

Tibet Oral History Project

Interview #7N – Dolma (alias)
April 8, 2015

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

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

Copyright © 2016 Tibet Oral History Project.



TIBET ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

www.TibetOralHistory.org

INTERVIEW SUMMARY SHEET

1. Interview Number: #7N
2. Interviewee: Dolma (alias)
3. Age: 74
4. Date of Birth: 1941
5. Sex: Female
6. Birthplace: Morong, Sokzong
7. Province: Dhotoe (Kham)
8. Year of leaving Tibet: 1983
9. Date of Interview: April 8, 2015
10. Place of Interview: Hotel Norbu Sangpo, Boudha, Kathmandu, Nepal
11. Length of Interview: 0 hr 52 min
12. Interviewer: Marcella Adamski
13. Interpreter: Palden Tsering
14. Videographer: Dhiraj Kafle
15. Translator: Tenzin Yangchen

Biographical Information:

Dolma was born in Morong in Kham into a *samadok* ‘farmers and herders’ family. She describes the self-sufficient life that they led; the farm and animals provided them with food and clothing. She says that yak hair; sheepskin and wool were used to make belts, shoes, bags, clothes and tents. Milk products were bartered for grains within the community if needed. Only salt was sought from outside of the village.

Dolma enjoyed playing with other children while grazing animals during summertime but winter was difficult with rain and snow. She gives us an account of the Losar ‘Tibetan New Year’ celebration, an occasion of singing and dancing for 10 days. Dolma enjoyed participating in the game of *pugyuk* ‘children running’ when all the children under age 15 visited each village family to receive special treats. Dolma also recalls watching *cham* ‘religious dance performance by monks’ and sings a song about the hills surrounding her hometown.

Dolma married at age 22 and had one son. After the Chinese invasion villagers were denied religious freedom and forced to destroy the monasteries. She recounts that even a devotional butter lamp could not be lit nor could one be seen with rosary beads in hand.

Topics Discussed:

Kham, childhood memories, herding, festivals, customs/traditions, life under Chinese rule, destruction of monasteries.

TIBET ORAL HISTORY PROJECT
www.TibetOralHistory.org

Interview #7N

Interviewee: Dolma [alias]

Age: 74, Sex: Female

Interviewer: Marcella Adamski

Interview Date: April 8, 2015

Question: Please tell us your name.

00:00:10

Interviewee #7N: Dolma.

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

#7N: Yes.

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

#7N: Okay.

Q: During this interview if you wish to take a break or stop at any time, please let me know. If you do not wish to answer a question or talk about something, let me know.

#7N: Okay.

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

#7N: There will be no problems. I will speak about my true experience. There will be no problems at all.

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

Q: Dolma, can you please tell me where you were born?

#7N: The birthplace is Sokzong. Sokzong.

Q: What part of Tibet is that?

#7N: Yes?

Q: Which province?

00:02:48

#7N: Dhotoe. Dhotoe.

Q: Dhotoe Province. Is that Kham?

#7N: Yes, Kham.

Q: Dolma, how many people were in your family?

#7N: I have only one son. All the older people are dead. [My] child's father also passed away. [I] have only a son.

Q: Now they're all dead but when you were born how many people were in your family?

#7N: When I was small there were father, mother, paternal uncle and paternal aunt. Later paternal aunt got married and left. Paternal uncle joined the monastery as a monk. Then [he] ran from the monastery and later passed away, must have passed away.

Q: Any other?

#7N: That is all and then I got married and gave birth to a son.

Q: Dolma, what year were you born and how old are you now?

#7N: [I] do not know when it was. I am 74 years old now. In Tibet we never observed the year of birth. There was no such practice of [recording] date of birth and time. The birth sign is horse.

Q: *Ama-la* 'respectful term for mother,' in your family what kind of work did your parents do?

00:05:34

#7N: In our region were agricultural lands and nomadic work. [We] were *samadok* 'farmers and herders.' [We] did farming in springtime, around the 2nd and 3rd lunar month. One group [of the family] looked after the animals and one group worked in the fields; *samadok*.

Q: Was your family very wealthy or very poor or just average?

#7N: In the place where my parents lived, father was a *genpo*; a *genpo* means a leader of a small village. The family I married into was poor.

Q: In your area where you were born in Morong, how many families were there? Was it large or small number of people, number of families living there?

#7N: Presently?

Q: When you were living there...

#7N: When I was living there...

Q: ...in the place called Morong.

#7N: Yes?

Q: About how many people were there in your birthplace, hometown?

#7N: When I left as a bride, there were four children in our family.

Q: That isn't the question.

#7N: Then?

Q: In the village?

00:08:02

#7N: I cannot say exactly how many people were in the village. There was a circular cluster of houses and it was said that it consisted of 18 families; 18 families initially.

Q: That's a medium-sized. Can you tell us any memories of your childhood? *Ama-la*, what was it like when you were growing up?

#7N: When [I] was small there were monasteries. There was a Gelug monastery higher up and a Nyingma monastery lower down. As a little one, the parents took [me] along to watch the *cham* 'religious dance performance by monks' during Losar 'Tibetan New Year' and for *dupa* 'sadhana practice of seven days' and *tsechu* 'tenth day of a Tibetan lunar calendar month.' Much later all the monasteries were destroyed.

Q: When you were growing up what kind of chores did you have, *ama-la*? What did you do?

#7N: When I was small, from the time you were able to herd animals, you were sent to graze them; graze the yaks, goats, sheep and such.

Q: What are some of the challenges or difficulties in taking care of yaks and goats and sheep when you were in charge of them? What's hard about that?

00:10:46

#7N: If the day is sunny grazing animals is enjoyable. There are things to eat and in summer there is curd, whey and playing with many other children, which was fun. It is very difficult when it rains or snows in wintertime.

Q: Very hard to do that kind of work. Did you give names to all the different animals?

#7N: Names were given. All the yaks, *dri* ‘female yaks,’ goats and sheep were given names.

Q: Really, what would be some of the...would the same names that you would give to people or would they be different kind of names?

#7N: Animals were given animal names. Some of the animals were named after the color of their fur or shape. Some you considered auspicious and gave good names.

Q: Tell me some of the names please, of the animals that you owned.

#7N: Okay. A *dri* was called Sergya.

Q: A *dri* called Sergya?

#7N: Sergya.

Q: Was it yellow in color?

00:12:59

#7N: Yes, it was *serpo* ‘yellow’ in color. Another was called Zera. A *zepo* ‘beautiful’ one with patterns was called Zera.

Q: Zera.

#7N: Yes.

Q: What was it, a yak?

#7N: It was a *dri*. A big yak was called Sengdak because it looked like a *senge* ‘lion.’ There was one called Markhu ‘Liquid Butter.’ [Laughs]

Q: Did you have any animals your favorite ones, any favorite pets?

#7N: It was called Yangkyab. It was a large one that was not to be killed for life and blessed by a lama called Yangkyab.

Q: Was it a yak?

#7N: It was a yak.

Q: When you milked the goats and the yaks, did you have any songs that you sang to them, *ama-la*?

00:15:10

#7N: There were no songs in particular that were sung while milking the *dri* and sheep. However, each region has its custom. In our region there was great interest in singing and dancing.

Q: Could you sing a little bit of that for us today?

#7N: [Laughs] Now [I] am old and the voice breaks. So [I] cannot though [I] did know to sing when younger.

Q: Try just a little bit.

#7N: Okay. I will sing a song about the hills in our hometown. Due to old age the voice may not be good.

Q: That's okay.

#7N: Okay. [Sings]

00:16:26

Bhoe gangchen ringo
Gangkyi kargong yarle
Chemarkyi shamdhe yo

**The mountains of Tibet, the land of snow
The snow-covered mountains are good
The snow-covered mountains resemble *chemar* ‘**

[To interpreter] Did [you] understand? Have you written it?

[Interpreter to interviewee]: I don't have to write it. Am just listening.

#7N: Oh, [you] are just listening?

Bhoe gangchen rikye
Pangkyi ripang yarle
Serkukyang shamdhe yo

**The mountains of Tibet, the land of snow
The pastures on the snow-covered mountains are good
It resembles a golden image**

Bhoe gangchen rithang
Tsokyi ritso yarle
Yongya shamdhe yo

Bhoe gangchen rila

Ngorkyi gormo yarle
Sangthang di

Tashi delek [Laughs]

Q: Beautiful. Can you translate? Could you translate, please?

#7N: [I] used to sing a lot when younger.

Q: What did the words mean in that song?

#7N: **The snow-covered mountains of Tibet are good.**

Q: Bhoe ‘Tibet’?

#7N: **Yes, Tibet, our homeland, the mountains of our country. The mountains of [our] homeland are covered with snow. The snow-covered mountains resembles *chemar* ‘mixture of roasted barley flour and butter’ offering [used as an auspicious offering during the New Year].**

[To interpreter] **Did you follow?**

[Interpreter to interviewer]: I couldn’t follow.

00:18:01

#7N: [Laughs]

Bhoe gangchen ringo
Gangkyi kargong yarle
Chemarkyi shamdhe yo

Is *chemar* offered during Losar ‘Tibetan New Year’?

Q: Yes, *chemar*.

#7N: **Yeah, *chemar* is offered and the snow-covered mountains resemble that.**

00:18:39

The tip of the mountain is covered with snow. [To interpreter] Did you follow that? The middle part of the mountains of Tibet has pastures, which resemble a golden statue. There are many golden statues on sale near the Boudha stupa.

Q: Like golden statues?

#7N: **Yes, [the middle part of the mountains] resemble that.**

Q: That's beautiful, a very happy song. She has a beautiful voice and it sounds like a very happy song.

#7N: [Laughs]

Q: *Ama-la*, did your life change from this very happy, you know, life with the animals and the hills and the sweetness of life? Does it come to a change? Anything happen?

00:20:09

#7N: After you got married, besides caring for the animals you have to carry out household tasks. Later the Chinese arrived. Everything changed after the Chinese arrived.

Q: *Ama-la*, when did you first see the Chinese with your own eyes?

#7N: I am a girl and in Tibet we do not move about much. The boys went about to buy things or on trade while the girls stayed back to care for the animals and work in the fields. That was the custom. So [I] did not see the Chinese until much later. It used to be said that the Chinese had come and that there was something called vehicles that carried a lot of people and looked like houses. [I] heard that there was one called motorcycle that did not need to be fed but was like a horse. It was many years since [I] heard such. Then at around the age of 30 [I] went to Lhasa. It was then that [I] saw vehicles and also the Chinese. [I] felt great fear on seeing the Chinese.

Q: What made you afraid of the Chinese?

00:22:49

#7N: The fear was...His Holiness the Dalai Lama was no longer there; [he] had left. His Holiness the Dalai Lama could not remain. The Chinese had destroyed all the monasteries. All the influential people, lamas and monks had been subjected to *thamzing* 'struggle sessions' by the Chinese. [I] used to hear such things. So [I] was afraid on seeing Chinese.

Q: How old were you when you were married, *ama-la*?

#7N: I was 22 years old.

Q: Did you know the man that you married or was it arranged?

#7N: We first met, became close and then the parents arranged.

Q: If you were married at 22, that would have been in 1963. What were conditions like in your village? The Dalai Lama had already fled in 1959, so what were conditions like in your village?

00:25:13

#7N: At that time the Chinese announced in Tibet that one was not allowed to practice the dharma and burned all the scriptures, destroyed the monasteries and tied ropes around the necks of the images and dragged them into the dust. All the elders cried because His Holiness the Dalai Lama had left. So on seeing the Chinese one was sad and fearful. You

did not feel like living there and was very unhappy. Though there was food to eat, one was not happy.

Q: Was your...the monastery that you went to, the one close to you, what was the name of it?

#7N: [We] went to the Gelug monastery and also to the Nyingma monastery. The Chinese destroyed the Gelug monastery.

Q: How many monks were there, *ama-la*?

#7N: [I] do not know how many monks were there.

Q: Like 50 or 100...something?

#7N: Oh, there might have been 300-400. It was a large monastery. It was a large monastery.

Q: This was in...was it in Morong?

00:27:20

#7N: A little further away in Sokzong. There was not any monastery in Morong. Sokzong.

Q: Was that a monastery that you used to visit sometimes? Did she go to Sokzong to pray to that monastery?

#7N: Yes, [my] parents took [me] there many times when [I] was small. Later when I went the monastery was destroyed.

Q: So there were no monasteries for the people to go to anymore?

#7N: There were not. It was done such that there was not even one monastery. In the place where we lived was a *ngagpa* 'tantric practitioner'...it was not a monastery for monks but *ngagpa*. It cannot be called a monastery but a small temple. This too was destroyed.

Q: Did you ever see the monasteries being destroyed with your own eyes or were you too little?

#7N: The large monastery, the monastery at Sokzong was already destroyed. [I] did not see it being destroyed. We were ordered to go to destroy the small monastery.

Q: Yes?

00:29:29

#7N: We were ordered to go and destroy it. The Chinese had appointed leaders in the village and the leaders ordered, "You go and do it. You go and do it." So they were the Tibetan people that actually destroyed the monasteries. Not doing so would mean being penalized.

Q: If the Tibetans did not obey orders what would happen to them?

#7N: Not obeying orders might mean being subjected to *thamzing* or a smaller punishment like being derided. Then you can be excommunicated. A serious punishment would be *thamzing*.

Q: *Thamzing*?

#7N: *Thamzing* means being beaten.

Q: Were families able to pray at home? Could they set up their own altar and their own shrine? Was that okay?

#7N: Oh, no. If one offered a butter lamp, one did so by hiding it in a pot. In case someone had expired and one lit a butter lamp, it was placed in a pot. Should a dog bark, fearing that the Chinese or the leaders were coming one closed the lid immediately to hide it. If there was not anyone around and things seemed calm, one opened the lid and lit a butter lamp for a while. One could not keep anything [on an altar], nothing to do with rituals whatsoever at one point of time.

Q: Did people still pray with rosaries like she has now?

00:32:46

#7N: Oh no, not *mani* ‘mantra of Avalokiteshvara.’ Something like this [indicates rosary in hand] should not be seen. *Mani* could not be chanted and it was so for some years. Then gradually there was said to be religious freedom and one was permitted to chant *mani* in public.

Otherwise, they [Chinese] observed who showed interest in the dharma and were very harsh. That was because [the Chinese] claimed that the Tibetans had the Dalai Lama in [our] hearts. For many years one could not even be seen holding a rosary like this [holds up a white colored rosary]. The situation was so. As [I] say this I feel a pain here [touches chest].

[Discontinuity in interview]

Q: *Ama-la*, do you have other experiences to recount? Not bad experience but some happy experience when you were little in Tibet. [You] could talk about it and if not, we’ll talk about the rosary and such. Do [you] have something to say?

#7N: To talk about the livelihood in Tibet, we lived on the produce from the farmers and nomads. Being semi-nomadic farmers, we did not have to travel anywhere to trade because you had butter, cheese and meat, and you had different types of grains. Some regions in Tibet have only animals and some have only farmlands. They have to drive yaks and travel for many months to trade. We did not have to do that. We were completely self-sufficient.

Within the community there maybe some differences in the number of animals and lands that were owned. If you [interpreter] owned more lands and I owned more animals, I gave you butter and you gave me grains. One could barter like this within the community. It was one of the happiest places. However, it took many months of journeying to collect salt.

As for clothes, [we] wore the skin of goats and sheep while the wool was woven into woolen cloth to make *chupa* ‘traditional coats/dresses.’ Whether it was belts or shoes, everything was made from sheep wool. Such was done. The part of yak *khulu* ‘fur on upper part of a yak’s body’ was made into mats and bags to carry things on yaks. The yak’s *tsipa* ‘yak hair’ was used to make *ba*. The black *tsipa* was made into *ba*; *ba* means tent, made into black *ba*. That was how things were done.

Q: It sounds very nice. Sounds a very happy way to live.

00:37:15

#7N: Yes, it was. It was a bit difficult for the animals when it rained and snowed. Otherwise, both the farmers and nomads were happy.

Q: It sounds like it was. So these are memories that she likes to talk about and think about. Are there any customs that you remember, anything that you want to share?

#7N: In our region there was dancing and singing during Losar and everyone gathered together. On the first day of Losar, all the children, all the children of the village got together and there was the practice of going to every family called *pugyuk* ‘children running.’ “*Pugyuk yothoe, pugyuk yothoe* ‘There are children running’” it was called out.

Q: *Pugyuk*?

#7N: Yes, children running. Children ran together shouting, “*Pugyuk yothoe*.” Children below the age of 15 did that. Those over 15 were not in that group. All the little ones that could walk would go, like 4 or 5 year-olds. If tomorrow was the first day [of Losar] the children gathered today and discussed, “Shall we begin from here or from there?” There were many families and the families counted the number of children below the age of 15 in the village and had meat, *thue* ‘soft creamy cheese’ and such in a tin can ready for the children. [Laughs] The children arrived in a group.

Q: Gave food?

00:39:40

#7N: Yes, gave food but [the children] cannot eat everything because [they] visited all the families. So everything was brought home, brought home. [I] liked that as a child. Once over the age of 15, one was out of this group. One could not join it.

Q: Losar. Was there more about Losar?

#7N: On the second day of Losar the adults invited each other home.

Q: Did you take presents?

#7N: No, [we] did not take presents. If I visited your home, you provided me with all kinds of food but [I] did not take presents to you that day.

Q: Anything else about Losar? Second day?

00:42:06

#7N: Starting from the third day there was singing and dancing. The younger ones danced and the elders watched. [We] played games until around the 10th day but the animals had to be taken care of. One cannot leave the animals. Other than that all other tasks came to an end and [we] just played.

Q: Until the 10th day?

#7N: Yes, until the 10th day, from the 1st to the 10th day [of Losar]. There were playing games, dancing and singing. Boys and girls gathered together and sang songs.

Q: Did the cattle get any...animals get any special treats for Losar?

#7N: The *dri* were not milked that day. On Losar the calves were allowed to suckle the mother. There was nothing special for the adult animals though. The sheep did not have milk because they were dry at the time of Losar. The *dri* calves were given milk during Losar.

Q: Wonderful holiday, Losar.

00:44:32

#7N: There was much dancing during Losar. There was singing in turns.

Q: *Ama-la*, did you ever go on a pilgrimage?

#7N: Pilgrimage in Nepal or Tibet?

Q: In Tibet.

#7N: I have not been on a long distance pilgrimage in Tibet but have gone to Mt. Kailash. [I] have been to Mt. Kailash, Lake Manasarovar and...[not discernible]. Then the four great mountains of Tibet like Samye Harpori, I have circumambulated. [I] circumambulated Harpori, Chakpori and Parchen Chuwori.

Q: Parchen...?

#7N: Parchen Chuwori, Samye Harpori...

Q: Samye Harpori...

#7N: Lhasa Chakpori.

Q: That's three.

#7N: That is three. [I] could not go to the other great mountain. The mountain has a name but it is located far away. [I] cannot recall [the name].

Q: *Ama-la*, I see that you have a beautiful rosary in your hand. Can you tell us how that was made?

00:46:47

#7N: These are shells that were drilled with holes by turning the *mani* [prayer wheel]. It is said that turning a prayer wheel 100,000,000 times will drill a hole in one of these shells. It is said that turning [a prayer wheel] 100,000,000 times will drill a hole in one of these. However, one cannot keep counting. These are shells from [turning] the *mani* wheel. [Laughs]

Q: So the hole is made by turning the prayer wheel.

[Interpreter to interviewer]: There are like 108 beads. So one bead is like one million times.

Q: One million, for each circle. *Ama-la*, how many years did you have that prayer wheel?

#7N: It has been 12 years since I do not have any work. So these are shells from [this period].

[Interviewer to interpreter]: Really? She didn't have any work...?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: ...for 12 years.

[Interviewer to interpreter]: ...for 12 years because she was retired?

Q: When was the 12 years, *Ama-la*?

#7N: It is after coming here. It has been 12 years since [I] do not have any work. When [I] arrived here from Tibet, there was the government factory, the Tibetan Government factory, the carpet factory...

Q: Yabshi Factory?

#7N: It is called Himkar Factory.

Q: Where?

#7N: Himkar Factory.

Q: Where is it?

#7N: Himkar Factory is right here.

Q: Himkar Factory?

00:48:46

#7N: It is near the stupa and is a branch of the Yabshi Factory. There is the new construction. [I] worked there and then there were no carpet sales and the factory closed down. If you [interpreter] live here, you would know. When the factory closed down, [I] was without work and then found a job as a helper in a school and then worked at the Home for the Aged managed by the Women's Association in Swayambhunath for three years. Then I was growing older, around 60 years and could not find work. So [I] stayed back to circumambulate. It must have been around 12 years now as [I] am now 74.

Q: Your work has been prayers.

#7N: [I] could not find work but due to the benevolence of His Holiness the Dalai Lama [I] am at the Home for the Aged and can chant and turn *mani* as much as [I] can.

Q: *Ama-la*, what do you pray for? What is your daily prayer about?

00:50:58

#7N: [I] pray, "May there be peace in the world. May His Holiness the Dalai Lama live long." [I] wish Tibet becomes independent but [I] do not know.

Q: *Ama-la*, that is a prayer we share with you and we pray for His Holiness' long life and for your long life.

#7N: [Nods]

Q: Thank you for sharing your story with us. Is there anything that you wanted to add or say?

#7N: [I] cannot recall any.

Q: You gave us beautiful memories of the animals and the lands. Thank you for telling us about that and the Losar celebration.

#7N: [Smiles]

Q: As we conclude we want to ask just to be sure, if this interview was shown in Tibet or China would this be a problem for you?

00:52:47

#7N: There will be no problems.

Q: Thank you for sharing your story with us, *ama-la*.

#7N: [Nods]

END OF INTERVIEW