

Tibet Oral History Project

Interview #8B – Dolma (alias)
December 28, 2013

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INTERVIEW SUMMARY SHEET

1. Interview Number: #8B
2. Interviewee: Dolma (alias)
3. Age: 84
4. Date of Birth: 1929
5. Sex: Female
6. Birthplace: Chushul
7. Province: Utsang
8. Year of leaving Tibet: 1960
9. Date of Interview: December 28, 2013
10. Place of Interview: Private Residence, Old Camp 4, Bylakuppe, Mysore District, Karnataka, India
11. Length of Interview: 2 hr 03 min
12. Interviewer: Marcella Adamski
13. Interpreter: Tenzin Yangchen
14. Videographer: Pema Tashi
15. Translator: Tenzin Yangchen

Biographical Information:

Dolma is from Chushul in Utsang Province. She is the youngest in the family of farmers. Her parents cultivated barley, peas and wheat, and the family was self-sufficient. She explains how farming and irrigation were carried out in her village. Around the age of 10 Dolma was adopted by a relative and moved to Lhasa to live with her new family.

In Lhasa she learned new skills like knitting sweaters, making boots and hair tassels. Dolma describes preparing the raw materials for the beautiful tassels which were made of parachute cords and explains how she sold her hand-crafted products to local shops and traders. She then describes how life in Lhasa changed drastically with the appearance of the Chinese.

Dolma describes how poor Tibetans were forced to conduct *thamzing* ‘struggle sessions’ upon their employers and monks and nuns were forced by the Chinese to relinquish their celibacy. She narrates in detail the events at Norbulingka where the people of Lhasa assembled to protect His Holiness the Dalai Lama in 1959. She witnessed the shelling of the Norbulingka by the Chinese, which lasted for two nights and saw many dead and injured Tibetans just outside her window. The Tibetan Women’s Association organized an incense offering for the safe journey of His Holiness the Dalai Lama to India, but then all the leaders were also subjected to *thamzing*.

Topics Discussed:

Utsang, childhood memories, farm life, customs/traditions, taxes, environment/wildlife, invasion by Chinese army, Norbulingka, oppression under Chinese, March 10th Uprising, *thamzing*.

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Interview #8B

Interviewee: Dolma [alias]

Age: 84, Sex: Female

Interviewer: Marcella Adamski

Interview Date: December 28, 2013

Question: *Ama-la* ‘respectful term for mother,’ 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?

Interviewee#8B: Yes, [I] do.

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

#8B: Okay.

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

#8B: Shown in China?

Q: Yes.

#8B: There might not be any problem if it is shown in China.

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

#8B: [Nods]

Q: *Ama-la*, what area of Tibet were you born? What section?

00:02:21

#8B: Chushul.

Q: And how old are you, *ama-la*?

#8B: [I am] 84 years old.

Q: When you were a child who raised you in Tibet?

#8B: Right at home in Chushul. [My] parents were there when [I] was little. [We] were farmers.

Q: How many children were in the family?

#8B: When I was little, [my] parents had 5-6 children.

Q: Where were you in that order?

#8B: I was among the youngest. There were older sisters.

Q: *Ama-la*, can you tell us any memories of your childhood that you can recall?

00:03:50

#8B: I can recall [my] parents farming and as a child [accompanying] the older siblings to gather firewood on the mountains.

Q: What kind of things did your family grow on the farm? What kind of vegetables or plants?

#8B: [We] grew grains, peas, wheat to make bread and turnips and various other kinds in the fields.

Q: Was there...?

#8B: [Interrupts] The water came from the river.

Q: For irrigation?

#8B: Yes, there was no problem with irrigating the fields. One could channel water from the river. There was plenty of water.

Q: How many crops could you grow a year?

00:05:21

#8B: [We] cultivated only once a year. The fields were sown around the end of the 3rd Tibetan lunar month after Losar 'Tibetan New Year' and the crops were standing in the fields for 4-5 months.

Q: Was there enough food for the families from your farm?

#8B: Yes, there was from the farm. [We] preserved seeds from the year's harvest, stocked the seeds of the year to be used later. Should anyone run short, one could avail loans of grains. In case one did not have sufficient food, one could borrow from others. However, there was enough for food.

Q: Did you have to pay taxes to the monastery?

#8B: Well, taxes to the monastery...being tenants of Sera [Monastery] there were no taxes in the past but when you reaped a good harvest, you made *tsampa* ‘flour made from roasted barley’ from the fresh grains that was harvested in the 7th Tibetan lunar month and offered the *tsampa* to the monastery, the Sera Lachi ‘Governing Council.’ This was not a tax but being tenants, you happily volunteered *tsampa* made from the freshly harvested grains.

Q: What were some of the favorite dishes that your mother prepared for the family? What did you like to eat when you were a little girl?

00:08:10

#8B: When [I] was little the better kinds of food [mother] prepared were meat and radish. There was not much else because it was a village. And there was plenty of butter and cheese, as you owned animals. There were *dzo* ‘animal bred between a yak and cow’ used for plowing, cows, oxen, goats and sheep.

Q: Were you considered...? Do you have something to say?

#8B: What to say? [We] were obliged to perform a little bit of labor tax.

Q: To whom?

#8B: [We] had to perform a little bit of labor tax with *tawu khema* ‘pack animals’ when government [authorities] traveled back and forth.

Q: *Tawu khema*? [You] mean when Tibetan Government officials arrived?

#8B: Yes, when aristocrats moved towards Tsang and back and forth, [we] would be taxed. [We] had to perform labor service.

Q: I see, labor service, yeah. *Ama-la*, was your family considered wealthy or middle class or poor? What place did you feel you were economically?

00:10:24

#8B: [Our family] was considered among the poor. Except for 2-3 wealthy families the rest were somewhat equal. There were not many wealthy ones.

Q: In your village area?

#8B: Yes, in the village area. There were no schools for the children to attend unless [they] became monks or nuns.

Q: Was there a monastery nearby that you could go to?

#8B: There is not a monastery close by us but a little further from Chushul is a monastery called Jangchupling. There is Jangchupling and then two villages away is a monastery in the place where the Jang Gunchoe [Winter Dharma Assembly held at Jangphu Monastery] takes place. It's a small monastery where the Jang Gunchoe takes place.

Q: You mentioned that unless you were a monk or a nun and went to the monastery you couldn't learn to read. Did many young girls from your area choose to go to the nunnery or was it only boys that went to the monastery at their parents' request?

00:12:35

#8B: There were none from our village that joined the nunnery but there was a nunnery and there were a few [nuns] living in hermitages.

Q: Were there girls from your village that joined the nunnery?

#8B: There were not any but there were [boys] that went to become monks.

Q: If a girl wanted to join the nunnery, was that acceptable to her family or was that difficult for them to let her go?

#8B: If one had a desire to become a nun the family will not stop [her]. Parents consider [their children] becoming monks and nuns as good.

Q: Is there anything that you...When you were a young girl, did you help with the farming? Did you learn any other skills when you were growing up besides farming and gathering firewood?

#8B: After coming to Lhasa the skills [I] learned are knitting sweaters and making hair tassels and *zompa* shoes [handmade boots]....and knitting sweaters.

Q: Before I ask you more about that, I forgot to ask you about gathering the firewood. Was it easy for you to find firewood to bring home in the mountains nearby?

00:15:26

#8B: There was plenty of wood. Though there was plenty to gather from while going there one has to climb up the mountain and while coming down it was difficult with the load [indicates load on back].

Q: Did you take hatchets to chop the wood? How did you... And were there many trees or very far apart? What was it like?

#8B: There were forests and some took small knives. Also there were dry [branches] that could be broken off, slender ones.

Q: Were there any animals in the forest?

#8B: There were musk deer and a few wild animals but except in thick forests there were no tigers and leopards in the wood gathering areas.

Q: Were you ever afraid of the animals?

00:17:16

#8B: There is this one called Tibetan brown bear in the forests. [I] heard that if one came upon it, it would [cause harm] and [I] was a little bit afraid but did not encounter any. It used to be said that its hair is long and hangs like this [indicates hair covering face] and when capturing a man, it does like this [pushes back head] and the hair falls to the back [of the head]. [I] used to be scared but have not seen one. And then it claws but [I] have not seen one. Such used to be said.

Q: And scratched the person?

#8B: [Nods] Such used to be said but [I] have not witnessed. They are called *demong* 'Tibetan brown bear.'

Q: You're 84, so in 1929 you were born. In the 1930s there were animals and lots of trees and firewood. Many years later when you left Tibet in 1960 were the trees still there? Were the animals still there?

#8B: [I] heard that the Chinese destroyed them a little. The Chinese had appeared by the time [I] came to India. In Tibet one never revealed about mountains that held mineral deposits that are precious for fear that [they] would be mined.

Q: Yes?

00:19:39

#8B: The Chinese were mining mineral deposits in the mountains. Hence, one never spoke about the existence of such precious [mountains] for fear that they would excavate.

Q: When there were animals in the mountains, were your father and your brothers, were they allowed to kill the animals like the musk deer or the leopards? Were they allowed to shoot them or kill them?

#8B: [Fathers and brothers] did not do that. [They] did not kill wild animals. There were some like vagabonds that did not have a place to stay. They killed and ate; [otherwise] wild animals were not harmed.

Q: Why did nobody kill the animals?

#8B: We should have compassion in accordance with the dharma. [Wild animals] feed on grass, drink water and exist by itself and our killing [them] is sinful.

Q: But did your family eat other kinds of meat from animals?

00:21:53

#8B: [We] ate as well as killed domestic animals during cold weather in winter when everyone killed an animal or two, large animals. [They] were killed and the meat left to freeze to be used later for food in springtime at the time of sowing the fields. The vagabonds were asked to slaughter [domestic animals] for our regular use as the family members did not do it.

The slaughterers did not have to be paid money but they took a little bit of the innards, sufficient for their use.

Q: In exchange for the slaughter?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: Yes.

Q: *Ama-la*, how did you happen to go? At what age did you go to Lhasa to learn how to make all those wonderful things you told us about?

#8B: [I] must have reached the age of 9 or 10, perhaps a little over 10.

Q: What was the reason why...?

#8B: [Interrupts] [My] relative did not have any children and adopted me.

Q: Which relative? Whose relative?

00:23:57

#8B: Maternal uncle's wife. No, my older sister's husband...older sister adopted [me] as she could not have children.

Q: Your older sister?

#8B: Yes.

Q: Not maternal aunt but older sister?

#8B: Yes, one should call [her] as older sister. When they could not have children after marriage I was adopted.

Q: Did you have any thoughts or feelings about going to live with your...it was your aunt, an older...?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: Older cousin.

Q: ...I mean to go with your cousin? Did you want to go? Was that difficult?

00:24:55-00:25:21

[Interviewee coughs]

#8B: It was [my] wish to go.

Q: Was there something about going to Lhasa that appealed to you?

#8B: We lived in a village and earlier when [I] visited my sibling a few times, [I saw that] Lhasa is a city and found it enjoyable as a child. So [I] wished to go.

Q: So tell us what was your life like when you got moved to Lhasa? What happened?

00:26:35

#8B: [I] lived with my sibling for a few years until [I] could fend for [myself]. [I] had been taught the skills while living with [my] sibling and then started to live separately. [I] used [my] skills and survived.

[I] had to pay rent for the house because [I] did not own one. [I] had to rent a place to stay.

Q: So you were about 10 when you went to live with your aunt. How long did you stay, I mean with your cousin? How long did you stay with your cousin and was she teaching you skills while you were there?

#8B: [I] must have lived with older sister for 6-7 years. It must be more than 6-7 because [I] lived with older sister until [I] met [my] spouse.

Q: So maybe...if you...it was, say 10 it would've been '39 when you left. How old were you when you got married?

#8B: [I] gave birth at the age of 22. The first child is 61 years old.

Q: So your first child was born, you're aged 22. So it was around 1951 your first child was born. Did you move in with your husband and live in Lhasa?

00:29:26

#8B: [My] husband was a soldier and [we] used to meet until His Holiness the Dalai Lama left for exile to India. Then I got left behind. As a soldier he left to escort [His Holiness].

Q: Before we get to that part of the story, could we talk of some of the skills that you learned you said, you learned how to make things in Lhasa. What was...boots and what was some of the things you made?

#8B: Hair tassels, ribbons for women's hair.

Q: And then?

#8B: [I] forget. Boots, tassels and...I forget as [I] talk.

Q: Isn't it *pangden* 'striped apron indicating married status of women?'

#8B: Not *pangden*. [I] do not know how to weave *pangden*. Sweater! [I] know how to knit sweaters.

Q: How did you make the ribbons? What was the material that you made them from and where did you get this material?

#8B: The ribbons are made from the white parachute. One can pull out silky threads from it. One can buy the silky ropes by weight and you split the rope, dyed it in different colors and made tassels.

One length of rope measures two and half arm-lengths. The rope of the parachute measures two and half arm-lengths.

Q: Where did these parachutes come from?

00:32:33

#8B: Perhaps they came from abroad but there were many [traders] that sold such in Lhasa, sold in kilograms. You bought from them, dyed into red, green, yellow and all. You purchased the colors and dyed [the silk threads].

When the parachute rope is split, there are 3-4 strands of thread within. You pulled out two strands at a time and hung them on a nail and then it became...[not discernible].

Q: It's hung on a nail and then...?

#8B: [The strands] are pulled out and hung on the nail, which is then removed from the nail in bunches and later dyed.

Q: What were the favorite colors people liked?

#8B: The favorite colors were pink and blue, light green and beige, dark green and beige. [People liked] such colors. The men's voluminous tassels were all dyed in red. One made small tassels for aristocratic gentlemen to be used for a single braid. [I] also made markers for rosaries and threads for *soji* earrings [indicates thread over ear to support earring] of Tibet. Then [I] also braided *pangdhi* of this [gestures off camera] width.

Q: What's *pangdhi*?

00:35:34

#8B: It is the bands for the *pangden*. One measured the waistline and then hooking it over the feet, [braided] with your hands. [People] bought a lot of *pangdhi*. One used colorful silk threads.

Q: Did you sell these yourself or take them to a store and they sold them for you?

#8B: [I] took them to a store that made a profit. [The store] paid us a price and then sold by adding their profit. One was not short of buyers because if the quality was good [people] said, “Bring it to us, bring it to us.” Traders that visited villages took these in bulk.

Q: This was a very popular item with the women and the men.

#8B: Yes. And it was absolutely necessary for the dancers. [We] also made the dangling earrings for the opera performers’ masks. Then we also made [holders for] the one called *chapl* ‘mouth rinsing vessel’ using yellow silk ropes that *rinpoche* ‘respected lamas’ wear.

Q: *Rinpoche*?

#8B: All lamas wear a *chapl* here [gestures off camera]. Then [we] also made bands to tie the *zen* ‘monks’ upper garment’ called *zenthak* with a long rope and a tassel. One can make a number of things.

Q: Did you work by yourself or have other people working together with you?

00:38:38

#8B: There were others. There were others and [we] also gave training if requested. There were trainees that came.

Q: Were you in charge or was your aunt in charge of this?

#8B: [Speaks before interpreter] Some carried a bunch [raises left arm] and went anti-clockwise around the Bakor ‘Central Square’ and found customers. I used to keep [the products] at the store.

Q: Were you in charge or was your aunt in charge of this?

#8B: It was older sister [who was in charge].

Q: Did you earn enough money to support yourself and live on your own?

#8B: There was just about enough to buy provisions and clothing but not for saving and such, as there are things to buy for the house.

Q: How did you meet your husband?

00:40:30

#8B: When [I] met him for the first time?

Q: Yes.

#8B: When [we] first met he was a soldier and [we] just met like that. He was in the Security Division [of His Holiness the Dalai Lama].

Q: How did [you] meet?

#8B: [He] came on a visit to meet someone [I] knew and they spoke [and arranged it].

Q: You also said, *ama-la*, that you learned how to make boots. Can you tell us what kind of boots you made and what were they made of?

#8B: The sole of the boots are made of yak hide, 2-3 [layers] of hide; some used two and some used three [layers]. To it you added a raised portion by hand sewing designs of the Great Wall of China and such. The upper part of the boot is made of *nambu* ‘machine-made woolen cloth’ with a lining within. Before attaching [it to the sole] you made embroideries with different colored thread and also embroidered the back heel using red woolen cloth. After [the two parts of] the *zompa* is done, then [the parts] are stitched together. Then you know the pin stands that are kept on tables? Beautiful ones can also be made.

Q: What on the table?

00:42:39

#8B: In offices pins, like nails, are pushed onto something [pincushions]. [I] know how to make such. Then [I] also made children’s boots, little ones like dolls’. Different things.

Then [I] made *zompa* that were not full length but half-length. Normally it is worn up to here [gestures off camera] but there were half-lengths too.

Q: The design that was put on the boots, the design of the Great Wall of China, how did that happen to be put on the boots?

#8B: The sole is made of leather; the part on which one walked is made of leather. There is this thing on top where one puts the foot in, here the design of the Great Wall of China is sewn using thread.

Q: Was that an important symbol for the Tibetan people?

#8B: It is considered a good [symbol]. The design of the Great Wall of China is put on boots called *thenyim* and not the *kyurtsang*.

Q: *Thenyim*?

#8B: *Thenyim* are those that have two layers of leather. Some have only one layer of leather.

Q: Did you make boots and then sell them or did people come in and give you their foot size and you made them to fit that person?

00:46:14

#8B: One made many such and gave them together to the buyers. There were separate sellers [of boots]. Whatever it may be, if one could make them there was no dearth of buyers. Traders bought in bulk from them.

Q: Wasn't it made according to foot size?

#8B: No, not to measurement. There were different sizes; some were made bigger and some smaller.

Q: How long would a pair of boots like that last a person in ordinary everyday use?

#8B: It lasted well. If the leather sole wore off, one could put another leather with the use of nails, small black ones. If the leather wore off additional leather can be put there. Nevertheless, it lasted well.

After you made these things the people of Lhasa did not buy many but merchants took them outside [Lhasa].

Q: You're married, you said around 1951. Did Lhasa seem the same in '51 and then in the years that followed? Were there any changes that happened in Lhasa?

00:48:39

#8B: It was the same until the Chinese attacked. After the occupation by the Chinese and before the attack, they made [people] plant saplings in the Bakor of Lhasa.

Q: Yes?

#8B: Saplings were planted in the Bakor of Lhasa.

Q: Saplings?

#8B: Yes, different kinds of trees after the occupation by the Chinese. It was the same before the Chinese occupation. Traders arrived from different countries. People from the world came to Lhasa.

When English ambassadors arrived, the Tibetan Government received them. [They] were received and they [the Tibetan Government] did what had to be done.

Q: Was that traders from all over the world came before the Chinese invaded Lhasa or after?

#8B: [The traders] arrived before the Chinese [invasion]. All merchandise came before the Chinese appeared. There were shops that sold gold and silver and everything.

Q: Tell us more about how Lhasa looked before the Chinese came to Lhasa? What other things...How was it different before the Chinese came and what did it look like after?

00:50:55

#8B: [Lhasa] turned poorer immediately after [the Chinese] arrived. After they occupied, they confiscated all possessions. And once in a month the people of Lhasa had to stand in queue from 3-4 o'clock in the morning to buy provisions from Chinese shops called *kungsi*. Wheat flour, rice and oil that amounted to a beer-bottle full per month had to be purchased from the Chinese. In the past villagers used to come and sell but the Chinese confiscated their goods. Everybody in Lhasa...except for the poor...the Chinese were doing such things. They occupied [our] land.

One could not buy from any place. There were *kungsi* established in each location from where to buy provisions.

Q: What happened to the shops that the Tibetans owned?

#8B: Regarding the Tibetan shops, there were a few aristocrats that sold [theirs] to the Chinese. The Chinese turned them into offices and such. The rest of the shops remained as usual. There were many Tibetan shops.

Q: What happened to your business, to your boot business, to your ribbon business? What happened?

00:54:01

#8B: The Chinese immediately established factories. A tailoring factory was set up for tailors and for us boot-makers, boot factories were established in different places. [The Chinese] gathered 15-20 skilled people and started factories in different places depending upon one's skill.

Besides, they taught various other skills like sewing half *chupa* 'traditional coats' for men where the upper part could be removed in warm weather and candle making. They taught new skills.

Q: Did you go to any of these units yourself, *ama-la*?

#8B: Initially [I] did for a few days, no, a few months, in the boot-making unit.

Q: Can you tell us about that? What did it...Where did they set up the units and how many people were in it and did you get paid for your work?

#8B: [The Chinese] set up [factories] in different places.

Q: How many people worked there?

#8B: There were some [factories] with 10-15 workers and some with 20 workers depending upon the number of skilled people. That was how it was done. More number of skilled workers led to a bigger factory. Less number of skilled workers meant few people.

Q: Was there any payment?

00:56:24

#8B: A little salary was paid, as one must buy provisions and such. However, the revenue was not like what you earned normally.

Q: Did you have a choice to go? Could you say, “No, I want to keep my business”? What would happen if you said no?

#8B: Initially, one could but later they [the Chinese] put restrictions.

Q: There was no choice later?

#8B: Later you had to remain in the assigned section. In case of meetings, each locality held a meeting attended by those living in the area and there should be no talking or laughing. One only spoke when asked a question by them [the Chinese]. One could not reply, “I will go home and consult [my] sibling or husband.” You were told to speak your opinion whatever it may be.

Q: How often did you have to go to the meetings, *ama-la*, and how long were they?

00:58:45

#8B: Meetings were called very frequently. If you had been a servant in the past or...meetings pertaining to launching protest against one’s masters were called very frequently. It could be the masters or something like what you [interview team] are doing. [The Chinese] will look for reasons to subject you to *thamzing* ‘struggle session’ by influencing people you knew. [They] did a lot of such things. Here we have the leaders and executive members of the Tibetan Women’s Association, the Tibetan Youth Congress, the staff members of the Tibetan Government, even if one had held the responsibility of a village leader, all of them would be subjected to *thamzing*. Then it would become worse and worse.

For instance, if I were serving as a maid for you [indicates interpreter], you would give me access to the entire house, the freedom to cook anything, provide me with clothes and pay me a salary. Yet, I would be advised to subject [my] employer to *thamzing*. “How many years did you serve [your] employer? You have been a serf for so many years. Subject [her] to *thamzing*.” “[I] do not need to subject [my] employers to *thamzing*. They are most beneficial, giving me the freedom to eat anything, provide clothing and pay a salary. [I] do not need to subject them to *thamzing*.” [However, the Chinese would] make every effort to force me to oppose you by saying, “I served you for so many years. You have caused me suffering.” One would be coaxed to say it. That was how *thamzing* took place.

Q: Were you ever made to be involved in *thamzing* of somebody that you worked for like your relative or anybody?

01:02:27

#8B: I was not told [to subject anyone to *thamzing*]. [The Chinese] did not target the humble and the poor but the well off and employers were subjected to *thamzing*.

Q: The poor were being forced to subject employers to *thamzing*. Were you ever told, “Your cousin isn’t good. [She] made you work” and to...?

#8B: No, those that trained people in a skill were not [subjected to *thamzing*]. It was the servants. [My cousin] taught me the skill.

Q: Can we establish what years we’re talking about here? From what year to what year are you describing, *ama-la*?

#8B: The *thamzing* began less than a year after the attack. The Chinese had occupied the country; after occupying the country...

Q: A year after Lhasa was attacked?

#8B: ...the employers were subjected to *thamzing*.

Q: Before Lhasa was attacked, *ama-la*, can you tell us were there many Chinese present and how did you feel about what was going on in the city before the attack?

01:04:33

#8B: At that time everybody... though we did not know much, the elders used to say, “Whatever it maybe nothing good is going to come about. The number of Chinese keeps growing. Nothing good is going to come about.” Such things used to be said. There were Chinese that ran restaurants, hair saloons and set up small offices, which kept increasing. Later they even brought goats and sheep for consumption from the villages. [The situation] was becoming worse and worse.

I mentioned earlier that in Lhasa there is the Gyutoe Monastery at the place called Ramoche, a fine monastery with statues of the Jowo and Tsepa Lhakang. The monks of Gyutoe Monastery were brought into Lhasa to clean toilets. There were carts pulled by men in which was dirt filled in cans. The monks were forced to dig out dirt from toilet pits. We were not allowed to assist the monks and were stopped from offering a cup of tea. The monks of Gyutoe Monastery were made to suffer so. Some of the monks of Gyutoe Monastery might have come here [to India].

Q: Was that before Lhasa was attacked?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: After.

Q: That was after.

#8B: [The Chinese] gave workshops for monks and nuns. The workshops were given together for the monks and nuns so that they might *baklo*. Later *baklo* happened. That was the creation of the Chinese.

Q: *Baklo* means to...?

01:07:07

#8B: That is when monks and nuns lose celibacy. There were good monks and nuns and the Chinese gave them workshops together and they assembled and lost celibacy. They [the Chinese] made every such effort.

There were many stupas along the route from Lhasa to Sera [Monastery]. One walked this way and then this way [indicates making a circumambulation of the stupa by walking clock-wise during the to and from journey]. Before we left all the stupas were destroyed and converted into roads. The people went there and wanted to take the debris to the river but were not permitted. [The Chinese] filled carts and threw the debris into ditches. That is how they did. [Becomes emotional]

During the attack animal corpses and human bodies were instantly removed in horse carts. It was remarked that the pile of human bodies and horse corpses was higher than a mountain. And then was set on fire.

And then they [the Chinese] made it worse and worse.

01:09:38

For around a week [the Chinese] may not have realized that His Holiness the Dalai Lama had gone for exile to India. Later when [they] came to know, [the Chinese] put up boards everywhere announcing where the Dalai Lama had reached on a particular day and “if any of your parents or relatives have left likewise, [they] will face problems neither being here nor able to get there. Seek information about [their] whereabouts and the Chinese will help you bring them back.” [They] gave such guidance.

To go to Sera [Monastery] from Lhasa during the attack...around a week after the attack when one walked to meet relatives at the monastery, one could not pass on the road because dogs were eating human corpses. People had been killed during the attack and the dogs attacked [passers by]. Later at the monastery older monks were interned in big assembly halls and forced to use the *tsodo* as toilets.

Q: What's *tsodo*?

#8B: *Tsodo* are [pots] in which monks' tea and *thukpa* 'noodle soup' are cooked. Old monks that could no longer do any work were confined in the assembly hall and forced to use the *tsodo* as toilets. Little monks were confined separately and the young monks appointed as leaders by the Chinese were given titles, donned Chinese uniform and were armed with pistols. All the younger ones were turned into officials.

Q: *Ama-la*, these were devastating scenes that you saw after the attack on Norbulingka but can you please go back and tell us what led up to the people going to the Norbulingka to protect His Holiness? Can you tell us that story and were you there?

#8B: Before the attack?

Q: Before the attack

01:13:22

#8B: Before the attack and just around the attack...as for security, there were many army divisions to provide security for Tibetans. There were units like the Drapchi Maga, Kusung Maga, Gyantse, Dongda and the police. The police were there right in Lhasa to provide security while the others moved from place to place whenever necessary. The Kusung Division accompanied His Holiness the Dalai Lama wherever [he] went.

Q: What happened as the situation developed in Lhasa?

#8B: The situation turned graver when the Monlam Festival began in Lhasa. The Monlam Festival began from the 2nd day of the 1st Tibetan lunar month under the authority of Drepung [Monastery]. At that time there was talk of an attack and crowds thronged to seek protective amulets from a certain *rinpoche*. Everybody realized nothing good was going to happen and made preparations in the event of an attack by digging toilets where there were none within the courtyard and dug water if there was no water available. One could get water wherever you dig in Lhasa because Lhasa is said to be located near a lake. Toilets were constructed within the courtyard where there were none. Such preparations were being carried out in advance, and in the monasteries.

01:16:09

Then after the attack the Chinese captured this lama. He was a very holy lama and had performed the rituals connected to the *thorgyab* ‘offerings of pyramid-shaped dough’ at the end of the Monlam Festival in Lhasa. He had performed the *thorgyab* rituals in such a way as to bring damage to the Chinese, which came to the knowledge of the Chinese. Rinpoche was not able to escape into exile and was still in Lhasa. He was not able to flee and hid during the day and visited people [he] knew during the night. Later the Chinese captured [him] and subjected the lama to a great deal of *thamzing*.

Q: You said after the attack, when the attack happened, *ama-la*, where were you when the bombs were falling on Norbulingka?

#8B: At that time I lived where there were 7-8 families sharing a courtyard. We were all together. The Chinese attacked at around 12 o’clock in the night and [I] heard the *dhing*, *dhing* sound of the cannons. [I] could hear the sound even after stuffing [my] ears with cotton balls. They began the attack at 12 o’clock in the night. It continued from 12 o’clock at night through the next day and...after two nights and a day...the following morning [we] lost, Tibet was lost. The attack took place for two nights and a day.

When the shells fell into water nothing happened. In Tibet there are water containers and up to the level of water nothing happened to the container but the portion that did not contain water exploded. Tin cans and such exploded or were dotted with holes from the shells. The walls were damaged and one remained indoors [covers ears with palms] and cried.

Q: Were there people at the Norbulingka when the shelling started?

01:19:56

#8B: The army and monks of Gaden, Sera and Drepung [Monasteries] were at the Norbulingka. Monks had been dispatched to protect the Potala Palace and the Norbulingka in addition to the troops. Many such arrived. [I] had a monk relative who came at night and said that [he] was assigned to the Potala Palace and wished to borrow a coat, as it was cold then. Many monks were deployed at night for protection in addition to the soldiers that were many.

Q: How did the people know how to get there?

[Interpreter interprets as: Were there people there?]

#8B: There were.

Q: How did the people know to get to the Norbulingka?

#8B: The reason [they] got to know about Norbulingka was on account of the one called Pamo Kunsang-*la* of the Tibetan Women's Association. She belonged to the Kundeling family. The Kundeling home is located between the Norbulingka and Lhasa. Being an aristocrat family they had been to attend the assembly meeting where the Chinese had said, "Tomorrow we are inviting His Holiness the Dalai Lama to a banquet at Silonpa. [We] will escort [His Holiness] in a Chinese vehicle." An invitation for a banquet meant that the senior aristocrats and His Holiness the Dalai Lama would attend. The Chinese had sent across this request. The aristocrats assembled for a meeting and, to put it in colloquial language, held discussions.

01:22:07

In Tibet there used to be two *mipon* of the judiciary, two *mipon*. Here it is called judge, which was known as *mipon* in Tibet. They were the ones that passed judgment to the people and were powerful. At around 7 or 8 o'clock their staff members relayed the message to the public, to every man and woman, "The Chinese have stated that they are going to invite His Holiness the Dalai Lama for a banquet at Silonpa tomorrow. A Chinese vehicle is going to take [His Holiness] across. If you care for His Holiness be at the Norbulingka around 3 or 4 o'clock without giving excuses like "my home or my children." If one does not want His Holiness then that is it." That was the message. The next day around 3-4 o'clock everybody—I had two children whom I left behind—went to the Norbulingka. Every man and woman went there. So the Chinese vehicle could not come there.

The aristocrats began the assembly meeting. A *tsidung*—a monk [official] is called a *tsidung*—of the Chamdo Phakpa-*la* too attended the meeting. He seemed to be a Chinese spy. After the assembly meeting when all the aristocrats returned to Lhasa, he too did. Their [Chamdo Phakpa and the *tsidung*'s] residence was located at Tumsikhang in Lhasa. There [the *tsidung*] removed his monk's robes, donned Chinese attire, hid a pistol here [indicates right waist], put on a pair of glasses, a scarf and a cap and almost got through into the Norbulingka on a bicycle amidst the people. Then the people stoned [him] to death. It was the people that slayed [him] and there were no soldiers or monks involved. The

public, both men and women did it, with the women crying and throwing handfuls of dust if that was the least they could do. This must have taken place at 2 or 3 o'clock as the assembly had concluded and [the officials] left for lunch to Lhasa.

Q: Two or 3 o'clock in the afternoon?

01:24:13

#8B: Yes, in the afternoon. [The *tsidung*] was slain around that time. It seems he had come after having accepted to kill His Holiness the Dalai Lama as [he] used to attend meetings in the Norbulingka every day and was familiar. At around 4:30 that evening, the man's corpse was tied with a rope and was handed over to a *rakyap*, a person that removes bodies. They dragged [the body] from the stone-lion gate of the Norbulingka to the Lhasa Omkhang where bodies are placed. We followed, spitting and flinging dust and by the time [we] reached Lhasa it was 6 o'clock. That day nobody had even a drink of water, the entire public.

Q: Where did you go? Lhasa Omkhang?

#8B: Omkhang is where bodies are placed. It was given there, the body.

Q: Is it a cremation ground?

#8B: It is not a cremation ground but the *rakyap* take over, and they took it elsewhere. That very night the family paid the *rakyap* who took the body away. Chinese trucks transported everything from the residence of the Chamdo [Phakpa family] in the night. [They] relocated to the Chinese area. [People] then realized that nothing good was going to come about. [I] think it was the 8th day of the Tibetan calendar that His Holiness the Dalai Lama, without the knowledge of the Chinese and the people was forced to flee into exile.

01:26:00

After [His Holiness] left for exile, a few days later under the leadership of Pamo Kunsang-la of the Kundeling [family]...there were four working members of the Tibetan Women's Association, one called Acha 'Older Sister' Yangchen-la; Ganishakha Ani-la, a very famous nun, and a lady called Hayanglenpa. These five were the chairperson and leaders of the people. They organized an incense offering ceremony so that His Holiness the Dalai Lama did not meet with any untoward incidents along the journey into exile. We were told that the Chinese were bound to do something and that we must offer an incense ceremony. [We] made incense and petition offerings at the Tsuglakhang 'Central Cathedral' and instead of returning home went to the Bakor of Lhasa and shouted, "Tibet belongs to the Tibetans, Communist Chinese get out this very day."

There were many Chinese with guns drawn in the residences that had been sold [to them]. After circling the Bakor [we] went towards the Norbulingka, exited through a gate and passed the Kundeling residence towards Banjori and Barmari, where offerings used to be made to protective deities. [We] made offerings of incense there. It was late by the time [I] returned. It was decided to make more incense offerings but that was the only one [we] were able to. This occurred on the 12th.

Q: Continue, please.

01:31:59

#8B: If the incense offering had taken place today, the Chinese attacked the following night. If the incense offering had taken place today, the Chinese attacked the following night at around 12 o'clock. Hence, it could be done only once.

It was decided to hold [incense offering ceremonies] later but it could not be done. The Chinese subjected them [leaders of the Tibetan Women's Association] to *thamzing* many times by taking [them] to different areas. They were brought to one area and made to undergo *thamzing*. Pamo Kunsang-*la* was subjected to *thamzing* the most number of times. [She] was forced to accept all that [she] had never done. [She] was taken to different places to undergo *thamzing*. Then Pamo Kunsang-*la* was put in prison. [She] was in prison for many years. [I] wonder what happened [to her] later.

Q: And then, *ama-la*?

#8B: What was it about...?

Q: Pamo Kunsang-*la* was subjected to *thamzing* and imprisoned.

#8B: Yes. And then the Chinese had taken full control.

Q: Yes.

01:33:56

#8B: I wanted to say something but have forgotten it. Pamo Kunsang-*la* and the others were subjected to *thamzing* many times. Wicked things like organizing workshops for monks and nuns with the objective for *baklo* were conducted. These have been mentioned earlier and about the monks of Gyutoe Monastery cleaning toilets. Things became worse and worse.

During a *thamzing* session all the people gathered in a big courtyard. Talking and laughing was prohibited. On a table the Chinese placed a flask of tea and a glass containing a few tea leaves that was meant for those conducting *thamzing*. Then giving the name, it was announced that there was such a reactionary...if it was Pamo Kunsang-*la*, it was proclaimed, “[We] have a reactionary called Pamo Kunsang-*la*. Should she be subjected to *thamzing* or not?” This was asked of the people and the people were forced to say, ‘Yes, [she] must be subjected’ [raises right fist] and not otherwise. “Should it be an aggressive *thamzing*?” “Yes, it should be an aggressive *thamzing*.” [Raises right fist] And then it was said, “Bring the reactionary.”

01:35:24

[Pamo Kunsang-*la*] was brought out with one person holding here [indicates left shoulder], one here [indicates right shoulder] and one here at the nape such that [she] could barely walk. [She] had to face the people and then was pushed down saying, “Bow to the people.”

As [she] bend [she] was pulled up saying, “[Face] the people.” Such was done [to her] and then [her] previous servants and maids were forced to subject [her] to *thamzing*. There may be some friends too that might have some grouse and that is how one was subjected to a great deal of *thamzing*.

Q: In the case of Pamo Kunsang-*la*, her servants and maids were forced to subject her to *thamzing*?

#8B: Yes.

Q: And then?

#8B: Then there could be [some of her] friends among the people or some wicked ones that were also made to conduct *thamzing*.

Take the present Tibetan Government for instance where there are different levels of officials. All those that worked for the Tibetan Government or in a village or in areas of Lhasa or that worked for organizations like the Tibetan Women’s Association or the Tibetan Youth Congress, even if it was a small post, all such people were subjected to *thamzing*, accusing them of being in the class that oppressed the people while working for the Tibetan Government in the past. Even if it had been just a small post one suffered *thamzing*.

01:38:40

During the attack...my house is located close to the Bakor of Lhasa and when [I] looked through the window there were the injured on the road that had been struck by bullets. There was blood and one removed his shirt and with the mouth [indicates holding one end of shirt in mouth] tying it. There was not anyone to help and [I] saw [him] dragging himself away. However, the Chinese did not leave behind the dead since they were the ones that had done the killing. [Bodies] were instantly loaded onto carts and removed.

It was not just our people but there were numerous dogs, horses and mules that went berserk on the roads and had also been struck by shells and killed. These were also removed in the carts.

There is the Gyanak Riwotsenga ‘Mount Wuthai of China’ and a lama from there found a *namyik* ‘letter from the sky.’ This was spoken about just before the appearance of the Chinese when I was a child—[I] was like a child though not in age. It was stated thus:

Gyanak Riwotsenga
Geshe Sonam Rinchen
Taro miro tsikpa rilay thowa
Zagyu yona zawang mepa
Gongyu yona gonwang mepa
Bhumay lhakhang dimpay tse
Geshe makpon dimpay tse

**Master Sonam Rinchen of
The land of China's Mount Wuthai
Corpses of humans and horses pile as high as the tallest mountain
From the food stock, people have no right to eat
From the clothes, they have no right to wear
The women now on tend to the temples
And holy masters rise up to command the army**

01:40:43

It was said that a letter fell from the sky. The Chinese were providing hints but we did not comprehend. Nobody understood it. [The prophecy] was right. The Chinese attacked and even if you owned a house, there was no right to live in it for you had to leave the house behind. One had to leave behind the food that one possessed, and numerous *geshe* 'monks with Buddhist philosophy degree' joined the army, that is *geshe makpon dimpay tse*. *Bhumay lhakhang dimpay tsay* prophesied nuns becoming temple caretakers. *Taro miro tsikpa rilay thowa, gyamtso ta kyi khang pay thue* "A time will be when oceans fill with blood." The Chinese had been talking about these earlier but we could not comprehend. The [prediction] really came true.

Q: When the people went to Norbulingka, *ama-la*, were you in that group that went?

#8B: Yes, [I] was there at that time. [I] went early in the morning. It was the day that the person, the Chamdo Phakpa-*la*'s [*tsidung*] was killed. [I] was there that day and also at the incense offering ceremony. [I] went to all [these events].

Q: Were there many people in both of those gatherings?

#8B: There were numerous people. At the time the Chamdo Phakpa-*la*'s *khenchung* 'rank of clergy in the Tibetan Government' was killed in front of the Norbulingka every man and woman had gathered. There were an incredible number of people, monks too. [I] heard that some of the monks were at the back [of the Norbulingka]. However, monks and soldiers were not involved in the killing. The killing was done collectively through stoning by the women and everybody.

Q: Who gathered for the incense offering ceremony?

01:43:30

#8B: There were only women at the time of the incense offering ceremony, women that were in Lhasa. It was a Women's Uprising and consisted of only women with not one man present.

It was only a day and a night following the protest...if the protest took place this day—the attack took place the night after the next day. There were not many days...around two days after the killing at Norbulingka His Holiness the Dalai Lama left.

His Holiness was living in the Norbulingka palace when the *khenchung* of Chamdo Phakpa-*la* was slain, at the time the Chinese invited [His Holiness] to the banquet.

A day or two after this riot took place [His Holiness] had to leave for exile.

Q: How did you feel when you heard he had left?

#8B: Everybody used to remark at that time, “[We] are so unfortunate. What a disaster! The sun of happiness shall no longer shine on us under the Chinese.” Although [I] stuffed [my] ears with cotton balls during the attack [I] could still hear the sound of *bung, bung*.

“May there be no obstacles in the life of His Holiness the Dalai Lama wherever [he] has gone!” Everyone made water offerings and such in their houses and prayed like that.

Q: And what did you decide to do and how long did you stay in Lhasa?

01:46:09

#8B: [I] lived for a long time in Lhasa. How many years has it been from the time [I] came from [my] home?

Q: No, how many years were you after the happening in Norbulingka and His Holiness the Dalai Lama’s escape?

#8B: [I] stayed for around a year after that, a little over a year.

Q: [You] stayed for a year after that.

#8B: Yes. [I] came to know about the *thamzing* during this period.

Q: Who was with you? Your husband had left with His Holiness you said? So you were alone? Did you have children with you?

#8B: [I] had two children to bring, two daughters. [I] was pregnant though not many months into it. [The child] was born in India.

Q: Is there anything else you want to tell us about conditions in Lhasa during the final year before you decided to flee that you haven’t mentioned yet? Anything in particular?

01:48:07

#8B: Did [I] mention about Sera, Drepung, Gaden and the monasteries? These days the general people indicate as if there are no other monasteries in Lhasa except Sera, Drepung and Gaden. There are almost five or six monasteries. There is the Norbulingka Palace where His Holiness the Dalai Lama resides. There are three palaces. There is the Potala Palace, which is His Holiness the Dalai Lama’s residence. There is another palace in the Tsuglakhang of Lhasa. There are three palaces for His Holiness. Three palaces and likewise, wherever [His Holiness] stayed there were the treasuries and the Chinese have confiscated all the wealth and properties.

Q: Did [you] say there are 5-6 monasteries?

#8B: [I] will mention the names of the monasteries, right? The one called Tengyeling Monastery is a branch of the Samye [Monastery] where there is the deity that...[not discernible]. It is called Tengyeling. Tengyeling and then there is Gadenling.

Q: Gadenling?

#8B: Yes, and then Shedhay Datsang, Shedhay Datsang. And Tsomonling Datsang and Muro Datsang. These are large monasteries and not small. Some of the monks might have come here [to India]. There are these three monasteries and then Gyuto [Monastery]. [I] mentioned about the [monks] forced to clean toilets by the Chinese.

Then there is one nunnery where only daughters of the wealthy and the aristocrats and not those of the poor could get admission. In the Tsuglakhang of Lhasa are huge images and it seems the nuns were responsible for turning the prayer wheels. The nuns chanted the Dolma ‘Praises to the 21 Taras’ and as a child [I] used to think [they] were singing. Later [I] realized [they] were chanting the Dolma. They would chant, ‘*Om Jetsunma...*’ as [they] pulled the rope [of the prayer wheel]. [They] were called the nuns of Tsangu, from Tsangu Monastery [Nunnery].

Q: The name of the nunnery is Tsangu Monastery?

01:50:05

#8B: Yes, Tsangu Monastery. There are that many monasteries in Lhasa, yet the names of these monasteries are never mentioned except Sera, Drepung and Gaden.

A little further from Chushul is a monastery called Jangchupling. [The monks] of this monastery had to participate in the Monlam Festival in Lhasa as *Khando Dzinga* ‘Dakini’ [during a performance]. There was an annual *cham* ‘religious dance performance by monks’ at the monastery and it was a fine monastery. Nobody mentions the names of these monasteries and those within Lhasa. I feel uneasy that nobody mentions them when there are that many monasteries and numerous monks.

Q: Thank you for telling us about these...

#8B: [Interrupts] Should I mention about the Monlam Festival in Lhasa? Is it okay not to mention it?

Q: Which one?

#8B: There is the annual Monlam Festival in Lhasa. Should [I] mention about this?

Q: That would be interesting. We have heard about that but I think what would be even more helpful if you could tell us why and how you decided to escape and then we want you to describe some photographs that you brought for us. Okay?

01:53:08

#8B: I left Tibet with this prayer, “May I reach the country where His Holiness the Dalai Lama is living! [I] shall have no regret if [I] died during the journey.” [I] stayed for sometime in Nepal and then came to Dharamsala. While in Dharamsala, when the Tibetan Women’s Association was initially being organized [I] did a lot of work, though not in the capacity of an official because I am not literate. [I] am recounting the story correctly as [I] know and have heard, and not depending upon others.

The Tibetan Women’s Association was initially formed under the leadership of His Holiness the Dalai Lama’s late sister and the Kungoe ‘Your Presence, title of address for government officials’ of the Kunsang family.

Q: *Ama-la*, would you please explain some photographs that you brought to us?

#8B: How shall I explain about the photographs...?

Q: [Hands over a photograph to interviewee] *Ama-la*, this is a beautiful photograph and maybe you can explain what this picture is?

#8B: [Holds a picture of His Holiness the Dalai Lama] This photograph was [taken during the period] when we had our country. At that time the Tibetan Government and all the people made contributions and constructed a Golden Throne for His Holiness the Dalai Lama. His Holiness gave a Kalachakra empowerment after the construction of the Golden Throne. At the time of the Kalachakra we had our country and the freedom to do anything you liked.

Here His Holiness is wearing grand robes during the Kalachakra because there was the freedom to take these out from the vaults. It was a fortunate time that [His Holiness] initiated the Kalachakra empowerment. All these riches have been confiscated by the Communist Chinese, as the Tibetan Government could not bring any, being more concerned about the life of His Holiness the Dalai Lama and escorted [His Holiness to India]. That is it.

[His Holiness] gave the Kalachakra at the Norbulingka.

Q: What year?

01:57:02

#8B: I do not know the year.

Q: What do you think about the shoes His Holiness is wearing?

#8B: The shoes are known as *jachen*.

Q: Yes?

#8B: The shoes are *jachen* and have brocade lining [points to shoes in picture]. The brocade forms the upper part like the *zompa*. The white part here has been stitched with white thread. The soles are made of leather.

Q: You would know how to make shoes like this?

#8B: [I] do not. Such as these are made by expert shoemakers. Whether it is His Holiness' robes or anything else, there are separate people that make them. Not everyone is permitted to make such although one has the expertise.

Q: Tell us about this picture.

#8B: [Holds up a picture of His Holiness the Dalai Lama joined to a photograph of the Potala Palace]

Q: What is this picture?

01:58:54

#8B: Yes?

Q: What is this picture?

#8B: The picture is of the Potala Palace; the Potala Palace, the Namgyal Monastery and the Security Division responsible for the personal safety of His Holiness the Dalai Lama. [I mentioned the Namgyal Monastery, right?

Q: It says under the picture of His Holiness, the quote is "Let love, peace and compassion be our religion."

#8B: Yes. [Joins palms].

Q: *Ama-la*, I would like to close by asking what was it like for you to share your story with us? How did it seem to you?

#8B: In my mind, we are confused and except for seeking refuge orally...in [my] mind [I feel for] our brethren left behind in Tibet that are suffering hell on earth. His Holiness the Dalai Lama with folded hands travels everywhere in the world so that we live happily in India, having the freedom to claim, "my house, my fields." We are happy but [our] brethren in Tibet are suffering hell on earth.

[I hope] His Holiness the Dalai Lama is able to visit Tibet at the earliest and sit on the Golden Throne in the Potala Palace like in the glorious past, and the Tibetan people can have the opportunity to see and hear [His Holiness]. May those that immolated themselves and sacrificed [their] lives be born again as males and have the chance to practice the dharma! That is how I always pray.

Q: Thank you.

#8B: [Smiles and joins palms]

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

02:02:01

#8B: There are no untruths in what I have recounted. [I] do not know to read and write to be able to copy from others. It is what I have witnessed and understood [to have happened]. I am very happy that you are putting in so much effort for the cause of Tibet. His Holiness the Dalai Lama has come right to us here [in Bylakuppe] and I am old and there is no knowing when [I] will die, but leaving that aside, [I have come here] hoping that your hard work will [help in] His Holiness being able to go to Tibet at the earliest. I pray that you will be successful in [your] work and wish to thank you. I have come here with that sentiment in mind.

Due to the benevolence of His Holiness the Dalai Lama [I] do not have any problems in my livelihood. And thanks to the Buddha I live a happy life without any illnesses. Thank you.

Q: Thank you.

#8B: [Joins palms]

END OF INTERVIEW