

Tibet Oral History Project

Interview #72D – Tenzin Phuntsok
May 24, 2012

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TIBET ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

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INTERVIEW SUMMARY SHEET

1. Interview Number: #72D
2. Interviewee: Tenzin Phuntsok
3. Age: 70
4. Date of Birth: 1942
5. Sex: Female
6. Birthplace: Lhozong
7. Province: Dhotoe (Kham)
8. Year of leaving Tibet: 2006
9. Date of Interview: May 24, 2012
10. Place of Interview: Hotel Tibet, Mcleod Ganj, Dharamsala, Himachal Pradesh, India
11. Length of Interview: 1 hr 48 min
12. Interviewer: Rebecca Novick
13. Interpreter: Thupten Kelsang Dakpa
14. Videographer: Pema Tashi
15. Translator: Tenzin Yangchen

Biographical Information:

Tenzin Phuntsok is from Lhozong in Kham Province. She was 12-year old when the Chinese first appeared in her village. On that day she was directed by the elderly women of the village to go out and wave a white flag as an act of surrender. Six of her family members were imprisoned by the Chinese because her sister's husband joined the resistance fighters. The Chinese sent Tenzin Phuntsok to do road construction, but she was unable to perform well and was sent back to the village.

Tenzin Phuntsok describes how the Chinese conducted *thamzing* 'struggle sessions' and the different methods applied to torture the Tibetans. Tenzin Phuntsok's family was labeled as counter revolutionaries and she speaks vividly about the ordeal her father, brother, maternal uncle and others endured in prison.

Tenzin Phuntsok travelled to Lhasa to search for her maternal uncle, a reincarnate lama who was sentenced to 30 years in prison. He advised her to stay in Lhasa because there was slightly more freedom to practice religion there than in Kham. She secretly became a nun at the age of 34 and lived in Lhasa for 31 years. She speaks of her pilgrimage to Mount Kailash from where began her escape to India with the sole intention of seeing His Holiness the Dalai Lama.

Topics Discussed:

Kham, first appearance of Chinese, destruction of monasteries, life under Chinese rule, oppression under Chinese, *thamzing*, imprisonment, forced labor, brutality/torture, escape experiences.

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Interview #72D

Interviewee: Tenzin Phuntsok

Age: 70, Sex: Female

Interviewer: Rebecca Novick

Interview Date: May 24, 2012

Question: *Choe-la* 'respectful term for nun,' can you tell us your name?

00:00:13

Interviewee #72D: Tenzin Phuntsok.

Q: Where are you from Tibet?

#72D: Lhazong.

Q: Lhazong?

#72D: Yes, Lhazong.

Q: Kham?

#72D: Yes.

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.

#72D: [Nods]

Q: Your memories are going to help us to document the true history, culture and beliefs of the Tibetan people.

#72D: [I] will talk about all that I can remember.

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

00:01:18

#72D: Yes, yes. It is safe here when one has arrived in a free country, thanks to the blessings of His Holiness the Dalai Lama.

Q: Thank you very much.

#72D: [Nods]

Q: If you want to take a break at any time in the interview just let us know, okay?

#72D: Okay.

Q: If there's any question you'd rather not answer, that's fine.

#72D: Okay.

Q: *Choe-la*, if this interview was shown in Tibet, China, anywhere else in the world, would it be a problem for you?

#72D: [My] name is changed and [I] do not think they will recognize the face since [the face] looks different at young and old ages. It would not be recognized, right?

Q: Right.

#72D: [I] do not think it will be recognized, and even if it is that is fine. I have experienced and seen all the sufferings. It makes no difference.

Q: Thank you very much. Thank you for coming today.

#72D: Thank you.

Q: *Choe-la*, I'd like to start by asking you a little bit about your family background.

00:02:45

#72D: Okay. Initially...should I speak about the coming of the Chinese that [I] told you earlier? [I] was 12 years old then. Is that okay?

Q: Please continue.

#72D: I do not know much about the early parts. I did not suffer as a little child thanks to [my] parents. I was 12 years old when the Chinese appeared. The Chinese put six of my family members in jail. [My] older sister's husband went here [to India]. When I was 12 years old...

Q: Where did your older sister's husband go?

#72D: To join the army along with Andrug Gonpo of Lithang. [He] joined the army, the Tensung Magmi [later called *Chushi Gangdrug* Defend Tibet Volunteer Force] with Andrug Gonpo. My older sister's permission was sought, "Is it okay for your husband to join the Tensung Magmi? [He] will be sent back later." Older sister replied, "It is okay since it is for the cause of the Buddha dharma." And the husband agreed to go and left. People remarked that 300 cavalrymen went to escort His Holiness the Dalai Lama [to India].

Q: Three hundred Kusung Magmi [Dalai Lama's Security Army]?

00:04:10

#72D: [I] heard in Kham that 300 cavalry [escorted His Holiness]. I heard like that but was not a witness to it. [My] older sister's husband joined it. Therefore, the Chinese imprisoned six members: my father, older brother, a *geshe* 'monk with Buddhist philosophy degree,' an *umze* 'monastic chant leader' and two maternal uncles who were district administrators.

Q: Six family members?

#72D: Yes, six family members jailed.

Q: Were there two district administrators in your family?

#72D: Yes, there were two district administrators.

Q: Your father was a headman?

#72D: [He] was a headman long ago.

Q: How old were you when you became a nun?

#72D: [I] was around 26 years old when I became a nun.

Q: Twenty-six?

#72D: Yes, [I] must have been around 26.

Q: Can you say the name of the nearest monastery?

00:06:24

#72D: Zethok Gonpa.

Q: Zethok Gonpa?

#72D: Yes, Zethok Gonpa. We [the nuns] did not have a monastery. Each of us secretly made the hair offering to a lama and lived normally. One could not wear monks' robes and practice the dharma. One was not allowed to even chant the *mani* 'mantra of Avalokiteshvara' "Hail the jewel in the lotus." One could not carry a rosary.

Q: When the Chinese arrived?

#72D: Yes, by the Chinese. While chanting the *mani*, one had to hide the rosary like this [indicates rosary under clothes].

[Addressing interpreter] Please say that there was no monastery. One must give correct information, right?

Q: When was the monastery destroyed?

00:07:04

#72D: They [the Chinese] destroyed the monastery and built a wooden one. It was a place for the Chinese to live. In general there were no monasteries because we did not have religious freedom. There was no religious freedom.

Q: How old were you when the monastery was destroyed?

#72D: I was around 13 years old when the monastery was destroyed.

Q: Was it a very active *gonpa* 'monastery' before the Chinese destroyed it? How many monks were there?

#72D: We held it [Zethok Monastery] in very high esteem.

Q: How many monks were there?

#72D: There must have been many monks then, perhaps 4,000-5,000, though I do not know much.

Q: 4,000-5,000?

#72D: Yes, perhaps there were that many.

Q: 4,000?

#72D: Yes, say about 3,000-4,000. Long ago it was the main monastery where people worshipped and *cham* 'religious dance performance by monks' used to be performed.

Q: What lineage is it?

00:08:23

#72D: Kagyu.

Q: Did you used to visit the *gonpa* when you were a young girl?

#72D: [I] have been to the monastery to make offerings.

Q: When [you] were small?

#72D: Yes, [I] have been to make offerings when [I was] small and also to view the *cham* that used to be performed long ago.

Q: Were *cham* performed there?

#72D: I have not performed *cham*.

Q: Was it performed there?

#72D: Yes, *cham* used to be performed [by monks] in *cham* costumes. I have been to see it once and then the Chinese appeared.

[Interviewer to interpreter]: Zethok. How does she pronounce it?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: Zethok.

[Interviewer to interpreter]: What's this word? How do you pronounce it?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: *Gonpa*.

Interviewer: Oh, that's just mean *gonpa* without a *pa*. Zethok. Okay.

Q: Do you remember...Did you witness the *gonpa* being destroyed? Were you there?

00:09:42

#72D: I would not be allowed there when it was being destroyed. I was deployed to the road construction site. [I] went where a motor road was being constructed for more than a year. There was nothing left of the monastery except a little part of a wall. The whole thing was demolished.

Q: Were you at work when the monastery was being destroyed?

#72D: [I] was at work at the road construction site.

Q: [Were you] sent by the Chinese?

#72D: Yes, the Chinese sent [me] at the age of 12.

Q: When did you first see the presence of the Chinese in your village?

00:10:36

#72D: I was 12 years old when I first saw the Chinese. [I] had never seen [them] before that. The Chinese appeared when [I] was 12 years old and [I] felt panic stricken. It was said that to surrender [I] must hold a long stick with a piece of wool in place of a *khata* 'ceremonial scarf' and wave it like this [waves right arm above head]. The village filled with Chinese. Later when my father and older brother failed in their attempt to escape, they were imprisoned. And then one was consigned to a life of suffering once imprisoned.

Q: Who told you to wave the *khata*?

#72D: The Chinese appointed leaders from among the poorest of the poor. [They] made plans and ordered certain families to be subjected to *thamzing* 'struggle sessions.'

Q: When the Chinese first arrived, [you waved a piece of] sheepskin...

#72D: Sheep's wool.

Q: Sheep's wool?

#72D: Yes.

Q: Who asked [you] to do it?

00:12:23

#72D: The aged mothers of the families told me that [we] should surrender. They said, "You are a small child. We dare not emerge. You are small. Keep waving the stick." So I waved the stick thinking, "I will be killed." My older brother and others were not to be seen then. I kept waving like this [waves right hand above head] and then the Chinese arrived.

Q: So the elderly ladies told you, "You should go and wave the *khata*." Why did they think this was a good idea?

#72D: If this were not done, all the people in the village would be captured. One had to surrender. Surrender. There were only four members left in my family: mother, older sister, the younger one and me. Six members were already in prison. The *geshe* and the *umze* were arrested from the monastery while the older brother and Father failed in [their] attempt to escape to India and was captured. The two district administrators were arrested in the county and put to *thamzing* there. [They] were beaten.

People were desperate and wondered how to surrender and feared being shot dead by the Chinese. It was said that all the people in the village would be killed. I volunteered to wave a *khata* and thought it better to surrender because it would be terrible if all the people of the village were killed. Hence, I waved a piece of wool and kept waving it like this [waves right hand high above head]. I waved as I wept. [I] cannot forget it.

Q: Were there a lot of people doing this also with you?

00:15:16

#72D: It was only I from the many families in the village. When the Chinese fired shots in our village, one could hear the sound of bullets whizzing by. The bullets fell to the ground spraying dust. Everybody kept inside [their] homes. It was only I that emerged from the door and standing near a wall, kept waving the stick like this [raises right hand].

Q: The Chinese were attacking your village, is that right?

#72D: Right, [they] came to attack and kill everyone. [They] fired shots and either arrested or killed everyone.

[Interviewer to interpreter]: And just to confirm she was 12? Can you confirm that?

#72D: [I] was 12.

Q: The reason that you were waving this white *khata* was because you were very frightened and you thought if you did this they wouldn't hurt you?

#72D: I thought [the Chinese] would not kill [me] and hoped that the people of the village would be saved. My mother cried, "Do not wave the wool or you will be killed!" I thought if everybody did not surrender... There was a huge commotion and [I] kept waving it saying, "Let me be killed." My father and the others were gone but none knew that [they] had been captured by the Chinese. [I] hoped that with the blessing of the gods everyone would be saved that day. I was crying as I waved. Then a Chinese arrived and told [me] to stop waving. [He] was armed with a gun and bullets...

Q: Did the firing stop when [you] did that?

00:17:39

#72D: It stopped and they [the Chinese] came to our village. They occupied the district administrator's house. Oxen were driven here and there to transport the army's provision. My older sister was forced to transport supplies and I was taken to construct roads at the age of 12. And then from the age of 14, 15... I have seen every kind of incredible suffering. [Begins to cry.]

Q: *Choe-la*, when you waved the *khata*, were you standing on the road? Where were you and where were the Chinese who were attacking the village?

#72D: No, no, not on the road. I was waving right near the wall of my house, close to the door. [I] waved like this [raises right hand above] and did not dare go out. Nobody dare go out.

Q: After the firing stopped, what happened then?

#72D: After [the firing] stopped, [they] came and the village filled with Chinese. The entire place was filled with Chinese soldiers. Then started to talk...

Q: How many were there approximately?

00:20:20

#72D: Oh my, one would not be able to take a count! [Swears] A great number of soldiers had arrived.

Q: And then what happened?

#72D: Then [the Chinese] questioned, "How many family members do [you] have?" They held meetings and asked, "How many family members do [you] have? Where have the family members gone? Where is the children's father?" [They] made such inquiries.

Q: Were they also questioning you?

#72D: I was small and was not asked questions. My mother told me, “If the Chinese ask questions, you are not in a position to explain anything. Do not say anything. The sky has hit the earth. We are the earth and the Chinese are the sky. The sky has hit the earth. You will not be able to explain, so do not say anything. I will do all the answering.”

Then the Chinese questioned my mother, “Where is the children’s father?” Mother said, “The children’s father has fled because the Chinese are very well-known [notorious].” Mother explained it like that. Later I was questioned, “Have you ever faced *dhugnyung munyong* ‘suffering’ in the past?”

Q: What’s *dhugnyung munyong*?

00:22:47

#72D: I was asked if Tibetan people had caused me suffering, meaning if I had suffered during the old society. The Chinese asked that. I replied, “[I] have not suffered during the old society. I have not seen suffering because I was small then. I am seeing suffering now.”

I spoke in that way because I was not aware. I said, “I am seeing suffering now but not in the past.” My mother said, “Compared to the great lamas, we are nothing but worms in the grass and woods.” My mother was extremely brave. Later [she] came to know that father and all the others were imprisoned in Chamdo.

Q: Taken to prison in Chamdo?

#72D: Yes, my father and older brother were taken to Chamdo. The maternal uncles who were district administrators were subjected to *thamzing* in our [village]. Oh God, [they] were assaulted to such a great extent. [Cries]

Q: Did you witness it?

#72D: [I] did.

Q: How were the ordinary people responding to the *thamzing* of the *zongpons* ‘district administrators’?

[Interpreter interprets questions as] Where did the *thamzing* take place?

#72D: The *thamzing* was carried out in our very village.

Q: How did the people react to it?

00:25:23

#72D: The Chinese appointed the poorest of the poor as leaders and gave them money. Paying out money [the Chinese] called the poorest ones, “Come, you are a *tsukdang* and you a *dhudang*.” [They] were chosen and appointed as leaders saying, “Berate these people.

[They] have caused you suffering in the past.” They [the Chinese] were teaching not good but bad things. Then beatings took place. The hair from the head of a boy was pulled out.

Q: Hair pulled out?

#72D: All the hair was pulled out and [his head] exposed. There were blisters everywhere [touches face] and the face became unrecognizable. The joints on the hands [indicates fingers] were dislocated. Oh God, [I] have seen suffering. My maternal aunt’s son was a monk. Gravel was laid and he was forced to kneel on it. The clothes were torn apart and [he] was rendered naked and then assaulted. The poorest of the poor did the thrashing because the Chinese gave money [to them]. Except for death, there is no suffering that [I] have not undergone. [Weeps]

[Interpreter to interviewee]: It’s okay. [We]’ll stop for a while.

#72D: Okay.

[Discontinuity in video]

00:26:51

[Translation by interpreter of statement made during break]: I have seen a lot of suffering in Tibet. The thing is like the Chinese were supposed to...They had supposedly come to liberate us and make us happier, but I have seen the true face of the Chinese and how they took all this happiness from us. For instance, we could not practice whatever religion that we practiced. We could not show our rosary beads. We could not offer butter lamps. We could not keep His Holiness’ pictures. And not only that, these Chinese would stomp on his face in the picture and my mother would really try to stop them, “At least take it away but do not stomp on his face.” but they would not listen.

[Interviewer to interpreter]: This is when she’s a little girl?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: Yes.

[Interviewer to interpreter]: Okay, and from the *thamzing*?

[Interpreter interprets interviewee’s account from 00:25:23]

Q: *Choe-la*, you were telling us about the *thamzing*. What happened then? What happened after that?

00:29:24

#72D: There was a great deal of *thamzing* that took place. [I] have undergone so much suffering. Really [I] have undergone so much suffering that dwelling over it or speaking about it might render one mad. If one were to talk [clarify], their territory is China. [The Chinese] claim that the old society caused suffering but in reality, their decree is worse. They pulled out hair, assaulted and tore off clothes into bits. There were thrashings, shackling of hands and legs and imprisonment. During a physical assault session, gravel

was laid under the knees and bamboo pierced between the fingernails [indicates between finger and fingernails]. The Chinese did various things, but one was not allowed to talk about. Even though we had witnessed it, one was not allowed to talk about it.

Q: [You] could not ask that such things not be done?

#72D: Never mind asking that such things not be done, one could not even talk about it! Even though we had witnessed it, you pretended you did not. Moreover [the Chinese] said, “[We] will have you executed” doing like this with the hand [raises right hand in a fist]. “[You] must be executed. [You] are a counter revolutionary.” The Chinese said [we] were counter revolutionaries.

Take our [family] for instance. I was told, “You are a counter revolutionary. You prefer the Dalai Lama. [You] like the Dalai Lama. You consider the Chinese as enemies.” [They] said this of my family. [They] said this to our family. “In comparison to animals, you are like the black goats. [You] are totally black. In comparison to birds, [you] are black like the ravens.”

Q: Like ravens?

00:31:13

#72D: Yes. “You are like ravens. You oppose the Chinese. [You] are counter revolutionaries.” They said of His Holiness the Dalai Lama. “The Dalai clique is supporting your entire family.” I was chided, harassed and stoned. [I] would be hit with stones [points to the sides of head] from every direction. The others were in prison while my older sister and I were subjected to such sufferings. It was the same for the others. It was like that for everybody.

Q: *Choe-la*, what happened in your life later? Moving on from the *thamzing*, what happened to you in your life? Did you go to school?

#72D: No, [I] did not. There were no schools to attend. I have never been to school. Father was released seven years later on account of old age.

Q: After seven years, right?

#72D: Father was in jail for seven years and older brother for perhaps around 20 years.

Q: Twenty years?

00:33:22

#72D: Yes. Older brother was very sickly when released. When [he] coughed the phlegm was bloody.

Q: Old brother?

#72D: Yes, the phlegm was bloody. [He] said he was beaten like this [indicates beating motion] with guns while in Chamdo. [He] said the Chinese assaulted [him] in Chamdo.

Q: [Beaten] with a gun, right?

#72D: Yes, beaten with a gun. I was taken to work on road construction when I was 12 years old. One day I took *tsampa* ‘flour made from roasted barley’ and butter for father and older brother but the soldiers did not allow [me]. I looked around...I had a few girls with me and the Chinese would not allowed [us] in.

Q: Into the prison?

00:34:05

#72D: Yes, I was not allowed in. So I climbed atop a wall. The prisoners were within the compound and I climbed atop the wall with the package.

Q: Did [you] climb up?

#72D: Yes, an interpreter that was present told me to climb up. As I climbed up, the soldiers moved the triggers of their guns to scare me. When they did that, I exclaimed ‘His Holiness the Dalai Lama’ and ducked. I exclaimed “His Holiness the Dalai Lama” and bend low. My older brother shouted from the prison, “Do not be scared. Do not be scared. There is no need to get scared. [They] will not shoot. [You] will not be killed. We have seen all the suffering. You will not be killed.” [Cries]

Q: *Choe-la*, you said you were sent on road construction, how old were you when you were sent to work on the road?

#72D: [I] was sent to work on road construction at the age of 12. I was not able to clear much earth. Then the Chinese told me that I should find a replacement because I was not able to do much work as a 12 year old. I could only pull the rope on the spade a little but not much with a hoe at the age of 12. So I returned home at the age of 13, back home.

Q: Were [you] sent back?

00:37:05

#72D: Yes, [I] returned home. However, it was said that somebody must be sent as replacement. Hence, we requested a relative to go.

Q: Who was the relative?

#72D: The relative was an old man. We requested him to go and provided [him] with food, clothes and everything. [We] requested him to go and [he] complied. So I was home at age 13, 14 and 15, during which time my older sister went to deliver messages. Later we could not venture out of our door but were always indoors. [We] always stayed indoors.

“The Dalai Lama will send you a bridegroom soon. [He] will contact you. When is the Dalai Lama taking you away?” I have been chided like this numerous times. My mother would say, “Do not say anything. Whatever [they] may say, remain silent. It is enough to keep your faith in His Holiness the Dalai Lama within your heart.” Being children, we were not assaulted. However, [I] have suffered immense misery in my heart. [Cries]

Q: What happened when you were 15?

[Discontinuity in video]

[Translation by interpreter of statement missing from video]: Like I said, when I was 34 I came to Lhasa and at that time there was People’s Congress being put on. The Chinese were very greedy and took all our grains. They didn’t bring anything for themselves from China. They made us work on the farms and took all the first... We couldn’t eat the first grains, the first harvest, the first grains. It’s only the last ones, which were left that we were able to eat. They almost took everything. So when I was 34 I told them that I was sick and I needed medicines, so I would have to go to Lhasa. The *geshe* in my family, he was my mother’s brother—not the eldest but mid-level brother. He was sent to around 30 years in prison. So he was also in a prison in Lhasa.

00:39:33

#72D: It is maternal uncle. [He] must be called *ashang* ‘maternal uncle.’

Q: [Your] father’s relative?

#72D: Mother’s relative.

Q: Mother’s relative.

#72D: Related to mother.

Q: Was he older or younger to mother?

#72D: [He] was among the middle. Mother had many siblings. There were many brothers. [He] was the middle maternal uncle.

Q: Later did people say where [he] was?

00:40:00

#72D: I had to go to the prisoners to seek information.

Q: Could one enter the prison?

#72D: One could not enter the prison. As you can see from documentaries, behind the Dapshi Lhamo...there are different types of prisons. The most serious offenders were imprisoned in Dapshi Lhamo and based on the magnitude of crimes, [the prisoners] were interned in other prisons. The prisoners must work. They could not eat and remain idle.

Wearing fetters on their hands and feet, they walked [with the sound of] *clang, clang* and split boulders and broke them.

Q: Making bricks?

#72D: Yes, making bricks and transporting them. I went twice to inquire about the holy Geshe Rinpoche of Pasho. [I] asked where he was and if anyone had seen [him]. Someone asked, “What is Geshe Rinpoche to you?” “He is called Geshe Sherap Gyamtso and is my *shashang* ‘maternal uncle’,” I replied. Here one would say *ashang* [for maternal uncle]. “Poor thing. He is a very holy lama but is in for a lifetime. He is in prison for a lifetime and has been subjected to a lot of suffering. [He] is sentenced to life, must remain in jail for life.”

After making inquiries for two days, I was directed to Dhothephu. The next day [I] went to Dhothephu. At Dhothephu [I] saw numerous aged prisoners holding spades. [They] had been made to dig earth to prepare a vegetable patch. I went there where an old man came to answer nature’s call. I asked him, “Where is the Geshe of Pasho, the Geshe Rinpoche?” “Who are you?” [he] asked. “I came from Kham. The Geshe is my maternal uncle,” I replied. “Poor thing, when did [you] arrive?” [he] asked. “It has been almost a month since I arrived and could not locate [maternal uncle],” I replied. “Poor thing, you are [his] niece,” [he] remarked.

Q: Was [he] a *geshe*?

00:42:13

#72D: He said that and added, “There, he is the one holding the spade. [I] will call the prison leader.” The old man was a prisoner.

Q: A prisoner?

#72D: Yes, [he] was a prisoner. He said, “You sit near the tree here. I will speak to the prison leader and request your maternal uncle be brought here.” I replied in the affirmative and sat there. And then my maternal uncle came. I wept and could not speak because of anguish. [Cries] I uttered “Shashang” and cried. *Shashang* asked, “When did you arrive?” I replied that it was a month since I arrived. [He] asked, “Is mother alive?” [She] was his older sister. I replied, “Mother still survives. Mother, father and all family members are alive.” “Why are you here,” [he] asked. “I have come to Lhasa to seek medical treatment,” [I] replied. At that time the Chinese did not allow [people] to see the Jowo ‘statue of Buddha Sakyamuni.’ The [temple] door was closed and no one was allowed inside. There was a lot of destruction in Lhasa.

The landlord had told me, “You are very fortunate. Tomorrow for the first time the door to the Jowo is being opened. [It] will be opened tomorrow. Would you be able to go there?” [I] had travelled [a long way] in a vehicle. [I] told him that I could. The door was not opened the next day but [I] was able to view [the Jowo] the following day.

Later when I went to see maternal uncle, he said, “Did you face suffering?” I wept and told Shashang, “[We] did and you too must have suffered.” Earlier Shashang had to be helped up by two *solpon* ‘private steward who arranges food for a grand lama’—one here and one here [indicates being held under arms]. He was known as a *geshe* but actually was a very holy *tulku* ‘reincarnate lama.’ The prisoners remarked that he possessed great miraculous power. [He] was one with great miraculous power.

00:44:10

“Shashang, I went to seek information [about you] for two days from the prisoners and was told that you removed the fetters from [your] hands and feet and exited from the locked door for 4-5 days and then returned to the prison and wore the fetters back. Therefore, please do not remain in the prison for life.” And I wept. [He] asked, “Has your father been released?” “Father was released after seven years. Older Brother has also been released but he was sickly and passed away. His phlegm was all bloody and he has passed away,” [I] answered.

He too cried and said, “My nephew has had to undergo every kind of suffering. That is due to lack of virtuous karma. It must be in [our] destiny. The sky has hit the ground. However, do not grieve. Do not worry. Is not His Holiness the Dalai Lama, who is everything to us, living in this world? [He] has had to escape to India and we are nothing [compared to His Holiness],” said my *shashang*. I told him that mother told me the same thing, “Is His Holiness the Dalai Lama not living? Are not all the holy lamas living? We are nothing [compared to them].” However, I told Shashang that there was great anguish in my heart, as I had seen a lot of suffering. [Cries]

The sleeping area of [the prisoners] was made of cement and there were around 27-28 prisoners in a prison.

Q: Twenty-seven people?

#72D: Yes. The beds were made of cement.

Q: Stones?

#72D: Yes, [the prisoners] had to sleep on the stones. Beds were made of something like cement or tar. There was one bed here and one there [points to different directions of room]. My *shashang* said, “We are similar to a thorn in the eye for the Chinese. We are the ones that the Chinese do not like. [You] must not grieve or worry because it is pointless. Is not His Holiness the Dalai Lama, who is our everything, living? We are nothing [compared to him].” He shed tears though not much when I wept.

Q: People from Kham were in this prison?

#72D: There were other prisoners that were very high lamas, lamas from Shigatse and Kham. My *shashang* said, “This is a lama from Shigatse. This is a lama from Lhasa. This lama is from another region. [They] were the highest of lamas. Except for one poor [man] the rest were lamas and *geshe* in the prison.

Q: Was there one poor man?

00:49:54

#72D: Yes, one hailed from a poor family.

Q: What's the name of the prison?

#72D: There were two types in Dhothephu prison.

Q: When you went to Lhasa, had Mao already died?

00:53:15

#72D: [He] was dead. I left [for Lhasa] after [he] died.

Q: You went to visit this prison and you saw your uncle. What happened then?

#72D: I stayed three months in Lhasa after meeting Shashang. Then Shashang told me after three months, "Go back home to Kham. Go back home while your parents are alive. Tell [your] mother that I am alive. Do not be anxious. The Chinese are causing suffering to everybody. For example, in the prison in Chamdo, if there were 100 prisoners tonight, except for around 10, everyone was dead from starvation by the next morning. One had to avoid walking on corpses as the dead lay here and there. The prisoners died from starvation. Many tens of thousands of people died. I did not die due to the grace of God. I did not die. Since I could not walk, the Chinese performed a surgery and removed two *gyama* 'half kilogram' of fat." Shashang himself told me about it.

Q: Were the intestines removed?

#72D: Fats. Shashang was told, "You are unable to move." and a surgery performed in Chamdo wherein two *gyama* of fat was removed.

Q: Stones?

#72D: Fat. It seems there was fat in the stomach.

Q: Fat?

00:55:03

#72D: Yes, all the fat was removed and then sutured. [Shashang] told me, "The Chinese operated upon me against my wishes. One does not have right over one's body. Take for instance the fundamental [right]—one does not have the basic right over one's body. The Chinese have violated this. [They] told me, "You are unable to move. One must work for one's existence. Who will feed you?" and operated upon me. Two *gyama* of fat was removed from the stomach. I could move after the two *gyama* of fat was removed." I wept as Shashang told me this.

Shashang said, “Do not grieve. There is no one who does not have problems. Since the appearance of the Chinese, since the Chinese appeared in Tibet, except for a few poor people, everyone else has undergone suffering. There are many like us. Countless numbers of prisoners have died from starvation.” Thus Shashang advised me.

Q: Was this done to many people?

00:56:13

#72D: No, it was done to Shashang alone, to Shashang alone. As for death from starvation in the prisons, if there were 100 prisoners here today, the next day only 10 survived. The rest died from starvation. [Joins palms in reverence and prays to His Holiness the Dalai Lama].

Q: Are you okay to carry on the interview? Do you feel all right?

#72D: It is okay to talk a little bit about the suffering in my heart because this is a free country.

Q: What did you do then?

#72D: [Looks toward right] Perhaps my colleague has arrived. Somebody knocked on the door. Who could it be?

Q: Could you please proceed? Did you then go to Kham?

#72D: Then I went to Kham from Lhasa. [I] returned after staying for only three months. My *shashang* told me, “Go back to Kham. Go back to [your] parents. Do not grieve. Everybody is treated the same. The Chinese are attacking the world. [They] are doing it to all the Tibetans in the world. It is not just us. The most important is that had His Holiness the Dalai Lama not left, [he] would have been treated the same. He could leave because of miraculous power. Suffering still continues but do not worry. Tell mother not to grieve. Stand on your feet and chant *mani* in secret. Chant *mani* well and recite the *dolma* ‘praises to the 21 Tara.’ Do not miss your prayers. Go back. After you return, stay for only one year.”

Q: Yes?

00:59:39

#72D: Shashang told me, “Remain for only one year in Kham.”

Q: Why?

#72D: Shashang told me to remain only a year in Kham. He said, “You have suffered a lot since the age of 12. If you live in Lhasa, there is no one to reprimand you. You can offer prostrations in front of the Jowo in the Tsuglakhang ‘Central Cathedral.’ Try to practice the dharma. Though there is supposed to be religious freedom but it is not so in practice, so use the rosary and chant the *mani* in secret. My younger sister’s family will take care of

you. Do not have attachment to wealth.” I said, “Shashang, I do not have any attachment to wealth. Wealth is not permanent.” What is permanent about wealth? My mother used to say, “What is the use of wealth? Wealth is not beneficial.”

The important charge [the Chinese] accused [us] was that we owned guns, guns to shoot as well as swords. One was forced to listen. Otherwise, when older brother and father fled, [they] took the guns and swords with them on [their] flight to India. “Bring the swords and guns that you possess. You have guns in your house.”

Q: Did the Chinese say that?

#72D: Yes, the Chinese said, “You possess guns and swords of this size [gestures off camera]. Bring them.” That was one charge we were chided for. Another was, “Speak about [your] connection with those in India.” [Father and older brother] were already in prison. “Who arrived from India?” [The Chinese] were seeking out spies. It was droned on and on.

01:01:22

I returned to Kham and stayed a year there. Then my mother passed away.

Q: Did mother pass away?

#72D: Yes, and then mother passed away. Mother used to cry for Shashang. I told her, “Mother, do not cry. Shashang says that the sky has hit the earth and Tibet has no authority. The Chinese have oppressed it. Do not cry.” And then I...

Q: Mother passed away a year later?

#72D: Mother passed away.

Q: How did mother die? Was [she] sick?

#72D: Mother became sick. She had suffered a great deal and was filled with anxiety. She had said, “Today I feel a little sick. [I] do not feel well. Perhaps it is a cold. What could it be? [I] feel a little sick.” Then mother passed away. [She] was ill for only three days.

Q: And then?

#72D: Mother was ill for only three days and passed away. Mother was ill for only three days. And then it was eight months since mother’s passing away. After eight months I told father, “Let us go to Lhasa. Shashang has told me to come to Lhasa. Let both of us go to Shashang.” So eight months after mother passed away, I took along father to Lhasa.

01:02:51

At that time one could at last view inside of the Jokhang. All the statues were not present except the Jowo Yeshe Norbu. [We] saw the holy sites of Lhasa. There was not much to see of the Potala, as most of it was destroyed. The [statues of] deities in the temples had missing

hands and other parts. [They] were broken. Father and I stayed for around three months in Lhasa.

Q: For three months, right?

#72D: Father was with [me] for three months. Then father said, “I want to go back. It is a year since mother’s passing away. I want to return.” My older and younger sisters were there [in Kham]. [Father] wanted to go back. Father met Shashang. At that time Shashang...

Q: Had [he] been released from prison?

#72D: It was a month since [his] release from prison. It was a month since Shashang’s release from prison. It was a month.

Q: One month.

#72D: Yes, it had been a month. Shashang was at Nethang Dolma Lhakhang.

Q: Where?

01:04:00

#72D: At Nethang Dolma Lhakhang. Nethang Dolma Lhakhang is a very holy pilgrim site located a little further away from Lhasa.

Q: Nethang Dolma Lhakhang?

#72D: Yes, it is called Dolma Lhakhang, Nethang Dolma Lhakhang, which is very holy. Shashang was living there. Shashang knew [of our arrival in Lhasa]. The day after reaching [Lhasa], I took father to circumambulate the Bakor. Shashang came circumambulating anti clock-wise. Shashang knew about us. I cried, “Shashang.”

Q: Did you meet while circumambulating the Bakor?

#72D: Yes, [we] met while circumambulating the Bakor. I cried, “Shashang.” Shashang asked, “Is this father?” [I replied], “Yes.” [He] asked, “How are you?” Father replied, “[I] am well.” “Poor thing. [You] have suffered so much. However, do not talk about it. I knew you had arrived,” Shashang said. I asked, “Shashang, how did you know?” [He replied,] “[I] knew as the landlord knew.” There was no way the landlord would know. He had prophesied. [He] could foresee such thing.

Q: It was prophesied?

01:05:22

#72D: Yes, it was foreseen. Shashang could foresee and had come in search of us. “[I] came to look for you,” [he] said. I relayed, “Mother has passed away.” He said, “Let us not talk here. I have an urgent work in Ngorik Monastery. Someone has passed away there and I

need to go there. After your circumambulation of the Bakor tomorrow, come to my landlord's place at around 12 o'clock." He was living at the place of a person from his village. I answered, "Yes." Shashang told father that it was a month since his release. "It has been a month since I was released."

Father told him that mother had passed away, "It is eight months since your older sister passed away." "Yes, yes, I knew about it," he said. [He] had foreseen it. "I knew it. It is okay; she will be able to find her way. She will find her way." Father and I went to the Bakor and made offerings everywhere. We had brought food supplies from Kham. What belongings would Shashang have after his release? [He] had nothing to give [us] in terms of food and clothing. Shashang possessed nothing since it was just a month since the release. "It is just a month after [my] release and I have nothing much to give you," [he] said. "[We] need nothing. Just a few blessed pills will do. If [you] have a few blessed pills, that is enough," [I] said.

At the rented place, he asked, "What blessed pills do you want? Do [you] want a picture of His Holiness the Dalai Lama?" "Yes, [I] do," [I] replied. We had one in our house long ago. My older sister and the others had been able to see His Holiness during the time of the old society. It was only I and my younger sister who had not. All our other family members had seen His Holiness the Dalai Lama long ago after travelling to Lhasa. "I do have a picture of His Holiness but I want one more," I said. He gave me that together with some blessed pills saying, "I have been able to interact a little with [someone in] India and have received some blessed pills." Shashang said [he] was able to interact [with people] here.

Q: Did the blessed pills come from India?

01:07:59

#72D: Yes. [He] had received blessed pills and also a picture of His Holiness the Dalai Lama. [He] gave a picture of His Holiness of this size [makes a size of 3 inches with thumb and forefinger] and a lot of blessed pills. I sent them home through Father who returned. Shashang told me to remain and since then [I] lived in Lhasa.

01:12:34

Q: And then what happened?

#72D: And then I lived in Lhasa. I lived in Lhasa for 31 years.

Q: Until the age of 33?

#72D: Thirty-one.

Q: Thirty-four?

#72D: Thirty-one. [I] lived in Lhasa. [I] chanted *mani* in front of the Tsuglakhang in Lhasa.

[Looks towards right] Could that be my colleague? Perhaps [my] colleague is ready to leave.

Occasionally [I] offered prostrations. One must have enough to eat and *tsampa* was sent from Kham through vehicles. An express vehicle took seven days.

Q: Did [it] reach in a week from Kham?

#72D: A vehicle took between seven and eight days to reach Lhasa from Kham. [I] was sent *tsampa* and other supplies from there.

Q: Were [they] sent from home?

01:13:25

#72D: Yes, from home. My older sister sent [supplies] to me from home. I remained in Lhasa. I practiced the dharma as by now all the torments had come to an end. Finally the sufferings vanished. Otherwise, oh my God, the amount of suffering I underwent for 12 years, between the ages of 12 and 24 is inexpressible. And there were many like me, right? [We] have seen so much suffering.

Earlier when I arrived at the Reception Centre here, [I] was told that one should speak about [the torments]. However, I was unable to speak and just wept. [I] was crying continuously and was unable to speak. Today is better. I could not then when [I] remembered the sufferings. [Cries]

Q: Was she a nun at this point already?

#72D: Then at age 34 I offered my hair to a holy lama. [I] requested the hair offering...

Q: What's the name of the lama?

#72D: Lama Kathok Rinpoche.

Q: Kathok Rinpoche?

#72D: Yes, [he] lived in Lhasa. Yes, Lama Kathok...

Q: Was [he] Kagyu?

#72D: Yes, Kathok Rinpoche belongs to the same sect as His Holiness the Karmapa.

Q: Was [he] Kagyu?

#72D: Yes, Kagyu. He accepted [my] hair offering and told me, "Continue to wear the *chupa* 'traditional dress.' Wear the *chupa* and a yellow like this [indicates shirt]. Wear only *chupa*. [You] should not wear anything red except for a little yellow." I lived in Lhasa in that way.

Q: Were you at a nunnery? Where were you living at this time?

01:15:53

#72D: [I] lived with [a family] that hailed from the same village. It was a poor family. The son of the poor family left to study in China. On completion of school he had joined the Chinese Army and then secured an office job.

Q: Working in a Chinese office?

#72D: Yes, [he] was working in a Chinese office. He had served there for many years. He was just four years younger to me.

Q: Four years younger than you?

#72D: The man was four years younger than me. He worked for the Chinese and I stayed at his place during my stay in Lhasa. I requested [from him] to rent me a room.

Q: Was his house empty?

#72D: It was an official house where he lived with [his] wife and children. I was given a separate room without rent.

Q: Did [he] hail from the same village?

#72D: Hailed from the same village.

Q: And then what happened?

[Interviewer to interpreter]: I think we can just move along. She's moving along with the chronology. If we...Otherwise, I think we'll be a very long time if we get into details. She seems to be fine to move on with what happened next.

Q: And then what happened after you'd become a nun?

#72D: I had become a nun by then.

Q: How long did you stay in Tibet after becoming a nun?

#72D: Thirty-one years, 30 plus one. Though there were no monasteries, one could circumambulate, chant *mani* and practice the dharma. One could use the rosary in Lhasa.

Q: Nothing was said?

#72D: It was better in Lhasa. [People] demanded religious freedom, which was why it was better. In the village there were no rosaries in sight. So I lived in Lhasa and Shashang helped me. After release from prison, Shashang lived for only four years, as [he] was

suffering from *dumbu* ‘rheumatism.’ [He] suffered from *dumbu* and knee pain from having slept on bare cement floors.

01:18:25

One day Shashang told me about his ailments, “You think I am alive. However, my body is gone.” I cried, “Shashang, please do not say that.” [He] said, “There is nothing to cry. One is born and has suffered incredibly. Now it is time to go and there is only one way left. Do not worry as I have made all preparations for my departure.” [I] think *shashang* had gotten in touch with His Holiness the Dalai Lama and made all preparations. [He] said, “I have made all preparations. There is no need to cry. I have offered the [images of] deities and everything that I own to the Drepung Monastery. I have also made contact with those in India. Do not cry. Continue to live in Lhasa and practice the dharma. Do not return to Kham. It is good in Lhasa as there is some religious freedom. [You] will not go hungry.” So in that way, I continued to live in Lhasa. After four years...I did not offer any pleas but continued to cry. When Shashang passed away...

Q: Did maternal uncle pass away four years later?

#72D: [He] passed away four years after release from prison. [He] lived only that long and passed away in four years. [He] could live for only four years after release from prison. [He] was many years in prison. It was imprisonment for life. [He] was given a life sentence.

There was an old man who came to inform me, “[Your] *shashang* has passed away. [He] has passed away.” I cried. “[Your] *shashang* mentioned that he has told you about it earlier.” “When Shashang said that I asked him not to say so and cried,” [I] said. “Poor thing, you do not know anything. However, there is no use appealing [to him] because we are five people who used to be together in prison and we approached [your] *shashang* and pleaded with him to live a little longer for the sake of the sentient beings. [We] pleaded with him not to leave.” He said that the five old men pleaded but Shashang had replied, “Do not talk stupid. What is there to plead with me? Is His Holiness the Dalai Lama not living? I am just an insect, an insect in the grass. I cannot live in this situation. Please do not be angry. When my time comes, how can you plead with me? How would I have the freedom?”

01:21:24

I cried when the old man told me this. [He] said, “One can appeal. One can make a plea to holy lamas [to live longer]. We lay people made a plea but in vain.” The old man was crying. “He has finished [fulfilled his wishes] at Drepung and in Lhasa and everywhere, so we should not worry. There is no use crying,” the old man advised me. [Cries] I replied, “At last when there is freedom, freedom to practice the dharma a little, [Shashang’s] life has come to an end. [He] suffered so much in [his] younger days.”

My mother used to say, “What we are suffering is minute. When the holiest of lamas have no freedom to live in Tibet, ours is nothing.” My mother used to tell me all the time. My mother would advise me, “Do not talk too much. There is no reason to talk to the Chinese.” How deeply she must have been suffering in her heart yet she did not speak about it.

Q: Maternal uncle passed away. Maternal uncle passed away after four years...

#72D: Yes, four years after being released from prison.

Q: After maternal uncle passed away, how long did you live in Lhasa?

#72D: Thirty-one.

Q: Thirty-one?

#72D: Yes, [I] lived 31 [years] in Lhasa.

Q: Did [you] live 31 years in Lhasa?

01:23:09

#72D: Yes, for 31 [years].

Q: And after that? Did [you] escape?

#72D: At the age of 64 I went to Mount Kailash. [I] stayed almost a month at Mount Kailash. Then [I] heard that there were people going to India. "How can I get to India?" There was a merchant whom I asked, "How can I reach India? Please help me." [He] replied in the affirmative and helped me. He found a guide. I paid 2,500 Chinese currencies.

Q: 2,500?

#72D: Yes, to the guide. I requested to be helped across and [he] did. There were 11 other people with me.

Q: Eleven people?

#72D: Yes, they were from Amdo, Kham Derge and everywhere.

Q: Were the 2,500 *dhayen* 'Chinese silver coins'?

#72D: What?

Q: Was the Chinese currency called *dhayen*?

#72D: [It] was Chinese currency.

Q: Was it *dhayen*?

#72D: [I] paid 2,500 Chinese currencies.

Q: Which route did the 11 people take?

01:24:21

#72D: [We] went to Porang from Mount Kailash and saw the Jowo ‘statue of Buddha Sakyamuni’ in Porang, made offerings and spent seven nights there. There was a merchant called Sonam whom [I] asked for help to go to India and he did. [We] walked for three nights...for 11 days and nights.

Q: Three nights and 11 days?

#72D: Yes. We walked for 11 days. One had to tie a rope and go across a *ding* ‘rope bridge.’ [We] paid 3,000 at the *ding*, 3,000 Chinese currency units. One had to cross the river on a metal wire; one person at a time and it was dreadful.

Q: Was it something like a bridge?

#72D: It was not a bridge. There was a metal [wire] and one was strapped with a rope into a wooden saddle. A metal wire like an electric cable was stretched across to the other bank of the river. One was tied with a rope like this [indicates being tied to the cable with something like a pulley] and pushed to the other end.

Q: Oh, there was water below.

01:25:35

#72D: Yes, there was water underneath. [We] paid 3,000 currency units.

Q: Each person?

#72D: Eleven of us paid 3,000. Then [we] arrived in Delhi. After journeying for 11 days and nights, [we] reached Delhi.

Q: Reached Delhi?

#72D: The guide brought us to Delhi but we had no knowledge. When I saw His Holiness the Dalai Lama’s pictures in Delhi [I] wept so much. [I] thought, “Is this not a dream?” [Becomes emotional] Then [we] were sent back to Nepal from Delhi and stayed a month there.

Q: Where were [you] sent?

#72D: Back to Nepal. [We] were sent back to Nepal. They paid the travelling expenses. The Tibetan Government gave us 3,000 *rupees* each.

Q: The Tibetan Government paid 3,000 India *rupees*?

01:26:32

#72D: Yes, and sent [us] to Nepal from Delhi. Each person was given 3,500 [*rupees*].

Q: 3,500?

#72D: Yes, and sent back. [I] was overjoyed thinking that due to the grace of His Holiness the Dalai Lama [I] had arrived in a free country. And I cried. [We] were a month and a week in Nepal.

Q: [You] stayed around a month, right?

#72D: A month and a week. When we were to leave, a nun was killed in Sha Khumbu.

Q: Yes?

#72D: Remember [the news report when] the Chinese fired and killed a nun in Sha Khumbu? [The incident] became well known and was witnessed by an Englishman. We were in Nepal then. Forty-one people [refugees] had arrived there. The Chinese killed a nun aged around 14 and another aged around 16. And also a man aged 25.

Q: [They] were killed on a snow-covered mountain.

01:27:30

#72D: [They] were killed in Sha Khumbu.

[Interpreter to interviewee]: Please wait as [I] have to translate.

Q: *Choe-la*, why did you decide to leave Lhasa after having lived there such a long time?

01:31:18

#72D: The reason being that though [I] was not hungry due to my hard work, for many years [I] wished that [I] could pray to His Holiness the Dalai Lama, see [his] face, receive empowerments and hear [his] voice. [I] always wished in [my] heart that [I] could see His Holiness. There is no freedom in Tibet. Observing the way the Chinese talk, they...mine and take away all the gold, silver and precious resources of Tibet to China. Even stones for the construction of houses and logs are transported to China. There is no freedom in Tibet, not even a semblance. There is no religious freedom. Tibetan people have no power. Though I do not have any other abilities, I prayed to and wished to see His Holiness the Dalai Lama at the time of my death.

I possessed a small amulet like the ones that are sold by the wayside here. [I] placed a picture of His Holiness the Dalai Lama within it and wore it here [indicates neck]. I believed that when I had this with me there would be no problems. It was said that if one did not succeed going over the mountain pass of Porang before 8 o'clock, Chinese soldiers would arrest and imprison you. I prayed to His Holiness the Dalai Lama. [We] left around 10 or 11 o'clock in the night after praying for deliverance to His Holiness. Due to his help, there was no problem along the way. To be honest I believe it is due to his help. [I] felt satisfied upon arriving here. I had the opportunity to speak whatever I wanted to His Holiness. I have succeeded at the time of my death after praying for many years.

01:33:19

I have faced great misery from the age of 12 to 24 in Kham in Tibet. It would take many days to describe in detail the extent of the misery, right? There is so much suffering in my heart. I am now in India, a free country thanks to His Holiness. To be honest, [I] feel so happy.

Q: *Choe-la*, when you were living in Lhasa, were you living openly as a nun in the later years?

#72D: [I] did not wear the monk's robes. [I] did not wear robes.

Q: In secret?

#72D: What?

Q: [You] did not reveal [yourself] as a nun outside?

#72D: [I] did not.

Q: How about the hair?

#72D: I cut my hair and wore a *chupa* 'traditional dress' but nothing red like these [points to robes].

Q: You couldn't wear the robes. What would happen if you wore the robes?

01:35:33

#72D: If one wore robes...There were people who demanded independence for Tibet. Since there was no religious freedom in Tibet, [people] raised slogans. The monks and nuns would be arrested.

Q: Were all arrested?

#72D: [They] were arrested. I did not have a place to stay in a nunnery nor did [I] wear robes at home. There is no need to be conspicuous. When you have faith in your heart for your root guru, you pray but dare not be conspicuous to the Chinese.

Q: Were you able to study Buddhism at all?

#72D: Of course not.

Q: [You] didn't?

#72D: There were none that studied Buddhism there. There were no monasteries where one could study Buddhism, except perhaps now. At that time the monks of Sera and Drepung Monasteries practiced the debates a little that [I] witnessed. When slogans were raised, "May His Holiness the Dalai Lama live for thousands of years" and "Independence for Tibet" every monk and nun in sight was apprehended. Old people flung rocks and paid

around 10 currency units to little children to throw rocks. [People] raised slogans seeking religious freedom. And then [they] were arrested. The Chinese arrested hosts of people.

Q: Are people in Tibet starting, the younger people... Would you say are they starting to lose faith in His Holiness the Dalai Lama?

01:37:59

#72D: In Tibet?

Q: Do you think the younger generation in Tibet is losing faith in His Holiness the Dalai Lama?

#72D: I feel like this in my heart. Those that have faith have no authority. All those that have faith do not obtain power from the Chinese, as they do not possess capabilities. Otherwise, [we] have faith that stems from the bottom of the hearts. However, there are some leaders who admire the Chinese, like Jampa Phuntsok and such. I feel sad when they criticize His Holiness the Dalai Lama. [They] are selling themselves to the Chinese and are unable to differentiate between white and black. There are many. There are many.

Q: [They] are like spies for the Chinese?

#72D: It is very sad when [they] follow the Chinese and criticize His Holiness the Dalai Lama and speak against Tibet. All the old people are forced to cry in unseen places. [The Chinese supporters] are known only as demons. The leaders that support the Chinese are secretly called as demons. "Yuck. Look, there is one that criticizes His Holiness the Dalai Lama not knowing that it is depleting his meritorious activities."

In general there was no freedom in Tibet except the right to work hard. There was the right to strive and to eat just enough to satiate, while the rest was for the government. The government did not take care of anyone, be it the prisons or schools or anywhere. [The people] had to support [the government.]

Q: *Choe-la*, I hope this wasn't too difficult for you. We really appreciate you coming and telling us your story.

01:40:19

#72D: That is okay. [Smiles]

Q: I just have to ask you one more time. If this interview was shown in Tibet, China or anywhere else, would it create a problem for you?

#72D: There should be no problems as [my] name has been changed. [My] name has changed and I have grown old. Nobody will recognize [me], as it has been 6-7 years. [People] say that [I] have aged drastically. When I arrived here, I was 64 years and had not aged that much.

Even if [I] have grown old, there is no regret because [I] have had the opportunity to see His Holiness the Dalai Lama, right? When one has seen His Holiness, what more is there to

say? You could not see [His Holiness] and there was no religious freedom in Tibet. When [the Chinese soldiers] armed with guns marched, oh God...The Chinese killed when numerous people protested. There were old ladies and even children that were killed! A lady I knew was taking photographs from the floor above. Two nuns and a monk were captured. [They] were shouting “Independence for Tibet” and “May His Holiness the Dalai Lama live for thousands of years.”

Q: Where did [you] witness this?

01:41:30

#72D: At the Bakor in Lhasa. I cried. Fearing [the protestors] would be caught on camera, I cried, “Fling a rock at the photographer!” The nuns and monks were captured. There was a scream, “Ayee.” At the scream, the Chinese fired in the air. All the protestors fled and three nuns and monks were captured. A lady held my hand and led me away saying, “Do not talk stupid. Do not keep looking at people. Flee or [you] will be caught by the Chinese.” The lady held [me] and I fled though the marketplace towards Ramoche. [I] escaped being arrested. Such things have happened.

I wondered from the depth of my heart, flesh and blood what I could do in order for the Chinese to depart to China, for religious freedom in Tibet and for His Holiness the Dalai Lama to return [to Tibet]. How much misery was there in [my] heart wondering how this could be achieved! It was not just me but all the old people. During pilgrimage rounds, [I] prayed at the Potala, “His Holiness the Dalai Lama, please return to the Potala so that it will be illuminated.” In [our] misery we found solace by saying that though we could not see, His Holiness the Dalai Lama lived [in the Potala] at night.

01:43:00

The people of Tibet have no authority. [They] strive hard and then the grains, meat, butter and everything must be paid to the Chinese as tax. [The Chinese authorities] claim that they are supporting the old people. They claim to be taking care of [them] and collect all the grains from the people by taxing them to be distributed [to the aged]. They speak very well and are shameless. The Chinese do not know the [Buddhist theory of] causes and effects. [I] think [they] are the very demons and mendacious, too. One that eats and sucks blood from a live person is a Chinese. That is true as I am familiar.

Q: Actually I do want to ask, *choe-la*, what you think of the self-immolations?

#72D: I think those who self-immolated are deeply religious and have strong faith in His Holiness the Dalai Lama. [They] are deeply religious and aware of the lack of freedom. [They] are desperate because of the lack of freedom. It is an act of hopelessness. [They] think in desperation, “There is no joy in living. There is no happiness.” They are unable to live in Tibet and are committing suicide in desperation. What else?

I remarked, “One has not heard of old people immolating. [They] are without determination.” The young ones feel motivated from having undergone extreme oppression and suffering under the Chinese. [They are doing it] out of hopelessness. All of them know

that there is no freedom of expression, no freedom of religious practice or freedom in any field in Tibet and are immolating because of hopelessness.

01:46:07

Earlier monasteries were not allowed to keep pictures of His Holiness the Dalai Lama. We were not allowed to but used to hide [them] and perform rituals. Actually there is no reason for them [the Chinese] to consider His Holiness the Dalai Lama as an enemy. However, [they] needed to blame someone in order to occupy the territory of Tibet and hence issued various statements. [They] wanted to occupy Tibet and after constructing roads, deployed hundreds of thousands of Chinese soldiers that remained idle. Lands in the villages were distributed to the Chinese. The Chinese were said to have remarked, “It is easy to make a living in Tibet. Just killing a bird can satiate one’s hunger.” The Chinese arrived because one could make a living happily in Tibet.

There is no freedom of expression and no freedom to practice religion. Though stated otherwise, the people have no freedom. Self-immolation is from desperation and utter hopelessness, as one does not have weapons to fight back, right? There are no weapons to confront the Chinese. When there is nothing, a time came when [they] felt it was better to kill themselves. There were many such monks that leapt into waters.

Q: *Choe-la*, thank you so much.

END OF INTERVIEW