

Tibet Oral History Project

Interview #7U – Chungla
April 5, 2017

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INTERVIEW SUMMARY SHEET

1. Interview Number: #7U
2. Interviewee: Chungla
3. Age: 83
4. Date of Birth: 1934
5. Sex: Female
6. Birthplace: Dhonga, Sakya
7. Province: Utsang
8. Year of leaving Tibet: 1960
9. Date of Interview: April 5, 2017
10. Place of Interview: Sakya Tibetan Settlement, Puruwala, Himachal Pradesh, India
11. Length of Interview: 0 hr 46 min
12. Interviewer: Marcella Adamski
13. Interpreter: Tenzin Yangchen
14. Videographer: Tenzin Choenyi
15. Translator: Tenzin Yangchen

Biographical Information:

Chungla was born in 1934 in Dhonga near Sakya in Utsang Province. She had a large family and her father was the leader of the 100 families in the village. She was given away in marriage at the age of 18 to a man she had never met in a nearby village. Chungla was given new sets of clothing and she describes the headdresses the bride would receive from both her family and the groom's family.

Chungla's in-laws grew peas, barley and mustard. She explains the process of extracting oil from the mustard seeds, which was used for both cooking and skincare. Despite being a wealthy family, there were no servants and the family members did all of the farm work themselves. They also wove and dyed their own cloth for making clothing.

Chungla's husband's family feared being captured by the Chinese. Only half of them managed to flee while the other half never made it out of Tibet.

Topics Discussed:

Utsang, farm life, customs/traditions.

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Interview #7U

Interviewee: Chungla

Age: 83, Sex: Female

Interviewer: Marcella Adamski

Interview Date: April 5, 2017

Question: Please tell us your name.

00:00:09

Interviewee #7U: Chungla.

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

#7U: Yes.

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

#7U: [Smiles]

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

#7U: Okay.

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

#7U: Okay. If I cannot recall something, it is okay to say, "I cannot remember"?

Q: Yes. I cannot remember too, sometimes.

00:03:18

#7U: I take a lot of medication and cannot locate things in the house. [I] will hold something in the hand and go look for it.

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

#7U: Yes?

Q: Would you have any problem?

00:02:18

#7U: What problem would I have if it were shown in China?

Q: I take that as an okay.

#7U: Show it in China?

Q: Show it in Tibet, China or anywhere.

#7U: I am living here. So how can [the Chinese] cause me suffering? If one were to go to Tibet, [they] may cause suffering.

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

Q: So *ama-la* 'respectful term for mother,' please let us begin by asking just how old are you today?

#7U: 83

Q: 83? Where were you born? What town or city?

#7U: Yes?

Q: The name of the place where you were born?

#7U: The birthplace is Dhonga.

Q: Dhonga? How far is Dhonga from Sakya, like by walking or animal cart?

#7U: It did not take days. It is just 5-10 minutes on horseback. It is close by. If one went walking, one could reach it quite early. One could go and return on the same day.

Q: Ten minutes on horseback?

#7U: It would not take more than 10-15 minutes, if one rode fast.

Q: Oh, very close.

#7U: It is just a valley away.

Q: Did you go to Sakya very often?

00:04:18

#7U: I was given in marriage at Sakya.

Q: To somebody who lived in Sakya?

#7U: Yes.

Q: So you didn't have to go far from home?

#7U: Close, it was close by. We could go to Sakya, do whatever it was and return early.

Q: How many people were in your family, *ama-la*?

#7U: When I was little there were my father, mother, two elder brothers and us three sisters. There was a *nama* 'sister-in-law' who had children. There were many.

Q: What size house did you have for so many people?

#7U: The house was large. The house must be about the size of the temple here. It was a large house.

Q: That is very large. About how many rooms?

00:06:16

#7U: I cannot remember the rooms.

Q: Okay. Was your family then considered among the wealthier families or middle-income families?

#7U: My family?

Q: Yes.

#7U: It was wealthy. Our family was the leader of the region.

Q: Of Dhonga?

#7U: Yes, the leader of the families living in the village.

Q: The father?

#7U: Yes, Father.

Q: How many people lived in that village?

#7U: There might have been over a hundred families in the village.

Q: The families numbered over hundred?

#7U: Yes.

Q: So the population was more than that.

#7U: Obviously there were more people, but I do not know how many. The families numbered over a hundred.

Q: Had your father been chosen as leader for some special reasons?

#7U: There was a leader above us who was called Lhatse Minkyiwa.

Q: What's he called?

#7U: Lhatse Minkyiwa.

Q: Lhatse Minkyiwa?

#7U: Yes, he was a big leader and owned estates. We were sent to an estate in a village. He sent us.

Q: Sent as manager of an estate?

00:08:14

#7U: Yes, sent as manager of an estate. [Father] had to look after the village as a leader.

Q: In the village?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: In the village of hundred families.

Q: And he became the manager of the estate of this wealthy family?

#7U: He had to look after the village and the taxes and was like the leader of the village.

Q: What kind of qualities did your father have that made him such a special leader?

#7U: I do not know. He was appointed as a leader, so [he] must have been capable, but I was little and cannot remember.

Q: What did your family do for a livelihood?

#7U: [We] were given lands in the village. Lhatse Minkyiwa had allotted lands for us to till.

Q: Do you have any idea how large the land was that your family cultivated?

#7U: It was large. I cannot remember much but it was large. [I] cannot remember much because [I] was given away in marriage at a young age.

Q: So maybe we should talk more about that. You'll remember more.

#7U: Yes?

Q: You may remember more about the time after your marriage because you were little when you lived in the village...before being given away in marriage.

#7U: Yes.

Q: So what was the age that you were given away in marriage?

00:11:00

#7U: At age 18.

Q: Did you know this young man or did your family pick him as a husband for you?

#7U: No, in Tibet we are given away after the parents have decided.

Q: Can you remember, did your family have a big wedding celebration for you or marriage ceremony?

#7U: A ceremony is performed. A big or small [wedding] depends upon your wish but it is done. I cannot remember much because it has been so long ago.

Q: I know, I know, but did the girls when they were going to get married, did they have...did they get like new *chupa* 'traditional dress' to wear and new clothing of all kinds to wear when they would go to the home of their bridegroom?

#7U: Yes, [new clothes] were made based on the economic status of the family. A rich family gave more clothes and a poor one gave less. That depends upon you.

Q: Well, if your family was well off, did you get many new dresses?

00:13:13

#7U: Yes. [I] was given three, four or five sets.

Q: What does a set mean? What does it include?

#7U: Those are the clothes made in Tibet like *pangdhen* 'striped apron indicating married status of women,' *kepthen*, *chupa*, *kangsar* and blouse. Full sets would be given.

Q: That includes *pangdhen* and something for the waist?

#7U: Something called *kepthen* is wrapped around the waist.

Q: And then?

#7U: Then there is *chupa* and *kangsar*.

Q: What's *kangsar*?

#7U: *Kangsar* means shoes. Full sets are provided.

Q: I notice Tibetan women always match beautiful colors between the apron and the *chupa*. Did you get matching aprons to go with each color *chupa*?

#7U: That was not so in Tibet and it became a practice only after coming here. It was random in Tibet though [full sets] were provided. There was no matching done.

Q: Did you wear any special ornaments for the wedding or were you given any special ornaments as a bride's gift?

00:15:28

#7U: The girl's family gave a *patu* 'headdress' and the boy's family provided a *thaktsa*.

Q: *Thaktsa*?

#7U: It is similar to a *patu*. These two were provided.

Q: A *thaktsa* and a *patu*?

#7U: The girl's family gave the *patu* while the boy's family adorned [the bride] with a thing called *thaktsa*. It is similar to a *patu* but a little different.

Q: Can you explain what those are?

#7U: [To interpreter] Have you not seen a *patu*? It is a headdress.

Q: Where do you wear it?

#7U: It is to be worn on the head. It is a headdress and it is made from bamboo, but I don't know much.

Q: What's a *thaktsa*?

#7U: *Thaktsa* is similar to a *patu*, which is worn over it. You do not seem to have seen one. It is in a picture I have. I am unable to explain. [They] are similar.

Q: These two gifts, were they family heirlooms or were they bought and made new for the bride?

#7U: No, no, [they are not heirlooms]. A *patu* is made for every girl by the family. The one called *thaktsa* is provided only if the bridegroom's family is economically sound.

Q: The bridegroom's family. So was your bridegroom's family wealthy?

00:17:59

#7U: They were.

Q: Did you know this young man before your wedding?

#7U: No.

Q: Did you ever see him with your eyes before?

#7U: No, [I] had never [seen him] and that was our practice in Tibet.

Q: Right. So how did you feel about getting married? Were you looking forward to it or scared or what?

#7U: Initially one might be scared because one was just a girl.

Q: And then what happened?

#7U: Nothing happened.

Q: You got over being scared. Okay. Did they have a wedding celebration in your hometown or did you go to the boy's?

#7U: It was done in the boy's home.

Q: Was he your age or was he older than you?

#7U: [He] is older by one year.

Q: That was a close match. And then when the...can you tell us a little bit about the celebration? How long did it last and what kind of events happened during that time?

00:20:26

#7U: I cannot recall but normally [celebrations] went on for a week. So it must have lasted a week, around seven days.

Q: Right, because people come from very far away?

#7U: Yes, your relatives and friends came.

Q: And then when the wedding was over, where did you live with your husband?

#7U: [We] lived in that very house, the home of the bridegroom.

Q: I see. Was it a big house like your own family home?

#7U: Yes, the house was large.

Q: Were there other family members that lived there along with your husband?

#7U: [We] lived together, everyone lived together.

Q: So parents...did he have brothers and sisters too?

00:22:21

#7U: There were father, grandfather and mother and then there were three or four brothers, some of who were monks.

Q: Everyone lived together in the house?

#7U: When younger all lived in the house, but later if they married, they would leave. However, while I was there, everybody lived in the house. Some were little.

Q: In what way was living in this new home different than living with your own parents? How did things change?

#7U: Yes?

Q: You left for a new home that would be different from your home...

#7U: You feel it is not your home. However, it was similar because it was the same region. Everything was similar like the work and such.

Q: Pretty similar. Tell me about what kind of daily work did you do and your husband do?

#7U: We were farmers. It was fieldwork.

Q: What kind of crops did you raise?

#7U: The crops grown were grain, peas and mustard from which oil is extracted.

Q: Grain meaning barley?

00:24:29

#7U: Yes, barley. We make *tsampa* 'flour made from roasted barley' from barley, and then peas and mustard for oil.

Q: You know, regarding the mustard, how did the plant get produced into oil? Who did that work?

#7U: This is how oil is extracted. Mustard that is small and reddish is ground. Then it is beaten and boiled. Then when it is squeezed, the oil comes out.

Q: The first thing is to ground it?

#7U: First the red seeds must be separated [from the husk] and ground finely like *tsampa*. This must be beaten and then boiled. Then this was squeezed [presses palms together] and the oil extracted.

Q: Wow, powdered and then boiled and squeezed. Did you do that in your own home?

00:26:16

#7U: It was done at home. Some who did not have it went to a neighbor's house to get it done.

Q: What was the kind of uses for the oil? What did people do with it?

#7U: It was applied to the hair, the body and is also consumed. It is the same as what we do here with oil, like frying vegetables. It was for consumption.

Q: Really? And what would be the reason for using it on the body and the hair? What did it do?

#7U: [I] do not know what it does but [we] use it. I do not know what it does.

Q: To make the skin not so dry and the hair not so dry?

#7U: Yes, we use oil [touches hair]. It is the same. It is like using hair oil but [we] did not have that in Tibet. It was just the [mustard] oil.

Q: You said your husband came from a well-off family. So did he also work in the fields or did he supervise? What was his job?

00:28:23

#7U: We did our own hard work in the fields and there was no supervising.

Q: What would be kind of a typical day of working in the fields? When did you go to work? Did you have a break at lunchtime, come home, what?

#7U: Sometimes there was the work of fertilizing the fields, sometimes channeling water or sowing to do. There were various kinds and one need not spend the whole day [in the fields]. You did what you could of whatever the work was.

Q: How did you feel about working in the fields? Did you like that kind of work or was it hard?

#7U: It was not hard because no one forced you. If you were tired, then you took rest.

Q: I notice that the land was given to your husband's family...or to your own family, I guess. Could you keep...did that land belong to your husband and his family or were they just allowed to grow things there?

00:30:35

#7U: The land was ours. It was ours. If one did not [own lands], one could buy, lease or do anything. However, the land was ours. It was okay to say it was ours. It belonged to us.

Q: If it was your husband's family's own land, could you just keep and use everything that you produced for yourself and was it enough or did you have to buy more produce?

#7U: There were taxes for some people that you would have to pay. Otherwise, you could retain.

Q: Besides working in the fields, *ama-la*, what other kinds of things did you do? Like, I'm looking at...like aprons. Did you ever do any weaving or spin wool or make...you know, make your own clothing?

00:32:16

#7U: In Tibet one had to weave *pangdhen* and make *chupa* that is made with woolen cloth. One must do the weaving.

Q: *Chupa*, *pangdhen* and then?

#7U: That was it.

Q: How long would it take to make one *chupa*?

#7U: Wonder how long it took? I cannot remember. If the woolen yarn is thick, it can be done quickly and if it is thin, it took longer. [I] cannot recall exactly.

Q: The actual weaving of it.

[Interpreter to interviewer]: Yes.

[Interviewer to interpreter]: Yes, I see what she's saying.

Q: Did you ever dye your *chupas* like different colors?

#7U: Dyeing was done and it was mostly black.

Q: In others?

#7U: In *pangdhen* many colors are used.

Q: If all the woolen clothing was dyed black, how could you dye different colors, have different color *chupas* if it was already dyed black?

00:34:16

#7U: In Tibet [*chupa*] were mostly black, but [I] cannot recall much.

Q: What were some of your happiest times or memories you have about being kind of a young bride in your new family? Are there any happy memories that you have?

#7U: [Laughs] I cannot remember.

Q: Was it easy to get along with a whole new family as a grown up?

#7U: [I] did not face any problems.

Q: No problems?

#7U: [I] did not face any problems.

Q: What about in the evenings when you're done farming and you come home. What did people do in the evenings?

#7U: Once home in the evening, everyone stayed home and had dinner. Then you went to sleep.

Q: Was everybody pretty much healthy in the family or were there ever any serious illnesses that came or any epidemics of any kind?

00:36:18

#7U: As far as I can remember there was not any epidemic.

Q: I know you said that...we're having an interview today but you're in the middle of...the beginning of a prayer cycle, can you tell us what that is about?

#7U: All the people gather together at the temple and chant prayers.

Q: All the people gather?

#7U: Yes. The *umze* 'chant leader' comes and begins the prayer and those that know it chant along and those that do not know can chant *mani*.

Q: And what is a *mani* mantra?

#7U: *Mani* is "Om mani padme hung" 'Hail the jewel in the lotus.'

Q: So there's many, many mantras.

[Interpreter to interviewer]: Yeah, different chants.

[Interviewer to interpreter]: Many different chants.

#7U: I would not know everything not being a dharma practitioner.

Q: How did you learn the chants?

00:37:58

#7U: Those of us that attend the prayer assembly learn slowly by listening to the *umze* chant. Some that do not attend do not know the chants much. However, there is no need to learn the *mani–Om mani padme hung*–because everyone knows it, including children.

Q: Did you go...if you were living in a house in Sakya, did you go to the main temple very often?

#7U: Perhaps [I] visited once or twice a month. We could not go more often because our village Samling is a little further away from Sakya.

Q: What's the name of the second village?

#7U: Yes?

Q: What's the name of the village?

#7U: Samling.

Q: That's the husband's village?

#7U: Yes, Samling.

Q: Okay, is there anything...let's see...anything else about...I guess I want to ask something about medical. If people got sick in the family, like say they had a tooth problem, who took care of it like if you needed a tooth pulled or some ordinary illness like that or earache or toothache, did you have a person considered a dentist or not?

#7U: [I] do not know much. Though I was 25 when I left Tibet, [I] do not know much except for doing [my] work.

Q: You were 25 when you left Tibet. Do you remember why did you have to leave Tibet? What happened in your family?

00:40:37

#7U: Everybody left after the Chinese appeared.

Q: Did you see them with your own eyes? Did they come into Sakya?

#7U: Yes, I did.

Q: What did you see?

#7U: Yes?

Q: What did you see?

Q: The Chinese came and...?

#7U: The Chinese came. The Chinese were there and I saw the Chinese. That is it.

Q: Did the family have to go away secretly or very publicly could they pack up and leave?

#7U: In secret.

Q: In secret. Were you able to take your valuables with you?

#7U: [We] were able to bring just a little and not much. Some of those that lived closer were able to bring some but we were far away.

Q: Did you say you lived close by or far away?

#7U: We lived far away in order to flee here. Those that lived close to the mountain pass could while we were far away.

Q: Was anybody in danger in your family from the Chinese?

00:42:41

#7U: The danger was that it was said those from the wealthy families were going to be captured and the Chinese did, which was why [we] fled...from the fear of being captured.

Q: Did you have many servants on your farm?

#7U: Yes?

Q: Were there many servants?

#7U: We did not have any servants. The family members did all the work.

Q: How long did it take to leave Tibet? How long was your journey?

#7U: I do not know how long it took by hiding in the day and fleeing in the night. [We] journeyed in the night and stopped during the day in the mountains. [We] were fleeing.

Q: In the night?

#7U: [We] journeyed the whole night and once again stopped during the day.

Q: Did everybody in the family go with you?

#7U: No, half of us did and half stayed back.

Q: Did the other half ever get away?

00:44:39

#7U: [They] did not.

Q: That's a sad ending, isn't it? *Ama-la*, thank you for sharing all of your story with us. I appreciate your time. I know you have important job, *mani* prayers right now and you want to go. What are you praying for Tibet? What is your prayer?

#7U: [I] pray for all sentient beings of the six realms and also pray for my good health. The first prayer is for all sentient beings of the six realms.

Q: Are there any special prayers you make for Tibet itself?

#7U: Of course, one prays for those that immolated themselves in Tibet.

Q: The people that immolated?

#7U: Yes.

Q: Well *ama-la*, we join you in your prayers and thank you very much.

#7U: [Joins palms]

END OF INTERVIEW