

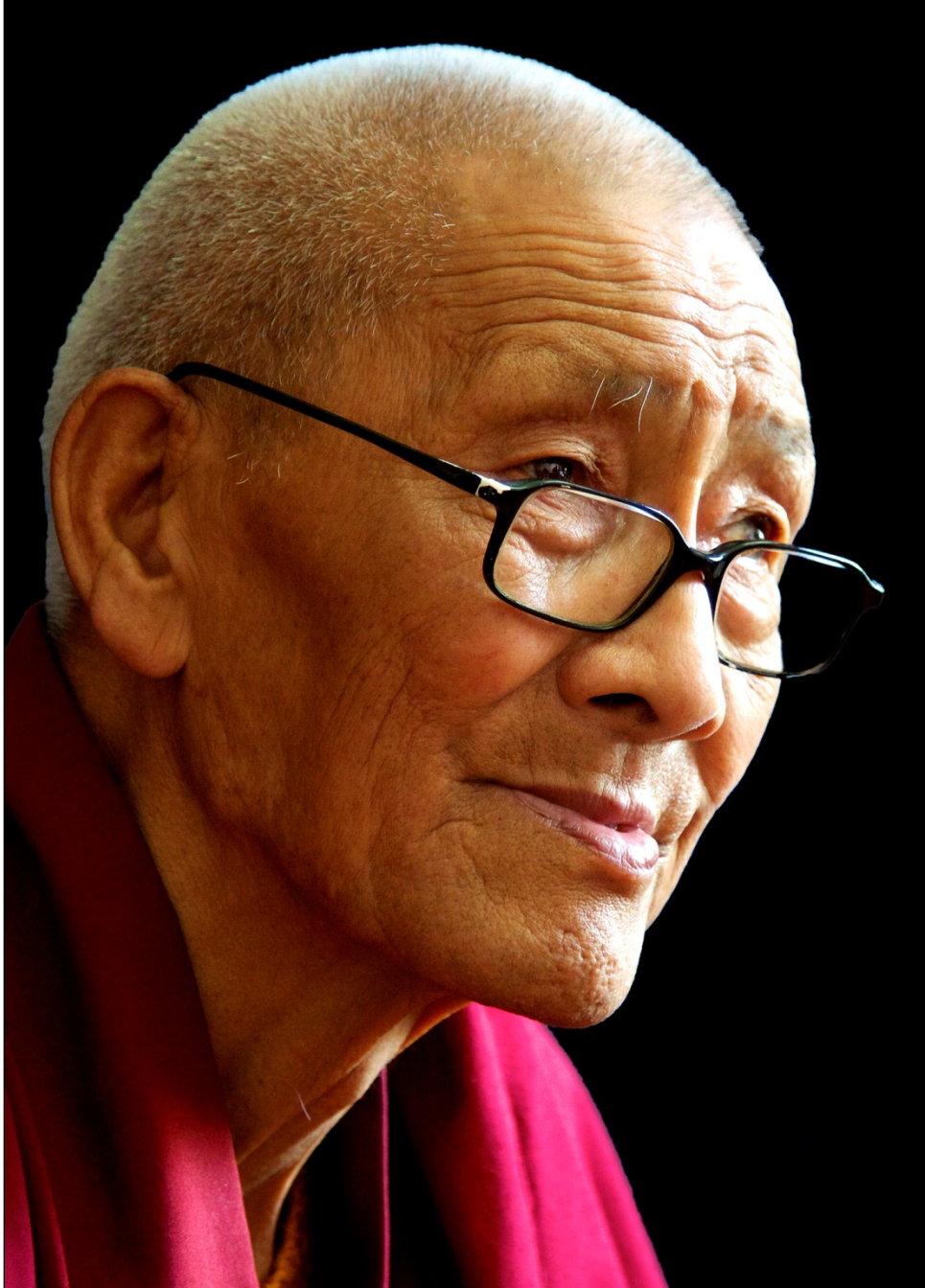
Tibet Oral History Project

Interview #34D – Samten
May 20, 2012

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INTERVIEW SUMMARY SHEET

1. Interview Number: #34D
2. Interviewee: Samten
3. Age: 82
4. Date of Birth: 1930
5. Sex: Male
6. Birthplace: Yawu
7. Province: Utsang
8. Year of leaving Tibet: 1961
9. Date of Interview: May 20, 2012
10. Place of Interview: Hotel Tibet, Mcleod Ganj, Dharamsala, Himachal Pradesh, India
11. Length of Interview: 1 hr 34 min
12. Interviewer: Rebecca Novick
13. Interpreter: Thupten Kelsang Dakpa
14. Videographer: Ronny Novick
15. Translator: Tenzin Yangchen

Biographical Information:

Samten is the youngest of 3 children and his parents were farmers in Yawu who grew barley, peas and wheat in their field. He coughed frequently as a young child and recalls a divination that declared he should become a monk in order to live a long life. So at the age of 5 he joined the local Gyangtse Shinay Monastery. Samten describes the famous Gyangtse Bakor Chorten, one of the biggest stupas in Tibet. He talks about his daily routine and assignments as a monk at the local monastery and later Drepung Monastery.

Samten spent only six years at Drepung and then returned to the Gyangtse Monastery. He vividly remembers how the Chinese launched the Reformation program when the 2,000 monks from 16 monasteries in his region were forced to assemble and interrogated. Many false accusations were made by spies among the monks and arrests were made. Earlier some of the monks had left the monastery to join the *Chushi Gangdrug* Defend Tibet Volunteer Force.

All of the monks in the local monasteries were expelled and told to go home. Samten and a small number of monks decided to remain in the monastery when the Chinese offered them “freedom of religion,” but later realized that the promise was false. He relates how the monks were forced to labor in the fields and constantly lectured about how religion was poison. After more than half of the remaining monks were arrested, Samten and three other monks fled to Buxar in India.

Topics Discussed:

Monastic life, oppression under Chinese, destruction of monasteries, imprisonment, thamzing, Chushi Gangdrug guerrillas, forced labor, escape experiences.

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Interview #34D

Interviewee: Samten

Age: 82, Sex: Male

Interviewer: Rebecca Novick

Interview Date: May 20, 2012

Question: *Gen-la* ‘respectful term for teacher,’ can you tell us your name?

00:00:12

Interviewee #34D: Samten.

Q: Where are you from in Tibet exactly?

#34D: It is the one called Yawu. My family name is Yawu Zenkhang.

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

#34D: Okay.

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

#34D: Okay.

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

#34D: [I] give permission.

Q: Thank you very much.

00:01:20

#34D: [Nods]

Q: During the interview if you want to take a break at anytime, please do let us know.

#34D: Okay.

Q: If there’s any question that you would rather not answer, that’s fine.

#34D: Okay.

Q: If this interview was shown in Tibet or China or anywhere else in the world, would it create a problem for you?

#34D: There will be nothing. I am old and will die here. [I] will not reach there [Tibet].

Q: Thank you. We're very honored to share your story. We really appreciate your coming today.

#34D: [Nods and smiles]

Q: First of all, could you tell us a little bit about your family background?

00:02:18

#34D: My father's name was Phuntsok and mother's Dachok. I have siblings, one of whom is called Acha 'Older Sister' Chudu.

Q: How many siblings were there?

#34D: [I] have two siblings, two older sisters and no others.

Q: Where were you in your family? Were you the youngest, middle or oldest?

#34D: I was the youngest.

Q: What did your mother and father do? What was their profession?

#34D: [They] were farmers. [They] worked in the fields.

Q: What did they farm?

#34D: [They] grew barley, grains, peas and wheat in the fields.

Q: What do you remember about your early childhood? Can you describe what it was like growing up in your family?

00:03:59

#34D: I became a monk at the small age of 5. The reason [I] became a monk at the age of 5 was that [my] parents...I used to cough a lot when I was small. So there was the Tibetan custom of seeking a divination. The divination predicted that I would not live if I were not made a monk. Saying that [I] might not live, I was made a monk at age 5, at age 5.

Q: What was the first monastery that you went to?

#34D: I joined the Gyangtse Shinay Datsang.

Q: Gyangtse Shinay?

#34D: Datsang. Shinay Datsang. It is located close to the Gyangtse Bakor Chorten. The monastery had 16 *datsang* ‘smaller monasteries.’

Q: Gyangtse Bakor?

#34D: Bakor Chorten.

Q: Bakor Chuduk?

#34D: Bakor Chorten. It was a large *chorten* ‘stupa.’

Q: Were there 16 *datsang*?

#34D: There were 16 *datsang* and I was in Shinay Datsang.

Q: So it’s like a...this area had 16 monasteries?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: *Chorten, chorten. Chorten* is...

[Interviewer to interpreter]: Like stupa.

[Interpreter to interviewer]: Stupa, and that stupa had around 16 monasteries around it.

[Interviewer to interpreter]: Around it?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: Associated with it. “I was at Gyangtse Shinay.”

#34D: The name of the *datsang* was Gyangtse Shinay.

Q: How far is Gyangtse Shinay from your home?

#34D: Very close. I could see my home from my living quarters in the *datsang*.

Q: What’s something particular about this Gyangtse Bakor Chorten? Was there something famous about that or something significant about that *chorten*?

#34D: [It] is very famous and 11 floors high.

Q: Eleven floors?

#34D: Eleven floors high. It is the biggest *chorten*.

Q: In Tibet?

#34D: Yes, it is among the biggest *chorten* in Tibet.

Q: What's holy about it?

00:06:54

#34D: It contained the idols of *kunrig*, a group of deities. On every floor of the stupa, there was a circular temple in which the idols were housed. There were such circular temples on the 11 floors.

Q: Do you know anything about the history of this stupa?

#34D: Yes?

Q: Do you know about the stupa's past like how old it is?

#34D: I do not know much about the stupa's history since I was a small child when I lived there. However, it contained the idols of the *kunrig* deities. As you entered the first door, there was a big statue of the Buddha, a huge statue of the Buddha. Then as you moved in a circular fashion, there were [statues of] the *kunrig* deities. Circular temples existed on all the 11 floors. One could move in a circular manner on one floor, climb to the next floor and move in a circular direction and so on.

Q: Do you remember the first day that you joined your monastery?

#34D: [I] was small, just 5 years old. When I joined the monastery there was a prayer assembly, but [I] was small and cannot remember much. [I] became a monk from the age of 5 and am now 82 years old. From Gyangtse I went to Drepung to study the scriptures, the Drepung Monastery in Lhasa.

Q: What age were you sent to Drepung?

00:09:53

#34D: [I] was almost 18 years old when [I] went to Drepung.

Q: When you became a monk did your health improve?

#34D: [I] used to cough, but later became well. Otherwise, [I] used to cough a lot when I was small. Hence, we had sought a divination, which predicted that [I] would not live if [I] did not become a monk, that [I] would live if [I] became a monk.

Q: Did [you] become better gradually?

#34D: [I] became well gradually.

Q: The first monastery's name was...

[Interpreter to interviewer]: Gyangtse Shinay.

Q: Gyangtse Shinay...how many monks were there?

#34D: There were a little less than 200 monks. At the time we lost our country, there were a little less than 200 monks.

Q: Tell us a little bit about life in the monastery. What was your daily routine like?

00:11:11

#34D: When I was small, after waking up in the morning [I] would be made to read the scriptures. Then the morning prayer assembly began, which [I] attended. The prayer assembly lasted around an hour. [We] had tea and ate food that was *pa* ‘dough made from roasted barley flour and tea’ there. [We] ate *tsampa* ‘flour made from roasted barley’; *pa* was eaten mainly in Tibet.

Then there was a prayer assembly exactly at noontime for around an hour. After it got over, one had some free time to stay in the quarters. Then in the evening one began memorizing the texts. It was like that for little children.

Q: Did you have any particular work or chores that you had to do in the monastery?

#34D: There was work but [I] was small then. One must bear responsibilities, as one grew older. Initially there were duties like cooking for the monastery, but that was only when one turned older. Little ones were not given [duties]. Duties were assigned according to seniority of monks. One would be assigned the duty of cooking for a year or so. It was exactly for a year, but you were assigned [this duty] only when you were older. Little ones would not be able to nor were [they] assigned any duties.

Q: Were monks from this monastery, did they ever go into people’s homes and do funeral rites, for example?

#34D: Yes, [they] went to recite prayers [at people’s homes]. The older ones went for *shapten* ‘rituals to dispel obstacles.’ [People] invited [monks] for *shapten*. Each *datsang* was assigned particular [homes]. One was not allowed to visit every home except the houses that were allotted. For instance, there were 16 *datsang* and each one was delegated [a certain number of homes]. [The monks] went if invited. It was the older monks that went while the young ones like us stayed in the monastery and memorized the texts.

[Discontinuity in video]

[Translation by interpreter of statement missing from video]: What you have to learn is very extensive. There is *lurig*, *thonrig*, *luring*, *nyamden*, *pharchin* ‘perfection of wisdom’ which...The *pharchin* scripture you have to study, the scripture which is around 200-300 pages for six years.

#34D: Without completing it one cannot become a *geshe* ‘monk with Buddhist philosophy degree.’ You know the ones that are called *geshe* here? It is like that.

Q: Did you study all of that?

00:15:14

#34D: I could not study all of it. The reason I could not study all of it was because I got to stay in Drepung for only around six years. Then [we] lost [our] country. I could not study the scriptures and then I arrived in India through Bhutan. [To interpreter] Okay, first translate this.

[Interviewer to interpreter]: One scripture?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: Yeah, this one scripture. You have to recite and you have to understand. You have to become a master at it, and *uma* ‘middle way philosophy’ for three years and *dugo* [*dhulwa*, ‘ethical codes’] for four years. After you complete all these, then you become a *geshe*.

Q: This scripture that you mentioned that you had to study for six years, what scripture is this?

#34D: The *pharchin* is about the six perfections: *jinpa* ‘generosity,’ *tsultim* ‘discipline,’ *zoepa* ‘patience,’ *tsondue* ‘diligence,’ *samten* ‘concentration,’ and *sherap* ‘discriminating knowledge.’ It is about all these. It is about the six *pharchin*.

Q: The six *pharchin*?

00:16:57

#34D: It is about how to carry out *jinpa*, *tsultim*, *zoepa*, *tsondue* and others.

Q: How people should carry out?

#34D: It is about how to practice.

Q: Can you describe how your education at the monastery was interrupted?

#34D: I lived for six years [at Drepung] and then returned to Gyantse. At the time the country was lost, I was living at Gyantse.

Q: Can you tell me what happened at Gyantse?

#34D: The Chinese launched the Reformation. The Chinese launched the thing called Reformation. There were nearly 2,000 monks belonging to 16 monasteries gathered at the Bakor Chorten in Gyantse. That was the number [of monks] of all the 16 monasteries. During certain prayer assemblies, all the 16 monasteries gathered together though usually prayer assemblies were held at individual monasteries. [We] were nearly 2,000 monks and then the Chinese launched the Reformation. What happened during the Reformation was...It occurred in the 5th Tibetan lunar month. [I] cannot recall the exact date.

During that year there was a double 5th month. There were two 5th lunar months. According to Tibetan calculations, there are certain years with double months. We assembled on the 1st day of the first 5th lunar month for a prayer assembly. While the prayer assembly was in session, the Chinese...

There was fencing around [the monastery] with three gates. There was fencing around the area that the monks lived with only three gates. [The Chinese] shut the three gates and planted mortars on the high mountains and atop the fence. [They] were there surrounding [the place] when we emerged after the prayer assembly. After the prayer assembly got over at the main hall, all the monks were enclosed in the area where *choera* ‘debate sessions’ takes place.

Q: Where?

00:19:25

#34D: In the *choera*, all the monks were together. [The Chinese] called out all the monks that were in their quarters. Now there was no exit because all the gates were shut. There were three gates and once these were closed, there was no way to get out. All the monks were shut in the *choera*. They [the Chinese] had placed informers [among the monks]. In the *choera* the Chinese read out the names of all those people that usually acted against the Chinese. Then these people were arrested one by one.

Q: Were they all monks?

#34D: [They] were all monks. [They] were arrested and handcuffed. After handcuffing [them], labeling them as perpetrators...there was a monastery called Dewachen...

Q: Dewachen?

#34D: Yes, Dewachen Monastery. They were all imprisoned in it.

Q: They were put in like prisoners?

#34D: They were imprisoned like offenders. [They] were among those that rebelled against the Chinese. Then the 2,000 monks were divided and interned in four monasteries, namely Shinay Datsang, Gupa Datsang, Dhinky Datsang...it was three monasteries. It was three monasteries.

Q: There were around 2,000 monks...

#34D: There were 2,000 monks.

Q: Were the 2,000 monks jailed in three monasteries?

00:21:02

#34D: Yes, jailed and then interrogated. [To interpreter] Translate that portion now.

Q: How many monks then were imprisoned?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: All of them.

[Interviewer to interpreter]: All 2,000?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: Yeah, all 2,000.

Q: You mentioned that the monastery had been involved in some kind of revolt earlier. Can you please describe that?

#34D: There were many that revolted because [they] did not like the Chinese. For example, at that time an army called the *Chushi Gangdrug* [Defend Tibet Volunteer Force] was formed and from each monastery 10, 11 or 12 monks left [to join it].

Q: From each monastery?

#34D: Yes.

Q: Did 11 or 12 leave from each monastery?

#34D: Yes, 11 or 12 left.

Q: You mentioned people in your monastery who'd spoken out against the Chinese. Were they speaking out publicly in front of groups of monks or were they speaking out directly to the Chinese...how's this happening?

00:24:14

#34D: Around 10 men from each monastery had left and they [the arrested monks] had sent them to join the *Chushi Gangdrug* and provided weapons. The Chinese would not like it when [the monks] did this. The Chinese had planted informers in the monastery that had supplied the names.

It was not like [the monks] spoke directly to the Chinese. The spies had provided information that [the arrested monks] had sent men [to the *Chushi Gangdrug*] and supplied [them] weapons. It was the spies that gave the names [to the Chinese].

Q: Were there many Chinese spies?

#34D: There must be many spies. Without the informers, the Chinese would not know the names of these people. When we were gathered at the *choera*, they read out the names of the individual monks. After reading out the names, [they] were pulled out from among the monks and immediately handcuffed.

Q: Had [they] joined the *Chushi Gangdrug*, received weapons from it and returned?

#34D: It was not like [they] returned. [People] left to join the *Chushi Gangdrug*. [The arrested monks] were accused of deploying [men] to the *Chushi Gangdrug* and of being among the rebels. It was the same thing.

Q: Actually the senior monks sent these monks to join the *Chushi Gangdrug*. Is that how it worked?

00:25:57

#34D: The monks had volunteered. Fingers were not pointed at each of them and told, “You must go. You must go.” It was announced, “Does anybody want to go?” and each one had volunteered, “I want to go.” It was not as if fingers were pointed at each person and told, “You must go.” Each one had volunteered. They did not own weapons while some of [the monks living in] the grander quarters possessed guns, swords or things like that. [These] were secretly supplied and [the monks] left to join the *Chushi Gangdrug*. Hence, the Chinese charged [the senior monks] of deploying [the monks] and likened [the senior monks] to the rebels, to the *Chushi Gangdrug*.

Q: So *Chushi Gangdrug* actually came and recruited? Is that when you said when “they made a call”?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: No, the elder monks made the call that *Chushi Gangdrug*...this is happening, so who wants to go?

[Interviewer to interpreter]: Okay.

[Interpreter to interviewer]: Some people then...

Q: *Gen-la*, when you said that the senior monks do you mean the abbot? Was it the abbot of the monastery who made this announcement to the monks that the *Chushi Gangdrug* are...?

#34D: The abbot did not deploy [them]. The abbot would not order [them] to go.

Q: Was it the abbot that made the announcement?

00:27:25

#34D: The abbot did not make the announcement for [them] to go. Each person volunteered and they were from the lower rung that left. How would the abbot send anyone to fight? [He] would not. However, from the lower rung...We did not like the Chinese and everyone knew that the Chinese were oppressing us. Hence, there were ones among the lower rung that wished to go and they were provided support. The abbot did not give orders for [them] to join.

Q: Was there actually an announcement that was made to a group of monks where somebody, some senior monk, somebody said, “This is happening. If you want to go join, you know, it’s up to you.” Was there like, sort of a public announcement made? Or was it very, very sort of private?

#34D: We knew that the *Chushi Gangdrug* existed. They were fighting then. The *Chushi Gangdrug* was fighting at Diguthang and they [the monks] wanted to join. However, in order to join [it]...For example monks did not possess weapons. So monks belonging to the

grander residences provided the weapons. That was the cause. The abbot would not tell them to go to fight. [He] would not.

Q: Before that day when the Chinese surrounded your monastery and came for retribution for having sent these monks off to fight, what had happened at your monastery? How had your monastery been affected by the Chinese presence?

00:30:04

#34D: There was no change before [the Chinese] arrived. [We] continued to practice our traditions. There was nothing else. It was an isolated region and one continued to practice the dharma, as is [our] culture or did whatever work one had to do. There was nothing else in [our] minds.

Q: But there were these monks who felt strong enough to give up their monastic vows and go and fight. So they must have had little bit of a feeling of why they did that, yeah?

#34D: Of course, one had feelings since the Chinese were inflicting suffering upon Tibet. However, there were no weapons for every monk to join [the *Chushi Gangdrug*]. Surely not all of the monks wished [to join] nor would [they] be allowed to go. [I] told you earlier that [monks belonging to] the grand quarters supplied weapons and [the volunteer monks] left secretly. [They] were not deployed by the abbot.

Q: Before this day that the Chinese surrounded your monastery, your life at the monastery hadn't been much affected it seems by the Chinese presence.

#34D: What change would there be? One continued to practice and live as in the past. Besides practicing the dharma and following the daily schedules of the monastery, there was nothing else on our mind for we were people of a remote region.

Q: The Chinese were nowhere at that time? You didn't see them at all?

#34D: What?

Q: Weren't the Chinese close by then?

#34D: What about the Chinese?

Q: Were the Chinese not close by? Had the Chinese not appeared nearby?

00:32:56

#34D: The Chinese had arrived, but there was no hostility from the Chinese in the beginning to us. Initially they said that [they] had come to help. They farmed lands and grew their vegetables. [They] did not cause any kind of harm to the Tibetans. The attack took place in 1959, but there was nothing prior to that. They [said they] had come to help and were loving towards the public.

Q: When the monks were imprisoned—the 2,000 monks—tell us what happened then?

#34D: Then we were told that [we] would have to criticize the handcuffed monks detained at the Dewachen [Monastery] for what they had done and also that they were rebels. “You must criticize them,” [the Chinese] said. We were being given lessons by criticizing [them]. Some that did not like them made allegations but the majority of the monks said, “We do not know anything. We have no knowledge about what they usually did.” Those who knew remarked that he [one of the monks jailed in Dewachen Monastery] did this or that. Then this man was named and brought out and subjected to *thamzing* ‘struggle session.’

Q: *Thamzing?*

#34D: [The prisoner] would be brought out where the people had gathered for a meeting and charged as a rebel who had done this or that. He would be forced to explain. They [the Chinese] had recorded the charges and [he] had to be accused of them. Those of us who knew did so but those who had no knowledge remarked, “We have no knowledge. We led our own lives and do not know anything about them.” Those that knew were made to subject them to *thamzing*.

00:36:02

The monastery did not deploy them [the monks to join the *Chushi Gangdrug*]. [Monks from] the grand quarters, the rich ones send the volunteers. The monastery did not issue orders [to them] to go.

Q: Some of the prisoners were subjected to *thamzing*...

#34D: Yes, *thamzing*.

Q: What happened after the *thamzing*?

#34D: They were subjected to *thamzing* and charged. Some of [the monks] who were aware said, “You sent the monks [to join the *Chushi Gangdrug*] and provided weapons. That is very bad.” The Chinese claimed it was bad and naturally, they too repeated it, as they cannot say otherwise. All his [prisoner’s] doings were to be drilled into his ears. That was it.

Q: And then what happened?

#34D: If the one who was brought out from the prison accepted the charges, it was fine. If [he] did not accept, then...then the charges could not be tallied.

Q: And then?

#34D: That was it. We, the common [monks] were told to criticize the seniors and disclose whatever bad deeds [they] had committed. “Those that we arrested have committed bad deeds and you are aware of them. Those of you that are aware must divulge the charges,” the Chinese advised [us]. A few that were aware made charges and [the prisoners] were

subjected to *thamzing*. However, the majority said, “We have no knowledge.” No one raised such charges.

Q: When [the prisoners] were charged of various crimes and should [he] not accept...

00:38:00

#34D: If [the prisoners] claimed not to have committed them, there was not anything to be done. He would be told, “You did it. You have done it.” He [the prisoner] was handcuffed and he [the Chinese authority] was free to do what he liked. Even if he [the prisoner] replied that [he] had not done it, [he] was still accused of having done it with pointed fingers and it would be taken for granted that [he] had done it. It would serve no purpose for [him] to say otherwise because those from the lower rung had already brought up the charges. The Chinese said, “You are bad. You did not accept the charges brought up by those in the lower rung. People brought up the charges because they know of it, yet you do not accept them. [You] are bad.” That would be another charge against him!

Q: Who was doing the finger pointing?

#34D: Monks from the lower rung.

Q: Were they all monks?

#34D: Yes, yes. We were all monks. There were only monks in the monasteries. The monks were all interned together. There were none but monks there.

Q: And then?

00:39:38

#34D: And then what? There is nothing much to say.

Q: After the *thamzing*, what happened at the monastery?

#34D: After the *thamzing* were done, they [the senior monk prisoners] were put back [in Dewachen Monastery]. We were also imprisoned for around three months and the same statement [about making accusations] was repeated. The Chinese trained us about it, “You have to bring out charges. It is not right if you do not. You are aware of [their doings] as you belong to the same monastery and live together. It is not possible for you not to be aware and must divulge the wrong doings.” Those that were aware disclosed them but those of us that did not said, “We do not know. We have no interactions with them normally. [We] are not aware.” [We] continued to remain imprisoned.

Gradually when [we] had nothing to reveal—they [senior monks] were handcuffed and jailed and taken elsewhere—we were turned out from the monastery. They [the Chinese] claimed there was religious freedom [but we] were not allowed to stay and were all expelled.

Q: [You] were expelled after three months?

#34D: The entire monk population was expelled. Those monks that wished to remain with “religious freedom” remained while the rest were expelled. [We] were sent to the villages from the monastery.

Q: Told to go back home?

00:41:00

#34D: Yes, told to return to our homes.

00:41:24

Q: This was every day for three months?

#34D: There were meetings every day. Meetings continued the entire day. The Chinese were present during the meetings and said, “Disclose the charges. There are charges you can reveal. You know of them since you live together all the time. [You] are aware and it should get disclosed.” Monks from the particular *datsang* that an imprisoned monk [at Dewachen Monastery] belonged to was ordered to divulge charges. This took place every day.

Q: During the *thamzing* was there ever mention made about the Buddha dharma and the study of religion?

#34D: Why would the Buddha dharma be mentioned? They [the Chinese] only said that [the monks] were bad and there was no mention about the dharma. Actually, [the Chinese] did say, “You wear the mask of religion. You are a spiritual practitioner but you engage in such bad activities.” That was a charge [they] made, “You are a monk that practice dharma all the time. It is very bad for a practitioner of religion to engage in such types of work. It is very bad on your part to cause harm to the Chinese.” Since it was the Chinese that gave instructions, it was said, “You have rebelled against the Communist Party.” That was the charge since there was not anything else.

Since [a monk] normally engaged in practicing religion, [he] was told that it was extremely bad for a person of religion to indulge in such things. They [the Chinese] had instructed [the ordinary monks] to say so [to the accused]. They had given such advice.

Q: The Chinese, right?

#34D: Yes, the Chinese had given such advice.

Q: Was any reference made to the Tibetan Government or the Dalai Lama?

00:44:19

#34D: The Chinese referred to such saying, “The Dalai Lama is a great rebel.” Then there were the two tutors of His Holiness the Dalai Lama, namely His Eminence the Ling Rinpoche and His Eminence the Trijang Rinpoche. They [the Chinese] gave instructions [to the monks] everyday, “The Dalai Lama is a rebel. The Trijang Lama is a rebel.” They said,

“The Dalai Lama is a rebel. [He] went to India. Do you not have any accusations?” We did not have any knowledge except about our monastery because we lived in an isolated region. Except for what was happening in this isolated region, we had no knowledge of what was happening outside, nor did anyone make charges. They said that the Dalai Lama was a rebel and that the Trijang Lama was a rebel and [we] were to make accusations against them.

Q: So you left the monastery at this point. What did you do?

#34D: I stayed back [under the impression of] “freedom of religion.” I did not leave. From the 2,000 monks around 160 of us stayed back. “You say that we have freedom of religion. We will stay back if there is freedom of religion.” They said, “You have freedom of religion keeping in view the policy of the Communist Government. However, you cannot continue like you have in the past.” There was nothing for us to go back [home] for and so we remained in the monastery with “freedom of religion.” We were around 160 monks that remained from the 2,000.

Q: So you stayed behind. What compromises then did you have to make in staying behind?

00:47:18

#34D: We were to practice dharma according to their rules. We could not gather for prayer assemblies like in the past. The 160 monks from the 16 monasteries could gather at the main assembly hall, but not in our respective monasteries.

Q: Then?

#34D: Then the Chinese prepared schedules [for us to follow] the orders that were issued. For instance, “a time for work.” We wished to practice dharma, but in actuality [we] hardly got time to practice because [we] had to transport the grain stock and properties belonging to the 16 monasteries to the main assembly hall. All the grains and articles that belonged to the various monasteries were stocked there. We were made to move [them] while the rest [of the monks] had left.

Those prisoners who were charged with serious offences were taken away to a distance and not left in the monastery. Those of us that stayed back labored the entire period transferring the properties there, while being told to fend for ourselves. [We] were to fend for ourselves by cultivating lands. In the past lay people cultivated lands and it was never the practice of monks to farm. Now [we] had to cultivate lands and feed ourselves. [We] were told, “Unlike earlier times you cannot snatch from the people and be fed by the monastery. You must work and eat your own food.”

Q: And then?

#34D: Then [we] had to work. They [the Chinese] had allotted us land, but it was the worst of lands. We monks were to plow these fields. Earlier in Tibet oxen and *dzo* ‘animal bred from a yak and a cow’ were used to plow. We were not allotted any [such animals] because men were to do it. One monk held the plow and three pulled it. Those monks that had

stayed back to enjoy religious freedom were not given any animals. Men plowed and sowed the fields. We stayed for over a year and harvested once.

[We] descended into toilet pits, removed the manure and transported to the fields on [our] back. [We] plowed the fields, sowed and cultivated. We were not allotted any animals. Normally lay people plowed using oxen and *dzö* but in our case, it was not like that. Men pulled [the plow]. [We] were not allowed to be monks and it was at this time that [the Chinese] said that religion was poison. However, they uttered that there was freedom of religion. However, [we] were not given time to practice the dharma, whatever was said or not.

Q: Why did you decide to stay behind?

#34D: What?

Q: [You] stayed for around a year...

00:53:04

#34D: I stayed for a little over a year. During that year, [we] cultivated the fields, dug out manure from our toilets, carried [them] to the fields on [our] back and sowed seeds. Men pulled the plow. Then we harvested the crops, thrashed the grains and transported everything on our back.

Q: Two thousand had left and only 160 remained. So why did you decide to stay when so many left?

#34D: Initially [the Chinese] said there would be freedom of religion and that [we] could remain. I wished to stay back if there was religious freedom because from a small age I was used to practicing the dharma and returning to the village would mean working in the fields and doing many other things. [I] was determined to remain a monk.

However, when [we] lived as monks, [the Chinese] forced [us] to plow fields, and in the end what [we] did was similar to what was being done in the village. [We] were just living in the monastery, but could not wear monks' robes, attend prayer assemblies or read the scriptures. [We] could not do any of that. [We] were just monks in form—wearing robes and carrying manure on the back. [We] did the same work as the villagers.

Q: How did it affect the—these three months of *thamzing*—how did it affect the minds and the emotions of the monks there? How did it affect the general population of monks?

00:55:39

#34D: It affected because they caused suffering and did not allow you to remain as monks. One felt, “Now the time is not good. These are terrible times. This is not good.” Changes took place in that all the monks could not remain in the monastery and left for the villages and the monasteries became empty. There was a change and one felt, “I have spent the major part of my life as a monk” and hoped to be able to continue as one. Therefore [I] was determined to remain a monk and did so when the Chinese said that there was freedom of

religion. However, later they [the Chinese] gave instructions saying that religion was poison. It was droned every day, “It is not good to practice religion. Religion is poison.” When this was mentioned, one felt sad.

Q: Did all the rest of the 160 monks, did they all leave after that first harvest?

#34D: The majority of the monks were not living there then. We were only 160 monks.

Q: One hundred sixty were living there...

#34D: The 160 cultivated the fields together and harvested the crops. We gathered the harvest into the monastery to feed ourselves.

Q: Did everyone disperse after the harvest, after one year?

00:57:37

#34D: [They] did not disperse but continued to live there. The Chinese launched something called *kyarship* ‘review’ committee. It was another reformation.

Q: Like a meeting?

#34D: A review committee was launched during which once again numerous monks among [us] were arrested. The number of monks later reduced to 60 and I was still there among the 60.

Q: Were only 60 left?

#34D: The number reduced to 60-odd.

Q: Were a hundred monks left?

#34D: No, no. A hundred were gone and only 60 left.

Q: [You] were among the 100?

00:58:14

#34D: I was among the 60. From among the 100 monks, the Chinese captured around 50. [They] were charged with offences and told, “You are yet to be indoctrinated.” Around a similar number left saying, “I am going back to the village to work there. [I] will not remain as a monk.” Then we were 64 or 65, I am not certain of the figure.

Q: Sixty-four?

#34D: That many of us still remained after the repeated reformation. Then they [the Chinese] continued to strengthen [their] grip and said that religion was poison. So four of us monks fled in the night.

Q: What is that?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: *Kyarship*.

[Interviewer to interpreter]: What is it?

#34D: *Kyarship*, to do it again. *Kyarship*.

Q: Sorry, it's a repetition of what?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: The *thamzing* and the cycle of things that they did.

[Interviewer to interpreter]: But it has a different name.

[Interpreter to interviewer]: *Kyarship*.

#34D: The first Reformation had already taken place. Once again [the Chinese] arrested people [charging them] with offences. *Kyarship* was organized in various regions and not just in our monastery. It was organized everywhere; it was exactly the same. So that many monks were arrested then.

Q: This word *kyarship*, what does it mean actually?

01:00:27

#34D: *Kyarship* means to repeat. To do again is *kyarship*.

Q: Did any of the monks take their own life?

#34D: Yes?

Q: Were there anyone in the monastery that committed suicide out of desperation?

#34D: There were suicides. There were suicides during the...in the Lekdup Datsang. For instance, there were monk officials among the monks. There were the common [monks] and those that were in authority, the [monk] officials—you know officials?

Q: Yes.

#34D: The officials were incarcerated in the Lekdup Datsang. They were given similar instructions in the Lekdup Datsang “There are rebels among you. Accept your crimes.” The Chinese gave such lessons, “There are still many rebels among you. Accept your crimes yourself and there will be leniency.” They were told that if they did not accept their crimes, they would be jailed in the Dewachen Datsang that I told you about earlier where [the monks] were handcuffed and confined. Just as we had meetings for three months, the officials that were jailed in the Lekdup Datsang had to attend meetings everyday.

01:02:49

Poor things, some of them might have committed offences and in panic were unable to express them. Fearing that they [the Chinese] would ill-treat... The Lekdup Datsang was a 3-story building—one person jumped from the third floor and died.

Q: Only one person?

#34D: One person who was a monk of the Gupa Datsang. I belonged to Shinay [Datsang] and the one that died was a monk of the Gupa Datsang.

Q: And he died?

#34D: [He] passed away. Who would not die after leaping from the third floor? There were many cases of some almost dying by eating paper. [They] swallowed huge quantities of paper. [They] could not jump but ate paper but survived as the Chinese became aware of it. They choked *agh*... There were some that swallowed paper and various other things. The obvious was the one that jumped from the rooftop and died. I was there then.

Q: You said that one night you and...four of you decided to escape. Was there a single incident that made you decide, “Oh, we’ve had enough” or was it built up with a series of things?

01:06:03

#34D: Yes, they [the Chinese] constantly made us take lessons. One could not practice the dharma nor enjoy freedom. One could not go outside but live within the monastery. One could not go anywhere except to the fields during cultivation season. [We] could not go anywhere and were similar to prisoners. It was like house arrest. Though nobody caused any particular torments yet one could not move about freely anywhere.

Then we fled. The nearby fields had all been harvested and now we had to go to the field located at a distance across the river. One must carry one’s beddings to camp there until the field was harvested for one could not [trudge] back and forth. [We] were told to go there, “Tomorrow is a holiday for you. Pack or wash clothes for tomorrow is a holiday. Report to the field the day after tomorrow. Everyone must report.”

Q: The Chinese said that?

#34D: Yes, the Chinese. There would be no meeting the next day and so nobody would realize [someone was missing] since each one would be in his dormitory. [We] would not be missed until the evening of the following day. Therefore, we took flight that very night. [We] escaped in the night and crossed the big bridge and came to India through Bhutan. [We] arrived through Bhutanese territory.

Q: Why didn’t you go back to your family?

#34D: Yes?

Q: Why didn’t you go back to your family?

01:09:29

#34D: [I] did not go home then. Had [I] gone home, the family would be subjected to suffering. The family would certainly suffer because the neighbors would come to know that [I] had come home. Instead of going home, [I] fled directly from the monastery to Bhutan. [I] did not go home. [I] knew that the family would suffer if [I] went home. It would be known that we had fled.

Q: Were you reunited with any of your family members later on?

#34D: [I] never met [them]. [I] never met any of the family members after being incarcerated. [I] never got to go home. We were jailed in the monastery. How could [I] go home? [I] made my escape journey at night from the monastery and did not visit home. Had [I] gone home, the neighbors would become aware that [I] came home. It would become known that we had fled from the monastery and they [the Chinese] would question the family members and they would answer that [I] came home and then the family members would be...

Q: Didn't you meet them in India?

#34D: How would [I] meet [them] in India when they are living there in Tibet? [They] did not come here.

Q: [They] didn't come here?

01:10:51

#34D: [I] never met any of the family members. [I] arrived in Bhutan during the escape journey. And we lived in Bhutan as coolies for a year. Initially when we arrived in Bhutan, [we] were detained at Dhala. At Dhala all the men were told that we would have to go to Phuntsokling to fetch supplies—supplies like rice and wheat flour on our back. We refused to go. We had arrived that day and were informed in the evening that [we] would have to go to bring rice the next day. “We will not go. We are monks and have never carried loads on our backs. [We] will not go,” we replied. When [we] replied thus, Bhutanese soldiers arrived who said, “[You] have to go. It is food for you and there is no one to bring them to you. You must go to fetch your own supplies. Otherwise, who will bring [them]? You have arrived in another country.”

The people said, “*Kusho-la* ‘respectful term for monk,’ please go. It does not matter as you can bring only as much as you can. There is no force and you are free to carry as much as you can. Whether it is 10 kilograms or 15 kilograms, it was up to your ability. No one will force [you] to carry more.” So we left. The laymen that were supposed to go with us had already left. Soldiers had accompanied them earlier while we had refused to go. Later the Bhutanese soldiers ordered us to go and the people too urged us saying, “You can carry only as much as [you] are capable. [You] need not carry more.” And then we left.

01:12:55

The soldiers did not follow us all the way. We travelled for quite a while, perhaps for around two kilometers where there was a mountain pass. Going downhill led to Phuntsokling where [we] had to pick up the food rations. [We] took another route and arrived in Buxar [West Bengal]. That was the place where the monks of the three great monasteries of Sera, Drepung and Gaden were studying the scriptures after coming from Tibet. We took that route since Buxar was close by. The soldiers did not follow us to the end but returned after telling us, “See that route there? Take the downhill route.” [They] must have thought we would go there [to Phuntsokling] and went back.

Then we came upon a teashop and drank some tea. [We] asked him [teashop owner], “Where does this route lead to?” Bhutanese can understand the Tibetan language. “This leads to Buxar and the downhill route leads to where your people have gone to fetch food rations this morning,” [he] said. We drank some tea and rested for a while and then instead of going to fetch provisions, we left for Buxar. [We] fled to Buxar. [To interpreter] Please translate that.

Q: Was there a monastery in Buxar?

#34D: [Monks of] the three great monasteries of Sera, Drepung and Gaden were there in Buxar. The monks of Drepung, Gaden and Sera were assembled in Buxar.

Q: Buxar? It's not in Bhutan.

[Interpreter to interviewer]: Buxar, yeah.

[Interviewer to interpreter]: It's not in Bhutan. It's not in Bhutan. It's in West Bengal.

Q: Is Buxar not in Bhutan?

#34D: No, no. How can Buxar be in Bhutan? [We] came down from Bhutan. [Buxar] is on the border of Bhutan and India. Siliguri [West Bengal] is close by.

Q: Where is Phuntsokling?

#34D: Phuntsokling is Bhutanese territory. [Phuntsokling and Buxar] are on different sides of a mountain. [They] are in different regions. We came towards Indian territory while the other route led to Phuntsokling, which is Bhutanese territory.

Q: *Gen-la*, I'd like to ask you actually about the Chinese involvement in the 24 small houses of Drepung Loselling in Lhasa. Can you describe exactly the nature of the Chinese involvement?

Interpreter interprets as: There are 24 *khangtsen* [a smaller community in a monastery in which monks of one geographical area live] in Loselling and one that is the Gya Khangtsen or the Chinese Khangtsen. How did the Chinese help the Chinese Khangtsen?

01:17:58

#34D: Help in the sense, [Chinese] monks came to study the scriptures from there [China]. They came to study scriptures at the monastery long ago. However, there were none during the later times. There were no Chinese around the time Tibet was lost. There were just two or three Chinese, but some passed away due to old age and no new monks arrived from there.

Q: I'm going to ask the question again. You mentioned the 24 small houses in Drepung Loselling in Lhasa and you said that there was some Chinese involvement in one or two of the smaller houses. Can you actually describe exactly how the Chinese were involved?

#34D: There was no special help but they came from there [China] to study. They came to study and not help. They studied and lived in that *khangtsen*. In Tibet the *khangtsen* were assigned to different regions. For instance, when people came from Kham [to become monks] they [joined] a particular *khangtsen*. One could not join any *khangtsen*; each one belonged to a particular [*khangtsen*], which you could join.

Q: Can you repeat what you said now because it's not been caught [on video]? Can you please repeat what you said?

#34D: What did [I] say earlier?

[Interviewer to interpreter]: It's alright. I'll ask a couple more questions and we'll kind of jog his memory.

Q: In Gya Khangtsen, *gen-la*, there was only 2-3 Chinese that you knew of at that time?

#34D: There were only two or three Chinese then. I did not take much notice but [I] heard there were two or three old Chinese who later passed away. [They] had passed away. It did not cross my mind that there were Chinese. It did not cross [my] mind but there were three or four Chinese then. However, new [students] were not able to join. In the past [they] used to come from China to practice.

Q: Do you remember what year this was that they were there?

01:22:07

#34D: [I] think they were very old.

Q: No.

#34D: Then what?

Q: How old were you when the Chinese were there?

#34D: I see. I was around 25-26 years old then.

Q: Were they monks? Do you remember them wearing robes?

#34D: [They] were monks. [They] were monks and were among the senior monks. I was a freshman then.

Q: And they must have known Tibetan very well, yeah?

#34D: Yes, [they] spoke [Tibetan]. Without speaking Tibetan one cannot do the debates.

Q: So they were joining in debates and everything. Did you ever debate any of them?

01:23:09

#34D: I have never debated [them]. I was a new monk then while they were in senior classes. We must debate among the new ones and cannot debate them, the seniors. I was a freshman then.

Q: The feeling was very friendly with the Tibetan monks and the Chinese monks?

#34D: [They] were friendly. There was nothing in the past. They were there to practice dharma and nothing else. They had come from there [China] to practice dharma and there was nothing else.

Q: Do you know if any of the other monasteries like the other big monasteries, like Gaden and Sera, did they also have a tradition of having a Gya Khangtsen?

#34D: There was no Gya Khangtsen. There was a Gya Khangtsen only in Drepung.

Q: I see. This is very interesting. Okay, so let's get to Buxar. You're going to tell us about what happened at Buxar.

#34D: Yes?

Q: Buxar. What happened at Buxar?

01:24:30

#34D: I stayed around six months in Buxar. I could not get admission into the Buxar group. There were 1,500 monks in Buxar but I could not get into the [assembly of] 1,500. I just stayed in Buxar. I did not get any food rations or anything. [I] did not because [I] was not included in the figure of monk population.

Q: You said that in Drepung Loselling in Mundgod you also stayed in the Gya Khangtsen, is that right?

#34D: Yes, in Gya Khangtsen, I stayed in my *khangtsen*.

Q: How come?

#34D: Gya Khangtsen is my *khangtsen* since long back in Tibet. That is my *khangtsen* and [I] could stay there. I can go there, as it is my *khangtsen* and attend prayer assembly at the monastery. [I] am among the senior monks now being a monk from Tibet. The monks that are present now are mostly Indian[-born Tibetan] monks. There are not more than 50-60 monks from Tibet that survive; only 50-60 survive now.

Q: In the whole of India?

#34D: In Loselling. There are only 50-60 monks from Tibet, that came as monks earlier from Tibet. The rest are fresh ones that arrived from Tibet later.

Q: Okay, so you are actually from Gya Khangtsen in Drepung Loselling in Lhasa, right? Okay, so it wasn't just Chinese monks there. It was mostly Tibetan monks, yeah?

01:27:05

#34D: There were many Tibetans. Nowadays it is only Tibetans for there are not a single Chinese. The name of the *khangtsen*, Gya Khangtsen still remains.

Q: Earlier on, in the earlier years in Drepung Loselling before you came there, there were more Chinese monks studying there, were there?

#34D: [I] heard [they] were there long, long ago. When we were there, there were 3-4 who were very old. I cannot recall much about them though I was old enough then. There were few dormitories in Gya Khangtsen due to which though I belonged to Gya Khangtsen, I lived at the Rongpo Khangtsen. [I] mostly lived at the Rongpo Khangtsen and attended prayer assemblies at the *datsang*. Except for attending prayer assemblies at the *khangtsen*, [I] did not go there much. Hence, I am unable to recall. [I] heard there were 3-4 then.

Q: This is the last question I think. We just want to find out when you said that you stayed back, the 160 monks who stayed back at your monastery, and you said you had all this work to do and there was no time to practice religion and you said that the Chinese officials there would occasionally say religion is poison, were they sort of lecturing the monks or giving any kind of indoctrination or formal kind of indoctrination or was it more sort of casual that they would sort of say this?

#34D: [The Chinese] said, "Religion is bad. There is no use practicing religion. There is no use practicing religion."

Q: Did [the Chinese] say it every day like a lesson...

01:30:01

#34D: Whenever there was a meeting, this was dinned into [our] ears at every possible moment, "One must not practice religion. Practicing religion is useless. Practicing religion is like poison." They dinned this statement into [our] ears whenever there was a meeting.

Q: There were no Communist indoctrination lessons?

#34D: No, there were no lessons, but this was orally dinned into [our] ears whenever a meeting took place.

Q: Were the monks who stayed there, did they have to take any kind of oath of allegiance to the party, anything like that?

[Interpreter interprets as: Did the 160 monks that stayed there have to say “I trust the Chinese. I support the Chinese”? Did they have to say that?]

#34D: What was there to say that [we] would support the Chinese? We had no authority. [We] did not have to say that [we] would lend support. They said that we could practice religion in keeping with the Communist policy but we could not continue as per our tradition. We had no authority to say that [we] wish to continue to practice religion. [We] could only say, “We will practice religion according to your rule.” There was no one to whom we could say that we want to continue as earlier.

Q: You never had to make any kind of public statement of support of Chinese policy or anything like that?

01:32:05

#34D: Of course, [we] would be forced to say that. That was part of the indoctrination of the Chinese. We were told there was religious freedom. So [we] said, “We will practice religious freedom. We will abide by the Communist policies.” It is the same [as declaring support].

Q: Were [you] made to say this in public?

#34D: One was forced to say so in public. The lay people were also given such indoctrination. It was exactly the same.

Q: Okay *gen-la*, thank you so much. It was so interesting to talk to you. Thank you so much.

[Discontinuity in video]

Q: Could you please tell us when you first went to Lhasa? Were there Chinese there and if so, how many?

#34D: Yes, the Chinese had appeared then.

Q: Were there Chinese present?

#34D: [They] had arrived.

Q: Around how many Chinese were there?

01:33:20

#34D: Chinese soldiers had arrived but were not that visible. Except for a smattering of the Chinese in blue, the soldiers were not noticeable. The soldiers lived at the barracks and did not emerge during the day. [They] could not be seen much. Quite a number of those Chinese that were dressed in blue could be seen.

Q: Alright, *gen-la*. Thank you so much. That was very interesting. Thank you very much.

#34D: [Smiles and nods]

Q: I just want to ask you one more time if this interview was shown in Tibet or China or anywhere else, would it be a problem for you?

#34D: There will be no problem for me. I will die here and will not be able to go there [Tibet]. What problem would there be?

Q: Okay. Thank you.

END OF INTERVIEW