

# **Tibet Oral History Project**

Interview #13D – Kunchok Tashi (alias)  
May 21, 2012

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[Anonymity Requested]

# TIBET ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

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## INTERVIEW SUMMARY SHEET

1. Interview Number: #13D
2. Interviewee: Kunchok Tashi (alias)
3. Age: 75
4. Date of Birth: 1937
5. Sex: Male
6. Birthplace:
7. Province: Utsang
8. Year of leaving Tibet: 1959
9. Date of Interview: May 21, 2012
10. Place of Interview: Hotel Tibet, Mcleod Ganj, Dharamsala, Himachal Pradesh, India
11. Length of Interview: 1 hr 22 min
12. Interviewer: Rebecca Novick
13. Interpreter: Thupten Kelsang Dakpa
14. Videographer: Ronny Novick
15. Translator: Tenzin Yangchen

### **Biographical Information:**

Kunchok Tashi used to herd sheep along with his grandfather, who chanted prayers and made Tibetan boots while they grazed the animals. His family owned around 150-160 sheep and his grandfather knew the names of each one. Kunchok Tashi gives a detailed insight into the life of a herder—how they spent their time and how the sheep were named and identified. The herders also spun wool while walking with the sheep that was used to make the nomads' tents.

Kunchok Tashi also talks about the kinds of dogs the shepherds owned: the ferocious *dhoyi* that was tied near the gate of the home and the *zikhnyi* that accompanied the shepherd and helped keep away predators like wolves. He describes the *wurdho* 'slingshot' that a shepherd used to chase away wolves and how the *zikhnyi* were trained to follow commands.

Kunchok Tashi and his father decided to escape from their village once they received news about the imminent arrest of his father by the Chinese. They had no time to make plans or take anything with them. When they reached Nepal, they worked as coolies for four years and then reached India in 1963, where Kunchok Tashi continued to work as a coolie on construction projects.

### **Topics Discussed:**

Childhood memories, herding, taxes, Tibetan army, Buddhist beliefs, pilgrimage, invasion by Chinese army, escape experiences, Dalai Lama, life as a refugee in Nepal, life as a refugee in India.

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## Interview #13D

**Interviewee: Kunchok Tashi [alias]**

**Age: 75, Sex: Male**

**Interviewer: Rebecca Novick**

**Interview Date: May 21, 2012**

Question: His Holiness the Dalai Lama asked us to record your experiences, so that we can share your memories with many generations of Tibetans, Chinese and the rest of the world.

**Interviewee #13D: Okay.**

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

**#13D: Okay.**

Q: At any time if you want to take a break, just let us know.

00:00:57

**#13D: That is fine.**

Q: If there's any question that you don't want to answer, that's fine.

**#13D: Okay.**

Q: I'll just let you start by asking you a little bit about your family background.

**#13D: My family here or in Tibet?**

Q: In Tibet.

**#13D: Mother and sister were left behind in Tibet while father and I fled.**

Q: No. When you were growing up?

**#13D: While [I] was growing up my paternal grandparents were there, everybody was there and it was a very happy time in Tibet. There were no problems in Tibet earlier. One herded the goats and sheep and the farmers cultivated their lands. Everybody was happy. Wherever one went there was not anyone to make problems. There was no one creating problems like the Chinese. One was free. There were no taxes and one was free to conduct trade, free to do any work.**

**Tibet was a happy place. There was not any thought of attacking other countries. The former Tibetan Government did not think of attacking other countries and there were not many soldiers. One practiced the dharma and worked in the fields. There were no taxes.**

Q: Weren't there taxes?

00:02:28

**#13D: There was not much tax. If there was a tax, it was on account of lands you had received from the government or association for which one must perform labor [tax]. It was for the land one cultivated. There was not any tax besides that. In the case of trade, one was free to stay anywhere. There was not anyone asking for tax or saying, "You cannot stay here" in the Changthang 'Northern plateau.' There may be gatekeepers at certain villages, but otherwise there was not anyone who said anything.**

**It was a happy time. Earlier Tibet was an incredibly happy [place]. They [the Chinese] deceived like this, "Where you have no roads, [we] will construct roads. Where there is no water, [we] will make water." The Tibetan Government did not send anyone to attack the Chinese, did not send anyone to attack India nor did it think of attacking Nepal. Each one was engrossed in work and lived happily.**

**[The Chinese said], "[We] will construct roads, water and electricity for you." In this way the authorities of Tibet were deceived and then [we] lost Tibet. Earlier to that, there were no problems whatsoever. Then we lost Tibet in this way having been deceived by treachery of roads being constructed where there were none and making water available where there was none. After roads were constructed up to Ngari, then suddenly one day the doors were closed. After drivable roads were constructed from China to Ngari through Kham, then one fine day in the year '59 [the Chinese] launched a sudden attack. That was how Tibet was lost through treachery. Otherwise, there were no heavy taxes and labor taxes in Tibet in earlier times. It was incredibly soft and even if there were taxes and punishments, they were endurable.**

00:04:23

**There were never any sentences like 10 years, life imprisonment or death penalty. The Tibetan law did not have any such [punishments]. It was very peaceful, incredibly so. These days there are talks of death sentences, life imprisonment, 10 years and 15 years. Earlier in Lhasa the Nangtsesha Prison was said to be huge but there were hardly 20 or 30 prisoners. That was the number and it decreased in a year or 5-6 months. These days there are thousands and thousands of prisoners in all the prisons in the country.**

**After the occupation of Tibet, my father and I...After Tibet was occupied, all the people were ordered to gather and father was questioned, "What work did you do during the old government?" Father was to be arrested, which we became aware of. So, at around dusk, at around 6 or 7 o'clock, wearing whatever we had been wearing then, father and I fled. Otherwise, there were no problems whatsoever in Tibet. It was like that since the early days. After escaping, [we] crossed over the mountain pass at Sha Khumbu.**

[Interpreter to interviewer]: *Pa-la* ‘respectful term for father,’ please wait. We’ll do it slowly from the time of your growing up.

**#13D: I see. Okay.**

Q: *Pa-la*, just going back a little bit, what are some of your very early memories of childhood that really stick out for you?

00:08:07

**#13D: I used to herd sheep along with my paternal grandfather. There were many different currency units of the Tibetan Government at that time. There were the *khakang*, *karma*, *karchung*, *chegye* and *kachen*. As children we used to take these various kinds of coins like the *ngulsang chu*, *chugor* and *sangsum gormo*. There were such kinds of money earlier in Tibet. Little children used to play with the coins. The big currency units like the 100 and 50 were made of paper. There were small coins made of copper called *khakang*, *karma*, *chegye*, *zhogang*, *sangsum gormo* and *zhongang gormo*. The *sangsum gormo* was made of silver.**

When children received a few, they put them in their *amba* ‘pouch of traditional coat’ and played. There were all these money in Tibet before the occupation. There were notes of 100 and 50. The Tibetan Government had such kinds of money. There was the *tanka karmo*. Earlier the *tanka karmo* was round but it was later cut into half. There was the *sangsum gormo* that was made of silver. Most of the other [coins] were made of copper. The *chugor* was made of copper.

There were all these kinds of money in Tibet; starting from the 100 notes to the *chugor*, the 50-note, *zhonga gormo*, *zhosum gormo*, *sangsum gormo*, *chegye*, *karma*, *kachen*, *khakang*. The smallest [denomination] of the Tibetan monetary unit was the *khakang*. I can recall all these.

Q: Was the *kang* made of copper?

**#13D: [They] were all made of copper. Except for the 100 notes, all the smaller ones were made of copper. They were copper coins with Tibetan script on them. Little children took small coins from the parents and played with them outside. Like the game *bolay* here, each one tried to take away the others’ coin by aiming at it. [I] used to play that as a little one when living with my parents. I recall herding sheep.**

00:11:15

Tibet had a very small number of troops. There were not many soldiers. The Tibetan army’s strength was 3,000. There were just 3,000 troops and a few policemen. There were never any intentions of waging wars against foreign countries; there never was any. [The Chinese] occupied Tibet in that way. Earlier if there were any taxes, the smallest amount...if [someone] was penalized, it was *khang*, *karma* and *sangang* based on certain calculations. Such amounts might be the penalty but other than that there were never any taxes or penalties in Tibet. Each one was free to do what one wanted. There was never any [restrictions].

[The Chinese] came in '59 and between '58 and '59, the Chinese said [they] would construct roads and provide water where there was none and electricity where there was none. [People] were made to construct roads. The government officials and everyone...After the roads were built [they] occupied Tibet. [They] attacked Tibet. The attack took place in the year '59. After the construction of roads, [the Chinese] drove 30-40 vehicles and inquired where [Tibetan] soldiers were based. Where there were 100 or 50 [Tibetan] soldiers, five, six, 10 or 15 Chinese vehicles brought [their soldiers] and attacked. And then Tibet was lost. They arrested some people and subjected [them] to *thamzing* 'struggle sessions.' The earlier leaders of Tibet were arrested after the occupation of Tibet. When my father was to be captured, we were forced to flee. My father was to be captured.

Q: What did you learn about Tibetan Buddhism growing up?

00:14:47

**#13D:** We were village children and had not been to school. However, our parents and everyone told us even if it was about a worm on the ground, "The worm may die. Keep it aside or [you] will be sinning. Do not throw stones at the birds. That is a sin." Such compassion of the Buddha dharma was prevalent. In our region in Tibet, families raised hens like it is done in India but nobody killed and ate chicken meat.

Q: Were there hens?

**#13D:** Yes, there were hens in Tibet. Families raised 10,15, 20 hens. I can recall that. When a hen died, it was thrown away or fed to the dogs. The hens were kept until [their] death but never killed. There were many fish in the rivers and the parents said, "Do not throw stones, the fish will die." Nobody ate fish, nobody ate chicken; it was never the practice to eat it. Each family owned 15-20 hens and they were kept until death. When a hen died, it was fed to the dogs. If it died in winter, it was frozen as though placed in a refrigerator. It was fed to the dogs. Buddha dharma was like that.

We invited monks to read prayers at home. Some village children did not have much education. If one became a monk, there were dharma [studies]. If someone joined monkhood, there were dharma [studies]. The common people did not know to read and write. The majority of the people in villages did not have the chance to attend schools. Once one joined monkhood, there were religious and scripture studies and practice of the dharma. However, farmers' children were told, "Do not throw stones at the birds. Do not throw stones at the dogs. It will be a sin should [they] die." So, such compassion of the Buddha dharma was taught. Even upon sighting an insect one was told, "Be careful, [you] may step on it."

00:17:08

The hens in your home were fed and left alone until their death. They were never killed. Here hens are killed, beheaded and sold. We have never eaten chicken in our region in Tibet. People disliked chicken meat. There was never the custom of eating fish. There were fish as big as the thighs in the river and some bad children flung stones but were told

**not to. Nobody ever ate them. These are [examples] of compassion of the Buddha dharma. The parents taught, “It is a sin. Do not throw stones. Do not throw stones at the birds. Do not throw stones at fish. Do not throw stones at dogs. Do not throw stones at anything on the ground. [They] may die. [You] will commit sin.” I did not attend school for long. We naturally possess the compassion of Buddha dharma since generations back. We are aware of the dharma but do not know the scriptures because one does not have education. Those that attended school and the monks know the scriptures.**

**The farmers that herded sheep and yaks only concentrated on their work. [They] lived that way. It was a happy life with freedom. There was no problem on account of your livelihood. It was like that. The Tibetan’s compassion for the animals is incredible. Though we do not know to read and write—[I] do not know the scriptures very well as [I] do not have good eyes and did not get the chance to study earlier—yet [we] naturally have compassion. Even if someone is speaking badly, we say, “Do not speak [that way]” since it can happen due to arrogance at times.**

Q: [Were the hens kept] just for the eggs?

00:19:51

**#13D: [We] ate eggs but not the chickens. There was no custom of killing hens. If [they] died, [they] were thrown away. However, eggs were consumed. They were not killed but left alone until they died, whether male or female. Once dead, they were thrown away. Nobody ate them earlier. That is what I can recall. Once the Chinese arrived and Tibet was occupied, [they] maybe ate them.**

Q: Why didn’t you eat fish?

**#13D: [I] do not know why. [I] think those regions in Kham close to the Chinese ate them. Those in the Kham areas ate them but it was never eaten in my region of Sheka. In Dhingri and Sakya areas, there were huge water bodies and big fishes but nobody killed or caught fish. I do not know about distant places, beyond Lhasa but we did not eat [fish] in our region.**

00:21:51

**[I] do not know if they really ate [fish in Kham areas] but that is what I heard, that they ate it. We never ate it in our region.**

Q: Where did you learn to write?

**#13D: After coming to India, I spent a few years in the [Indian] army. [I] learned to write a little at that time. [I] did glance at the scripts while in Tibet but could not write legibly. I just knew how to write my name and that was it. After coming to India and upon joining the army, I copied writing from newspapers but it was not good. I am quite a lazy person.**

Q: Who in your family taught you most, do you think about dharma?



**#13D:** From my family it was my father's older brother who was a monk. [He] was good. There were many other family members like my father's siblings' children. My mother's older brother was also a monk and [he] knew [the scriptures] well. Mother's sibling was a monk.

My father's sibling's son became a monk. My father's sibling who is my paternal uncle was a monk and he was well read in the dharma. In my home lived my father, my paternal grandparents and me. My mother and sister lived separately. I herded goats and sheep and there was no opportunity to study.

Q: Your paternal grandfather, he used to spend a lot of time...

00:24:41

**#13D:** [Interrupts] We owned a large flock of sheep. Grandfather was old and as a child, [he] used to take me along to help [him].

Q: How many sheep were there?

**#13D:** There were around 150-160 sheep before the fall of Tibet. Grandfather herded them and when grandfather could not reach the sheep that were far away, [he] send me to round up the sheep. [I] was send as grandfather's helper. Grandfather did not know to read and write but of course, he recited prayers like *benza guru* 'the mantra, *Om ah hung vajra guru padma siddhi hung*' and the *mani* 'mantra of Avalokiteshvara' and prayed. So [I] am not very good in my writing.

Q: Did he used to tell you stories?

**#13D:** [I] cannot remember much about stories but while herding sheep, [he] used to teach the names of the sheep and where good grass could be found and water was available to take the sheep. [I] cannot recall stories being told. He used to sew *zompa* 'traditional boots,' stitch and spin wool. I cannot recall stories being told.

Q: Your grandfather had named all the sheep?

**#13D:** The houses were...

Q: No, no. Did all the sheep have names?

00:26:55

**#13D:** All the sheep were named depending upon [distinct] fur like Gapa, Amkar. Sheep were named like this. Goats were also named. Such names used to be given. The pasturelands also had names. "That place has good grass and good water. Go there tomorrow. The name of the place is such and there's good grass and water. Herd the sheep there," such [information] would be given. [I] cannot specifically recall stories but [grandfather] spent all his time sewing boots. They were the Tibetan boots that are available in Ladakh. They required a lot of stitches and [he] used to make many of those. I knew how to make those when [I] was younger.

Q: Was it difficult to remember the names of 150 sheep?

**#13D:** [Grandfather] said the names of almost all the sheep and in case a sheep was lost, he would say that such and such a goat or sheep was missing. [He] knew all the goats and sheep. One spent everyday with them and the goats and sheep had distinct coats. Some had large yellow spots and some had small spots, some had white ears and some had one white or black ear, some had white tails and some had black patches on the back. There were different types of coat color; not everyone was the same.

The nomads knew [the names of their flock] better. We owned only 140-150 sheep, which was a small number. The nomads could tell immediately when a goat or sheep was missing. They would describe the missing sheep, whether it was male or female and the identification marks of the goat or sheep. There were identification marks like I have this [not in frame]. Likewise, animals have many identification marks like white ear, cuts or white cheeks. There were many different kinds of color.

Q: How far away would your herd of sheep have to be before you could recognize, “this is my flock of sheep”? What distance could you recognize your own sheep?

00:30:10

**#13D:** Unless the sheep were close, you could not recognize [them] from afar. One must count them everyday. [They] must be counted in the morning and in the evening to check if any was missing. If found missing, it must be identified. Unless you were close, you could not recognize the sheep from afar. If the neighbor owned sheep, they could get mixed up. One could lose [sheep] in that way. If [flocks] came close by, the [missing] sheep smelled [its flock] and came running. It came back. It recognized the scent.

Grandfather used to say, “If people become familiar, they start fighting. If animals become familiar, they love the scent.” If animals became familiar, they learned to be affectionate and when people became too familiar, [they] start to fight. That was an example of how it was when animals became familiar. When the animals were let loose and if there was a flock of around a 100 sheep and another flock nearby, they recognized their own flock and came running.

Q: How did you herd the sheep? Did you use dogs to round up the sheep?

**#13D:** The shepherds took dogs along with the sheep. In Tibet there was a predator called wolf that attacked sheep. If not watched, wolves attacked sheep in the nooks of the mountains. So, dogs were taken along. A shepherd kept a good dog with him.

Q: What type of dog was it? Was it *dokhyi* ‘Tibetan Mastiff’?

**#13D:** There were different types of dogs. One observed dogs and chose a good dog that was huge and barked well. It was the person’s choice. If I liked a dog, I kept and fed it and took it along with the sheep. It followed. If a wolf was spotted—in Tibet we had the slingshot that is made of ropes—the slingshot was fired and the dog was commanded to go

and it did. It chased and the wolf would not be able to kill a sheep but if it had [we] would get the carcass of the sheep back. The wolf ran away and would not be able to eat the dead sheep and [we] got the sheep's carcass back. It was important for a shepherd to take a dog along. Most of the shepherds took a good dog; though [I] do not know if a few did not.

00:33:28

In our region there were flocks of 100, 200 or 300 sheep and some with a 1,000. [The shepherds] always took along dogs that were reared at home. The shepherd fed it and took it along during the day. The dog followed and moved with the person. When a wolf appeared suddenly and the sheep scrambled about and the wolf succeeded in catching a sheep, the shepherd shouted at the dog to go and it ran. At times the wolf succeeded in killing a sheep and at times it was unsuccessful and ran away. It happened like that. In Tibet it was crucial for a shepherd to take a dog. There were dogs like *dokhyi* 'Tibetan Mastiff used as guard dog' and *tsangkhyi* [heavier breed of Tibetan Mastiff]. The shepherd did not take the *tsangkhyi*. The *tsangkhyi* had a big mouth. The *dokhyi* was a good barker. You have the huge ones here these days and they were the same.

Q: Was the *dokhyi* taken along?

#13D: Most [shepherds] took the *dokhyi*. The nomads owned [different kinds of dogs] that lived at the tent and that went with him. The shepherd took a dog along and kept one or two at the settlement where he lived in a tent for the night—nomads [lived] in tents and did not have houses. Nomads reared three or four dogs; they kept many dogs. [He] took along one dog with the sheep and the others guarded the tent. In case someone arrived, they barked and you would know if thieves and bandits had come. The nomads had such dogs.

In our region in Tibet, we had one dog to take along with the sheep while a very good barking dog was tied at the nook near the gate of the family house. That was a good barker and this dog was called *dhoyi*. It was called *dhoyi*.

Q: *Dhoyi*?

#13D: [It] was called *dhoyi*. *Dhoyi* was the [dog] that was tied near the house.

Q: Was it big?

#13D: The dog was big. All dogs were big. One must keep big and grand dogs that will scare away people.

00:36:16

The one that killed sheep can be seen on the television. It has a red mouth and kills animals like buffalos but it is not a tiger or a leopard. The wolf is a greyish one. There were many [wolves] in Tibet and they attacked sheep.

Every family owned a dog. It was tied with a chain at the gate of the house. The dog called *dhoyi* was a good barker. It was fed everyday and not let lose to go outside. The one that

went with the sheep stayed outside in the *lhara*. The sheep pen is called *lhara*. The dog slept beside the *lhara* and when the sheep were herded out the next day, the dog followed the shepherd. Most of the families in our region owned a dog called *dhoyi*. The *dhoyi* was especially meant for protection of home. When someone knocked, it started barking and one looked out.

Q: Was it called *lhara*?

**#13D: Yes? The sheep enclosure was called *lhara*.**

Q: *Lhara*?

**#13D: It is also called *lha* or *lhara*. It was known by this name in Sheka and Dhingri but was called differently in Lhasa and the areas of Kham. The pronunciation was different. It was called *lhara* in our region. Most of the regions near Lhasa, Shigatse and Sakya called it *lhara*.**

Q: Is it [*dokhyi* and the *dhoyi*] the same breed or different breed?

**#13D: Dogs had different coats. [A dog named] Serkya was one with yellowish eyes. Rokpo was completely black. Rokpo Nyingkar was a black dog with white heart. And then there were ones with white paws. Dogs had various coats. The owner [named] their dogs like Serkya, Mari, Nakri, Rokpo and many others.**

00:39:52

**One could keep [a dog] of any color. The dog must be good, ferocious, able and massive. One reared a good dog because there could be thieves.**

Q: The sheep herding dog, were they different...

**#13D: [Interrupts] They were called *dokhyi*. The shepherd's [dog] was called...I have forgotten it.**

Q: I just want to know...

**#13D: [Interrupts] It was called *zikhnyi*.**

Q: *Zikhnyi*?

**#13D: *Zikhnyi*. *Zipo* 'shepherd' *khyi* 'dog.' The *zikhnyi* was a special dog that the shepherd took along and it was called *zikhnyi*. The one that accompanied the shepherd was called *zikhnyi*.**

Q: The sheep herding dogs, did they have a different kind of temperament from the house guarding dogs?

**#13D: The *zikh* were the ones that went to herd sheep with the shepherds. One boasted that one had a good *zikh* that was ferocious.**

Q: Was there any difference in the temperament of a *zikh* and a *doi*?

**#13D: The *zikh* and *dokhi*, [dogs] that were reared by the nomads...**

Q: What's the difference between *zikh* and *doi*?

00:41:06

**#13D: *Doi*?**

Q: *Doi*. You told [us] about the dog that was kept at home.

**#13D: *Dhoyi*.**

Q: *Dhoyi*?

**#13D: *Dhoyi*. The one that was tied [at home] was called *dhoyi*.**

Q: What's the difference in temperament of a *dhoyi* and *zikh*?

**#13D: There was no difference in temperament. The one that was tied at home was called *dhoyi*. The coat was different, like black or white. The dog that accompanied the shepherd was called *zikh*. The one that trailed the sheep was called *zikh*. [They] took along good dogs and not bad dogs.**

The *dhoyi* was tied in a corner near the house. Since it was tied up, it was called *dhoyi*. This was the name used in Sheka and Dhingri. That was in the earlier days. [I] do not know if there have been changes these days. It has been a long time since '59 and I would not know if there are changes. That was the name used before '59, *dhoyi* and *zikh*. The *zikh* accompanied the shepherd; the person that grazed the sheep was *zipo*. The person who herded the sheep was called *zipo*. "[He] is our *zipo*," it would be said.

Q: *Zipo*?

00:42:35

**#13D: A person hired to take care of the sheep was said to be, "our *zipo*." The person that herded sheep was called *zipo*. Whether he was a hired help or the master, he was called *zipo*. *Zipo* was the one that grazed sheep.**

The dog was called *zikh* and the man *zipo*. And the sheep is *luk*. These three went together. There was a *zipo* for every 100 or 200 sheep. If the flock also consisted of goats, it was called *ra-luk* 'goats and sheep.' It was just *luk* for the sheep. There are those that bleat *laa* and those that bleat *baa*. One goes *baa* and the other says *laa*. Goats cried *laa*. So goats and sheep mixed together was called *ra-luk* and [animals] that bleated *baa* were the *luk* and not *ra*.

Q: I'm just curious about how you communicated with the *zipo* and *zikhyi*?

**#13D: *Zipo* and *zikhyi*.**

[Interpreter to interviewer]: *Zipo* is people who followed the...a person.

[Interviewer to interpreter]: Follow a person?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: It's a person.

[Interviewer to interpreter]: Follow a person?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: No, no. It follows the sheep as in like, he's a shepherd. *Zipo* is the word for a shepherd, who herd the sheep.

[Interviewer to interpreter]: Yes, and *zikhyi* also is...

[Interpreter to interviewer]: *Zikhyi* is dog. *Khyi*, because *khyi* is dog.

[Interviewer to interpreter]: This is the sheepdog? *Zipo* was the sheepdog name?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: *Zipo* is a person.

[Interviewer to interpreter]: *Zipo* is a person?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: Shepherd in Tibetan...the word for shepherd is *zipo*. One who...

[Interviewer to interpreter]: Okay, so the dogs who actually herded the sheep, whatever the name is...

[Interpreter to interviewer]: *Zikhyi*.

Q: Okay. How do you communicate with the dogs? How did the shepherd communicate with the dogs?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: Yes, I was getting there. So what used to happen is if you scream, like if you just made loud noises, then it just goes and attacks the wolf.

[Interviewer to interpreter]: Oh, that's the signal to go and attack the wolves.

[Interpreter to interviewer]: And you have those *wurdho*, the slingshots. When you throw the slingshot, it goes there wherever the stone has landed.

[Interviewer to interpreter]: Oh, so you could direct the dog by...with the slingshot.

**#13D:** [We] made something called the *wurdho*. It was made of ropes stitched together. The *wurdho* had a base for a stone and a slender main rope. If fired, [the stone] traveled a distance. [It] travelled a great distance. [It] travelled a distance of 100-200 meters. The stone traveled a great distance. One threw it in the direction of the wolf, and said *choho* to the dog and it ran to where the stone had been hurled. It has been taught that every day, so it ran there. Then the wolf either ran away or if it had killed a sheep, it ran away leaving [the sheep's carcass] behind.

Q: Okay...

**#13D:** [Interrupts] The shepherd followed the sheep and [he] will find out if the sheep is dead, eaten or left behind. If the wolf had killed the sheep, the shepherd brought it back.

Q: Okay, so you would throw the slingshot and throw the stone in the direction that you wanted the dog to go in, for whatever reason, yeah? That's how you would send the dog in the direction you wanted it him to go?

00:46:11

**#13D:** [The dog] ran towards the direction of the stone. [The stone] was aimed at the wolf, in the direction of the sheep and when the dog saw the wolf, being its enemy, [the dog] chased [the wolf]. They are hostile to each other. [The dog] pursued [the wolf]. One must throw the stone so as not to hit any sheep. Wherever one threw the stone, the dog pursued it.

[The dogs] have been trained every day. When one said *choho* and pointed the finger, the dog ran to where the finger was pointed. The dogs have been trained like parrots that have been taught human language. The *zikhhi* are trained. It is training like pointing the finger and saying "*choho*." If one continually said "*choho*" every day the dog would not budge. By needlessly saying "*choho*," some dogs will not move. However, if one said "*choho*" upon sighting [a wolf] the dog ran immediately.

If one continually said *choho* without sighting anything, it will not respond. It will consider it deception just like humans and not move. If [a wolf] was spied, the slingshot fired and the person took a few steps, the dog followed the man and then saw [the wolf] and chased it. It pursued the wolf.

Q: Did you have a series of commands also that the dog would respond to apart from the slingshot or noises or sounds that the dog would respond to?

00:48:21

**#13D:** In general one said "*choho*" numerous times to the dog. If "*choho*" was called out, it started to bark. It was trained every day. People gave training...these days in foreign countries and anywhere, certain dogs...When [I] was in the army, [a dog] was made to smell a pencil that was then hidden. The dog then uncovers it. Dogs are very intelligent. There is a Tibetan saying, "Humans, horses and dogs possess similar nature." I have heard that dogs, horses and humans are intelligent but I do not know if it is true. If a dog was commanded "*choho*," it ran. If it didn't, the person ran a few steps and then

commanded “*choho*” and it followed the man. The man will run in the direction of the wolf and the dog will see [the wolf] since it runs with open eyes. That is how the chase took place. If it [the dog] did not respond, we must run a few steps and then it follows us. [Dogs] are clever. Dogs are very clever.

Q: How did it sound, this “*choho*”?

#13D: One sounded “*choho*” as the dog stood beside. One said, “*choho, choho*” and trained [the dog] every day and it understood. It learned to give chase.

Here in India if one commands, “*ao*” a dog barks and if one said “go” in English, it must go if given training. [The dog] will go outside. If commanded “come in” some dogs will respond. Dogs are intelligent. They were driven with the sheep everyday and encountered wolves 3-4 times a month. They killed sheep. There were plenty of wolves in Tibet. There were not any tigers and leopards but wolves were predators of sheep. Hence, they were chased.

The reason the dog was commanded “*choho*” immediately was because we had spied the wolf while the dog had not. So “*choho*” was said and the finger pointed and the dog ran since it had been trained. The dog gave chase because it was accustomed. Dog training is the same and dogs are intelligent. They ran alongside instantly while we fired the slingshot. The wolf ran away and the dog pursued it.

00:51:05

Training must be imparted. The *zikhyi* that accompanied him [the shepherd] every day must be trained like coming when the command “*sho*” is given and “running” to the command “*choho*.” Once properly trained, it will respond. There were very good dogs in Tibet. *Zikhyi* and the *dokhyi*, the dogs of the nomads, were very special.

Q: I’m kind of getting the sense that *choho* was more like “go and do your job” kind of thing rather than a...

#13D: [Interrupts] I have herded sheep for a long time. I have been with sheep since the young age of 14, 15, 16 and so I have the experience. One must raise good dogs. If a certain family had puppies, one did not buy it but if you knew the family well, you could make a selection and request to be given the puppy. One would make a choice of a good, grand male dog. You had be given it and you reared it well and took it along as *zikhyi*. If it was a ferocious one, it became a *dhoyi* and was tied at home. Certain families tied a *tsangkhyi* that was a huge dog with a large mouth found in Tibet. These dogs were called *tsangkhyi*.

Q: *Tsangkhyyi*?

#13D: *Tsangkhyyi*. These were rare. I heard that the Chinese charge an exorbitant rate these days. The dog had a hanging mouth like this [gestures off camera] and went “*wow, wow*.” It was called *tsangkhyi*. There was a slender breed of dogs called *shakhyi*. They have long legs and are slender that one can see these days. They were called *shakhyi*.



Q: *Shachi*?

00:52:48

**#13D: *Shakhyi, shakhyi*. They are very fast. The biggest one was *tsangkhyi* and [they] had big mouths. The *shakhyi* was a slender one that you see running around the circumambulation path here. They are slender without any flesh on the stomach. This slender one is called *shakhyi*. It is very fast.**

Q: I'm just wondering before we kind of probably move on from the sheep herding questions, but when the sheep strayed, which they must have strayed sometimes from the flock, then how did you direct the dogs to herd the sheep or did they just naturally know what to do at that point? How did you get the dogs to keep the sheep together when they would stray off?

**#13D: There was always a shepherd present if the sheep strayed. When the sheep strayed...When I went with grandfather and the sheep strayed—some sheep strayed far away—I was a child and grandfather sent me saying, “Bring them in.” If there were children [in the family] they would be taken along. A flock was never without a shepherd. [Families] with children took them along. Grandfather took me along when I was 11, 12 or 13 and I would be told, “A sheep has strayed there, bring it in” or “That is straying there, bring it in.” The children ran to round them. One took a slingshot and [the sheep] came together.**

**During the time [the sheep] strayed, wolves lay in wait around mountain bends and rocky cliffs and killed them. We might not see the sheep stray far due to lack of concentration by being engaged in other work. Otherwise, the sheep were kept together. Some nomad families owned thousands of sheep, thousands and thousands. Oh, a huge number. There were some with four horns. The four-horned ones were [found in the place] called Bongpa. Numerous goats and sheep with four horns were found there.**

Q: Was it called Bongpa?

00:55:06

**#13D: Bongpa. It was in the region of Thoe Ngari. In the area called Bongpa...**

Q: Were [they] sheep or...?

**#13D: Sheep. There were sheep with four horns. [They] had four horns. Each sheep had four horns where normally there are only two. There were many with four horns. There were many different kinds. There was a huge population of goats and sheep in Bongpa. There was a huge number of sheep with long fur. The wool was considered inferior but [the sheep] were bigger in size. It was called Bongpa and located close to [the place] called Jang Tsawa. Have you heard of Jang Tsawa? In Tibet Jang Tsawa was said to be the storehouse of precious items. It [Bongpa] was close to the saltpans of Tibet. I have not been there but heard about it. I have not traveled much but I have seen those sheep. [The people of Bongpa] brought salt on the sheep to sell in our region. The sheep were laden with 10-15 kilograms of salt that were sold in our region.**

[The sheep] were in huge numbers in Bongpa. There were over a thousand and two shepherds herded a large flock of sheep, an older person and a younger one. There were two shepherds who were called *lukze* or *zipo*. There were two names, one called *lukze* and the other *zipo*. The person that herded sheep had two names.

Q: *Lukze* and...?

#13D: *Lukze* and the other is called *zipo*. Here we call a person that drives a vehicle as driver. A driver is a driver everywhere. One that grazed sheep was also called *lukze*. "We have a *lukze*" it would be said but *zipo* was also used. *Zipo* was the actual term and used most of the time. One that grazed sheep was also called *lukze*. There were two terms and people in our region understood both *lukze* and *zipo*.

Q: They are actually the same. They have different names.

#13D: Both the terms were understood. [People] in the regions of Tsang like Sakya and Dhingri understood it. During the day a task that a shepherd performed was spinning. He was out the whole day and continued to spin in order to make slingshots and ropes. Shepherds did most of the spinning. The thick yarn was used to make ropes and such. The shepherds wore a *bhenze* on the arm [points to left arm and does spinning motion with right hand] and spun goat fur or sheep wool on it. The shepherds spun a lot of yarn through the day. Some shepherds made boots. They stitched the boots as they went along. There was not much time to sit; a little rest and then [they] followed the sheep wherever they went. That is how it was done.

00:59:18

It was the shepherds that did most of the spinning. Shepherds spun the thread for the nomad's tent. Shepherds mostly spun the thread that is used to make a tent.

Q: Were you actually doing the weaving as you...

#13D: [Interrupts] They made such ropes...

Q: *Pa-la*, were you actually doing the weaving as you were walking along with your sheep?

#13D: One spun with the hands as one walked along. There were no machines in Tibet. One spun thread that way or there was one that rotated like this [spinning motion with right hand]. Everything was done with hands in Tibet, the huge nomads' tents and all the ropes. Everything was done with hands since there were no machines. There were never any machines in Tibet earlier. There were no machines that could spin yarn. These days it must be available with the Chinese.

Q: Yeah, but were you doing it while you were working with your sheep? This is what I'm asking. Were you walking and doing it, you know with your sheep?

**#13D: One must always move with the sheep while grazing them. One could not sit down like this. One followed the sheep walking slowly, spinning and walking. One must walk the whole day, following the sheep until they reached back home in the evening. So, one spun as one walked the entire day. Once back home in the evening, there were others that did the weaving. The huge tents of the nomads that were bigger than this [interview room] were made of thread that was spun. The *chupa* ‘traditional coats/dresses’ of Tibet was made from fine thread spun by girls while boys spun *tsipa* ‘yak hair’ for tents and ropes. Shepherds did all the spinning. Shepherds did that work because there were no machines.**

Q: Did girls do [the spinning] for the *chupa*?

01:01:17

**#13D: Girls mostly carried out the spinning for *chupa*. The thread was very fine. The boys did the thicker ones.**

Q: This life of sheep herding, what happened to that life? How did that life change?

**#13D: [Speaks before translation is complete] I herded sheep from the age of 8, 9 to 16,17 or 18.**

Q: From the age of 8?

**#13D: [I] grazed sheep from around the age of 8. [I] fled to India at the age of 22.**

**Initially [I] assisted grandfather with the sheep and when he was no more, I did the herding. After grandfather passed away, I took the responsibility.**

Q: What happened to your father?

**#13D: Yes?**

Q: What happened to father?

**#13D: My father did the work at home. There was fieldwork as well as cows, oxen and donkeys at home. [He] took responsibility of them and cultivated the land. Now is the corresponding time for sowing in Tibet. Father did the farming and took responsibility of the home. The sheep were herded far away from the house in the Changthang ‘Northern Plateau’ region by the shepherd. The sheep left in the morning and did not return until at dusk. They must be brought home by nightfall. The sheep grazed far away in the mountains the whole day wherever there was good grass and water available.**

Q: What happened to your father later?

**#13D: Yes?**

Q: What happened to your father? Did anything happen?

**#13D: How do you mean?**

Q: Did anything happen to father later?

**#13D: What?**

Q: Did he come out with you to Nepal?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: Yeah, yeah he did.

Q: Did you come to India with father?

01:04:19

**#13D: [I] came with Father to India. My grandfather passed away. [My] father's father passed away. My father's father passed away and I came with my father to India.**

Q: Can you just describe the decision, the experiences leading up to the decision to leave? What were the things that went into the decision to leave?

**#13D: The reason was that my father was on the verge of being apprehended by the Chinese. It was in the year of '59 when Tibet was lost. It was in the 7<sup>th</sup> Tibetan lunar month of '59. [I] wonder what the corresponding Western month was. It was the 18<sup>th</sup> day of the 7<sup>th</sup> Tibetan lunar month that I fled from Tibet in the night. The Chinese had decided to arrest my father. Ten Chinese and a Tibetan interpreter arrived and decided to arrest [father] and [we] became aware of.**

**So around dusk at about 6 or 7 o'clock, the Chinese said, "[We] will decide tomorrow. [We] will decide tomorrow. You can go for the night now." [The people] were let off around dusk. [We] became aware of it then. A relative of father said, "You must leave because it has been decided to arrest [you]. It has been decided to arrest [you] in the night inside the house." Hence both of us fled around dusk, at about 7 o'clock—you could just about see in the dark—in the clothes that [we] were wearing.**

Q: Why did they want to apprehend your father?

**#13D: One of my father's friends and a relative were officials of Tibet earlier. [They] were officials, leaders of some sort of higher strata. The Chinese said that all those who interacted with officials must be apprehended, that they must be cleared; like a tree that must be cleared of its branches. [They] said that all the branches of the officials of earlier Tibet must be rooted out. They discussed the arrest and decided to defer it for the night. It was decided to apprehend [father] in the night at home. [We] learned that [he] was to be apprehended that night in the house. So without taking anything... There were 5-6 local people around our home that were spies to keep watch over [us].**

01:07:29

**In Tibet [we] used to collect soil that was spread over the toilet. He pretended to be leaving to collect [soil]. I followed a little later. [We] did not carry anything. Since we were**

not carrying anything, they [the spies] did not suspect; [they] did not think that [we] were escaping. [We] wore whatever [we] were wearing during the day. They were not aware and we succeeded. After we had walked a little distance, like that circle over there; after taking 50-60 steps, [they] came in search with flashlights. Thirty to 40 people with flashlights came in search [of us].

Q: How many people?

**#13D:** Thirty to 40 people came running. The Chinese sent people of the village, even those that did not want to. Whether [they] liked it or not, [they] were told, “Search and catch them.” [They] came bearing flashlights. There was a waterway in the fields that originated from a great distance with water that reached up to here [indicates below knee level]. It was a channel to feed water to the fields. It was not a pipe but a channel. There was such a channel with water that reached up to here. [The water] flowed from a great distance. My father said, “Remove the shoes and put them in the pouch.” There was nothing else besides the shoes. [I] put [my] shoes in the pouch. “Enter the water,” [father] said. [I] rolled up [my] clothes and entered the water. [We] followed the waterway and nobody came to search here. Not one person came to search in the water. And then we succeeded.

Q: The water wasn't deep?

**#13D:** The water was only so deep [gestures off camera]. The water was quite big; the channel was wide but its depth was only so much. That was the waterway of the village. It was called *kakyi* or *ka* in Tibet.

Q: *Kakyi*?

01:09:35

**#13D:** It was called *kakyi* or *ka*. In India waterway is called *naali*. The water that flowed in the *kakyi* was used to irrigate fields. It was shallow water that reached up to here [gestures off camera]. Its source was located far away in the region and then it flowed in the *ka*. Canals fed [water] to the fields. We walked in the water of the *ka* and nobody came in search there. They looked [for us] around the water and thus we succeeded. Then we stayed hungry for two days without food.

Q: Two days?

**#13D:** Two days.

Q: Where did [you] stay?

**#13D:** [We] stayed hungry atop a mountain. [We] had no food since [we] had brought none. There were no restaurants in Tibet and nobody [we] knew. The Chinese sent spies to people we knew well saying, “They will go to their house because they are relatives.” They [the Chinese] sent informers to their [relatives'] houses. So [we] stayed hungry for two days and on the third day [we] went to a relative that father knew close to Dhingri.

[He] provided 5-6 kilograms of *tsampa* ‘flour made from roasted barley’ and then [we] fled to Shakumbu. Oh, at that time...

Q: Where did you go from Dhingri?

**#13D: Yes?**

Q: Where did you go from Dhingri?

**#13D: From Dhingri [we] went to Shakumbu in Nepalese territory. Father knew somebody in Dhingri who gave us 4-5 kilograms of *tsampa*. Carrying that we came to the mountain pass of Shakumbu.**

Q: Is Shakumbu in Nepal?

01:11:08

**#13D: If one crossed over the mountain pass of Shakumbu, one was in Nepalese territory and the other side was Tibetan territory. The mountain pass of Shakumbu is called Nangpala. [We] crossed that pass. The mountain was covered in snow; it was inconceivable. [We] managed to cross the pass around nightfall. [We] had reached Nepalese territory from Tibet.**

**It became dark and [we] slept on some rocks. While sleeping, an avalanche moved down the mountain, oh...*ta, ta, ta, ta*. [We] got up in fright but did not know the surrounding nor could [we] see in the dark. [We] stayed the day there. Due to the grace of God, the avalanche had passed us close by. Then filled with fear, [we] slowly descended. The pathway on the Nangpala was very steep with water and snow. And then we arrived at Shakumbu in Nepal.**

**Once in Shakumbu, [we] worked as coolies since [we] did not have anything to eat. [We] cleaned toilets. The wage for cleaning toilets was 4 *rupees* a day. [We] received 4 *rupees* a day and were provided with food. In this way, [we] worked for 10-15 days in Nepal, in Shakumbu. [The people] were called Sherpa. They spoke Tibetan and read the *kangyur* ‘translated word of Buddha (108 volumes)’ and *tengyur* ‘translated treatises (collection of 225 volumes of religious commentaries)’ in Shakumbu. It was a bit difficult [to understand their] Tibetan when we initially arrived. The pronunciation was a little different like in Kham. [We] continued to work as coolies in Shakumbu. [We] lived in Shakumbu for four years working as coolies. After four years in Shakumbu, [we] came to India. After four years, [we] came to India in the year ’63. In the year ’63...**

[Interpreter to interviewee]: Please wait. I’ll translate.

01:15:18

**#13D: [Father and I] had entered the irrigation canal and [the search party] could not even find our footprints the next day.**

01:16:08

**[We] were close to Mount Everest. They were just a few mountains apart. Mount Everest's located here [gestures off camera] and just around three mountains away was the Shakumbu mountain pass. Then there was another mountain pass called Rowongsha and climbing down [from it] one reached Shakumbu.**

01:16:57

**And then we were relieved and very happy. Father was saved from the Chinese and I was saved. [We] were extremely happy and did not feel the struggle of working as coolies. We received Nepali money and for four years cleaned toilets and transported manure to the fields. And then [we] came to India in the year '63.**

Q: How many people came out with you, *pa-la*?

**#13D: Father and I.**

**Even at night while sleeping [we] wore the same *chupa* and used [our] boots as pillows. For 4-6 days, we came in that manner [during the escape journey].**

Q: Do you have any dogs now, little ones?

**#13D: No, [I] do not. Earlier [I] raised small dogs, but [I] have grandchildren and they complain that dog hair is not good and [my] wife does not allow [me] to keep dogs. Earlier [I] raised two little dogs but they died.**

Q: I just want to ask you: you talked so much about the dogs in Tibet. Did you have a favorite dog during this time when you were a child growing up?

**#13D: As in India, when I lived four years in Shakumbu [I] kept dogs but [they] died. The dogs were very small ones and white.**

Q: Were they Pomeranians?

**#13D: Yes?**

Q: Were they Pomeranians?

01:19:06

**#13D: [I] do not know. The wife says [she] does not want dogs because dog hair gets into food of the little children. [She] does not want to keep dogs, so we do not. [We] have no dogs now.**

**I was happy then [in Shakumbu] because father was saved and the Chinese were left behind in Tibet and I was able to cross over the mountain pass. There was no fear and [we] were incredibly happy. I wondered when I would get the chance to see His Holiness the Dalai Lama. In the year '63 someone came to tell [us] that [we] must come to India and then [we] got to see His Holiness. [His Holiness] was living in the old palace and it was**

a good [audience]. [I] felt happy and relaxed. And then [I] worked as a coolie and lived life that way.

As long as one got something to eat, there was no thought of accumulating wealth. [I] was extremely happy and felt satisfied. [I] was young and was able to perform any work. The employer provided a meal during the day and in the evening one received 4 *rupees* that went into the pocket. [I] lived four years in that situation and when [I] came to India, [I] had saved about 600-700 Nepali *rupees*.

Q: Indian *rupees*?

**#13D: Nepali *rupees*. And then [we] came to India.**

Q: And you finally got to see His Holiness.

**#13D: And then [I] got to see His Holiness and was very happy. Here [I] went to the Bhagsu Road up the hill to fetch stones for which [I] was paid 12 *rupees* a day. [I] worked as a coolie and lived life that way. Big flat stones used for roofing was recovered from the hill earlier. An Indian contractor paid 12 *rupees* a day. I carried food with me. That is how my life has been.**

Q: You worked so hard but you seem really healthy.

**#13D: [I] am 75 years old.**

Q: 75 years. You look really strong.

**#13D: [My] eyesight is not good. The ears are not good. Eyesight is not good but body is okay.**

Q: *Pa-la*, thank you so much for sharing your story with us. It was so interesting to hear; you've so much to tell.

END OF INTERVIEW