas and people were arrested and wealth confiscated. For instance, in the place called Sewushen—this is written in my book—[the Chinese] dug a pit and buried 10,000 people in it.

Q: Where was this?

#35U: It is called Sewushen and is a part of our Tsangyue region. That is mentioned in my book.

Q: What happened to your family?

00:33:34

#35U: In my case...in the year '54 half of our family went on a pilgrimage to Lhasa and half of the family stayed home. When we returned all the members had been captured and the Chinese also came and arrested us along the way. Everybody was either captured or killed. Those that resisted were killed and those that did not and surrendered were captured. Then everyone was taken to prison. I was 18 years old then. "According to the law of the world, there is no [punishment] for [those] under 18. So you should serve [us]." [I] was sent to graze animals.

Q: That's when [you] returned from the pilgrimage?

#35U: Yes.

00:35:01

Sorry, it was 1958.

Q: What did you do when the...Wait, what happened to your father and your mother?

#35U: Father had already been captured and taken away then; Father, Paternal Uncle and Grandfather. The Chinese had captured grandfather and tied a rope around the neck and killed him at the place called Jekundo. Mother was there.

Q: Mother wasn't there?

#35U: Mother was there; Mother and Maternal Aunt were there. Father, Paternal Uncle and two elder brothers—everyone had been arrested and taken away. My maternal uncle, sister and I had been to Lhasa and encountered the Chinese along the way and were captured.

Q: And where was your father? Was he with you or still back at home?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: Father had been captured.

[Interpreter to interviewer]: Oh, Father had been captured. Father and who else? I'm sorry.

[Interpreter to interviewer]: A paternal uncle, an older brother and grandfather. Those that stayed at home had already been captured, and Mother, Maternal Aunt, Maternal Uncle and myself had been on a pilgrimage to Lhasa and we were captured... We encountered the Chinese along the way and were captured when we returned.

Q: And then you were made to work in a commune. What did you have to do for work?

00:37:11

#35U: Soon after we came there...they [the Chinese] had many groups of animals and I was made to graze 500 male yaks alone as was also another person. Each man was made to graze 500 male yaks that were counted once a month. If there were none missing during the count, it was fine but should there be any missing, [I] had to pay a penalty. [I] remained so for a year.

After a year my father was brought out handcuffed and shackled at the feet among the people to be subjected to *thamzing* ‘struggle session.’ When [Father] was subjected to *thamzing* among the people...the people claimed that he was wealthy and belonged to the class of rulers, a leader, and that he was wealthy and possessed a large flock of cattle and was a rich person...

There were three categories, *ngadhak delrim* ‘class of leaders,’ *chukdhak delrim* ‘class of wealthy’...Take this hand for instance [holds up left hand and indicates three fingers] these are the three categories. He was among all three categories and was burned alive. [Father] was killed like that.

Q: Was that a typical punishment for people who had been wealthy?

00:39:34

#35U: Some were killed by burning and some were killed by pouring hot water, while some were dragged by the neck with a rope and killed. [They] were all lamas and leaders. There were different ways of killing.

Q: What was your reaction to such a tragic ending of your father’s life, such a cruel ending?

#35U: Now how can I serve the Chinese, let alone follow the white path? [I] thought of challenging [the Chinese] until my death. A few boys and I had a discussion. We did not have any weapons, but had been given many hoes to dig the earth. So [we] carried the hoes and hit the Chinese over the head and killed two of them. Taking along...[not discernible], we fled to the mountains. I took some things and my mother and sister and fled to the mountains.

Q: Were you doing that because you were so upset about your fathers being burnt alive?

00:42:12

#35U: The Chinese killed Father, destroyed our monastery and confiscated [our] wealth. That was the cause of the anger.

Q: When your father was killed, did you actually see that with your own eyes? Were you made to be there? Were other people there? How...Can you tell us how that happened?

#35U: There were not [many people]—people everywhere had been captured. There were hardly any around because the men had been taken to prison by the Chinese. Some women were left there to take care of the animals. There was no one else.

We were a few boys herding the male yaks that discussed and killed [the two Chinese] and we fled to Lhasa hoping to see His Holiness the Dalai Lama. On the way it was heard that a certain Andrug Gonpo Tashi had established an armed force called *Chushi Gangdrug* [Defend Tibet Volunteer Force] and that there were many people from Golok that had joined it. So whether it was possible to meet up or not, [we] were going with hope.

Q: So you were just describing who were around the commune. Is that correct, not around the execution of your father?

00:44:37

#35U: At that time, except for a few boys that were my colleagues, Mother and others, the other people were those that the Chinese had brought from everywhere else to work there. Those that were poor in the past were now working there. They were the ones that were the main members of the commune. We were the servants.

The site where we herded the male yaks was somewhere else, where two Chinese leaders arrived one night asking, “There are some rebels moving about and you have to provide some yaks.” Seizing this opportunity, though there were no weapons, we hit them on the head with hoes and were able to take revenge and managed to flee.

Q: But before you fled, *gen-la*, did you see...did your father have a trial, a public trial before he was executed by fire?

00:46:47

#35U: The Chinese had tortured [my father] earlier and [he] was shackled at the hands and feet, and there were sores. Then [he] was brought to our commune. There were communes formed everywhere and [Father] was taken to all and finally brought to be killed where I could see.

Moreover, the advice they [the Chinese] gave was, “If you follow your father that is the black path and this is what will happen. If you follow the Communist Party, that is the white path. If you follow whatever the Communist Party says, that is good for you.” [The Chinese] advised this.

Q: Was your father able to say anything to you before he was killed?

00:48:03

#35U: We did not meet because [I] had been on pilgrimage for a year and did not get to meet at home. [Father] had already been arrested.

Q: May I...I know this is very painful, but I wonder how did they burn him alive that's such an unusual punishment. How did they do that?

#35U: The reason for burning [my father] alive was because of the three categories of leadership...

Q: How was [your father] burnt?

#35U: By pouring kerosene—it was either kerosene or petrol—and then burnt.

Q: Were there other people killed with him at the same time?

#35U: There were some other people that liked the Chinese and they were given orders, “You pour kerosene. You set fire.” Such orders were issued and they did it. Those that gave the orders were the two Chinese leaders that were killed.

Q: Did they say what his crime was? For what was he being executed?

00:50:08

#35U: A lot was said prior to that about him being a leader since seven generations, and that being a leader he was an authoritarian. And secondly, that he had a great amount of wealth which he did not accumulate through hard work but had been snatched from the people, and that such kind [of people] should be annihilated and not allowed to live, and that he had not accumulated the wealth...

That [he] was a *ngadhak* for being a leader, a *chukdhak* because of the amount of wealth, a *delrim* for belonging to the class of leaders, and that [a person] that belongs to all three categories must be annihilated immediately. Not just that, I was told, “Though you are the child yet [your father] is your enemy. You should subject [him] to *thamzing*.” I was told that.

Q: Were you forced to do that?

00:52:02

#35U: [The Chinese] were going to do that, but I escaped on the pretext that the yaks had run away and fled to where the yaks were.

Q: How soon after your father was killed, did you take some instruments and kill the Chinese? Was it like the next day or a week later? How soon after that did you do that?

#35U: A little time elapsed. The Chinese said that some enemies were moving on the other side and needed yaks to go there and would come the next or the following day. [I] waited a day—waited a day and got the yaks ready, got the yak saddles and covers ready. Then [I] became filled with animosity and thought of nothing else.

Q: Did it take a day?

#35U: It took a day.

Q: And so right after you did that in revenge for your father’s death, you went home to get your mother and where did you go with her?

00:53:54

#35U: Then we trekked and trekked having heard about the *Chushi Gangdrug* and Andrug Gonpo Tashi in the direction of Lhasa, and that after Golok had been occupied, a number of Golok men had joined the *Chushi Gangdrug* that had been established. [We] hoped to meet up with them and trekked day and night and then reached the *Chushi Gangdrug*.

Q: Where did your mother go?

#35U: Mother and a few of the women and children stayed in an isolated area in the wilderness called Bayin, where there is a range of mountains—rocky mountains. A tent was pitched here and the women and children, including my mother, were told to camp for the Chinese would not come there. Actually, there were many escapees and [the women] were left with them while we the men and horses went in search of the *Chushi Gangdrug*.

Q: Did you ever see your mother again?

00:55:52

#35U: After His Holiness the Dalai Lama was escorted out we did not get to the main *Chushi Gangdrug* base, but we fought in a smaller area and then [I] went back and met Mother—not only met Mother, but we formed a unit of the *Chushi Gangdrug* there at a large place called Marpothang.

Q: Did you go to that?

#35U: [I] went to Marpothang. We established a large *Chushi Gangdrug* camp at Marpothang. We were around 11,000 fighters that assembled there from everywhere, including monks and women without children that carried guns.

Q: How many?

#35U: Eleven thousand.

Q: Eleven thousand?

#35U: Yes, 11,000. Then we prepared to fight the Chinese and weapons came from the United States in the night in airplanes.

Q: And then what happened?

00:57:31

#35U: Then we...Chinese airplanes flew and also sent men saying, “You should not go on the black path. Surrender. You should not follow the path of death for there is nothing but death.” Fliers were tossed, but we got ready and replied, “You fish-catching, yellow-dressed people, any number of you can come for we are ready to die.” I think it was the 15th day of the 3rd lunar month that Chinese troops were to come; 12,000 of them were to

come. We, the 11,000, were to put up a challenge and got ready to fight. Instead of the night of the 15th day, the Chinese attacked in the night of the 10th day. Then we battled.

Q: So there were at that point 11,000 Tibetans and 10,000 more was supposed to come?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: Twelve thousand Chinese were coming to attack.

[Interviewer to interpreter]: Twelve thousand Chinese were coming to attack. Okay, and at night the attack began?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: Yes, and they battled.

[Interviewer to interpreter]: And they battled.

Q: What happened to you in the battle?

00:59:36

#35U: At the time of the battle we were 15 groups of fighters with a commander each. I was one of the commanders that took responsibility. We fought exactly for 15 days and nights. Wherever one looked there were dead Chinese and Chinese marching in and the river at Marpothang flowed with the blood of Chinese. [We] killed that many. The wind blew away the hats of the Chinese and one thought, “If this is the situation, we can withstand another year or two.” [We] were satisfied and proud to continue fighting.

Thanks to the Americans there were weapons and one felt encouraged. Then two Russian planes flew and dropped bombs flying this way and that way. There were a large number of yaks in our region. [The planes] dropped bombs on the yaks and horses, too. Then before a month...in around 15 days there was destruction everywhere, killing everywhere and we were forced to flee.

Q: How large were the bombs, like did they cover a big area or just a few people killed at a time?

01:02:09

#35U: When [the bombs] came down the sky they were two objects of this size [indicates fists] and when they landed on the ground, sank into an area of this area [indicates room] into the ground. If one was riding a horse, there was time to escape, but one could not do so on foot. [The bombs] burst open the ground and killed everything around it.

Not just those, but shells of this size [touches right arm at elbow] were shot from the planes. If struck it cut up a person or horse into two pieces. Five shots were fired as [the plane] flew this way and five shots were fired as [the plane] flew that way. The American planes came only in the night because the Chinese would target it while they came during the day. We were destroyed in that way during the day.

Q: Planes from the U.S.?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: ...U.S. came only at night to drop the weapons.

Q: Oh, they were dropping weapons and the Russians were dropping bombs?

#35U: Yes.

Q: Were those things happening within the same day? One night...one day there'd be bombs and then at night there'd be weapons dropped?

01:04:27

#35U: The American planes had already dropped [the weapons]—already dropped. In fact, there was a pile of weapons the size of this house because we could not find people to take them. We had informed [the Tibetans] that Chinese planes were coming and that planes challenge each other, and a reply came telegraphically that that cannot be done—that a challenge cannot be put up and that if the planes coming during the day, it would be targeted. [I] do not know about that, but it was a secret. So the planes could not come while Chinese planes continued to come.

Q: Do you remember getting any of the weapons that the Americans dropped?

#35U: Oh, there were plenty of weapons. There were three sizes of weapons one could get. One got a rifle, a pistol, a Tashi *khagye* 'rifle with eight rounds' and six grenades. Earlier one could jump onto a horse, but now due to the arms and ammunition one had to take the horse to a mound and then get on it. Such was the weight.

Q: About how many people in your forces were actually able to get arms like was it enough ammunition for five people or 50 people?

01:06:50

#35U: Everyone got three kinds [of weapons] if one could carry [them]. Still there was a pile the size of a house that was left behind. Later, we set fire to it lest it fall into Chinese hands.

Q: Where was that house?

#35U: It was not a house, but an open ground. [I] mean the pile of guns was the size of a house. It was an open ground. There were no houses.

That is the reason I say that the United States is as benevolent as one's parents.

Q: So the reason you had to set fire to the pile was because you were escaping, because the battle had been lost? Is that correct?

01:08:13

#35U: Now our territory was lost—territory was lost and most [people] had already escaped. Some of us that were there said, "What to do with these things?" "Let us set it on

fire.” And it was set on fire. There were...[not discernible] and it was easy to set fire. It was said, “Better to set it on fire than it falling into Chinese hands.”

Q: What happened to you next, *gen-la*, in your story, for you personally?

#35U: Then we went towards the Changthang ‘Northern Plateau’ where there was Mt. Achen Gangyab. It was uninhabited but for wild animals. It is in the north of Tibet. On one side [indicates left] of it was the country called Kazakhstan that had already come under the Chinese. Except for that it was uninhabited and [we] stayed there for a year.

The reason for staying a year there was because I was together with around 30 families, some of whose mothers had been left behind and some whose fathers had been left behind. Therefore, [we] stayed there in order to search for the women and children. That was our loss. By leaving directly [we] would have reached India. Instead of coming directly [we] spent a year there.

Q: Why had some lost their parents?

01:09:50

#35U: Some had lost their fathers and mothers during the battle. The influential people and leaders had lost their fathers, mothers and monks. So in order to search for them, [we] spent a year in the uninhabited place.

[Interviewer to interpreter]: So they went back to the battleground to look for their relatives...

[Interpreter to interviewer]: ...lost relatives.

Q: And when they...if they found them, did they...what did they do? Did they bury them? Have ceremonies? What did they do?

#35U: [We] hoped to find [the missing family members], but could not because the Chinese had caught [them]. We searched the whole winter—there were rarely any Chinese in wintertime—but could not locate them. Then we continued to advance and when it turned summer the Chinese blocked [us], a thousand of them.

Q: Where? When summer began?

01:11:46

#35U: It was summer and perhaps it was near about the region of Thoe when 1,000 Chinese appeared and that is where we suffered the loss. [We] fought and there were casualties and finally that is where I was captured again.

Q: And what happened to you next?

#35U: The Chinese appeared and we fought and fought for many days. Except for a few of us that were wearing protective amulets, the rest were killed. A sibling was killed in front

of me. I wanted to shoot the killer to avenge my sibling's death when [I] was caught from behind. There were a number of Chinese and [I] was caught from the back.

Q: What did you say about the sibling?

#35U: A sibling was killed. The sibling was killed in front of me and when I was avenging his death, the Chinese caught [me] from behind. All the colleagues had been killed except me and a few others. The Chinese came from behind...There was fighting going on in the front while [I] was caught from behind. Then the Chinese took [me] away.

Q: You spoke about the protective amulets.

01:13:33

#35U: [I] was wearing a protective amulet that consisted of barley blessed by His Holiness the Dalai Lama. Until at least 20 rounds were fired, bullets could not penetrate [the body]. So there were four of us alive because of that while the rest had been killed.

01:14:24

What gave me satisfaction was that there were five senior commanders of the Chinese with flags that we killed, and then we were captured.

Q: You killed them?

#35U: Yes, killed them.

Q: When you said only four survived, is it because they were wearing protective amulets or they were the only ones that survived of all those wearing protective amulets?

#35U: If one had belief in the protective amulet one did not die. One without belief died even if one wore a protective amulet. I did not die and my three colleagues did not die. Then we were caught and led away with [our] hands at the back. I was wearing a protective amulet and a good *dzi* 'special beads made from agate stone' around the neck that had been discovered in the ground at the hometown. The *dzi* seems to ward off ammunition. If the *dzi* and the protective amulet were removed, then one could be stabbed with a knife.

Q: What did you say about the *dzi* and the protective amulet?

#35U: [I] was wearing a *dzi*, which could ward off ammunition—ammunition could not penetrate the body—and a protective amulet that stopped penetration even if ammunition touched the body.

[Interviewer to interpreter]: What was the first thing?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: *Dzi*.

[Interviewer to interpreter]: *Dzi*?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: An agate stone.

[Interviewer to interpreter]: An agate stone. *Dzi*.

Q: And then what happened after you were captured?

01:16:33

#35U: After being captured I was eight years in a Chinese prison. During the eight years [I] was given continuous work to do.

Q: Were you abused in the prison?

#35U: [The Chinese] did not abuse [me] in the prison, but the amount of work was enormous.

That is because it was in the Northern Plateau.

Q: Yes?

#35U: The prison was in an isolated region.

Q: Did you get out after a year and what happened?

#35U: Eight years.

Q: Did they know...what was your crime? What did they accuse you of doing?

#35U: In the beginning it was digging for borax and then...

Q: The crime, crime...what was the crime for imprisoning you for eight years?

#35U: Work?

Q: No.

#35U: Then?

Q: What was the crime for imprisoning you?

#35U: The crime was my being a soldier of the *Chushi Gangdrug*. [The Chinese] did not say *Chushi Gangdrug* but Sengi Rabtang, which is in Chinese language. "You are a soldier of the *Sengi Rabtang*. If water is poured in a jerry can, one can take it away after it is filled. Until then you will be left alone. However, there are two paths, a black path and a white path. It is in your hands to make a choice."

Q: What does it mean by pouring water in a jug?

01:18:32

#35U: For instance, if water is poured in a jug, it is taken away when it becomes full. If you committed a crime, if you did not obey the orders of the Chinese, [the jug] becomes full. If one obeys every order of the Chinese, the jug remains empty. That was the example they gave.

Q: And then when you were finished your eight years, where did you go?

#35U: After eight years, one day it was said that a commune would be formed again. This was in the Thoe region of Utsang. Earlier the commune system had been established in Kham Province. The commune system was started in Kham and that is where our animals had been confiscated. Now it was said that a commune would be started in Utsang in the year '62...It was in the year '70 that a commune was to be established in Utsang. However, it was said that not one person belonging to the leadership category and the *Chushi Gangdrug* would be allowed to join it.

We were around 15 men of the *Chushi Gangdrug* left there. Before that we were all sterilized and told, "If you become a soldier, if you join the Chinese army, you need not get married. Would you like to join?" [We] thought, "If we get to join the army, it is an opportunity to avenge the Chinese" and replied yes. [The Chinese] checked the superiority of bloodline by making [us] lie naked on ice and roll a thread. If one could roll the thread, it meant a superior bloodline— [if one] could roll the thread. One hailing from a low bloodline could not roll the thread.

Q: Made one lie naked?

01:20:32

#35U: [We] were made to sit on ice, on water that had turned into ice. We were five or six people that had to roll threads.

Q: How do you roll a thread?

#35U: One had to roll a woolen thread like this [rubs palms]. If the thread that was rolled turned out straight, it seems his bloodline was superior. However, it was difficult to do so sitting on ice and feeling cold. A person of low bloodline could not roll the thread. Then it was said, "You are fit to be a soldier. You are fit to be a soldier and should join the army in a month." Then everybody was injected, injected to become sterile. "You can get married."

Q: One can get married?

#35U: One can get married, but cannot have children. Then we went to join the army in a month's time. It was said that Mao Zedong and the government would be asked...

Q: Why did you want to join the Chinese army?

01:22:55

#35U: If one could join the Chinese army and kill a Chinese leader, then we would have achieved something. That was our objective. Theirs was to annihilate our bloodline.

Q: And did you succeed?

#35U: Then it was said that [our joining the Chinese army] was cancelled.

Q: Didn't get to join the army?

#35U: No, not at all. Besides...

Q: I see.

#35U: Then one day a few Chinese leaders arrived and said, "Those of you who were soldiers of the *Chushi Gangdrug* will be killed one by one." Then it was done. Six men were killed and I was the seventh one.

Q: Were you in prison at this point? Were you in a prison or in a commune? Where were you living that they told you like that?

01:24:31

#35U: In a village. Each of us was shut inside a *ba* 'tent made from yak hair' in a village.

Q: By the Chinese?

#35U: Yes.

Q: Shut inside a *ba*?

#35U: Shut inside a *ba* and guarded by a person at the door holding a gun.

Q: Did you see them kill the other six people?

#35U: [I] saw the other six people being killed and not just witnessed it but...The reason for keeping [us] in the village was because 40 people from the village conducted *thamzing* in the night, while 40 people conducted *thamzing* during the day. Those that conducted *thamzing* during the day were those that stayed home and those that herded animals conducted *thamzing* in the night.

We were beaten for 80 hours. I was 31 or 32 years old then and all the joints of the fingers were twisted due to the beatings. Along with the beatings, one was accused, "You are from the *Chushi Gangdrug*. You are a commander of the *Chushi Gangdrug*. You have killed this and this Chinese [person]. This is to avenge them." The people were thus influenced like that and they agreed to the killing.

01:26:00

Of the six men, the first two men were hanged to death. The next two men’s hands were stretched like this [stretches out hands] and shot dead. One man was thrown in a pit dug in the ground and foamed at the mouth and did not die for a day. [He] was killed in that manner. Then one man was pushed under water again and again and killed. The people said that I would not be killed in that manner, but should be killed like my father, burned and killed quickly. Others said that [I] would be killed by pouring boiling water just like the leader called Gangchu. Anyway, I was to be killed the next day.

Q: Why were the people so angry at you?

01:28:56

#35U: They were advised by the Chinese—advised that, “The soldiers of the *Chushi Gangdrug* are the real enemies of the Community Party. Do you want to recognize [them] as enemies or friends?” “Oh, we recognize [them] as the enemies.” That was the reason for their anger and we did not have any malice towards each other.

Q: Propaganda?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: Yes.

Q: And so how did you escape?

#35U: Then I was to be killed the next day. There was an opposition to me...there were two groups among the Chinese that fought inside the prison. One group was called the Red group and the other was the opposition or the United group, and the two sides fought. The reason for the fight was that Mao Zedong’s supporters were the Red group. The wife of Mao Zedong, who was of American descent, was in the group that opposed the Red group. They fought against each other and the Chinese asked who wanted to side with which group. We joined the Red group and fought in the prison and quite a large number of people were killed.

01:30:41

At that time the two groups separated and among us were...[not discernible]. Then the *Chushi Gangdrug*...Then she lost and she wished to destroy the men of *Chushi Gangdrug*. That was what was said. At that time there was a man called Tashi Thondup in the other group. He was a senior official of the Red Guards of the United group and I was one of the senior members of the Red group. We were against each other.

When I was being subjected to *thamzing* in prison, he came there. He exclaimed, “Wangdak Tashi’s hands and legs have not been broken yet? Why is that? I have broken the limbs of so and so people. If this person is left like this and escapes, who will be responsible?” he chided the Chinese and in the evening they held a meeting. “Tomorrow morning Wangdak Tashi will be killed with everyone having knowledge of it. First the four limbs will be broken, and then [he will be] killed.” This was announced.

01:32:03

I prayed to the Triple Gem and in particular to Guru Padmasambhava, Ling Gesar and Goddess Tara, “If possible please help me. If not I am finished. It is good if I die in the Northern Plateau, but if I were to die in this prison, [my] soul will not be free. My soul will not be free if I die like Father.” [I] prayed to the Triple Gem.

Then there was a massive hailstorm and lightening. The Chinese guard was sitting at the door holding a gun. The others were having a meeting about killing me. Then [I] took hold of a large piece of rock—I had undone the ropes at the back—the hands were tied at the back—and hurled the rock.

A person’s soft spot is here [points to temple] and if [the rock] lands here [I would] have succeeded and otherwise not. When [I] hurled the rock, he fell down and the gun fell off. [I] picked up the gun and got ready to aim and as if to say, “Here, if you cannot see...” There was a flash of light and there was blood oozing from here [points to temple] where the brain is. [I] was satisfied and there was not any need to shoot.

Then I went to where Mother was and said, “I have to escape.” “Run away for you will have the good fortune of seeing His Holiness the Dalai Lama. The way for you to go will be to travel during the night and hide in the day, keep moving in the night and you will have the good fortune of seeing His Holiness,” Mother advised. I was so pained on leaving Mother that I could not speak a word in reply.

Q: Mother...

01:33:37

#35U: [I] could not speak a word in reply to Mother. “Run, run.” The Chinese had found out and were looking [for me].

Q: Where did you meet Mother?

#35U: Mother was there in the village.

Q: So you met Mother and then escaped?

#35U: Yes. I spoke to mother about it.

01:35:44

And then as advised by Mother, I trudged in the night. Then [I] reached Ladakh [India] alive after trudging in the night for three months and 19 days. [I] never thought I would be alive and wondered where [I] would get killed, but [I] survived. It would not have been possible to escape by walking during daytime because many had been killed in the past by the Chinese. Darkness is very beneficial.

These days I tell the young people, “It is very good to sacrifice your lives for the cause of Tibet. However, if one can kill a Chinese leader and flee in the night, there is nothing better than darkness. I fled in this way and have the experience.” [I] advise like this.

Q: And then how did you get from Ladakh to becoming a..., you know, a shaman now, *gen-la*? How did...can you tell us that?

01:37:43

#35U: Actually I had held the responsibility of a commander in the *Chushi Gangdrug*. I am actually a political prisoner, but Ladakh being a remote region, nobody knew of it, for one. Secondly, I got a job at the airport with papers that were not original but duplicate. [I] got a job there.

Then one day Gyaltsab Rinpoche came...There was a letter. In the letter was mentioned, "The Chinese starved your mother to death." There were 13 people, including Maternal Uncle. They were told, "Food if there is work and no food if there is no work" and not provided food for 15 days and everyone foamed at the mouth and died." This was mentioned in the letter.

What do I do now? I have constructed a large carved *mani* 'mantra of Avalokiteshvara' stone for the cause of Tibet. Other than that I have not practiced the dharma. I was a pauper and thought, "How do I practice the dharma?" and spoke to the root guru.

"You should perform the *chod* 'spiritual practice of "cutting through the ego" based on the Prajnaparamita.' This will help the living and the dead." "Kindly reveal the practice of *chod*," and the root guru granted it. Then [I] went into retreat at the Hemu Monastery and became a practitioner. I have a sponsor, a girl from Germany who is a good nun, and she took me on pilgrimage to various places and made a film and did an interview just like this. However, the places where the *Chushi Gangdrug* battled are not in there, but the rest is. It has been 25-26 years that [I] have been doing the *chod* practice. This is for Mother and for all sentient beings.

Q: Can you tell us what the *chod* is?

01:41:21

#35U: *Chod* means...long ago when the dharma flourished in Tibet there was one called *chod* in the Buddha dharma. Then there was Machig Labdrin who was a divine being. She was the daughter of a wealthy family. Many kings sought her hand, but she refused all and wished to practice the dharma. She was a divine being and practiced the dharma and all the divine beings came and helped her. [Machig Labdrin] brought all the devils, goblins, ghosts of dead people and *sondey* 'goblins possessing living people' of the world under her control. Machig Labdrin is such a precious one. *Chod* helps the dead, the living and the whole world. It is the most precious among all dharma practices.

Q: So have you been practicing that for 25 years now? Has it...does it help you with the anger and the grief you have from all the tragic experiences of your life?

01:43:15

#35U: The mind becomes peaceful. The mind becoming peaceful, benefits the whole world. As said by His Holiness the Dalai Lama this is very precious for all sentient beings.

For one thing the mind has to transform and in my life, in the beginning [I] was the son of a ruler and then became a pauper, then a soldier in the *Chushi Gangdrug* and a sinner, and finally to atone for the negative actions and feel remorse, I became a tantric practitioner later.

I try to practice what happened to Milarepa ‘great saint of Tibet, born 1052 A.D.’ and there is nothing more precious than *chod*—nothing more precious than *cho*. For even if one cannot meditate still the mind can be transformed.

Q: Does transforming of the mind occur because of prayers that you say or actions you take?

01:44:54

#35U: The transformation of the mind occurs from practicing the dharma. His Holiness the Dalai Lama has said, “Do not pile up the *kagyur* ‘translated words of Buddha [108 volumes]’ but look into it and practice what is in there.” If one practices the dharma, one will realize many useful things from it. Therefore, after practicing the dharma the mind is transformed.

Q: Wonderful. I wish, *gen-la*, I wish we can spend a lot more time with you, but I know time is limited, and I want to thank you very much for giving us your story about yourself and about Tibet.

#35U: Okay. Thank you.

Q: Why did you think it was important to tell your story?

01:46:13

#35U: It is [important to tell] my story and a film has been made. The reason is because the Chinese have sterilized me and [I] cannot have children. I married five times in Ladakh, but because there were no children all of them left me. So if I had a child, he would tell the world, “My father has done such for the cause of Tibet.” However, there are no children and I am bound to die some day. So I think something in writing should be left behind to tell the world what [I] have done for the cause of Tibet. That is the reason I have submitted a statement to the *Chushi Gangdrug* and a film has been made about me in Germany. That is the reason my mind has transformed and the film was made.

Q: What is the name of the book that you wrote?

#35U: It is called *The Story of Wangdak Tashi*.

Q: Wangdak Tashi.

#35U: Last evening [I] gave him a copy—to Pema Delek-la.

Q: Thank you.

01:48:08

#35U: If you go through it carefully, all the places of encounters are mentioned in there. However, in those days there were not any cameras and so there are no photographs. [Laughs] It would be nice if pictures of the battles were available.

Q: I know. Well, we are...we will look forward to reading your book, but also very grateful for taking time to tell us your story in person.

#35U: Okay, and thank you for interviewing me. Actually I wanted to perform a *chod* and explain it to you, but we do not have time. However, your interviewing me today has made me as happy as a parent meeting a child. [Joins palms] Thank you.

[I] pray that [we] meet again and again. *Tashi Delek* ‘Good luck.’

Q: Thank you.

END OF INTERVIEW