

Tibet Oral History Project

Interview #54M – Tsewang Dorjee
April 10, 2010

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INTERVIEW SUMMARY SHEET

1. Interview Number: #54M
2. Interviewee: Tsewang Dorjee
3. Age: 68
4. Date of Birth: 1942
5. Sex: Male
6. Birthplace: Dhongpo Ringmar
7. Province: Utsang
8. Year of leaving Tibet: 1973
9. Date of Interview: April 10, 2010
10. Place of Interview: Kalachakra Hall, Camp No. 3, Doeguling Settlement, Mundgod, Karwar District, Karnataka, India
11. Length of Interview: 2 hr 58 min
12. Interviewer: Rebecca Novick
13. Interpreter: Namgyal Tsering
14. Videographer: Ronny Novick
15. Translator: Tenzin Yangchen

Biographical Information:

Tsewang Dorjee was born in a nomadic family in Thoe Ngari in western Tibet. He was the eldest child of his parents. Though there were no government schools, he studied for a short while with a private tutor. Then he engaged in herding yaks and sheep. Besides herding, his family also engaged in salt trade.

Tsewang Dorjee recalls how his father traded with Indian traders, which had been going on for thousands of years. He fondly remembers the biggest trade fair in Ngari at a place called Gya Nyima. Traders from every part of Tibet and neighboring countries gathered to do business. He speaks in great detail about the fair and the various goods available.

Tsewang Dorjee recounts his memories of the liberation process brought about by the Chinese and how they misled the people. He goes on to discuss about the commune system during which people died from starvation and the great Cultural Revolution in 1967-68 when monasteries were destroyed and people imprisoned. He shares the story of his own capture and imprisonment after the Chinese discovered his plans to escape. He was forced to watch the execution of three prominent people of his region. He managed to flee to India only in 1973 after two failed attempts.

Topics Discussed:

Childhood memories, education, nomadic life, trade, first appearance of Chinese, life under Chinese rule, forced labor, commune system, Cultural Revolution, oppression under Chinese.

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Interview #54M

Interviewee: Tsewang Dorjee

Age: 68, Sex: Male

Interviewer: Rebecca Novick

Interview Date: April 10, 2010

Question: Okay. *Pa-la* ‘respectful term for father,’ could you start by telling us your name?

00:00:20

Interviewee #54M: Tsewang Dorjee.

Q: His Holiness the Dalai Lama asked us to record the stories of older Tibetans to share with the future generation of Tibetans, with the Chinese people and people in the outside world, so that we can properly document the true experiences, history and culture of the Tibetan people.

#54M: [Nods]

Q: Do you give permission for the Tibet Oral History Project to use your interview?

00:01:20

#54M: Yes.

Q: Thank you very much.

#54M: [Nods]

Q: If at anytime you want to take a break, please just let us know.

00:01:35

#54M: Okay. If I feel tired...

Q: You could say I need to rest.

#54M: Yes, yes.

Q: To go to the bathroom or anything.

#54M: [Nods]

Q: If there’s a question you’d rather not answer, its fine. Just say I’d rather not answer that.

00:01:58

#54M: [Nods]

Q: If this interview was shown in Tibet or China, would this make any kind of problem for you?

#54M: I will have no problems. If this interview was shown, I will have no problems. It is my truthful [experience].

Q: We are very, very pleased that you could come here today to share your story with us. Thank you.

00:02:31

#54M: [Nods]

Q: Sometimes we might ask you what did you hear, what were people saying, but most of the time, we're really just interested in what you saw personally. You know, what you witnessed personally. That's really the main focus of what we want to hear.

#54M: [Nods, smiles]

Q: *Pa-la*, can you tell us something about one of the earliest memories you have of being a child in Tibet?

00:03:24

#54M: When I think of my childhood, [we] were happy because the Chinese were not there. We were quite wealthy. There were tasks in the house like herding the sheep and yaks from the age of 10. There were no schools. I did attend school but I did not learn. There were no government schools like there are here. One requested a learned person to teach his child. That was it.

Q: Why did you never have the opportunity to have an education?

#54M: [I] do not know why but in our village the Tibetan government...

[Question is repeated.]

00:04:45

#54M: I studied for 5-6 years and learned a little, but there was a lot to do at home like herding the sheep and yaks. My parents' other children were small and I, being the oldest found no time and could not study [further].

Q: Did you study for 5 years?

#54M: I could study for 5 years.

Q: How old were you when you were studying?

00:05:34

#54M: I might have been 11 or 12 and studied until the age of 13.

Q: Yes?

#54M: I studied until the age of 13.

Q: From what age?

00:05:49

#54M: From the age of 11. Then I left studies and engaged in herding yaks and sheep and the tasks at home.

Q: Where was the school?

#54M: There were no schools in my village. Respective parents had to plead with learned people to teach their sons for a month or two.

Q: What kind of things did you learn?

00:06:42

#54M: The main objective was to learn writing in Tibetan and mathematics.

Q: Was it only Tibetan?

#54M: There was nothing except for Tibetan, no English...

Q: So in your family, what kind of things did you learn from your mother? What kind of things did your mother pass on to you? And I'm not talking about ordinary education necessarily, but you know, what kind of other things did you learn from her?

00:07:22

#54M: She has taught how to do our work. Except for teaching us how to work, there was nothing about culture that mother has taught.

Q: Did you have grandparents living with you?

#54M: [I] had grandparents when I was little.

Q: Did they teach you anything?

00:08:02

#54M: The advice given by [my] grandfather and grandmother was, "Be polite. Be good. Practice the dharma." My maternal grandfather was a devout person. He was accomplished in the dharma and taught us and made us practice it. The opportunity was there, but the workload did not allow me.

Q: In your family, your father was a salt trader?

#54M: [He] traveled on trade. [He] worked as a trader just like the sweater traders here, but there were no sweaters in Tibet. The produce from the land was not enough to feed us, so salt was collected from the salt pans of the north— there was salt to the north of us—and transported on sheep to be bartered in India.

Q: Did you go with him?

00:09:44

#54M: [I] have not been with father to the Changthang [Northern plateau] to collect salt. However, when he went to India, [I] accompanied father twice to help him.

Q: Can you describe a little bit what that journey was like?

#54M: The path between my region and India was narrow. We from Thoe Ngari loaded [salt] on sheep—300, 400 or 500 sheep. Each sheep was laden with one [pack of] salt. There was a rule in the region [on the quantity of] rice and grains [that were bartered for salt] and they gave us that.

Q: Did any of the sheep ever lose their footing and fall down?

00:11:34

#54M: That did not happen much to me. There was a particular [trade] period and if one was early or late—at times it snowed. Once it snowed and blocked the mountain pass. My father could not return and had to stay in the valley for two or three months.

Q: Were you there?

#54M: I was not.

Q: So the Indian border where you were doing this trade, is that Ladakh?

00:12:42

#54M: The Indian border where we conducted salt trade used to be called Nithi. It is presently in Uttar Pradesh. If you looked at the direction, it was on the route of Yujimar and Chungmolay. If one traveled further, you reached Gurudwar in Ritikesh.

Q: And the people who were coming to trade, to buy salt from you, were they trading something else in return or were they giving you money? What were they giving you in return?

#54M: One received grain in return. According to the number of sheep loads, a fixed percentage of rice, wheat and many other things were given.

Q: What else?

00:13:57

#54M: Wheat, rice and mainly grains.

Q: Was it quite exciting for you to go on this journey with your father?

#54M: [I] felt happy then. The region was peaceful. During the three summer months, Indians filled Ngari Kor Sum. The fair was incredibly large. People arrived from 11 or 12 different mountain passes and converged on Ngari. There were 12 mountain passes [moves hand in different directions], even from Ladakh and Shaho Kotay of Porang. There were 12 mountain passes. From whichever direction they arrived, they converged in the same area of Ngari. It was a very happy place.

Q: And the people who were trading in return who were coming from the Indian side were they ethnically Tibetan people?

00:15:56

#54M: [They] spoke perfect Tibetan and did not require interpreters. It was the border area and there had been contacts since thousands of years. They arrived from the Himachal regions. Indians from the plains like Delhi also arrived. It was very enjoyable when the Chinese were not there.

Q: Can you describe what it looked like then when the trading actually took place at these border areas, like how many people were there? What did it look like? You know, what were people doing? Describe little bit what it looked like.

#54M: Every kind of goods was available though machines were not there in Tibet. [People] arrived from everywhere including Amdo. The fair in Ngari was incredibly large and [held at] Gya Nyima. There were different sizes of fairs. People from all over the world came there during the good times. Once the Chinese appeared, there was nothing to be seen.

Q: By “world” you mean India and which else?

00:17:20

#54M: Indians arrived and you could see every type of people. Though they did not come to trade, there were tourists that came from Kham, Lhasa areas and every region of Tibet. Then there were people from Ngari who performed dances and opera. There was a wide variety of things to see. There were *shungtsong* of the Tibetan government.

Q: What’s *shungtsong*?

#54M: *Shungtsong* means the traders of the government.

Q: What did they do?

00:17:49

#54M: They sold tea [pressed into blocks] and various goods belonging to the government like...and *puruk* ‘fur blankets.’ Buyers arrived and if they could not buy, that was it. From the direction of Kham were brought guns and boxes of beautiful swords with handles made of horns in white and black. [I] do not know from where they originated.

There were many who came from India including Ladakh. Innumerable people who were ethnically Tibetans and Buddhists arrived from the Nepal regions of Mon Tawang, likewise Sherpa and Mustang. They came to the fair, the Bhutanese. At that time there was no fear for everyone. Once the Chinese arrived, the region became empty.

Q: Where did the trading actually take place then? Was it in a village? Was it in a place where everybody had decided that’s where they always met and would meet in the same place and trade in the same place?

#54M: There was a village called Chunglung, a little further away from Dhongpo. At its border was a place called Gya Nyima which bordered Porang and many regions. It was an open ground. The fair was held there with tens of thousands [of people]. There were no houses but only tents which were similar to the stars in the sky. There was an expression about the Ngari fair which said “Gya Nyima is the star of the sky.”

In olden Tibet there were many bandits and thieves. That was a possibility. There were the noblemen of the Tibetan government and such. I was not old then but about 15 or 16.

Q: Was it in a valley?

00:21:30

#54M: It was flat ground just like India. As for water one did not have to dig for it. Water was available everywhere. There was no worry over water.

Q: Approximately how many people would gather at one time in this place?

#54M: To make a guess, perhaps many hundred thousand gathered there. That’s for certain as there were people from many countries. Nepal...

Q: More than a hundred thousand people! How long did the trading season last?

00:22:32

#54M: The 4th month of the Tibetan lunar calendar, so is it not the month of May? If it began in May, the fair lasted until August in one particular place. Then the fair folded and the big traders proceeded to Ngari Gar. They moved there and became divided.

Q: You were very young when you went there. How old were you?

#54M: When I went to the fair which was before the Chinese came, I was about 16 or 17 years old.

Q: Did you used to buy other things? I mean, I know the main things were to buy rice and supplies, but did you used to buy jewelry and other things, more personal items?

00:24:37

#54M: The fair was so large [with varied goods] that your parents were almost there [on sale]! People came from different countries and there were jewelry, silver items, gold and spices or nomads could buy horses, yaks, sheep and even dogs from each other. There were fabrics like woolen cloth, brocade, silk and everything. If we had the money there was no end.

While the trade was going on, since there were no vehicles, those who possessed yaks waited at the base of the hills to transport goods. There were marvelous items from India. It became cold in winter and they returned to India. They could keep their [unsold] goods for safe-keeping. Goods amounting to 10-15 truckloads were given for safe-keeping to families at Ngari Gar.

Q: Would you buy gifts for your family and friends sometimes?

#54M: [We] have purchased.

Q: Did you buy yourself?

00:26:41

#54M: I did not buy as father was the main person. I went along with father. Father made the purchases and there was everything available on sale, like grapes. Everything one wanted to buy was available in packets.

Q: Grapes?

#54M: Not fresh grapes but raisins. The white and black ones of good quality that are available here. If one wished to buy a hundred such packets, it was available with one family [trader]. [We] purchased such. There were varieties of sugar candies which were in packets. It was very simple. It was incredible those days.

Every type of jewelry for girls was available, like corals from Kalimpong. There were turquoise, coral and *dzi* ‘special beads made of agate stone.’ *Thingma* was brought from Lhasa.

Q: What is *thingma*?

00:27:56

#54M: *Thingma* was a kind of good quality fur blanket which was used for horses. It was a fur blanket. There were fur blankets of exceptional quality called *sherma*. There were *pangden* ‘striped apron’ made of *serchen*, which are not available here except for the similarity in color. *Martem marchim* for horses came from Lhasa. Much later, but prior to the appearance of Chinese, such goods arrived from India. It looked like Tibetan goods

came here [India] and was then brought there [Tibet]. Tibetan tea [leaves] in the form of bricks came from Lhasa.

Q: Who were considered to be like the best bargainers— people who were the best at bargaining and getting a good price? Was there certain people from a certain region who had a reputation for being, you know really good at this?

#54M: You mean the main traders?

Q: Hmm...

00:29:34

#54M: The main traders were the Indians.

Q: Who were the most accomplished traders from the many traders?

#54M: There were many types of traders.

Q: Who was the best?

00:29:42

#54M: I do not know. [Laughs]

Q: Was there a lot of news exchanged at this gathering, news about what was going on in different regions and, you know, information about happenings and events in different areas? Did you get a lot of news?

#54M: You mean arguments?

Q: Yes.

00:30:27

#54M: It happened though not to us. During the time when Tibet was an independent country, there were Khampas [people from Kham] who were bandits, thieves. There were such. They did not cause much harm but only to a certain extent. There were security forces that were from Ngari to keep watch.

[Interviewer to interpreter]: In this sort of temporary tents? Well first of all, I want to ask how long would he normally camp there? How long would he normally camp there?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: Where?

[Interviewer to interpreter]: In this place. In the tents—where it was set up. How long would he stay on an average, you know?

#54M: [I] stayed about 10-15 days at the fair with my father and then returned home because we lived close by. It was a day's journey by horse.

Q: In this sort of tent city that you described of hundred thousand people, so where there different areas were the Khampas would stay in one area and the people from Amdo would stay in another area, like that or would they stay together?

00:32:17

#54M: There were different areas. The Indians stayed separate, the Tibetans stayed at the edge of the fair and the Nepalese were here [points] and the Tibetans there. The general size of the fair was the [people that arrived from the] 11 or 12 Indian mountain passes. Some Indian traders traded only grains, which one could buy as much as one wished to. Some sold only rice while others dealt in wheat flour.

Q: So the Khampas, the people from Kham, had a bit of a reputation it seems through causing some problems, yeah?

#54M: There were some bandits. Except from the area of Kham, there were none else. Those from Thoe were humble, very normal people. Kham is a large region and [I] do not know where they came from. [People] were very wary and afraid of them.

Q: Just tell me why were you afraid of the Khampas?

00:34:19

#54M: Those were not the Khampas belonging to the province of Kham. [I] heard there were certain people among the Khampas who indulged in robberies. There were none in Ngari. They indulged in robberies throughout their lives and there were various such groups [of people]. They came only at times and if one happened to encounter them, they looted the travelers by waiting by the road. There were people traveling to and from the fair. They could not do so in the center of the fair, though. There were many such instances. It was not every Khampa.

Q: Did you actually see any fights yourself?

#54M: I have seen it once. The bandits had their own groups. There was a famous bandit called Nagtsang Dakpa, which was the name of one of the persons [involved in the fight]. The opponent was one called Khampa Dharchong. Nobody put up any opposition to these two groups of bandits, but they did not get along between themselves. They both said that they wished to fight [moves finger to indicate pulling of gun's trigger]. I saw that one.

Q: Can you describe a little bit more of what you saw?

00:36:02

#54M: Each one claimed to be the bigger bandit.

Q: What was the name of the bigger bandit?

#54M: Nagtsang Dakpa. He was very famous in Ngari. The other one was called Dharchong, Khampa Dharchong. They did not kill each other. They declared that they would fight and boasted to each other the strength of their men. I saw that.

Q: Were they showing guns to each other?

00:36:59

#54M: [They] aimed their guns to fight but did not shoot. Then [I] do not know what the two bandit leaders discussed, but it gradually wore off.

Q: Was there a lot of drinking *arrack* ‘spirit’ during this time?

#54M: There was not.

Q: At the fair?

00:37:28

#54M: There was *chang* ‘home-brewed beer’ at the fair. There were the beer ladies. A big quantity of *arrack* was brought from Shaho, which was in proper India. People drank it. There was not anything you could not find. There were good people and bad people.

Q: Did you or were you considered too young to drink?

#54M: [I] did not feel like [drinking]. [I] was a child and hated *chang* and *arrack*.

Q: The people from Utsang were very well behaved and they never got into fights with each other or anybody else?

00:38:25

#54M: There were never any such in Ngari. [I] do not know why but no fights took place. There were the bandits who are like the vagabonds we have in India. Tibet was independent then and [we] were happy. Each region like Ngari and Lhadha had their respective district officials, but they [the bandits] did not listen to them. These people were lawless.

Q: Did you take the opportunity to talk to different people from different regions? Did you try and talk to them to get the news and find out what was going on?

#54M: As I was young in age then, I did not talk to others much. Actually, there were many different customs.

Q: You were 16-17, so you weren’t that young? I’m just thinking that did you ever hear—this is 1958—so did you hear anything particular from the Khampas or anybody about what the Chinese were doing in eastern Tibet?

00:40:35

#54M: Oh, it was well known. A Khampa or two had managed to escape. A couple would have managed to escape. They said that the Chinese killed a lot of people in Kham. They [the Khampas] were aggressive [people]. For example, they said that if they killed 10,000 [Chinese] that day –arms did not harm the Khampas and they were very courageous—if they killed 10,000 that day, 20,000 arrived the next day. Some of them were fleeing and said, “You live near the border and should not remain here.” Poor things, they were good Khampas and we provided them with food when they did not have anything to eat. They were fleeing to India. Two such people arrived.

Q: So they were telling you stories about battles. Were they telling you anything about the kinds of policies that the Chinese were enacting in these areas?

#54M: They explained everything—“If one submits to the Chinese and lives under them, one cannot consider them as good. So the decision is made to fight them.” The others who arrived later...[not discernible]. “One does not have power over [one’s] wealth as it is collected by the government.” [I] think that was happening in most parts of Kham and Amdo. “You must make preparations—Ngari is located at the Indian border—at once to escape. Tibet is being conquered. We resisted them in Kham for 9 years, but in vain due to their huge number.”

Q: So you took this information back to your village, yes?

00:44:42

#54M: The wealthy families [of the village] sought a lot of information [and said], “Now this is not good. Times have overturned. Once Tibet is conquered by the Chinese, they are extremely bad [people]. They have done things to the Khampas.” The Khampas had told us frankly and many people believed them.

Then in the winter of the year ’61 or ’62, the Chinese implemented liberation, the Democratization of Liberation process. When the Democratization of Liberation process was implemented, take our village for example as [I] could not see what was happening far away. There were two district officials in Ngari. Both of them were captured. There were four or five districts in our region. All the district administrators were captured and taken to prison. They [the Chinese thus] implemented the Democratization of Liberation process.

“You have contacts with the rebel Khampas who have informed you that one does not have power over [one’s] wealth, that the Chinese are bad and that there is no [freedom of] religion. These are lies. One has power over one’s wealth. One can own wealth. Earlier the Tibetan government collected a lot of tax. There will be no tax. The Dalai Lama has fled to India.” [They] would debase His Holiness. “Your happy days are here. Do not listen to the libel talks of the Khampas and other people.” Some people believed them [the Chinese]. There were the beggars and poor people who were misled because they [the Chinese] were giving. They spoke well.

Q: When the Chinese came and said that to you, you didn’t believe them, right?

00:48:15

#54M: I was young and thought that if they put that into practice, there would be a change as earlier there was a lot of taxes. There was freedom and no taxes. Therefore, if this [policy] remained stable, there was freedom to practice religion, one had power over one's wealth and I thought that was the right thing. I was quite young then.

Q: Did you believe them then? Did you trust them?

#54M: I did not believe entirely but felt that they were right. We did not believe them as on one side we heard the stories of the Chinese atrocities, so [my belief] was partial. The older people like our parents remarked, "The sun of happiness has set. If His Holiness the Dalai Lama does not sit on the golden throne, times have overturned. There will never be happiness again." All the elders said that. The younger ones—there were many who were younger to me—were misled by the Chinese and believed them partially.

Q: So you thought that change was good?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: Good, satisfied or something like that.

Q: Maybe, but did you remember what the Khampas had told you a few years earlier? Did you remember what the Khampas had told you a few years earlier during the trading?

#54M: Yes?

Q: Did you remember what the Khampas had warned you about a few years earlier?

00:51:23

#54M: At that time many people feared that the Chinese would mistreat them and had fled. It was around the time liberation came into being. Many people escaped. We'd made preparations to escape knowing that there would be no happiness. They [the Chinese] arrived and spoke various things about the rebel Khampas just as I told you earlier. They wanted to explain. "They [the Khampas] did not submit to us but confronted us. We are implementing liberation for the common people. The meaning of liberation is that earlier [you] were oppressed by the *ngadak* 'people holding leadership positions.' Likewise there were no rights [for you]. Everyone is equal. One is free to practice any religion. One has freedom over one's wealth."

Then it was 1964-65 and the Chinese policy changed. Things became better. There was total freedom. The reason was that there was a deputy leader under Mao Zedong called Liu Ruchi [Liu Shaoqui]. He was very important. These days the story about Liu Ruchi is never mentioned. During our time, there were two rulers. The Prime Minister was different. From the two rulers, Mao Zedong enjoyed both *magsi* and *tangsi*. He [Liu Ruchi] had only *tangsi*...

Q: What is *magsi* and *tangsi*?

#54M: *Tangsi* means political responsibility. Mao Zedong and he enjoyed the same [power] where law and other duties were concerned. Liu Ruchi did not have the *magsi* ‘military responsibility.’ Mao Zedong had *magsi*.

Then in 1961 and earlier, the two rulers did not get along. He [Liu Ruchi] said that liberation be implemented and that people should have freedom to [utilize] one’s own wealth, freedom to retain one’s home, to continue with the traditions of earlier Tibet forever. Mao Zedong disagreed and demanded that socialism be implemented. When they argued, trouble arose in China.

When trouble began in China, what happened was that the general public and the officials—it was a large country—supported Liu Ruchi because there was freedom [under his leadership]. There was no struggle for the upper classes. Mao Zedong wanted struggle for the upper classes which were eight in number and said that all those who were among the wealthy, the landowners, etc. must be suppressed. The majority of the people went to Liu Ruchi’s side; they were called the right and the left sides. Therefore the military ruler...[not discernible]. So Liu Ruchi could not succeed. Liu Ruchi was subjected to trial. The great Cultural Revolution was to bring down Liu Ruchi.

00:56:23

After Liu Ruchi was brought down, his supporters like Deng Xiaoping, Turin Reng, Wen Jeimi and Tang Goka— all these four leaders were imprisoned. The reason they were jailed was because the military authority lay with Lin Biao. He was the army general and he supported Mao Zedong. The entire army supported him. So the great Cultural Revolution was started and Liu Ruchi was brought down. There were two sides, the right side and the left side. Everyone on the right side went to jail. When we left, Deng Xiaoping was in prison.

[Interviewer to interpreter]: Where is he talking about? Is he talking about China now?

#54M: [It happened] in China and not in Tibet but its effect was felt in Tibet. The great Cultural Revolution was to destroy the four old ones and begin four new ones. All the old were destroyed. Destroying the monasteries originated from here. Lin Biao was the highest Chinese army authority. After Liu Ruchi was brought down, his post was awarded to Lin Biao. He was very renowned. [I] have seen his photograph. He was in power for 7 years assisting Mao Zedong. After 7 years, he rebelled against Mao Zedong and sought protection from Russia. When he was flying to Russia, the airplane was fired at from the ground. It got burned on the border of China and Russia.

Q: Let’s get back to your village, yeah?

#54M: Okay. China’s is a big story.

Q: So in 1958 the Khampas had warned you that the Chinese were doing some really bad things in eastern Tibet and they warned your village, people from your village to prepare and then you went back and you told the head of your village this information. Did they prepare? Did they do make any preparations for the Chinese’ coming?

00:59:39

#54M: They [the Khampas' advice] were not ignored. Then in 1959 Ngari rebelled against the Chinese. We prepared to flee, some towards the direction of Nepal and the majority to India since it was close by. Many people fled to India in '59.

Q: People from your village?

#54M: Yes, from our very village. Eighteen families from our village escaped.

Q: Okay, but no preparations were made to fight? No other preparations were made other than people just leaving, right? No other preparations were made in the village?

01:00:53

#54M: The wealthy families in every village led the people.

Q: So in your village, do you about how many people left before 1959?

#54M: Eighteen families escaped as one group. Then one or two or three families escaped gradually.

Q: So in 1959, March 1959, did you get a lot of news about what had happened in Lhasa?

01:02:01

#54M: [We] heard everything. There was a riot in Ngari and people fled. Some of them were killed and some captured at the Nepal border. A few managed to escape. After the riot died down, we were not able to escape. The Chinese arrived and in order to stop the riot, they took away every yak and every horse. All men—I was 18 then and left behind but father...Never mind escape, all the fathers of every family were taken away to serve them [the Chinese].

Q: Your father was taken?

#54M: My father was taken by the Chinese, but not to a prison. The riot took place in Ngari and since there were no vehicles, provisions had to be transported on yaks. Every male yak, every male horse and every man except children were taken away from many villages; they were to serve the many thousands and tens of thousands [of Chinese soldiers].

Q: What kind of work was your father doing for them?

01:04:08

#54M: The Chinese troops were on their way to fight.

Q: Where?

#54M: At Ngari where the riot took place. There were many different people in Ngari like the Bompas and most importantly the Khampas who had united and rebelled against the

Chinese and were fleeing. The Chinese pursued them and before the Tibetans could reach the border, the Chinese fought them.

Q: Was your father transporting things there?

01:04:35

#54M: There might be thousands and hundreds of thousands of Chinese troops and they needed their things. The Chinese used camels and yaks belonging to the nomads to transport their things and we went to drive the yaks.

Q: So your father was made to carry the things of the Chinese who were using to fight the people from your region and the Khampas?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: Yes.

[Interviewer to interpreter]: There were Khampas fighting?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: The Khampas and...

[Interviewer to interpreter]: The Khampas who had come from Lhasa?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: From Lhasa and riding away towards exile. The fight was going on between the Chinese and the Khampas and Ngari district...

Q: Do you know what your father thought about doing that?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: Yes?

Q: Do you know what your father thought about doing that?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: Means?

Q: Do you know what your father thought about supporting the people who were killing his own people?

01:06:21

#54M: [They] were forced to go. We owned yaks and [I] heard that they [father and others] were made to transport arms. They were not allowed to go to the battle zone. There were single men [without animals] from many other regions who were taken to the battle zone. Initially the Tibetans could not be overcome, but they [the Chinese] fired artilleries and the Tibetans lost. That's what he [father] said, but he did not see the actual clash.

Q: What were you doing?

#54M: I was at home then, grazing the yaks and sheep.

Q: When the Chinese first came to your area in 1960—they didn't come before that?

01:07:56

#54M: [I] heard that the Chinese were in Lhasa and Porang in '57, '56 and '58. I actually saw a Chinese...When I lived in my village and went about, [I saw that] 10-15 Chinese had arrived in Thoeling. They were traveling up and down. Their belongings were being transported on camels. I think that was around '58. Then their number began to increase.

Q: What were they wearing?

#54M: Most of them were wearing blue then.

Q: Dark blue?

01:09:10

#54M: Something like that [points off camera]. If there were a thousand people, they were dressed alike.

Q: These were the ones on the camels you're talking about?

#54M: [They] were riding on camels. Our area was on the edge and [I] do not know from where they came through, but there were horses. The Chinese owned many horses.

Q: The ones on the camels were wearing this color?

01:09:45

#54M: They did not wear that uniform. They wore yellow...[not discernible]

Q: The ones on the camels were wearing a light yellow?

#54M: I did not know, but people said that those dressed in blue were soldiers. Since the area was at the border and close to India, they pretended to be peaceful and not soldiers. That's what people said but I would not know it. However, the soldiers have something red here [touches left collar] which was there.

Q: What was the peaceful sign?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: Wearing a uniform in blue color was a peaceful sign.

[Interviewer to interpreter]: It was a peaceful sign?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: ...sign, like that. If you wear yellowish, that's something...not a good sign.

Q: The ones that came on the camels wearing the light yellow, what were they doing?

01:10:59

#54M: When they travelled to Thoeling, our village happened to be on the route. They did not say anything and passed by. They did not say good things or bad—whether they were on horses or...

Then in the year '62, a huge number of Chinese appeared. They were all dressed in blue. [I] heard they were soldiers. There was a place called Wuri at the border. On one side of the river was India and on the other, Tibet. Even though it was Indian territory, they crossed to the other side of the river and set up a huge army camp.

That was the time when *dhayen* 'Chinese silver coins' was available. What they did was, they needed a large amount of things to be transported. Perhaps they were planning to wage a war or whatever. The Indians did not accept that and they returned. The Indian troops left. Many of their soldiers were there. They did not fight and went back. Perhaps their officers discussed, but we would not know that.

The number one reason we could not escape, as I recall, was this. At the very beginning, the most influential people of our village like Tenzin Wangdu and Zongpon [District Administrator] Sonam Dhargay were taken to China. I do not know which year it was. Then they returned and said, "The Chinese are good-natured. [You] should not escape. It was the fault of the Khampas that they resisted. It is exceptionally good for us that the peaceful liberation has been implemented." Yes, that was the reason we did not escape.

Q: I want to go back to 1959 for a second. In 1959 when there were so many people who were fleeing from Lhasa across the border, did many of them come through your village?

01:15:45

#54M: [Our village] did not fall on the route. [I] do not know which route they took. When His Holiness the Dalai Lama escaped, he left through Mon Tawang [Arunachal Pradesh] or elsewhere. It was not from our side.

Q: People did not come there?

#54M: Except for a Khampa or two, nobody came.

Q: When the Chinese came and, you know, and then these kids came back from China and told you, "Don't make any trouble and you'll be fine," and you said earlier that they were explaining the new policies, socialist policies, and one of them is that you don't have to pay taxes anymore and you said that it actually sounded kind of a good idea, was there a difference in how the older people viewed this information and the younger people?

01:17:03

#54M: All the older people did not believe them. They said, "That cannot be. That is not mentioned in the prophecy or anywhere. We cannot believe them." The younger ones did not say much because they were happy. [They] did not oppose them [the Chinese] as much.

Q: And you said also earlier that one of the things that they said was that you didn't have to pay taxes anymore. Was tax a big issue for your family?

#54M: Yes, we viewed it [as a big problem] in Tibet long ago. On one side it was good because we were paying tax to the Tibetan government.

The origin and history of Tibet was in the hands of the Chinese. What we Tibetans did not know, they would give us advice about it, "This is the way the Tibetans are doing—oppression, eating the flesh and drinking pus of live people, not letting the people to progress and [rendering them] powerless." They would say that, the worst things. There were some *trelpa* 'tax payers' who were paying a lot of tax services and they believed the Chinese. [Laughs]

Q: So I just want to ask you, was it true? Did the Chinese stop all taxes?

01:19:14

#54M: They said that orally. Later there was not a large tax, but they collected the one called *doktel* 'nomad's tax' from the nomads and a *shingtel* 'farmer's tax' from the farmers.

Q: So there was tax but smaller. At that point you're kind of thinking maybe this is not such a bad idea and maybe they have some good ideas, maybe life might change for the better? At what point did you, well, I guess...it's a misleading question. Did you change your mind about socialism and...[not discernible]...good idea? Did you change your mind? What made you change your mind?

#54M: There was some change. Some people said, "Now [we] are happy after the Chinese arrived." Some people who had no possessions became wealthy. We were rich even from earlier times. [Poor] people in the village became rich, though I would not know about distant villages. [I am] speaking about my village as an example. All the beggar types were appointed as leaders by the Chinese, leaders like we have here.

Then the categorization began. All those who were upper class like the wealthy and leaders earlier; there were many who held high posts and they were oppressed by the Chinese. And the oppression was done by our people. And then nobody liked the Chinese.

Q: So can you just describe to us then from this period of 1960 when the Chinese really started making an impact on like in your village? Can you just describe how your everyday life changed?

01:22:13

#54M: You mean in one's thoughts?

Q: How did life in your village change?

#54M: Now we could not expect anything from India while earlier everything came from India. The Chinese did not have all the types of goods that used to come from India. The

Chinese did have grains and wheat flour to trade, which we bartered with our wool. When this could not suffice, [we] went to Porang. The Nepalese came to Porang through its mountain pass.

We went to Porang and like we did in earlier times with the Indians, the rich nomads took wool and by selling their wool, got the requirements. There were many villages like Tsando and Thingkar in Nepal. They were allowed to come by the Chinese and a fair was held at a place called Bhelethang and we traveled all the way to Porang.

Q: Why weren't you able to trade with the Indians anymore?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: Because the Chinese arrived.

]Interviewer to interpreter]: Yes?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: So it was not allowed by the Chinese to come inside and do trade in Ngari side. They used to have a big trade center for a period of three to four months earlier. This was not allowed by the Chinese.

Q: So the Chinese did not let you go to this area to trade?

01:24:20

#54M: They did not allow [us] to India from '62.

Q: They did not let them [the traders from India] in?

#54M: They did not let them in nor [us] out. If an army [camp] was close, one might see the scouts but...[not discernible]. Until we escaped to India, there were no contacts with the Indians.

Q: So the border was secured by the Chinese on both sides. What else did you see happen?

01:25:05

#54M: After the Democratization of Liberation process, they implemented the great Cultural Revolution. During the Cultural Revolution, it was said that four old things had to be destroyed, people's old thoughts, properties and monasteries. They were bringing down the wealthy families. Rules were very strict then and there was no freedom of speech. If they [the Chinese] heard anything, one would end up in jail.

During the great Cultural Revolution, starting from Lhasa every monastery was destroyed. When the destruction occurred, people were sad and in every village people only thought of escaping and did not wish to remain. However, escape was not possible.

Q: Which year was that?

#54M: It was around 1967-68.

Q: So by that time, were the Chinese camped...I mean, were they all around in the village? You said it was impossible to escape. Was it because there were so many Chinese people there watching?

01:27:42

#54M: Chinese in numbers of 10, 11, 5 or 6 remained continuously in the village. They stealthily moved around the mountain pass and if anyone fled, he was captured.

Q: Were people encouraged to inform on one and other?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: Means?

Q: Were Tibetans encouraged to give information about other Tibetans for the Chinese?

#54M: You mean [informers] placed there by the Chinese?

Q: Yes.

01:28:24

#54M: There were informers among the Tibetans. The Chinese were sharp eyed and knew them. They were known to them, but the Tibetans had no knowledge [of the informers]. Those Tibetans were the lower people—I can say this here but over there [in Tibet], one could not say that—the beggar types who were appointed to high posts. They were given guns so that if anyone fled, he could be shot immediately. They were called the *yulmag* ‘militia’ in Tibetan. They appointed them.

When the great Cultural Revolution came to an end, they started the *Mimang Kongzi* ‘People’s Commune.’ What *Kongzi* meant was—there were the individual possessions—take Camp Number 6 [in Mundgod] for example, how many families are there? All of them became one family in terms of wealth. If one owned many thousands of sheep, one did not have authority over 10 or 11. If your [animals] had so much milk that you could not milk them, yet you did not have the power to drink even a cup of it.

They [the Chinese] said that what an individual owned belonged to the society, and this was socialism and that people would lead a life of happiness. Never mind a life of happiness, people died from starvation. An assessment was done at the end of a year. Everyone engaged in some kind of work whether it was grazing sheep and yak or farming or trading. The wage was one currency unit.

01:30:20

If the production was good, whether it was from nomadic activities or field work or trade, the one currency unit turned to five. I do not know how the calculation was done. In case the production was not good, the one currency unit became half. What should the people eat? During the assessment at the end of the year, the wages were paid as one cannot remain hungry. When the distribution [of grains] was made, if there were many children in a family who could not work and it was only the parents who went to work, there was no

way they could have a full stomach. If there were working people [in a family], one just about managed.

What the Chinese rationed could in no way satiate us, so we emptied all the stock of grains that we had saved for many years! When we escaped, we had nothing left. Then we prepared to flee though there was not any chance. As we were close to India, my father and I—the younger sibling was quite small—packed provisions to be loaded on the yaks.

Q: So what did your family face?

01:33:15

#54M: When the commune system was started, the family members did not even have an hour a day to meet at home. We were powerless. One had to do some kind of work [and was ordered], “You go there. You go there.” My younger sibling was dispatched as a servant to the Chinese troops at the border where they had formed an office to draw maps and such. He was sent driving along three or four yaks. I was ordered to either graze sheep or work in the fields. My little sibling had to herd the yaks. [We] lived in that situation and could not meet even for a day. We lived like that for three years.

Q: Were those your own yaks or...

#54M: They were the commune yaks. They belonged to the commune as there were none that belonged to individuals. If one got a tent, one ate in the evening and stayed in it. There was nothing else besides that. The situation was so pathetic that we could not sleep at night out of anger. [We] regretted that we could not escape earlier. [We] suffered miserably.

Q: So many socialist policies like the redistribution of wealth for example. Did you in theory support these policies? Did you think these policies...some of them were good ideas?

01:36:10

#54M: I felt regret. Orally they said that socialism was great but [it rendered the people] beggars and in some regions, [I] heard that people died of starvation. We did not die of starvation, but our situation became exceedingly pathetic. One did not have a bit of power.

As for work, the animals were...[not discernible] just like we keep money in the bank, which is recorded. One only received a wage for servitude. The wage was one currency unit.

Q: So this problem with hunger, did it get to the point where people were actually starving?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: Starving, yeah.

Q: Starving to death?

#54M: Yes, [they] died of starvation in certain regions like the Changthang [Northern plateau].

Q: Why did they die?

01:37:44

#54M: If one had the freedom, one could kill an animal and eat it, but one did not. The Chinese leaders could not provide and they [the Tibetans] died from starvation.

Q: Starving to death? Starving so much that people actually died?

#54M: The deaths did not occur in the village where I lived. No one died. I have to be honest. There were villages like Bongpa in the nomadic region where I heard that many old people from several families died due to lack of food. One heard these things later during discussions with friends without the knowledge of the Chinese.

Q: Did you see this?

01:39:16

#54M: [I] did not see this but only heard it. Some people I knew had died. [To the interpreter] You would know. You know Mey Dakpa who died [in Mundgod]? His older brother was Gopa Yulgyal. He and his wife died from starvation. He was released from prison and...[We] belonged to the same Ngari region.

Just before the People's Commune began, there was a village called Zarang located a little further away from our village where there were Tibetan soldiers. They conspired in the night and killed two Chinese officials.

Q: Did you see it?

#54M: I did not see it but I went to get the bodies.

Q: Were they Chinese soldiers?

01:40:32

#54M: [They were] not soldiers but leaders. One of the leaders was named Tang Shaoqui and the other, the interpreter who was a Chinese was called Ruting. I knew them. They were sent to Zarang and the Tibetan soldiers conspired and killed them.

Q: Oh. Okay, let's get back to that. I have a question about the starving. Had you ever heard of anybody in your area starving to death before the Chinese came?

#54M: [I] have never heard of it. The nomads could eat meat since they owned animals. They had the freedom [to eat them]. When the Chinese arrived, to speak as a nomad, one did not have freedom over even a lamb. One could see the animals but could not kill them; one could not eat them. The work was terribly hard. There were meetings the whole night and work the whole day.

The two Chinese leaders were killed and later they arrested the killers and imprisoned them for three years. I saw three people being executed right in front of my eyes.

Q: Yes?

01:42:20

#54M: I saw them being executed [makes sign of gun] by the Chinese.

[Tape change]

Q: The killing of the Chinese soldiers by the Tibetan army, did you see this yourself?

[Interpreter interprets as: Some Tibetan soldiers were shot dead by the Chinese, did you see this yourself?]

#54M: I saw them being executed right in front of my eyes. We were 80 people. I will tell you the story about my imprisonment. I was preparing to escape and the Chinese came to know about it. I was imprisoned and interrogated for three months with a gun pointed to my chest. I did not like the Chinese and they called me a rebel.

Q: Why?

01:43:56

#54M: I planned to escape and was charged with a serious crime. All those men who were charged with a serious crime were taken to witness the execution of the three people; the ones that I saw. They were killed at Thoeling.

Q: Thoeling?

#54M: Yes. The wife of one of the leaders of Zarang was executed. The owner of the house where the two Chinese leaders who were killed by the Tibetans stayed was executed. Then there was a man called Gatuk who was earlier a *shangdang*, a Chinese [appointed] leader. He had interacted with Tibetan soldiers as the border was very close and this became known. They were in prison for three years and executed on the same day.

The reason I witnessed this though the villages were different was that 80 men were taken there. There were 80 men from various regions who did not like the Chinese. It was like a movie and they were putting fear into us. Just before the three people were executed, a speech was made by the Chinese. There were 200 Chinese troops surrounding the 80 of us with their guns ready. We were sitting in a circle like dancers. In front of us were three pits which had been dug earlier.

01:45:23

The speech began, "If anyone does what this person has done, he will go the same way, like these three people. They are not killed by Communist Chinese but they have killed themselves. They have broken the 10 points of the Communist rules. [They are the] running dogs of the Dalai Lama. They are part of the Indian rebels and the Tibetan rebels. They are killing us as...by the Dalai Lama and the rebels. What happens to these three

people will happen to any of you who do what they have done. That's what [we want] to show."

Then they brought the Zarang lady. The leader [her husband] had died in prison. Since he was dead, she was brought. She was held by two soldiers and made to stand there. Just like a movie, [I] suppose he [the shooter] was close by; a shot was fired from behind us right here [points to chest]. The shot rang out "thang."

Q: In the back or front?

01:46:35

#54M: [She was] shot in the front. "Thak," a sound was heard and [she] lurched forward. The two men let go of her thinking she was dead but she was not. They once again made her stand unsteadily and fired. The shooter was shivering. [I] heard that if the person did not die in three shots, the Chinese soldier who was shooting would be killed. He knew the rules himself. [I] heard that it was like that. Then a last shot rang out "thing" and the eyes turned pale and [she] shivered and died in the pit. As she died the pit was covered.

Again another person was brought there. There were three pits. The man was made to stand at the edge of a pit and shot like the one earlier. He was an old man and died after one shot. Gatuk was very smart and [I] suppose he was putting up resistance. He was brought out squeezed among the soldiers. He was a young man. He was executed. All three were executed.

01:47:33

At the back were some Tibetans and Chinese school students who shouted, "There's no crime in revolution. There's a cause for opposition. The rebels led by the Dalai Lama have been annihilated." It was just like the demonstrations we hold here. They were going around.

Q: Who dug the hole?

#54M: The Chinese might have dug it. It was there when we reached. There was a huge army camp located there and it was dug in the grounds.

Q: How far away was the Chinese soldier from the people who they were executing?

01:52:08

#54M: [He] was close by.

Q: How close?

#54M: If I make a guess, it was as close as that door there [points off camera]. If the person was standing here, he was just within the door. They had been imprisoned and were brought out one by one by the soldiers. We could not move because [the soldiers] were at the back with guns ready. [We were] surrounded by 200 soldiers. There were 80 of us who were against the Chinese. They'd ordered us there.

Q: Where was the person who was doing the killing? Were they standing behind the person or in front of the person?

01:53:10

#54M: [They were] shot from the front as they stood; to the heart [points to chest]. [The shooter] stood with the others who surrounded us from behind.

Q: Did they shoot in the front or at the back?

#54M: From the front.

Q: Like about as far as I am from you?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: Like from the door to here.

[Interviewer to interpreter]: Oh, from the door.

[Interpreter to interviewer]: It was about 10-15 yards.

01:53:42

#54M: We who had been charged with crimes were brought there from a distance of a day's journey on horseback with the intention to witness the execution.

Q: Did these people who were being shot, did they say anything before they died?

#54M: You mean those people who were brought there [to die]? They never said anything, poor things. Their faces were red and they were like this [bends head and moves side to side slowly] when they were brought out. Nothing, not a word was uttered. They had been in prison for three years.

Q: You were in some kind of camp situation? What was this? A prison or what was it?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: Where?

Q: You said there was 80 people who were all against the Chinese. They'd all been staying at the same place.

01:54:55

#54M: You mean the 80 people?

Q: Yes.

#54M: They were similar to me. [We] were not in prison. Those people that did not conform to the Chinese policies, like me were brought from various places.

Q: Where were they kept, in prison or...

#54M: [We] were not kept in prison then. If released, I could go home.

Q: But you said that these 80 people were people who were against the Chinese. What had you been doing to show that you were against the Chinese?

01:55:56

#54M: A maternal uncle of my wife, an ex-district administrator, and I wished to escape and spoke against the Chinese, “Everybody has fled and we have not succeeded in escaping.” We had discussed internally. For some reason both of them [maternal uncle of wife and ex-district administrator] were imprisoned. After they’d been in jail for two years or so, I was interrogated. I had already broken rules by saying, “We are not happy. [We] must escape. [We] have no freedom over our wealth.” [I]’d said the worst things against the Chinese, which had been heard by them. So I was interrogated for three months at gun point. That was one.

Secondly, there were many reasons. After many people had fled, I went to the Indian border which was close by. There was a man who belonged to my village—he died a few years back. He’d told me that he would reach his family [to India] and come back for us and I was to come there. Looking back now, he would not be allowed to return by the Indians. I went there and met two Indians who asked me, “Where are you going?” “I have come here to meet a person from my village.” I knew one of the Indians from earlier times.

Q: He was known to you?

01:57:16

#54M: [I] knew him. Earlier Indians and Tibetans were the same. We knew each other though we had not met for many years. He said, “Stay back because all the wealth is being wasted and people are dying due to the heat [in India]. Karma is nowhere to be seen. He has gone to the plains of India. You cannot see him.” I had asked him about Karma. We had the conversation.

Well, Indians are Indians and I turned back as home was nearby. Then I remained at home. Almost a year later, no [I] think it was less than a year, two men had gone [to the border] and met the Indians [who said], “What is he [interviewee] doing? He wanted to flee and I stopped him.” They’d mentioned my name and my father’s name and such. “He said that he wished to escape as he was not happy and that all the monasteries were demolished. He said he was not happy.” They’d had such a conversation.

These two Tibetan beggars did not speak to any Tibetan about it, but went and reported to the Chinese. When the Chinese heard it, they kept it in their mind and I suppose they were watching me. [The beggars gave the report] in order to receive a promotion. The two men would receive a promotion on my account. Later when I was questioned I thought, “The Indians are Indians and I am in Tibet. They would not have told this to anyone.”

Q: Okay. So then you got a sentence, yes, of seven years. This sentence... where were you kept? What was the living situation that you were kept in for seven years?

02:01:30

#54M: I was not kept in jail. It was planned to put [me] in prison for seven years. The Chinese law was such that I confessed to whatever I had done from my heart for three months. After three months, the Chinese leader [name not discernible] who was a better person said, “You have formed relations outside. [However], it cannot be said that your forming the relation is bad and that people who managed to escape are blameless. They know about the new policies of China and your having told them is no stain. You have admitted your mistakes very well. You have spoken from the depth of your heart and lungs. Your sentence is planned for seven years in prison. However, you need not go to prison for your bad actions but similar to a prison sentence, you will have to wear “the cap” on your head.” It was the Chinese law that called it “the cap.” [Points to head]

Q: What cap did you have to wear?

#54M: It was not an actual cap. It was a punishment called “the cap.” Wearing “the cap” meant “without any power.” My power was lost, not that there was any power in general. Whether one had it or not, I was like a dead man, a nameless man. I wore “the cap” for one year. The following year I was able to escape even as I wore “the cap.”

Q: A rebel? Did “the hat” mean a rebel?

02:03:57

#54M: Yes, the “black cap” person was a rebel. The Chinese called him a rebel.

[Interviewer to interpreter]: What was the seven years? I’m confused about what the seven years was.

[Interpreter to interviewer]: It was the seven year punishment that he was termed. Because he tried to escape once and he shared his view against the Chinese, doing so the Chinese policy was the seven year punishment.

[Interviewer to interpreter]: So he was seven years *logchoepa* [black hat, rebel]?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: No, not that. He was the seven years...the punishment for he has done against China...

[Interviewer to interpreter]: Oh, you mean he has done bad things for seven years?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: Not that. Seven years was totally different. Whatever he has done earlier against China...one is to try to escape and not happy and one is he shared his views with the administrator. Due to that it is the law that he has to face seven years. Because he told everything so they made it less.

[Interviewer to interpreter]: So they made it less? I understand. So he is labeled *logchoepa*.

[Interpreter to interviewer]: Instead of seven years.

Q: Can you describe what that meant for you and to have this label *logchoepa* “rebel,” the symbolic black hat? What did this mean? How were you treated differently? What is your life like?

#54M: If one made a tiny mistake, one could be jailed for that was the law. One had already been sentenced and had received a leniency. I was able to speak impressively and also the leader happened to be a very good one; the main person who was called [not discernible] was a Chinese. He said, “I think it is useless to make you suffer because whatever secrets China has are already revealed through the thousands of Tibetan people who have escaped. They have revealed whatever secrets there are. You have also spoken about it, but your expressing it cannot be termed as wrong and their revealing it as fine. Just as the Chinese leader Mao Zedong says, you have admitted to all your mistakes. You have accepted them and have received a pardon.” So I was given the “black cap,” the cap of the rebels and labeled as a rebel. That was the reason we were taken to witness the execution.

Q: Were you treated differently by the community after that?

02:07:43

#54M: [The Chinese] did not have the time to do that. After [I] was given the “black cap,” I spent a winter and a summer there and then I fled to India. [Smiles]

Q: How long did you stay?

#54M: Where?

Q: After you were given ‘the black hat.’

02:08:16

#54M: After [I] was given the “black hat,” I was interrogated for three months from which a month was spent at the place of execution. Then [I] returned and spent the whole winter there.

Q: How many months did you spent altogether?

#54M: Perhaps it was about a year that I stayed wearing the “black hat.” I fled in the 7th Tibetan lunar month. It was a year [later].

Q: I have a note here about the public killings. It says “forced to keep secret,” the public killings forced to keep a secret. Can you just ask about that? Did the Chinese say that you should never talk about this, the public killings? He was forced to keep them secret?

02:09:31

#54M: Yes, that had to be kept a secret. We could not even mention it among ourselves in the village. One could never mention that the Chinese were causing misery or killing

people. What we suffered was normal and everyone could see that, but one could not tell people from outside “I am being mistreated.”

Q: You were told that by the Chinese?

#54M: The Chinese told us. They told us that personally.

Q: Yes?

02:10:28

#54M: In case someone took [news] outside and told people from other villages, “I faced this and that,” [the Chinese said, “[We] will come to know of it and once [we] know of it, [you] will have nowhere to go.”

Q: Did you tell anybody?

#54M: I never said a word while in Tibet. [Laughs] One was afraid. [The Chinese] said that if one made a mistake, the punishment would be like the execution carried out for the three people.

Q: You mentioned earlier about, during the beginning of the Cultural Revolution the destruction of monasteries and sacred objects. Did you witness this yourself?

02:11:52

#54M: [I] saw it with my eyes but thanks to God, we did not have to do the destruction ourselves. There was someone who saved us.

Q: Who demolished them? Were they Tibetans?

#54M: Those that carried out the demolition were Tibetans as ordered by the Chinese. Tibetans volunteered and carried out the demolition. However, I did not see them do it but [saw] only the ruins.

Q: Who took part in it?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: It was taken part by the Tibetans itself as ordered by the Chinese authorities.

Q: Okay. So the Tibetans themselves were asked to take part ...

02:12:38

#54M: The Chinese ordered them. There were many [Tibetans] who were supporters of the Red and they volunteered. There were many such Tibetans. We did not have to demolish the monasteries in my village. Five or six families did not even witness the demolition as we were nomads and living in the hills.

Later, the destruction was such that the mountains were covered with pages of scriptures. The winds carried them when the scriptures were flung. It was impossible to look anywhere. The images were not taken away by the Chinese. What was done was that there were many beggars and leaders who supported [the Chinese]. They claimed that these were the wealth of the people and took them to be sold in Chinese shops at Thoeling.

Q: They went to sell them?

#54M: Yes and they used the proceeds themselves. There were many people who sold them and now, except for one or two, all of them are dead.

Q: Where are they?

02:13:38

#54M: [They are] in Camp Number 4 [Mundgod].

Q: In which camp?

#54M: In Camp Number 4.

Q: Can you describe what else you saw up until when you left in 1973 in terms of what the Chinese were doing and the effects of their policies and anything else that you can tell us about that?

02:15:16

#54M: [The situation] was such that one just did not have the wish to stay on. There was not even one good thing. The rules were so stringent that one could not even speak! One might get to meet a person from outside while herding yaks and sheep, but other than that one did not have the freedom to obtain permission to go and meet one's relatives for a day!

Q: One was not allowed to meet?

#54M: One could not meet. There was no time for that. It was work all the time. There were some who obeyed the Chinese rules orally, but if they did not perform their task... [Your] performance and [obedience], both had to be present. It was incredibly bad. The rules were so bad, so bad.

Q: Was there like an incident, something that happened that made you think, "Okay, this is it. I've had enough. I'm getting out of here." Or was it just sort of a gradual thing of, like it just built up and built up and built up and then you just decided, "Okay, time to go." Was there any actual event or incident that made it seem like, "Okay, I've had enough"? Do you understand?

02:17:19

#54M: [I] became mad with regret because [I] had been unable to escape earlier. It was incredible as there was not even one thing to look forward to. If one possessed a cup, one had the freedom to say, "This is my cup." Otherwise one could not say "I." However, it should be possible to say "I am hungry or I am thirsty" but that was difficult.

Everything [belonged] to the community. Though everything was the community's, there was nothing to eat in the community! Each person received one currency unit. Where there were many children in a family and only the parents...we stayed for only three years. [I] wonder how they managed. It was shocking.

Q: I just want to ask you one more question about the destruction of the monasteries. When did that first start happening? What year?

#54M: It started in 1966 and '67. That was the [period] of the great Cultural Revolution. I am certain of that.

Q: And not before that?

02:19:03

#54M: [I] do not know if it happened in other regions, but it did not take place in my village.

Q: You were 31 years old by the time you left. You thought about leaving many times before, right?

#54M: [We] tried to escape three times. I told you about hiding things in the hills; that was one. But [we] could not escape. Then my mother's father became seriously ill, the illness that paralyzes. The reason [we] could not escape along with the other people was because we were taking care of grandfather. After that [the situation] became more and more strict and [the Chinese] became more and more suspicious.

[Interviewer to interpreter]: Okay, that [grandfather falling ill] was the first time. The second time the Indian guy told him to go back.

Q: When was the second time?

02:20:34

#54M: The second escape attempt was—many people had already fled—I told you about meeting the Indian. That was another attempt...

Q: Was the third time successful or not successful?

#54M: [Continues to speak without waiting for question to be interpreter] He told me not to escape. That was it.

Q: The third attempt?

02:20:52

#54M: I succeeded on the third attempt! [Laughs and claps]

[Interviewer to interpreter]: In English we say “third time lucky.” Do you say that in Tibetan? Tell him we say that.]

#54M: Yes, that’s the same as us. The Tibetans say that.

Q: That’s interesting. We say that “third time lucky.” So the third time you came out, which route did you take?

02:21:24

#54M: We came to Uttar Pradesh [India].

Q: The first place in Uttar Pradesh...

#54M: The first place in Uttar Pradesh was Neti.

Q: How many days did it take?

02:21:38

#54M: It did not take any time for us to reach the border. Indians [soldiers] had arrived in Tibet. Earlier when we used to go to trade, it took seven days over the mountain pass. Fortunately, the place where I told you I met the Indians was occupied by the Indian army. There was a high mountain pass called Gangla between Tibet and India. A day or two after crossing the Gangla, the Indians were there in Tibet. Right across the nomadic region were tens of thousands of Indian troops, intelligence division and six offices. I was shocked at the tens of thousands [of Indian troops].

I had my mother then. She said, “We have tarried this long because of our wealth. It does not matter if we do not have wealth. It is enough if we can reach India whether [I am] dead or alive. If I can see His Holiness the Dalai Lama even once, that is enough.”

Q: Please carry on.

02:22:38

#54M: There was trust among the parents and children. Besides them one could not speak to anyone in Tibet. There were many cases of children making their parents land in jail. We used to fear that. With us, there were my younger brother, parents and I and we could talk about anything amongst us. Mother used to say, “Right from then until now, we had the thought of our wealth in mind. That was the reason we could not escape, as our wealth would be left behind. Let’s not care for wealth.” I did not bring anything. Except for the riches in the home, there was no freedom over our animals and land. Our family properties had not been confiscated.

Properties belonging to three families of our village were confiscated; all the gold, silver and whatever they owned. That did not happen to us. Whatever little we owned, we packed them in a shabby bag and always carried it on us with the thought of when we could make a getaway. [The Chinese] did not allow us to carry good boxes thinking that we might flee since the border was near. A leader who was one of our people inspected the things in the

home. As nomads we had a lot of stuff and we hid gold and the valuables in shabby bags along with rags, which we managed to bring. Other than that—being a rich family, we owned a number of household belongings—we left everything behind.

Q: How many people came out with you?

02:25:29

#54M: We were nine people: my parents, the four siblings, the wife, the wife's child and a child of my late sister. We were nine people. Nobody else knew of it [the escape].

Q: Was everybody in 100% agreement about leaving? Was there some dispute?

#54M: Everybody wanted to [escape]. Thinking that the younger ones might not wish to, my younger brother asked the wife. We were certain [that this was the chance]. The reason for certainty was because I have a daughter, who now lives in Camp Number 1 [Mundgod]; she was little [then]—about 3 years old and she was being made *tsalok* 'to keep warm' since Tibet was cold. This was not revealed to [my] parents. Father was [working] in the fields and had availed leave to take her for treatment. That was the Chinese rule and he was requested leave.

There was a girl at home who was engaged in herding the sheep and word came to me that she was suffering from appendicitis and was being taken to Thoeling for surgery and that I was to come home to look after the sheep. So father and I were home. My younger brother had been transporting things for the Chinese since three months and he returned home. The youngest child [brother] was a yak herder and the wife lived at home. It was just one night...

The next day we were told to move camp to another place at a distance of a day's journey. Due to the huge number of sheep we owned, the nomads were formed into groups of four families. At that time, since everybody was moving the next day, yaks had been loaded and readied by every family. There was no suspicion though there were people with guns keeping watch. I took a detour to see if they [the guards] were sleeping while the family packed the belongings. So nine yaks and nine people...[moves hand to indicate leaving]. Thanks to Tibet's protective deity, the Palden Lhamo, the yaks followed the path to the Indian border without being driven by men. The lamas and Gods were watching over us.

02:28:08

I had been to the place called Porang. There was a holy nun living in the snowy mountain without the knowledge of the Chinese. I knew some traders in Porang and went to seek a divination. [I] told the nun that [I] wanted to escape. The nun did a divination and said, "You will succeed. Your fortune is good and it is certain [you] will succeed. However, you must offer prayers to Palden Lhamo. If you do not have the chance to do it there, I will do it." I offered [her] about 40 currency units. Whether it could be due to that or...[I] do not know, but straight on...[moves hand to indicate easy passage].

Q: What part of the Indian border did you come across?

#54M: The border was Ritikesh.

Q: Yes?

02:32:02

#54M: Ritikesh, the holy lake.

Q: Is it in U.P. [Uttar Pradesh]?

#54M: Yes, U.P. It was Ritikesh and if one traveled further up, one reached Chungmolay and if one journeyed this side, there was Gurudwar.

At the Madur Mountain, the Indian government sent an interpreter and six very good policemen. We reached Ritikesh when it became dark. There was bright light twinkling on the mountain [and were told], “That is Madur Mountain and there are many Tibetans there.” [Smiles] We were at a loss and did not know where [we] had arrived.

Q: It was actually 1973. Were people surprised to see you? I mean not many people were coming out of Tibet in 1973. Were the Tibetans surprised to see you?

02:33:50

#54M: We met the army.

Q: Yes?

#54M: There were Tibetan troops there. Among the soldiers was one who was a relative of my wife. They took permission from the higher ups and the army treated us extremely well.

Q: What did they ask you?

02:34:05

#54M: Since they had fled before the great Cultural Revolution, they asked about their relatives and the people left behind in the village and whether they were alive. The leader of the army himself came [to see us]; he is from Bylakuppe [Karnataka, India].

Q: Was he a Tibetan?

#54M: Oh yes, he was a Tibetan.

Q: I know this is a difficult question and you know, feel free to take a little bit of time before you answer. But I would just like to hear from you the three main reasons why you left Tibet?

02:35:26

#54M: [Starts to speak before interpretation is complete] One reason was the inability to adhere to the strict rules of categorization [of the community]. Secondly, one did not have the freedom over one’s wealth. That is two. Thirdly, one cannot even utter *Om Mani Padme*

Hum [devotional mantra]. Everything was Red. If [the Chinese] found out that one had uttered *Om Mani Padme Hum*, he was done for.

Q: Okay, great. What do you think of socialism now?

#54M: I feel it's incredibly bad. We are so happy here. We practice democracy and mainly due to His Holiness the Dalai Lama and thanks to the Indian Government, we are so happy here. One is free to do anything. If someone walked on his head with his feet in the air, there is no one to bar you. Over there you could not even move. It was just like prison. The categorization was so strict that it was shocking. There was classification even among parents and son. There was no freedom at all.

Q: How did you feel when you heard that Mao Zedong had died?

02:37:38

#54M: The sun rose in my heart, really. [I] heard it here immediately. We had arrived here by then. [Smiles]

Q: I just wanted to go back and just clarify something you said earlier that there was... You were talking about that there was a split between the followers of Mao Zedong and the followers of Liu Shaoqi. Did this split occur in your region or you are just talking about China? Were there followers of Liu Shaoqi in your region or you're just talking about what was happening in the situation in China?

#54M: Liu Ruchi. It was not Shaoqi but Liu Ruchi. This situation was studied by them. [Ruchi means Chairman in Chinese. So interviewee is probably referring to Liu Shaoqi, but since Tibetans called him Liu Ruchi and he is not aware of the name Shaoqi.]

Q: By whom?

02:39:07

#54M: By the Chinese themselves. [The Chinese] studied it like the studies that are done here. It was studied because in history there are stories about two rulers who fall apart and do not get along. Then the great Cultural Revolution was started in order to stop him, to stop Liu Ruchi. It was then announced. That was said so by the Chinese.

[Interviewer to interpreter]: It was actually announced to them?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: Yes. Announced and practically learned in our area because lots of Chinese were there.

[Interviewer to interpreter]: Oh, it was announced to other Chinese? It was announced to the Tibetans?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: Not to the Tibetans; within the Chinese.

[Interviewer to interpreter]: Oh, within the Chinese?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: Chinese.

[Interviewer to interpreter]: I see.

Q: So was there like a split then amongst the Chinese inside?

#54M: Internally all those that supported Liu Ruchi...

Q: Were there many of them?

02:40:31

#54M: There were many. The majority of them [supported Liu Ruchi]. [They] were oppressed and a more serious crime meant imprisonment. Who went to prison? Deng Xiaoping was sent there. Deng Xiaoping's story was told...I was thinking, "Whenever news or [stories] are broadcast, there is never any mention of Liu Ruchi." He was very famous in Tibet. He was considered a serious wrongdoer by the Chinese. Liu Ruchi was called *halishaobhu* in Chinese which meant rebel. *Halishao* meant one who was destroying China, a rebel. During the time he was in power, which was before the start of the great Cultural Revolution, we were very happy for 4-5 years.

The happiness stemmed from enjoying freedom of religion and one could do anything that was done in the earlier days. There were 30 points that he had formulated and it included—not much was there about Mao Zedong—freedom to follow the traditions of thousands of years. Chinese do not have love for family relations but such relations were permitted. Everything that was good was there during his period. When the great Cultural Revolution began, he was ousted and then the Chinese became worst.

Q: Okay. I have a couple of questions about this. One, how did you find out about the policies of Liu Ruchi? How did you find out that they were potentially more benefit? They weren't enacted because he didn't have power, so where were you finding out this information – from the Chinese people or...

#54M: They were against each other. The 30-point, which was his [Liu Ruchi's] policy, was annulled.

Q: Were you there when this took place?

02:43:42

#54M: It was '64-'65 then and I was still living there. There was freedom during his [Liu Ruchi's] period. Then whether it was the officials among the Chinese or whatever, all the old ones were brought down. Some junior officials were expelled within a month. Every document pertaining to him [Liu Ruchi] was confiscated from every family. During that time, Mao Zedong was not very famous. Some people used to comment, "What is this? [We] are told that this can be done and again that this cannot be done. The policy of Communist China is not stable." It looked like an order came from him [Liu Ruchi] and another order came from Mao Zedong. And they were like this [joins the back of palms].

Q: The followers of Liu Ruchi, were they punished?

#54M: They faced a lot of problems.

Q: The Chinese army?

02:45:34

#54M: The army did not face any problems as they were completely on the side of Zedong as the *magtsi* was with him. He [Liu Ruchi] did not have the *magtsi* but only the *tangtsi*, like in Tibet it was both the religious and temporal [leadership]. He had power only politically and not the army. For Chinese, the main authority lay with the army, which Zedong was not letting go to anyone. There was an army commander called Lingbar, who sided Zedong. That was why Liu Ruchi lost, otherwise it was said that there was no chance for him to loose. He was a very capable person, one of the seven wise men of the world.

Q: Yes?

#54M: He was one of the seven [wise] men in the world. He was said to be highly proficient. During his time, Liu Ruchi was very famous. When His Holiness went to China, His Holiness mentioned that he'd met him.

Q: When you say there was a clash and now I'm just talking about your region and not talking about Beijing or China or anywhere, just in your region, when you said there was a clash between the followers of Mao Zedong and Liu Ruchi, did you mean actual fighting or did you mean just a difference in ideology?

02:47:32

#54M: [I] heard that there was a lot of fighting in China.

Q: Did that happen in your village?

#54M: It did not happen in the village. [I] heard it occurred in Lhasa.

Q: Yes?

#54M: It was in-fighting among the Chinese in Lhasa and the Tibetans had no say in it. Tibet Autonomous Region was formed during the period of Liu Ruchi, and there were Ngabo and a lama called Sandho Tsewang Rinzin. After the formation of Tibet Autonomous Region, two lamas arrived in Ngari. And they were welcomed. After a month or two they were expelled.

Q: But fighting or...

[Interpreter to interviewer]: Fighting, real fighting...

[Interviewer to interpreter]: Actual fighting?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: Actual fighting was done in Lhasa.

[Interviewer to interpreter]: Really? Between these two...

[Interpreter to interviewer]: Between these two Chinese groups.

Q: Did this problem occur within the Chinese [groups]?

02:48:35

#54M: [I] heard they faced a lot of problems internally.

Q: Did they physically fight?

#54M: There were killings and imprisonment and a lot of such things. Though we could not escape, it was on account of the in-fighting between them that we experienced some happiness.

Q: Hmm...so interesting. Okay. You said earlier that the older people were warning the younger people that it was not a good sign Chinese coming into Tibet and that they should be careful and they were warning that bad things were going to happen and you said that the younger people didn't really listen to them and now you are an older person yourself. Do you feel that young people do not listen to you?

02:49:42

#54M: [They] are being [indifferent]. [I] consider that as very bad, really. [I] see it as very bad if [the younger people] do not listen to the elders, now that I am old.

Q: Is there anything you would like to say to the younger generation?

#54M: If [I] have to, [I] can [give some advice].

Q: What advice would you give?

02:50:37

#54M: If it is for the Chinese.

Q: No, what advice or guidance would you give the younger generation of Tibetans?

#54M: If [they] would listen, my advice is, "We have already suffered while you are happy. Irrespective of the happy state, [you must strive] for the cause of Tibet's independence as there is support from many foreign countries. Even if you have just one word to speak, it is good if you speak for the cause of our country. That's what [I] think. However, [they] will not listen.

Q: Thank you. Okay. When you left Tibet, did you think that you were going to get a chance to go back or did you realize that this is probably for good?

02:52:17

#54M: [I] do wish to go back to Tibet...if I get the chance.

Q: *Pa-la*, people who left Tibet in 1959, many of them felt that they were going to be returning in just a few months. You lived under the Chinese for so long up until 1973. When you left did you think that you were going to get a chance to return?

#54M: At that time, [I] thought, “Perhaps...nothing is certain.” I told you about the two Indians I met and one [of them] said, “You should stay back this year. Though I do not know about it, but our leader says that the Dalai Lama has spoken about returning soon to Tibet at the United Nations Organization. It is said that Tibet will get independence, so why do you come here?” When he said that I felt hope. [Smiles]

Q: Thank you very much. It’s been really, really interesting to talk to you.

02:54:32

#54M: [Joins palms in thanks]

Q: It’s very rare to talk to someone who came out so late.

#54M: [Nods, smiles and joins palms]

Q: Thank you. Could you please tell us what it was like to share your experiences with us?

02:55:05

#54M: I have related my experiences of seeing with my eyes what the Chinese did with [their] hands and the things that I witnessed. I have spoken about what the Chinese did similar to charging them in a court of law. [I] feel that by talking about it, it will cause some harm to the Chinese. [I] hope.

Q: Have you shared your experiences a lot before?

#54M: They do not listen though [I] have shared [to the younger generation] regarding the killing of people, the Chinese rules which led to the scarcity of food and the fear of starvation. [I] do tell them.

Q: Okay, I want to ask you one more time because you did tell us a lot of things. If this interview was shown in Tibet or China, would it be a problem for you?

02:56:29

#54M: [This] will not [be a problem]. It is a factual story. I witnessed them fight with my eyes.

Q: I know we asked this before but we have to ask you one more time. Can we use your real name for this project?

#54M: [You] can use the very name.

Q: Okay.

02:56:56

#54M: My story is true. I have the support of His Holiness the Dalai Lama and others and I am not afraid.

Q: Thank you. We also feel very proud to hear it.

#54M: One must share unless one does not have anything to say when there is help. There is support and help.

Q: So you understand the importance of giving this information. You understand how important it is to tell these experiences.

#54M: Now I am old and not a person with capabilities. [I] am old and do not have much education. Otherwise, the agony of losing the country of Tibet to the Chinese, and having seen it with my eyes and underwent the experience, but for the helplessness [of the situation], it would not satisfy [me] even to kill them.

Q: Thank you so much.

END OF INTERVIEW