

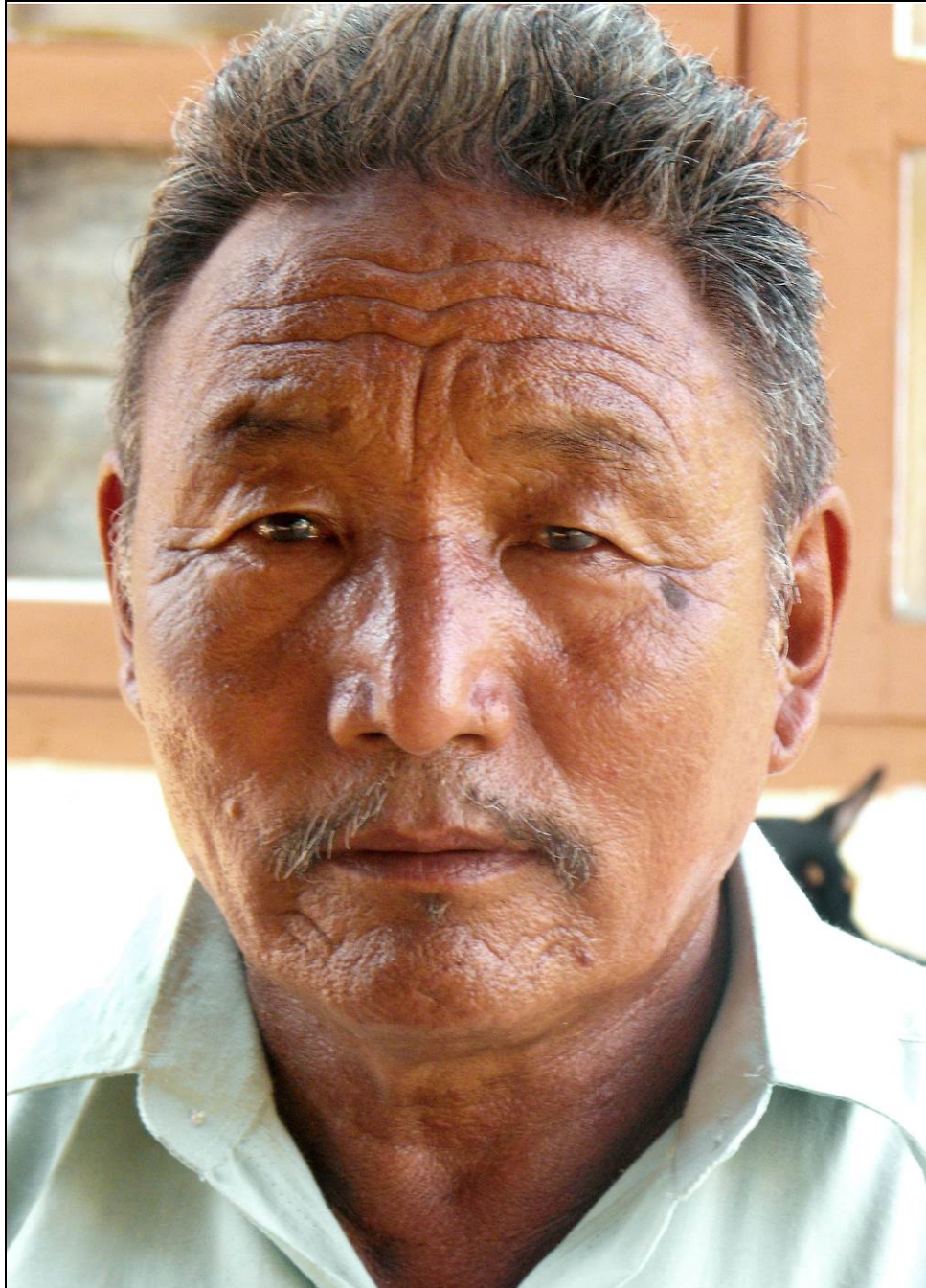
Tibet Oral History Project

Interview #40M – Khiku Luku
April 10, 2010

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INTERVIEW SUMMARY SHEET

1. Interview Number: #40M
2. Interviewee: Khiku Luku
3. Age: 69
4. Date of Birth: 1941
5. Sex: Male
6. Birthplace: Gerge
7. Province: Utsang
8. Year of leaving Tibet: 1962
9. Date of Interview: April 10, 2010
10. Place of Interview: Kalachakra Hall, Camp Number 3, Doeguling Settlement, Mundgod, Karwar District, Karnataka, India
11. Length of Interview: 2 hr 11 min
12. Interviewer: Rebecca Novick
13. Interpreter: Namgyal Tsering
14. Videographer: Ronny Novick
15. Translator: Tenzin Yangchen

Biographical Information:

Khiku Luku's real name was Karma Wangchuk Gyaltzen. He was given the name Khiku '*puppy*' Luku '*lamb*' after he nearly died of an illness as a baby. Two older siblings had died and the family wanted to prevent his death by calling him this name to indicate that he was not a human child, which should protect him from evil spirits. As a nomadic family, Khiku Luku's family owned about 160-180 yaks and 1,200 sheep. They lived in a large tent made from yak hair. He describes the *atung* who traveled from place to place to deliver letters.

Khiku Luku speaks about the origin of his family, which was the Kham Province, and how they came to live in Gerge in Thoe Ngari in the late 1800s or early 1900s. His ancestors and several others were travelling home from a pilgrimage when they assisted the local army in defeating the Nepalese in a battle. In gratitude for their efforts, the group of travelers were offered grazing land and special tax exemptions so they decided to start a new community there.

Khiku Luku's first experience of Chinese occurred in 1958. His father had been elected as community leader, but before he could take office, the Chinese arrested him. Khiku Luku describes the villagers failed resistance, capture, imprisonment and forced labor. He paints a vivid picture of the suffering undergone by his father and other prisoners.

Topics Discussed:

Childhood memories, nomadic life, taxes, invasion by Chinese army, resistance fighters, life under Chinese rule, forced labor, imprisonment, escape experiences.

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Interview #40M

Interviewee: Khiku Luku

Age: 69, Sex: Male

Interviewer: Rebecca Novick

Interview Date: April 10, 2010

Question: Could you start by telling us your name?

00:00:24

Interviewee #40M: Khiku Luku.

Q: His Holiness the Dalai Lama asked us to interview older Tibetans, to share your stories with the younger generation of Tibetans, with Chinese people and people in the outside world, so we can properly document the true history and beliefs and experience of the Tibetan people.

#40M: Okay.

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

00:01:55

#40M: Yes.

Q: Thank you very much.

#40M: I do not have much to say that will be beneficial since I was young [when I lived in Tibet].

Q: Do you want to use a different name?

00:02:12

#40M: You can use my name.

Q: If you need to stop or take a break, let us know.

#40M: [Nods]

Q: If there's question you'd rather not answer, just say you'd rather not answer that.

00:02:41

#40M: Okay.

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

#40M: There will be no problem for me.

Q: Do you have any questions for us before we get started?

00:03:10

#40M: When I was a child of 9 or 10 years old, I was too young to think like an adult. But I have heard stories of the old days, the way Tibet was and how it was invaded from my father. Should I relate such stories?

Q: Absolutely.

#40M: Okay.

Q: So first of all, we'd like to hear about some of your very early memories of your childhood in Tibet.

Q: Well, why don't we start out actually by asking you about your name? That would be a good place to start. How did you get the name like Khiku Luku? Where did that come from?

00:04:36

#40M: My real name is a different one. Two siblings had died before my birth, so in order that I too did not die, I was given the name Khiku 'puppy' Luku 'lamb' to indicate that I was not a human child. Two children had died before my birth.

Q: Why did your parents use this particular name to protect you? What was considered protective about small dogs and small lambs?

#40M: Actually the lama had named me Karma Wangchuk Gyaltsen, but that was nullified when I fell sick and almost died.

Q: Can you tell us more about that? What other name were you given?

00:06:14

#40M: Karma Wangchuk Gyaltsen.

Q: When did you get that one?

#40M: That was the name I was given when I was born.

Q: And then what happened?

00:06:33

#40M: I fell sick and then they [parents] thought I would die and so my name was changed. My clothes were entirely changed and my head was shaved.

Q: How old were you when you got sick?

#40M: I might have been a little over a year. I do not remember anything. My parents did that.

Q: So I can understand why you wouldn't want to change your name, if it saved your life.

00:07:23

#40M: So this name remained.

Q: Did you live in a tent, a *ba*?

#40M: We were nomads and lived in a *ba* 'tent made of yak hair'.

Q: How big was your tent?

00:07:46

#40M: The *ba* was very large. It was larger than this room. The length of the *ba* was one and half times the length of this room while the breadth was a little shorter. There were four pillars in it.

Q: Bigger than this place we are sitting in now?

#40M: The breadth was not as large. It was this [gestures] size. It was longer than this room by about one and half times.

Q: Wow, it's huge. How many people...

00:08:37

#40M: [Interrupts] There were joints in between which made it possible to detach them [the fabric of the *ba*].

Q: Did you have separate things that separated it into rooms, into sections?

#40M: There was a partition for the area of the shrine, where we placed the photographs [of gods] and lit butter lamps. The rest was one long room.

Q: How many people lived with you in the tent?

00:09:24

#40M: There were 11 or 12 members in my family.

Q: The shrine area, was that always in the same part of the tent? Where was that?

#40M: That was located away from the door, in the innermost area.

Q: What would be there? What would be in the shrine?

00:09:58

#40M: There were holy texts, idols and amulets which we had in my village and many other different images.

Q: You lived in the Changthang [northern desert region]. When you stepped out of your tent, what did you see? What was the environment like?

#40M: The environment was plain. In our winter location, there was a mud wall erected around the *ba*, which was about this high [raises arm to a height about four feet].

Q: How about the other locations besides the winter area?

00:11:30

#40M: There was no wall in the other areas.

Q: Was it very quite?

#40M: It was quite in the plains.

Q: Anything else?

00:11:36

#40M: There were mountains.

Q: How many animals, did you own and what kind?

#40M: We owned goats, sheep, *nor*, which means *dri* 'female yaks' and yaks, horses and dogs.

Q: How many sheep?

00:12:46

#40M: We owned about 1,200 sheep at the time the Chinese appeared.

Q: How many *dzo* 'animal bred from a yak and a cow'?

#40M: We did not own any *dzo*.

Q: Yaks?

00:13:03

#40M: There were 180 or 160 yaks. I cannot remember clearly.

Q: Did your family own all these animals outright? You weren't looking after them for somebody else? They were yours? They belonged to you?

#40M: They were our own animals.

Q: Do you know roughly, how much tax you had to pay?

00:13:32

#40M: We had to pay taxes. An assessor came once every three years. An official of the region came to make a count. The tax levied was one fourth of the count known as *tanka* 'a quarter.'

Q: [Was it based] on one animal?

#40M: A *tanka* was levied on every six goats and five sheep. It was one [*tanka*] for one yak.

Q: What was the climate like in the winter? Can you describe the weather?

00:14:57

#40M: There was a lot of grass in the nomadic plains. Every year the sheep would be taken to the same area. High walls made out of heaped small stones prevented the wind from reaching inside [where the sheep were housed]. However, there was no roof [over the stone wall].

Q: Was it very difficult to stay warm in the winter for you?

#40M: There was no problem because we were used to [the cold].

Q: You don't remember being cold?

00:16:06

#40M: We did not feel the cold so much. For example, in my region when we went out in the early morning, ice formed on the eye brows and moustaches but you would find people walking about with their sleeves off! That was because the people were accustomed to the region. We did not feel the cold. Some people removed their sleeves.

Q: I'm sure you were really busy during the day looking after everything, but when all the work was finished and you had some time in the evening, what would you do?

#40M: The whole family ate dinner after reaching home. Then everybody sat together after dinner and the little children recited the *mani* 'mantra of Avalokiteshvara' while the elders read other prayers.

Q: Were there ever stories told?

00:19:08

#40M: Stories were told sometimes. After that [the prayers], some did not go to sleep and listened to stories. Stories of Ling [a mythological king of Tibet] used to be told. There were a few people who would tell such stories.

Q: Did you wish to listen to the stories? Did you like the stories?

#40M: I did not know much, but I liked the stories. I listened to them.

Q: Tell us something about, you said you wanted to pass on some things your parents had taught you. Tell us some of the things your parents told you about your life back then?

00:20:16

#40M: My parents told me about the story about our origin. The region where we lived was not our original place.

Q: Where had you come from?

#40M: We were originally Khampa 'people of Kham province.' We belonged to Zasup in Nangchen. They [ancestors] embarked on a pilgrimage to Mount Kailash. On their return journey after the pilgrimage, around the late 1800s or early 1900s, the Gorkha 'Nepalese' waged a war in Ngari. The nine families [who were on pilgrimage] were asked to help in the battle. Then the battle was won. The fighters [of Ngari] had been trapped in the mountains and they [ancestors] helped rescue them. Twenty men from the nine families took part in the battle. That was how we came to be. More will emerge as the story progresses. [On account of fighting for Ngari], we did not have to pay any of the other taxes that were prevalent, except the tax on the number of animals.

Q: So there were other families like you?

00:23:18

#40M: When the battle took place, there were 20 fighters. They hailed from nine families; that was how the Tsaptsar Dhue Gu came about.

Q: When did you start noticing Chinese coming to your area?

#40M: It was in '58-'59 that they had come to areas close to our region.

Q: When did you first see the Chinese?

00:24:29

#40M: They first came to my region in 1958 to a place called Thingkong.

Q: What were they doing?

#40M: When the Chinese first appeared, they went to the larger districts like Ngari Gar, where there were wealthy families. They [the Chinese] visited and met them but did not do anything special.

Q: How were they traveling?

00:25:20

#40M: At that time they rode horses into our village.

Q: They were wearing light yellow?

#40M: They were dressed in the yellowish padded military uniform.

Q: Where was the next time you saw the Chinese?

00:25:47

#40M: Their number increased and covered Ngari Gar and Porang District. Then I think it was in '59 that there was a lot of trouble. They traveled on horses, mules and camels. It was our people who guided them on their way.

Q: Where were they going?

#40M: They said they were going to Ngari Gar and Porang District.

Q: Were they dressed in the same kind of dress?

00:26:59

#40M: Yes, the same dress. There were some women who could follow our language a little and they were dressed in blue. That [points off camera] was the color. In the later days, they that were dressed in blue were called *lethongrawa*.

Q: What did *lethongrawa* mean?

#40M: They were officials who understood our language.

Q: Were they Tibetans?

00:27:52

#40M: There were Tibetans as well as Chinese.

Q: As being descended from Khampas, I am just wondering what kind of information you were getting about what was happening in eastern Tibet, in Kham? Did you hear anything about the fighting that was going on?

#40M: I have only heard about [the war with] the Nepalese. The reason how we came to settle in Thoe began during the battle [against the Nepalese]. The fighters of Ngari became isolated on a mountain, which was surrounded by the Nepalese soldiers. When they were thus trapped, they were rescued [by the ancestors] and as a result, we were able to settle in Thoe. Otherwise, it would not be possible to live there and rear such a huge number of animals. That was the reason how we could settle in Thoe.

There were many laws in Tibet, but the law was specifically more lenient in Gerge, which was on account of that [winning the battle against the Nepalese]. The government had supplied 20 numbers of English-made short barrel rifles. We were obliged to act in the event of robberies in the three regions of Thoe, Ngari and Kor.

[Interviewer to interpreter]: So there was a fight with the Nepali troops. What period are you talking about?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: That was the past one.

Q: I am talking about 1958. There was a huge amount of fighting in the east. Kham was being invaded basically. So you heard nothing about the invasion that was happening in Kham in 1958?

00:31:20

#40M: The battle was going on. We did plan to join the resistance. The Amdo and the Khampa resisted. By then the Chinese entered Ngari.

Q: Did you hear about it?

#40M: We heard it.

Q: You were supplied with 20 guns, right?

00:31:58

#40M: That was long ago, during the battle against the Nepalese. They [the guns] were not provided to us during the resistance against the Chinese. That was the reason Gerge was established in Thoe. Taxes were heavy for the Tibetans [locals], but we did not have to pay any of that, thanks to the battle against the Nepalese. The 20 guns were received during that time.

Q: How did you find out about the fighting that was going on in the east? Did people come in and inform you or was there a radio? Was it just through series of people who told each other? How did the information get to you?

#40M: We heard through people. There were people traveling back and forth. There was an *atung*, a mailman, in Ngari Gar who heard a lot of what was going on.

Q: What was the *atung* like?

00:33:36

#40M: He carried a piece of cloth, which he was not allowed to put down. His boots and these parts [gestures to waist band] were sealed, so that they cannot be removed. The *atung* had to go wherever he was directed. He had a particular area to cover, like if he was to go from Mundgod to Hubli [nearest city] or wherever, he could not remove his boots nor untie his waistband until he reached there. Even if it was Mysore [farther city] he had to reach, he must go. He must reach the destination.

Q: So he was very, very fit.

#40M: He was fast and smart. Where he could avail tax service, he would ask for a horse.

Q: If he was in a hurry, he could just jump on anybody's horse and just go?

00:35:20

#40M: He would tell the villagers to lend a horse. When he passed through my village and the neighboring villages of Senkhor, Dongba, Shongba and Tengzey; whichever village he passed, they supplied him a horse.

Q: How is he dressed again?

#40M: He was dressed in the normal way. He could wear anything.

Q: What was special about him as an *atung*?

00:35:56

#40M: He carried a piece of cloth called *bok* in which to wrap the letters. It was similar to the cloth cover of our scriptures. He carried nothing besides that.

Q: Was *atung* his personal name or was that the general name for all of the persons?

#40M: *Atung* means one who delivers letters.

Q: Anybody, if he was a postman, you called him *atung*?

00:36:54

#40M: [Speaks before question is interpreted] He had to hand over the letters from one point to another.

Q: Could anyone become an *atung* or was he appointed by the government?

#40M: [To interpreter] Do you remember a man called Chonden in Camp Number 3 [Mundgod]? Can you recall Gangkyi's brother who passed away at the Home for the Aged? They used to work as *atung*. An *atung* brings letters to a point like Senkhor and pass it over [to another *atung*]. He did not need to go beyond that point. He would pass on the letter and return.

Q: It was a really interesting system. I've never heard of this before.

[Change of camera battery]

Q: So all the news, what was happening in the outside world would come to you through the *atung*?

00:38:40

#40M: That is right.

Q: [Did they deliver letters] of common people?

#40M: The letters were sent from one district to another and not to small villages like our camps.

Q: You said you heard about the fighting in the east through the *atung*. What letter did he bring and who did he bring the letter to?

00:39:15

#40M: We heard the news orally. The people of Gerge had no involvement [in the fighting] as they were not obliged to supply horses or men, except [that they were obliged to act] when there was a theft or robbery. Gerge's people did not have to perform miscellaneous service taxes, like providing for the *atung* or making preparations during the visit of nobles. That was it.

Q: That's not what I meant. I meant that he said he learned about what was happening in the east through the postman.

[Interpreter to interviewer]: That was not officially through letters or something.

Q: When the guns were distributed, who distributed the guns?

#40M: They were distributed by Ngari Gar when the battle took place.

Q: And they came through the village on horseback with a bunch of guns and then just handed them out to people? Is that correct?

00:40:42

#40M: At that time, the fighters were present as the battle with the Nepalese was going on. Each person was given a gun. There were 20 fighters. Ngari Gar provided each man with a gun and eight sheep as gift. The areas of Thangto Sharnup and Babchu Lhojang were provided as grazing areas for the sheep. Other than these areas, we did not own any land in Ngari Gar. We started to earn and live there.

Q: Can you describe the gun? Can you remember what it looked like? And how was it loaded?

#40M: The guns were English-made short barrel rifles.

Q: Did you put one bullet at a time?

00:42:28

#40M: One did not need to put in the bullet. There was a lever, which you moved to load or remove [bullets]. At the top of the gun was a clip for changing the focus.

Q: Did you put many bullets at a time?

#40M: Five bullets at a time.

Q: Before these guns were distributed...

[Interviewee gestures the use of gun's lever]

Q: Did you get one?

00:43:17

#40M: My father had one.

Q: Did he show you how to use it?

#40M: He taught me to use it.

Q: Before these guns were distributed, did you have a gun in your family or not?

00:43:42

#40M: All the 20 guns distributed to the fighters were with the nine families. In the later years, people from many regions like Lithang, Amdo Torma and Golok also joined us. Leaders were appointed among the people and the guns had to be passed on from one leader to the next. The English short-barrel rifles were passed on.

Q: How was the leader selected?

#40M: Votes were cast. If certain disagreements arose over the election, then a decision regarding appointment of a leader was made at the monastery by rotating small dough balls in a bowl.

Q: Were 20 persons elected?

00:46:07

#40M: There were 20 men and a commander was elected from among them. If I was the commander today, I owned a rifle. The others were ordinary soldiers, who also owned guns. When I ceased to be an army leader and you became one, I gave my gun to you.

Q: But he also owned a gun.

#40M: His gun remained with him until he died, in which case it was given to another person.

Q: The way you got the names out of the bowl wasn't to see who would get the guns, it was to see who would be the head of the community, and he decided who got the gun. So, who became the head of the community in your area? Who was the person?

00:47:46

#40M: At that time my father was the commander. Later votes were cast for the post of community leader. Once you became the community leader, you could not keep the gun, although you rose in rank. Though my father's position rose, he could not retain the gun. Another person was elected in the place of my father [as commander] to whom it [the gun]

was passed. However, he could not take over reign as community leader, as the Chinese had arrived by then.

Q: What were the responsibilities of your father?

#40M: My father was to take the post of community leader and he had to hand over the gun to the commander. The community leader's post was higher.

Q: What were his responsibilities?

00:49:16

#40M: He was like the Camp leaders here, who are in charge of the people. That was the sort of work. There were four such people.

Q: Was there like a small unit formed with these men with the 20 weapons? Did you form like a unit?

#40M: Unless a call was given that trouble had brewed, there was nothing but to keep the guns with them at home.

Q: What happened then after the weapons were distributed? What was the next thing that happened?

00:50:46

#40M: After the elections, the community leader performed his duties. That was not a permanent job as it depended on the outcome of the elections.

Q: Then?

#40M: Then he [the leader] might rise to the post of Overall-in-Charge which is the highest position. In the leadership ranks, the lowest was the Prefect and then the Commander, who was in charge of defense. If one rose higher than the post of Community leader, he became the Overall in charge. In the later days, there were about 500 families in our village, of which he would become the Overall in charge. There were four Commanders and eight Prefects in the village of Gerge; eight Prefects, four Community Leaders, four Commanders and one Overall-in-Charge.

Q: When you say governor, what kind of region are we talking about, governor of what?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: Gerze, the newly formed region with 500 families.

00:52:50

#40M: We did not own any land in the region of Ngari, except for Thangto Sharnup. We did not have any land. Our original land was back home. It was on account of the battle with the Nepalese that we settled there.

Q: Where did you settle in Gerze and Gerge?

#40M: In the Changthang region. Gerge is in Nangchen, but I have already spoken about that. I do not have to repeat.

Q: The people in your area, I'm getting a feeling, were independent minded people. They didn't like being told what to do. I'm getting this feeling.

00:53:55

#40M: Gerge had a lot of freedom. Later, the leader of Gerge was awarded the 5th rank in leadership by the government. He had the *thok* [headdress?] of a 5th ranked leader. So Gerge automatically became a government state. The people of Gerge, because of their courage, established themselves there after the battle against the Nepalese. They did not have to go back to their original village and lived freely on account of the battle. There was a document, which was this long [gestures off camera] and written on Tibetan paper.

Q: Who wrote the letter?

#40M: That was received during the period of Batsa Samti and [the document] was issued at Ngari Gar. We were considered as a defense unit because in the event of a robbery in the three regions of Thoe, Ngari and Khor, we were required to act.

Q: What was your people's next experience with the Chinese?

00:55:37

#40M: We heard that Lhasa was defeated in the year '59. Due to unrest, a group of people arrived from Xinjiang, presently known as Turkistan. They [Xinjiang people] were fighting against them.

Q: Against whom?

#40M: Against the Chinese. These two were at war and a group arrived in our region. My father had to join the fight. He came home in the night and left for the hills in the day. This continued for a long while. The people of Gerge formed a unit, irrespective of whether you were one of the owners of the 20 guns or not. The war with the Nepalese took place around 1800 and since then until '59, the population had risen to a large extent. There were about 500 families of which many were from Kham and Amdo.

Q: Where was like the frontline of this war being fought?

00:57:40

#40M: The two Chinese [countries] were at war and sought help from the Tibetan government or some such thing, due to which there was a clash.

Q: Where did the clash take place?

#40M: They reached our region as they clashed.

Q: The men of Gerge were required to join the fight and where did they [the opponents] come from? From the direction of Kham?

00:58:02

#40M: No, they were in the north itself. They were from Xinjiang, which is very close to us.

Q: So the East Turkistan people asked your people to come and join fight. But you didn't fight, right? You were too young.

#40M: I was not in a position to fight at that time. When the Chinese arrived, the people of Gerge formed a unit to fight the Chinese. Guns of all types, like the ones which used only one bullet at a time and automatic rifles belonging to all the 500 families were collected. Then horses and the guns were distributed to the people who did not have them and thus armed, they planned to ambush Chinese vehicles, which passed on the drivable road in Gojethang. They lay in wait for two or three months. However, one man—it's no use taking his name as he lives among us now—had already passed on the message [to the Chinese]. Earlier he used to work at Thingkong and knew many [of the Chinese]. So, the vehicles turned back to Xinjiang.

Q: They didn't come? It sounds like they were afraid.

01:01:48

#40M: They were afraid because they heard that we had blocked the way.

Q: Were the people of Gerge fighting alongside the Muslims?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: They were helping the East Turkistan against China.

Q: Exactly. So were they fighting man to man, next to each other?

#40M: The fight took place and I have heard the sounds. In fact, many Chinese were killed by the Xinjiang people at Tsaktsa in Thingze.

Q: Did the people of Gerge help in the fight?

01:02:50

#40M: No, they did not. The people of Gerge made preparations to fight the Chinese themselves. They did not fight against anyone.

Q: I have heard about the Mongolians seeking help of the people of Gerge.

#40M: That was a very long time ago. That was such a long, long time ago.

Q: Did a fight take place then?

01:03:09

#40M: No. Gerge did not encounter the Mongolians at any time. We only fought the Nepalese and won the reward [of settling in the region]. We missed encountering the Chinese. Later we heard that the *Chushi Gangdrug* [Defend Tibet Volunteer Force] was passing through Lhoka to Mustang. So our men withdrew from the area and left towards the south. We could not cross the Martsang River and everyone was captured by the Chinese one night. There was no fight to speak of. Each man was surrounded by hundreds of [Chinese] troops and captured in the night.

Q: When was that?

#40M: That was in 1960. Everyone was captured. Eighty-six of our men were taken to prison and 22 or 23 of them killed. Some of them were either taken to Lhasa or elsewhere. The cause for the additional misery suffered especially by the people of Gerge came about due to their not surrendering their weapons, with the intention to resist the Chinese, while people of Thoe, Ngari and Kor had surrendered to the Chinese and given up their weapons.

Q: When they got into the situation where they were completely surrounded and there was no way out, did they just keep firing their guns anyway or did they surrender? How were they captured?

01:06:42

#40M: They could not do anything. Not just one or two, but everybody was surrounded during that night. They did not get the chance to do anything.

[To the interpreter] You know Senkhor? He fled and we two escaped alongside. The people of Senkhor were not captured, but were turned back to their villages. Since Gerge people did not surrender their weapons, this led to their capture.

Q: If they didn't surrender their weapons, why were they not killed in combat? If you don't surrender, you just keep going until somebody shoots you. How did they catch them then? I don't understand.

#40M: It was night and there was nothing [to shield them]. All of a sudden, they were surrounded that night.

Q: Were they in possession of guns?

01:08:07

#40M: Everyone carried their guns. The army unit had already been disbanded and we were fleeing towards the south. The men were back home and had their weapons with them.

Q: What happened in your family?

#40M: They immediately took us away from our home. My father and I were arrested, while they left the women and others alone. Our weapons were seized and taken away.

Q: Then?

01:09:13

#40M: Then they [the Chinese] began to capture man after man until all the men were arrested. The men were detained for five or six days at Dhoomthanglok and all the others were sent back to their respective villages. People were segregated into two groups; those who had not worked [in official capacities] and the wealthy families. They were sent back home. Those who had served in official capacities, the wealthy and families with monks were arrested that very day.

Q: What happened to you?

#40M: I was detained along with those in the same category. We could not move about and were under the supervision of their soldiers. I was kept with the other prisoners, like the lamas and influential people. People were categorized into three groups.

Q: Then?

01:11:09

#40M: Then at Dhoomthanglok reformation was carried out on three monasteries located in the vicinity, the village where Sonam Dhargyay [Mundgod resident] used to live, Chogyal Tinlay's [Mundgod resident] village and Tomar.

Q: Were they killed?

#40M: All their wealth was distributed. That took place at Dhoomthanglok. At that time, all those in authority and the wealthy were captured and the rest of the people were driven away to a place called Woma to live with the *shungpa* [people who paid taxes to the government but did not serve the monastery]. The 500 families were captured there. Except for Yangjor [Mundgod resident] and a few other families, the rest of the families were there.

Q: What did you do there?

01:12:36

#40M: We were told that we must report those that have committed wrongdoings and they would be given [propaganda] lessons. They [the Chinese] said, "You are among the classified people and you belong in the rebel group. Bearing no difference, every one of you has committed a mistake." By rebel, they meant that we had rebelled against the Chinese government. They informed the public, "There are three kinds of *ngadak* 'holding leadership posts.' They are the lamas, leaders and the wealthy. You too have rebelled like them. If you accept your crimes, you will receive leniency, otherwise there is only one way for you. You, the common people who are humble and poor, are afraid when you see them [*ngadak*], but now you no longer need to fear them. The reason you no longer need to fear them is because the liberation army is here. We are here to untie [liberate] those who have been bound [oppressed]."

That was how they educated the people. At the place called Woma, complete reformation [distribution of wealth] was carried out.

Q: Were you considered in the middle category?

#40M: We were grouped in the lower category.

Q: But your father was a leader.

01:15:08

#40M: My father was one of the leaders, but they [the Chinese] made the category based on the status of wealth.

Q: And the leaders?

#40M: All the leaders received the same treatment. The distribution of assets depended on the wealth status.

Q: You said you were in custody. What does that mean? Where were you kept?

01:15:52

#40M: The prison was earlier a place for meditation. We were detained at Shang Zimbuk. Every arrested person was detained there.

Q: Who meditated there?

#40M: I heard that people went into retreat there long ago. That was the village of the late Chonden [Mundgod resident] and I do not know much about it.

Q: Were you kept together with your father?

01:16:46

#40M: I was detained for only one day and released along with Tashi Chogyal [a Mundgod resident]. My father was kept there. We had already been trapped a month and a half earlier at Dhoomthanglok and pursued until this region.

Q: Do you remember anything that your father told you during this time? You were with your father for one day, is that correct? Did your father give you any advice?

#40M: There was nothing to say because we were watched by the soldiers.

[Interviewer to interpreter]: Was it one day or one and a half months?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: Before one and half months, they were kept in his own area.

[Interviewer to interpreter]: Oh, they were kept in their own area?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: Later they were taken to the other areas.

[Interviewer to interpreter]: For one day.

[Interpreter to interviewer]: Taken and he was kept for only one day.

[Interviewer to interpreter]: Then he was sent somewhere else.

[Interpreter to interviewer]: Later he was released but father was in...

Q: How long did your father stay in custody?

01:19:09

#40M: My father [was in custody] for a year and a half.

Q: And then he was released?

#40M: He was released. But like a prosecuted person, upon receiving a written document, he had to present himself [before the Chinese officials] once every 15 or 16 days.

Q: After one and a half years, your father came back to live with you?

01:20:00

#40M: Yes, we lived together. However, we did not get to live long after that, maybe six or seven months. Then all those people who had been arrested on and off were made to work by the Chinese, like cutting trees in the forest and gathering salt.

Q: When?

#40M: By then it was '61.

Q: After your father returned, you were made to work by the Chinese?

01:20:34

#40M: They made us work, not my father. Those of us who were included in the classification had to work. It was the same for Tsering Wangyal and the rest of the others. We were made to clear all the sparse forests to make way for farming. Then we had to go to the salt-pans to gather salt. Later they made us dig up pasturelands.

Q: Did you get wages?

#40M: No, there was none at all. There was no road leading to the Gerge Monastery; it was a sort of narrow pathway. The Chinese army camped there [in the monastery] and we were forced to construct a road by clearing away the boulders. We did not have any tools at that time except a few iron rods. It was in the middle of winter and we worked in the water

of the stream that flowed there. The boulders were dumped in the water. They made us go through so much of suffering.

Q: Was your father also doing this?

01:23:17

#40M: My father was not allowed with us. He was elsewhere at the top of a mountain with the [Chinese] soldiers, plucking *dama* [? - used for firewood and animal fodder] from a certain type of wood. A person was required to pluck a certain amount of it in a day and it was measured in a scale. They were the prisoners' group.

Q: That one year and half when your father was kept in custody, were you allowed to see him during that time?

#40M: There were certain times when we were allowed to meet him and other times when we were not and the food we brought would be taken to him by them [the Chinese soldiers].

Q: How was your father treated during that time?

01:24:53

#40M: He was mainly interrogated to know the crimes. The questions were like, "How much did you mistreat your servants? How much did you mistreat the people? How many people did you deceive? How many people did you force to work?" They asked such type of questions, but besides that they had nothing to say [charge father of].

Earlier our men had formed a fighting unit and camped at Gojethang [to ambush Chinese vehicles]. They [the Chinese] had full knowledge about it. So they asked who planned and formed the fighting unit. They asked such questions. They also questioned as to under whose advice we refused to surrender our weapons, when the whole of Thoe, Ngari and Khor had surrendered theirs.

Q: Do you think your father was tortured?

#40M: Of course, he was tortured. From Dhoomthanglo to Shang Zimbu, a distance of three days and nights' journey, a row of prisoners was confined between two rows of soldiers; [shows three fingers and explains] this one [in the center] is the row of prisoners and these [on either sides] are the rows of soldiers; and driven day and night. Not just my father, but every Tibetan who was captured were in the group, and if anyone lagged behind even slightly, he was hit with the guns, wounding him [gestures to the back]. People like Tendhen and Nam became sick from being hit by the guns. When they came across water, they [the Chinese soldiers] did not let them [the prisoners] remove their boots but drove them straight on. The boots became wet, which led to cuts, dripping blood as they walked and making a [wet] sound. The story of my father is not his alone. All the influential people of Gerge have undergone the same thing. It was not just my father. The people of Gerge have suffered in particular.

Q: In exile, the people of Gerge, did they tend to settle in one particular area or were they scattered all over?

01:29:41

#40M: They scattered.

Q: Where?

#40M: In Ladakh [Jammu and Kashmir, India], Bylakuppe [Karnataka, India] and everywhere.

Q: Where are the majority of them?

01:29:53

#40M: Perhaps the majority are in Ladakh. Now they are also in foreign countries.

Q: You also stayed in Ladakh for sometime?

#40M: Yes, I did.

Q: How long?

01:30:13

#40M: I lived in Ladakh for five years.

Q: Can you describe some of the events that led up to your escape into exile?

#40M: I think it was on the 17th of July 1962 that we arrived in India.

Q: Is there anything else you want to tell us about what happened to you and your family before that?

01:31:17

#40M: We went through the same problem that everybody in the region underwent. There was no particular problem that my family suffered. The prisoners were [treated] the same and when it came to the division of wealth, it was done to everyone. Where forced labor was concerned, some were subjected to slightly more but besides that, everybody [suffered] the same fate. There is no difference between families in that, all the people of Gerge suffered harshly based on our not surrendering the weapons, forming a fighting unit to rebel and then fleeing to join the *Chushi Gangdrug*.

Q: Did you flee with a view to join the *Chushi Gangdrug*?

#40M: Yes, we fled with the intention of joining the *Chushi Gangdrug*. Fleeing towards the south and not taking the direction to Ladakh was on account of that intention. We'd heard that the *Chushi Gangdrug* were fighting the Chinese and wished to join it. That was the reason why we fled towards the south.

Q: Then what happened?

01:32:40

#40M: Then we were captured at Martsang River. We were blocked by the river on one side. Gerge and Senkhor people were caught at the same time.

Q: Your decision to leave with your family, who did you leave with?

#40M: You mean the successful attempt? We fled twice. We were caught during our first attempt. The whole village was together.

Q: When did you escape the second time?

#40M: We fled the second time towards Ladakh. We were 30 families together.

Q: Then?

01:34:35

#40M: On this attempt, when we reached Thoe Thingtse, one of our people conspired with the Chinese and we were once again stopped by Chinese soldiers. Suspecting his intention with the Chinese, we were returning towards home. We told them [the Chinese soldiers] that we were going back home and thus escaped. We then moved towards the north and then into Ladakh. Our final escape took place on the 22nd of February.

Q: Did you encounter the Chinese?

#40M: We met the Chinese and told them that we were not fleeing. [Speaks to interpreter] Do you know Tsenpo [Mundgod resident]? He was a Chinese official then, while my father was an old prisoner. We had fled beyond Thingtse to as far away as Gyamdhir and Yakong. Our whereabouts were revealed and when confronted [by the Chinese soldiers], we explained, "We are returning home. The Chinese government has decreed that our animals can graze wherever the grass is good. We are not fleeing but going back home." We'd traveled from as far away as Ngobong to Tsori.

Q: When you did come into Ladakh, did you ever have a desire to join up with *Chushi Gangdrug* when they re-formed in Mustang?

01:36:50

#40M: At that time there was no *Chushi Gangdrug* in India. After I reached here [Mundgod], around 1966 words came in about the *Chushi Gangdrug* in Mustang and then it was established here. Earlier there was no *Chushi Gangdrug* in Ladakh. It came into being in Mundgod in 1966. I came to learn about it while serving in the [Indian] army through Topla and some others. But I do not need to talk about that.

The *Chushi Gangdrug* here was formed through the *Chushi Gangdrug* at Mustang. Bapa Yeshi and Andrug Gyatso Dhondup were the ones who started it in the [Indian] army. The

***Chushi Gangdrug* we have at present came about through Mustang, after it was shut down there. Many weapons were brought to Mustang, but I do not know if they were used or not.**

Later when Unit 22 [in the Indian army] was established, the *Chushi Gangdrug* in Mustang was shut down. One could find plenty of weapons and leather coats supplied by the Americans at Unit 22 in Charpatty.

Q: Did you bring anything with you out of Tibet, any small things?

#40M: There was nothing.

Q: There was no *gawu* 'amulet with holy pictures' or anything else?

01:39:14

#40M: Some people who had their *gawu* on their bodies might have brought them along. I have this here. [Reveals an object around neck].

Q: What is that?

#40M: I have only this.

Q: You wore that?

01:39:28

#40M: This is a *chung dzi* 'special beads made of agate stone.'

[Interpreter to interviewer]: You know what is a *dzi*?

[Interviewer to interpreter]: No.

[Interpreter to interviewer]: It is a precious stone.

[Interviewer to interpreter]: ...And what is that?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: *Dzi*, a precious stone. It's worth over a *lakh* '100,000.'

[Interviewer to interpreter]: It's over a *lakh*?

01:39:58

#40M: This is not a good quality one.

Q: Did you bring it from Tibet?

#40M: Yes, I brought it from Tibet. It goes further back to my grandfather's original village.

Q: It's been passed down from generation to generation. Are you going to give it to one of your children now?

01:40:22

#40M: I might give it to my son or daughter.

Q: Where do you find the stone? Is it from your region?

#40M: Nobody knows where it comes from. Some people say that it is a worm, while others say it comes from underground.

Q: Where did your family get it?

01:40:49

#40M: It was from my grandfather's time, so I do not know where it came from. The story goes—I am not talking about this *dzi* but another type which have nine, five or three “eyes” [white circles on stone] that can be found in burrows. Some people say that they are worms. If one sees such a worm and covers it with something like a hat, it turns into a *dzi*. Wherever the *dzi* occurs, even if it snows heavily, that area remains dry and snow-free.

Q: You mean wherever the worm exists?

#40M: Yes, wherever the worms' burrows lie. There is another type of worm, which brings on illness in animals and rashes to humans and also death and it is called *khatsondo*. The area over the burrows of these [*dzi* and the *khatsondo* worms] remain snow-free. When the ground turned white with snow, the area about this size [gestures an area of two feet by two feet] remains dark.

Q: How big are these worms?

01:42:45

#40M: I heard they are not big but long. I have not seen them. It must be this [shows the *dzi* on his neck – approximately 2 inches] size in average; some could be a little larger or smaller. Not everyone could get one [*dzi* worm]. He must be a sort of fortune-teller or possess certain powers. Such people could spy them. If one owned such a *dzi*; not all the *dzi* were good. My late father possessed one from his original village. It had nine “eyes.” During thunder and lightening animals get killed. When there was such a danger, if one took it [*dzi*] outside, the thunder rolled away to a great distance. I have seen this happen myself.

Q: Have you ever seen anyone doing that?

#40M: I have seen it. My father owned one. That *dzi* is in the possession of Rokhoe in the Changthang area of Ladakh.

Q: Did your father sell it?

01:45:14

#40M: He sold it when we had nothing to eat. We had reached a foreign land and had nothing to eat.

Q: Your father sold his but you have another one.

#40M: This is not one which will fetch a good price. This *dzi* does not have any designs on it.

Q: Do you ever see any other people with this?

01:46:20

#40M: Some people do have it. But most of them have sold them.

Q: I have one last question. Do you ever dream about Tibet?

#40M: Yes, I do. I dream a lot and also miss it. When I look at it, I feel I might not be able to recognize the old areas, but in my dream I see the old regions.

Q: Thank you very much for talking to us. It's been really interesting.

01:47:23

#40M: That's not necessary. You did not ask me about the monasteries.

Q: Oh, you want to talk about the monastery?

#40M: [Nods]

Q: Let's hear it.

01:47:37

#40M: Long ago when Gerge was established, a lama from Derge called Tsampa Kunga Rinchen came that way and a monastery was constructed. I do not know about the construction but I was told it by the elders. Then gradually the monastery progressed. It was a very good monastery. The monastery was not a very large one with only around a hundred monks or so. As per the custom of the region of Gerge, behind the dormitories of the monks at the monastery, every family [of the village] owned a small room, in which the wealthy trader families stored barley. They took it away when required.

Q: Who took it away?

#40M: Whoever was the owner [took it away] from the room behind the monk's dormitory. That was a Kagyu monastery. The monks had to study and remain in retreat for three years at Tsurpu. The family whose storeroom was behind a monk's quarter was responsible for sponsoring that monk for his studies.

Earlier I told you about the 25 percent tax levied on the animals. That used to be collected in the 8th month. The traveling expenses and wages for the collector were paid from the tax. The very poor who did not have anything, collected firewood and took care of the horses and received food in return for their service. People made offerings of many goats and sheep to the monastery. There were lay people who did not have any money or barley, so they offered goats, sheep and yaks. These animals were left [by the monastery] with the very poor families to be taken care of. They must return the same number of animals [to the monastery] after a certain number of years, whether five or three years.

Q: What must they return?

01:51:15

#40M: They must return the same number of goats and sheep that were left in their care. If the number of animals [left with the poor person] dropped to zero, his relatives helped him by making good the repayment. Some families went bankrupt.

Q: Why did that happen?

#40M: Nobody knows why that happens. All the [poor] families would be distributed the same number [of animals to take care of] and some families became very rich from it. If 500 or 1000 goats and sheep were left with a family, it increased to 2000, 3000, 4000 or 5000. In some cases, a family given the same number of animals gradually went bankrupt.

Q: Did you not have to return more [than what you were given]?

#40M: You did not have to return more. One could freely utilize the butter, milk, wool, etc.

Q: Did you think that was a fair system?

01:53:23

#40M: There was no special problem, though in few cases the number of goats and sheep dropped.

Q: But that would bring problems for the family.

#40M: He would face problems, but his relatives would come to his rescue on the day of repayment and pay back [the animals] if he was desperate.

Q: However, this system of the monastery brings problems for the people. Is the system fair?

01:53:29

#40M: That particular man faced a problem, but his relatives paid back on his behalf. The monastery was repaid the due. However, on the other hand, you earned a profit when the animals gave birth. But still, some people faced losses.

During the period of the previous Dalai Lama, in order to bring about democracy [in the country], a Reformation Office was set up. My late father knew of that. I do not know in

which year it was started. His Holiness wrote off the debts people owed to the government and set up a Reformation Office. It was discussed that our region should not adhere to that. It was discussed though it was not my father who was going to do it.

When the meeting took place in the 8th month, everyone joined the discussion. A public fund was raised during the meeting. In case a poor family's parents passed away, the children were raised by the richer families. After rearing him for several years, a time would come when he was able to work, like take care of the sheep or assist a trader. Having raised him since he was young; when he grew up, he was provided with a share of a certain number of goats and sheep, like five or six in a year. He would raise them and by the time he married, he owned quite a lot. Some might have 200 to 300 [heads of animals], while others not so many. Some might even have 500 to 600; there were many different types.

Q: Was it in 1957 [when the Dalai Lama brought the reformation]?

01:56:46

#40M: I do not know. My father used to tell me about it. After they [the elders of Gerge] heard the news [about the reformation], they made plans. Those who went on trade for barley, rice or salt, had their share of animals for transportation. That was the custom.

This was so not just in my village, but the custom in the whole of the region of Gerge. If there was a poor family—they needed milk because we did not have much else to eat except for the staple diet [of dairy products]—they would be loaned 15, 10 or 20 female goats for their milk. That was the custom in our region because the Reformation Office was set up, the objective of which was to bring about democracy. Under the old Tibetan government, its officials levied heavy taxes on the people, but I do not need to go into that.

Q: So that [lending animals] was something that the community did themselves; it was not something the Chinese...

[Interpreter to interviewer]: Not Chinese, only the community.

[Interviewer to interpreter]: The community did it themselves. They kind of did their own distribution.

[Interpreter to interviewer]: Own distribution like that. Our community should not be equality and should not be treated very badly. All the community should come equally and should be brought up to each other. So they were helping them and letting them and working under them. After they stand on their own legs, they were allowed to stay and do anything, trade or farming and nomad; no objection to them, like that was treated. It was something special.

Q: If I get into trouble, I know who to call: somebody from Gerge. [Laughs]

#40M: [Smiles]

Q: So I think we're going to have to call it a day.

Videographer: I would like to see the *dzi* one more time.

02:00:30

#40M: [Shows *dzi* to the camera] This is not one of the better ones. I keep it for the belief that it is an ancient item.

Q: It's been in your family for a very long time and that makes it very special.

#40M: [Continues with the story] So the child is raised [by a rich family of the village] and finally when he gets married, he has everything a family needs.

Q: You mean because of karma or you mean because people would provide it for them?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: Within the community.

02:01:59

#40M: The policy came about during my father's generation when His Holiness set up the Reformation Office to bring democracy and annul the power of the aristocrats. The government's nobles had misused their power, seized lands and disbursed much loans. The people were not in a position to pay back the loans, which were written off. Carrying out such schemes was extremely beneficial to the people and so the officials implemented such policies in Gerge. That was before the arrival of the Chinese.

The neighboring villages of Gerge were Sengo, Jangpa, Thingze, Rawang, Jongpa, Bongpa and many others. In all these regions, [the system of leadership] was through father to son. An overall manager's son became an overall manager, a leader's son became a leader, a prefect's son became a prefect.

Q: That's really interesting. Thank you so much.

[Discontinuity in video]

Q: You are from Gerge. You are part of the Gerge community. You are also a Khampa. You are also an Utsang. You are also a Tibetan. When you think of your own identity, what comes first in your mind?

02:04:54

#40M: Nothing comes to my mind except that my country is Tibet. I wish my children to have that tradition and not copy something else. To be frank, I know no discrimination among the three provinces [of Tibet]; more so as we are refugees.

In 1984, they [the Chinese] came to demarcate the boundary. His Holiness the Dalai Lama speaks of non-violence. If not for that, in my mind I feel that we have to avenge the Chinese, to be honest. When the border talks [between India and China] were going on in 1984, I was many days in jail in Delhi. I went there to take part in a protest march. Many protests took place in 2008. I could not join but I sent my children four or five times; twice to Delhi, twice to Bombay and once in Goa. I let my children take part.

I am very grateful to all the countries that have been very helpful to the Tibetans. However, since helping us will not benefit them in anyway, many countries cannot or do not assist us. That is the truth. Some countries that like us, help us with basic necessities but where politics is concerned I have not seen any help forthcoming that could humble the Chinese.

The United Nations Organization must have a law, but perhaps China does not observe that law. I do not see them as doing a good job.

Is the interview over? Thank you.

Q: Thank you so much. We just want to ask you. What was it like to talk about your experience today?

02:09:20

#40M: I feel that this interview will help in preserving the Tibetan identity. Being refugees, we have our struggle for independence or the “Middle Way” and I do not know whether it will benefit these efforts. However, this will help preserve and continue the Tibetan story for the future generations. I am grateful for that.

Q: Absolutely.

#40M: If we cannot achieve [independence] during the lifetime of His Holiness the Dalai Lama, then things will turn strange.

Q: I need to ask one more time. If this interview were shown in Tibet or China, would this make any kind of problem for you?

02:10:42

#40M: I have not an iota of problem. If I face any problem from China on this account, I have no regrets whatsoever. I have no doubts whatsoever.

Q: That I am certain.

#40M: If this could be heard in the world community, I will feel very happy. If they [the world community] could hear what sufferings they [the Chinese] have wrought upon us, I will feel happy.

Q: I have to ask you one more time. Can we use your real name?

#40M: [Nods].

END OF INTERVIEW