

Tibet Oral History Project

**Interview #41D – Jangchuk Nyima (alias)
May 15, 2012**

The Tibet Oral History Project serves as a repository for the memories, testimonies and opinions of elderly Tibetan refugees. The oral history process records the words spoken by interviewees in response to questions from an interviewer. The interviewees' statements should not be considered verified or complete accounts of events and the Tibet Oral History Project expressly disclaims any liability for the inaccuracy of any information provided by the interviewees. The interviewees' statements do not necessarily represent the views of the Tibet Oral History Project or any of its officers, contractors or volunteers.

This translation and transcript is provided for individual research purposes only. For all other uses, including publication, reproduction and quotation beyond fair use, permission must be obtained in writing from: Tibet Oral History Project, P.O. Box 6464, Moraga, CA 94570-6464, United States.

Copyright © 2014 Tibet Oral History Project.



[Anonymity Requested]

TIBET ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

www.TibetOralHistory.org

INTERVIEW SUMMARY SHEET

1. Interview Number: #41D
2. Interviewee: Jangchuk Nyima (alias)
3. Age: 65
4. Date of Birth: 1947
5. Sex: Male
6. Birthplace:
7. Province: Dhotoe (Kham)
8. Year of leaving Tibet: 2011
9. Date of Interview: May 15, 2012
10. Place of Interview: Hotel Tibet, Mcleod Ganj, Dharamsala, Himachal Pradesh, India
11. Length of Interview: 1 hr 35 min
12. Interviewer: Marcella Adamski
13. Interpreter: Tenzin Yangchen
14. Videographer: Pema Tashi
15. Translator: Tenzin Yangchen

Biographical Information:

Jangchup Nyima's parents separated when he was a small child. He lived with his mother and herded animals. Both of his parents supported his wish to become a monk and offered to admit him in the local monastery when he became older, but the Chinese attacked his village when Jangchup Nyima was 11 years old.

Jangchup Nyima describes how he and the people of his village fled to the mountains to escape being captured by Chinese soldiers. They hid for three years, suffering from starvation and inhospitable weather conditions. They continually moved from place to place and were pursued and attacked by Chinese troops.

Jangchup Nyima recalls finally being captured and all the prisoners were sent to a village to join the commune system. He describes life in the commune which included strenuous field work and long meetings at night where one was forced to insult lamas and former village leaders. Food rations were too small and starvation and death was rampant until the mid-1960s. Jangchup Nyima's mother died after only one year and he became so weak he could hardly walk.

Much later in life Jangchup Nyima fulfilled his wish to become a monk, travelling first on pilgrimage to Lhasa around 1995 and eventually to Dharamsala, India.

Topics Discussed:

Kham, childhood memories, invasion by Chinese army, oppression under Chinese, life under Chinese rule, thamzing, commune system, monastic life, Buddhist beliefs.

TIBET ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

www.TibetOralHistory.org

Interview #41D

Interviewee: Jangchuk Nyima [alias]

Age: 65, Sex: Male

Interviewer: Marcella Adamski

Interview Date: May 15, 2012

Question: *Gen-la* ‘respectful term for teacher,’ please tell us your name.

00:00:12

Interviewee #41D: Jangchuk Nyima.

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

#41D: Yes, [you] can.

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

#41D: Okay.

Q: During this interview if you wish to take a break or stop at anytime, please let me know. If you do not wish to answer a question or talk about something, let me know.

#41D: Okay.

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

#41D: There will be no problems.

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

#41D: Okay.

Q: *Gen-la*, tell us what kind of work did your mother and father do in Tibet?

00:02:27

#41D: When [I] was small, my parents separated and I lived with mother. Father did not look after [me]. We possessed a few animals, which [I] grazed. I herded the animals from the age of 8 to around 11.

Q: What kind of animals were they?

#41D: At times [they] increased to around 10 and at times there was 6-7.

Q: What kind of animals were they?

#41D: *Dri* ‘female yaks’ and yaks.

Q: Was the place where you lived, was it a large village or a small one or a city? What kind of a population?

#41D: It was a small village.

Q: Was there a monastery nearby?

#41D: Yes, there was a monastery.

Q: Did you ever go and visit the monastery as a child with your mother?

00:04:14

#41D: [We] visited the monastery when there were *cham* ‘religious dance performance by monks’ or at times during festivals. The monastery was located at a distance, so [we] could not visit the monastery everyday.

Q: About how long by walking?

#41D: One could reach it in one day on foot and another day to return.

Q: What were the financial circumstances of your family? With six or 10 animals, what level of economic status was your family?

#41D: Since there were only two members [in the family], it was not a very poor one. [We] were middle class.

Q: Before you turned 11 what was your childhood like? Can you describe what a typical day was like for you?

#41D: My daily schedule was to take the animals to the mountaintop to graze and bring them back in the evening. The next day [I] also drove the animals early in the morning to the mountaintop and brought them back. That was the daily routine. My mother did the cooking at home. Once back home I did not have any duties, as I was a small child.

Q: Did you have any opportunity to go to school or take lessons in anything?

00:07:10

#41D: [I] have never had any opportunities. The Chinese had not arrived then and [people] were scattered around in Tibet. So besides becoming a monk, there were no

scientific education or schools. Each one fended for himself by herding animals or farming. That was how time was spent. I did not have any opportunity to attend school or gain knowledge in science.

Q: At that time did you ever think of going to the monastery?

#41D: It was in my mind to join the monastery around the age of 12 or 13. Mother also said, “You should join the monastery. We are only two people. If you live at the monastery, I will do whatever to fend for myself.” I wanted to become a monk and go to the monastery. I thought of it and talked about it as well but in the meanwhile the Chinese attacked and it was not possible.

Q: You mentioned that your parents were separated. Did you ever have any contact with your father again after he left your mother?

00:09:16

#41D: I was around 3 or 4 months old when they separated. Then when I turned 4 or 5 years old father said, “Come to me when you grow older and I will let you join the monastery as my son. I will help you find accommodation. She [mother] will fend for herself and I will help you.” He did not give me any inheritance but told me such orally. He spoke to me like a father and I had feelings for him [as a son] would for a father. Then the Chinese attacked and he joined...There was unrest in our region and he joined the resistance group. He went to the army camp based at Chara Penpa in Lhozong. He was killed during an encounter there. We did not meet.

Q: He was killed there. And then...Did you know he was killed or how did you find out?

#41D: Everyone else’s fathers also had fled to the mountains to evade the Chinese. We heard that the fathers were in the forests and rocky mountains. Mother told me when she heard about it. All of us rebelled against the Chinese for around three years and fled to the mountains. “Your husband has been captured by the Chinese.” “Your father has been killed by the Chinese,” my mother told me that she was informed of that.

Q: When you found out about it you were about 11 or 12, is that right?

00:12:58

#41D: [I] was 11 years old when the resistance against the Chinese began initially and [we] fled to the mountains. [I] was in the mountains at age 11, 12 and 13, facing incredible difficulties in survival and being pursued by Chinese with guns. [We] hid and fled from mountain to mountain in the night. Then when [I] was 13 everyone had to return and the People’s Commune was formed. Both of us went there.

Q: Where?

#41D: The Chinese took [us] where they had formed the People’s Commune. [We] were captured on the mountaintop.

Q: To where the People's Cooperative was?

#41D: Yes, where the Cooperative was formed.

Q: When you were hiding in the hills with the other people, how were you surviving? How were you eating, how were you sleeping if you were always running from the Chinese?

#41D: [Speaks before interpretation is completed] The Chinese were pursuing us day and night with guns. We were running helter-skelter in the mountains and were on the verge of starvation. [We] were three years in the mountains and survived on greens or grass that were not poisonous.

Q: When you said you were hiding, what were you hoping to accomplish, like hide forever from the Chinese or what was the purpose...Hoping they would never find you in the hills?

00:15:35

#41D: As a child I used to believe that the Chinese would kill me and was scared to hear the sound of gunfire thinking [I] would be killed. I ran wherever the adults did. All the old people said, "The Indians will lend support. And there is the Tensung Magmi 'Defender of the Dharma Army' or *Chushi Gangdrug* Defend Tibet Volunteer Force who are fighting the Chinese. In a few months or short years, we will be free from the Chinese." The old people used to say such things. "The Indians will lend support. They will provide weapons. The Indians are helping and it will be fine. [The Chinese] will surrender in a few months and then we will get freedom," said the old people. I did not have much knowledge.

Q: So it was a time to just hold on until help came?

#41D: "The Tensung Magmi will arrive and conquer the Chinese. Then we will be able to live in the village," it was said. Therefore [we] ran here and there. Some said that the Tensung Magmi was coming while others remarked that the Chushi Gangdrug was fighting. Still some others opined that Indian leaders had arrived and provided guns. Hence [we] lived in the mountains wondering when they would come.

Q: You lived there three years with about how many people in this group that kept running and hiding from the Chinese?

#41D: All the people of our region were living in the mountains. They [the Chinese] had captured those that they could and killed those that they could. The rest were running about, staying at a particular place for a night and then moving to another place the next day. [We] kept moving places.

Q: Around how many people were there?

00:18:47

#41D: At times there were 15-20 people.

Q: Yes?

#41D: [We] moved around in groups. At times there were 15-20 and at times only two or three.

Q: What did people do with their animals because many people like your mother had animals? Did they bring the animals with them or leave them behind?

#41D: We drove the animals with supplies laden on the yaks. Gradually the Chinese seized [the animals] one by one. When [the Chinese] pursued with guns, the animals ran helter-skelter taking the supplies with them. They [the Chinese] captured some people and shot some dead on the mountains. Such things took place. The Chinese seized everything.

Q: What did you do for spiritual guidance or comfort during these times because you were away from the monasteries? Was there any spiritual support?

#41D: All the monks of the monastery had fled to the mountains.

Q: Were monks of the monastery present [on the mountains]?

00:21:13

#41D: The monks of the monastery fled to the mountains. The monastery was empty and the Chinese army lived in it. The monastery was an army camp.

Q: Was there in this crowd of scattered people anybody in particular—you don't have to give a name but anybody in particular—that was guiding the group?

#41D: All the senior people who were in [their] prime and possessed horses and yaks had left for Lhozong and then escaped to India. [They] fought the Chinese along the way and then fled to India. [They] left with the intention to escape to India if possible or fight and be killed anywhere. People like us that were not very able had been left behind. [We] believed, "The army will come and save us. The Tensung Magmi will defend us. The Indians will support us."

We could not escape from the Chinese nor live at home. Hence, [we] moved in other areas. During summertime when the Chinese did not pursue, [we] dug *doma* 'tiny wild sweet potato' and ate green plants. In desperate times, [we] went to beg for food in the Tibet Autonomous Region, [the people of] which the Chinese did not suspect.

Q: Was there a leader that guided you? You were all common people in the mountains, so was there a leader that said, "We will do this today or we will do this tomorrow."

#41D: There was not. There were no leaders and our friends and relatives got scattered. Even couples became separated when the troops hounded [us] here and there. All the brothers and sisters, and husbands and wives became scattered. [We] were like wild animals.

Q: How wide of an area or how large of an area were you running in? How did the Chinese come after you? Were you on foot and they were on foot or were they in airplanes or how were they coming after you?

00:25:22

#41D: On level parts of the region the Chinese came riding horses. Each one rode a horse with two extra horses for every 10 people. They were armed with guns and pursued [us] here and there on foot on the mountaintops and rocky areas.

Q: How wide was the area?

#41D: The mountains were rocky and high like this [points behind]. When they [the Chinese] appeared, someone hid under [a rock] here and another hid there. They searched and then left when they could not find anyone.

Planes flew in the sky once every 3-4 or 5-6 days. No weapons were dropped from the sky since they could not see us hiding. No weapons were dropped from the sky. A few days after the planes flew, troops arrived.

Q: The amount of territory that you could hide or run in, how big was it?

#41D: The territory of our region was vast with high rocky mountains. Then we fled towards the region of Tibet Autonomous Region that included Lhasa. We lived there for around a year.

Q: Lhasa?

00:27:51

#41D: The areas of Tibet Autonomous Region and our territory lay side by side.

Q: Was it high enough that there was snow because you were there three years. So you were there several winters.

#41D: It was winter when [we] went there. [We] stayed the next summer and left in the winter. There was no snow on the mountaintops except when it snowed. When it did not snow, there was no snow in our region, except when it snowed in winter. The plains were dotted with many steep mountains. However, there were no vast plains where cities could be established. There were no drivable roads.

Q: When does this long 3-year stay in the mountains, how does it come to an end?

#41D: The soldiers captured us at the end of the third year.

Q: Chinese soldiers?

#41D: They surrounded while [we] slept at night. Pointing numerous guns, they told [us] to surrender or get killed. There were Tibetan interpreters. Then we surrendered. After the surrender we were taken to the area.

Q: Taken to the village?

#41D: Yes, [we] were taken to the village.

Q: What was the reaction of the people when the soldiers surrounded them?

00:31:06

#41D: In comparison to the time here, it was around 4 o'clock in the morning when there were numerous gunshots. People were frightened. Tibetan interpreters said, "*Rimapi. Rimapi.* Surrender. If you flee, you will be killed. *Rimapi.* Surrender and [you] will not be killed."

Q: Does *rimapi* mean "don't flee"?

#41D: Yes, do not flee. A Tibetan shouted, "Do not flee. Do not flee. Surrender and [you] will not be killed." Then we surrendered.

Q: Were people frightened or unhappy or angry? What kind of feelings did they have about having to be finally captured after so much effort to stay free?

#41D: There were no men then, only women...

Q: Where?

#41D: Only women and children. The men had either been arrested or killed. There were only women and children present. All the women wept and the children cried. Everyone started wailing. "Do not cry and [we] will not kill you. Give up the swords and guns wherever they are. Bring your husbands from wherever they are. Bring your husbands, swords, guns and wealth wherever they are. You do not have to cry as [you] will not be killed," [the Chinese soldiers] said. The Chinese had already captured and taken the husbands. Everyone wailed, "My husband has been killed" or "My husband has been captured. [We] do not have husbands." Saying so everyone wept. Then they drove [us] to the village.

Q: What did your mother say and what did you do?

00:34:12

#41D: My mother said, "I am alone. [I] have no swords or guns. I do not have a husband. We are just my child and I. I have no husband, swords or guns."

Q: *Gen-la*, did all of the men when the Chinese attacked that morning, were there no men in the group at that point? Did they run away at that time?

#41D: The men were not there. All the men had either been captured or killed or fled across the mountains towards Chara Penpa in Lhozong. Only children, women and old people were left behind. There had been many encounters. The men hid and ambushed when they [the Chinese] arrived. [They] shot a few Chinese dead and fled. In this way all the men were killed one by one.

Q: So the group started out with men. It's just that in defending the group many were killed.

#41D: Everyone left together, loading supplies on the yaks. Everyone left together for the mountains.

Q: So the final group of people...Can you estimate when the Chinese brought this group down about how many women and children were in the group and any men that you remember?

00:37:01

#41D: There were around 30.

Q: Were there any men?

#41D: There were no men but two or three old men aged about 70.

Q: Do you remember what your feelings were? You were about 12 at the time when the Chinese captured you and took you down back to the village?

#41D: The elders used to say, "The Chinese are wreaking misery. [We] will lose [our] lives or be captured by the Chinese and suffer much." [I] thought [I] would be shot dead but did not know much besides that. The Chinese seemed human in form but [I] had thought of them as demons. When the Chinese caught us and took us along, [I] realized that they were humans while earlier [I] thought [of them] as spirits or something else.

Q: I realize that if you had been staying in the mountain for almost three years avoiding the Chinese, you were not living in houses and you had to be careful about cooking, cooking smoke because that would be seen by the Chinese. How did you survive without shelter for three years and how did you manage to cook food?

00:39:48

#41D: [We] made fire in caves or under huge trees with hanging branches, using dry wood to prepare tea. [We] ate *tsampa*, turnips or *doma* and plucked greens or edible plants that people in the olden days did not care much for. During the day [we] lay down in niches wherever they could be found. Then in the night—there were no watches then—perhaps it was around 10 or 11 at night that fire was made. Fearing that the fire would be seen from afar, it was made underneath. Then [we] would get some hot water to drink, which was once a day. At times the Chinese would go away. Once they left, they did not return for around a month. When they did not return for *dhari* 'one month' we moved about.

Q: What's *dhari*?

#41D: At times the Chinese went away.

Q: Oh, [they] didn't return for around a month?

#41D: Yes, once they left. After seeking information about the Chinese' whereabouts, [we] would go to the villages and seek *tsampa*, turnips, peas or any kind of crops that were not in plenty like now. [We] begged and ate them.

Q: Why wouldn't you stay in the villages that you were going down to get food from?

00:42:54

#41D: They would not let us stay because the Chinese had labeled us as *yopin* and instructed [the villagers], "[You] cannot let the *yopin* enter. [You] cannot give food to the *yopin*. [You] cannot speak to the *yopin*. Inform us whenever you see a *yopin* and you will receive a good reward. If [you] give food, speak to or let a *yopin* live here, you will face severe consequences."

They [the villagers] were Tibetans and we were Tibetans and they had compassion for us. When we went there in the absence of the Chinese, they gave us some *tsampa* saying, "Do not remain here in the night. Go away." They would give other things like turnips and say, "Go, go. Go at once. If the Chinese see you, [you] will be captured. If the Chinese see you, [you] will be killed. The Chinese will punish us too. Our husbands may face capture. Do not come here."

Q: Does the word *yopin* mean that you were shunned, unable to be acceptable by other people?

#41D: Help?

Q: You mentioned *yopin*, that you were called *yopin*.

#41D: *Yuwik*.

Q: Yes?

#41D: *Yuwik*.

Q: *Yuwik*?

#41D: Yes, *yuwik*, one that had left home. The Chinese called us *yuwik*. [We] were those that had left [home] after rebelling against the Chinese and were known as *yuwik*.

[Interviewer to interpreter]: So they said, "You are *yuwik*, so do not give any food to these people. Do not shelter them," right?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: Exactly.

[Interviewer to interpreter]: And so the people would know that's who you were.

[Interpreter to interviewer]: Right.

Q: We left off your story when the village gets captured in the mountains. Was that about 1960? From your recollections, what year was that that happened to the village?

#41D: The attack took place in our region in 1957 and the Tibetans resisted the Chinese in '58. And then [we] fled from the Chinese to the mountains. We were taken back to the village in the year 1960.

Q: Please explain what happens when the Chinese bring you down from the mountain? What happens to all the people that they have captured?

00:47:12

#41D: Those that had been captured earlier were in the village where the commune system had been formed with everyone working together. Numerous people had gathered in one place and each large building housed three or four families. We were then interned in dilapidated houses that just about kept out the snow but not the wind. [We] were jailed 2-3 or 4-10 in a room. [The Chinese] gave us two poor meals a day.

Q: This was the village that you came from, is that correct? Yes? So there were many levels of accommodations in that village, people with different amounts of money. So how were the houses assigned to people? Who got the nice houses? Somebody like you and your mother, you got a shelter that the wind and snow came in.

#41D: No, [we were taken] to a different village. It was the same region, but there used to be only four, five, six or seven families in a village. Everyone had assembled in another place and there were 300-400 people. Numerous villages were brought together.

Q: Who were assigned the better houses?

#41D: There were not many good houses since it had been a nomadic site earlier. Chinese officials, soldiers and heads of the Commune occupied the better houses. And those [Tibetans] that had returned earlier had chosen the others and when we arrived later, there were no good houses. However, one could not refuse to live in one, as you obeyed orders. You would even have to sleep out in the open without any shelter if it came to that.

Q: Please tell us how your life progresses. What happens next in your story?

00:50:56

#41D: Those people that were able to work...There were hardly any animals because the Chinese had killed and eaten them and the rest had died. There was dirt [manure] where the nomads had lived in the past and these were deposited in the fields. Since the fields had not been farmed for a few years, they were overrun with weeds.

The Chinese supplied hoes with which the women tilled the lands. We were put in a school. Each of us was given a [bag?] to carry dirt. These were filled with dirt from the area where

nomads used to live and we carried them. The others worked in the fields that had not been farmed for a long time, hoeing out the grass. One had to work without missing a single day.

Q: What did you say was in the [bags] of the children that attended school?

#41D: In the school children's [bags] was dirt [manure] from the nomads' animals. These were old ones because there were no longer new ones since the animals were either dead or killed by the soldiers or stolen by thieves and bandits who were starving. [They] had been consumed. When cultivating farmlands people had to till the fields, there being no yaks left. To carry dirt to the fields, the Chinese provided [bags] made from leather or yak hair. There were none like these [points off camera]. People were distributed with [bags] from wherever possible and told to carry...

Q: What was carried in them?

00:52:58

#41D: Dirt. Manure.

Q: Manure for the fields?

#41D: Manure for the fields.

Q: What was the school like?

#41D: [I] was sent to school. I was given a bag made from yak hair and told to carry manure.

Q: Didn't you attend school?

#41D: There was nothing taught in school. One must work. The school for the children was just in name and not a letter of the alphabet was taught. [We] had to work, everybody must work.

Q: What was happening to your mother?

#41D: Mother's group was engaged in digging the fields with hoes.

Q: What was the food situation like?

#41D: At times [food] was provided twice and at times three times a day. It just about prevented one from starvation. The *tsampa* was rationed out in spoons and not in cups. In the case of turnips, they were boiled and mashed and about this much [gestures off camera] provided. This amount [cupful?] of hot water to drink was provided twice a day.

Q: What affect did this have on the people?

00:56:15

#41D: All the people became thin and...[not discernible].

Q: Were [they] swollen?

#41D: Yes, swollen [touches face] and [sways body to right and left]. Daily 10-20, three, four or five people died. [They] died because there was no food and a lot of hard labor to perform. [We] were not allowed to sleep at night, as there were meetings to attend. During the meetings, one must speak against the lamas and leaders. Due to lack of food the stomachs bloated and people died. We, the children [sways body to right and left], really I am not lying. This is the very truth. We have witnessed real hell. I am speaking against the Chinese not because they cannot hear or that [I] am hostile to the Chinese, but this is the truth. Oh, [we] have suffered!

Q: Can you describe a little more what happened in the meetings and how long were they?

#41D: Comparing to the timeline now, [we] assembled for around two hours. First the Chinese spoke and then Tibetans that had been appointed as leaders spoke. And then it was you, me and him. Tonight would be the turn of three of you and the next night would be our turn to say, "The lamas are bad. The leaders are bad. The wealthy are bad. [We] were oppressed and suppressed. Capitalism is bad. It's very good now. The Communist Party is good. The Communist Party is great. Mao Zedong is an excellent and good person." One was forced to say such things.

Q: How did people react to this?

00:59:55

#41D: [People] knew in [their] heart that this was not right. However, you were forced to say such things. Whether it was one word, two words or three words, you could not remain without uttering something. When you did not wish to, you could not speak much. Each one said, "I cannot say much. The only thing [I] know is that Mao Zedong is good. [I] know that the Communist Party is good and beneficial. I do not know how to say much. I know that the lamas and leaders are bad. I can only say this much." "[You] do not speak because there is hostility within. You do not like to, otherwise you would be able to speak. Speak up," [the Chinese] would say.

Q: How long did this go on? How long were you in this commune?

#41D: My mother died around a year later.

Q: Yes?

#41D: My mother died hardly a year later of starvation. I suffered from diarrhea and became gaunt. [I] could not work and all [my] clothes fell off. [I] wandered about. [I] got to eat only when food was rationed which was only at times. [I] was an orphan but survived. There was a maternal uncle who was a very good monk. He was captured in the mountains and brought down. Soldiers caught him in the mountains. There were no [sewing

machines] but he did hand stitching. He tailored clothes and had enough to eat. He would secretly give me a little bit everyday from what he received. In that way, I was saved from dying of starvation while numerous children died. I could not walk on my feet but was rendered to the point of crawling.

Q: You would have been about 13 years old during that time?

01:03:37

#41D: [I] was about 13.

Q: How did your mother die?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: Starvation.

[Interviewer to interpreter]: Okay. You didn't say that.

[Interpreter to interviewer]: Sorry.

[Interviewer to interpreter]: His mother died of starvation.

Q: So how long did you remain in that situation?

#41D: It was like that for around a year. And then at around age 14, [I] could go to work in the fields. Crops that had been sown the previous year were harvested. During the harvest one stealthily stole ears of grains to eat. After breaking mounds of earth, one could find *doma*, which [I] ate. Then [I] could walk a little.

Q: You got your strength back and then were you still going to this school? Did anything change there?

#41D: [I] was never sent to a school where anything was taught. One had to work. The children were not beaten much if you said that you were sick. [They] would be left alone. However, if young girls [said so], they would be beaten a great deal [gestures to show slapping on cheeks] and told, "You are not physically but mentally sick." One was not allowed to be sick. One died as one trudged along or as one slept at night. One was not allowed to fall sick saying, "You are not physically but mentally sick." One was not allowed to be sick but had to continue working. [Sighs]

Q: So you saw many people die as a young man.

01:07:00

#41D: I was not there when my mother died. My mother and I were separated. I was grouped among the school [children] and mother among the earth-tilling group. I only heard that my mother had died. Numerous people were assigned to various work groups and [a child] would say, "My father died today" or "My mother died today" or "My paternal aunt died today" or "My maternal aunt died today." Messages were passed on from child to child.

Many people died. When one went to work, one saw that five, six, 10, 20 bodies had been flung in gaps in the fields and isolated places. These were swarming with worms and the stench was terrible.

Q: Did you see that?

#41D: [I] saw with my eyes. [I] saw it in reality. The clothes were still there and the worms had eaten this part [gestures off camera]. The boots were from here to here [gestures off camera]. There were worms crawling over the clothes. Bodies upon bodies were flung there. There were no cremation grounds or anything like that. [Bodies] were flung where people did not venture. There were no huge rivers in our region.

Q: Does the situation ever change or does it just continue like that for years?

#41D: [We] had small quantities of *tsampa* to eat in the year '62, the years '62-'63, but the starvation continued until '64. After '64, [we] had enough *tsampa* and turnips to avoid starvation. The common kitchen was stopped and [people] allotted grains once every 15 days. Each one was given a little quantity of *tsampa* and turnips every 15 days. One looked for utensils, earthen pots or whatever one could find to boil them. Survivors who had lost spouses—surviving siblings rejoined and lived together though they hailed from different families because both had lost spouses and children. Acquaintances did the same. This continued for a year and nobody died from starvation.

Q: Did you have a family that you could join and who were they?

01:11:45

#41D: I lived alone. As I lived alone, [my] maternal uncle gave me little quantities besides my allotment [of grains]. [I] cooked in a small pot and did whatever possible. I had two maternal aunts one of whom died. The other was taken to a different place. Hence, we were separated. I lived in that way. At times there was something to eat and at times nothing. [I] could not be careful and overate when there was stock and then there was nothing at times. It was like that.

Q: How long did you stay in that community?

#41D: [I] continued like that until '70. Then the Chinese brought numerous cattle and sheep from the nomads of Amdo [Dhoday Province]. There were survivors that were a little older than me, like aged 24 or 25 and the little children also grew up. The Chinese took all these young people to Amdo and Mongolia and provided them with sheep and cattle.

When they returned, [the animals] were distributed to groups of people. Then [we] had a little butter and small quantities of meat. People did not have to plow but could use yaks and horses. Though people did till with hoes but it was to a small extent. Then there was no fear of starvation and fewer illnesses. The Chinese also provided a little, so there were

fewer illnesses. Nobody died from starvation. There was not a great problem with clothing and food.

Q: At what point, *gen-la*, do you leave your whole situation and become a monk?

#41D: [I] lived in the People's Commune in the region until the year '81, in the People's Commune.

Q: In the People's Commune, but one could cook separately?

#41D: Yes, one cooked separately. However, the fields were cultivated together and the grains divided. The produce was divided; a huge quantity had to be given to the country. A big quantity must also be reserved for general purpose and a little was allotted to individuals.

Q: When did you leave that and become a monk and move to other places?

01:16:15

#41D: I became a monk in '93, '94 or '95.

Q: '95?

#41D: '94 or '95, I am not sure. [To interpreter] Yesterday you mentioned that [I] was 20 years old then.

Q: You became a monk and then did you move from place to place?

#41D: I became a monk and then went to Lhasa and saw the Jowo 'statue of Buddha Sakyamuni.' [I] wanted to come to India but could not cross the border. I attempted four times but could not find anyone to take me across since I did not have any money. So, [I] travelled around on pilgrimage and lived in caves.

Q: When you lived as a hermit, what spiritual practices did you do?

#41D: At the place called Lhoduponazong, [I] performed the 100,000 preliminary practices, which a new monk must accomplish.

Q: The 100,000 preliminary practices?

#41D: There are 400,000 [repetitions]: 100,000 prostrations, 100,000 *kyabdo* 'refuge practice,' 100,000 *lamay naljor* [practice of supplicating for the blessings and mingling the mind of an enlightened master with one's own mind], 100,000 *yigya* 'hundred syllable mantra' and 100,000 *mendel* [offering to one's spiritual master, in which one visualizes offering the entire universe and its precious contents].

Q: Five [hundred thousand]?

01:18:46

#41D: Five hundred thousand. There was a small monastery [I] begged food from and stayed for a few months.

Q: Were these full prostrations with the body?

#41D: One hundred thousand full body prostrations.

[Interviewer to interpreter]: Can he name from what city to what city he went?

Q: While doing the prostrations did [you] go from place to place or was it done in one place?

#41D: [I] remained at one place to perform the prostrations. I could not prostrate long distances because I did not have facilities like a helper and food. [I] performed the 100,000 in one room.

Q: I'm trying to understand, did you join a monastery or not join a monastery? What was that about?

#41D: I lived alone and requested the monastery to help me with my sustenance, which they did. Other people also helped me. So I did the prostrations and recited the mantras. Because of the support, I did not face any difficulties in subsistence.

Q: Why did you choose to do that? [Tibetan word used in the translation of the question is *khaka* 'live separately.']

#41D: *Khala* 'food'?

Q: *Khaka*. Instead of joining the monastery, why did you choose to live separately?

01:21:15

#41D: [I] hired a room at the monastery.

Q: Couldn't [you] have joined the monastery as a monk?

#41D: The Chinese would not allow one to join a monastery. They were aware of the number of monks in a monastery. They [the monastery] allowed me to live there secretly without the knowledge of the Chinese. Otherwise, [I] could not live there.

Q: Why did you want to be a monk?

#41D: I had a son who died from a motorcycle accident at the age of 27.

Q: Yes?

#41D: I had a 27-year old son. I had only one son. I took a wife at the age of 25 and had a son that died. I gave whatever I owned and the house to [my] wife and said, "I am going on

a pilgrimage. Let us separate. You can keep all the possessions. Our son is dead and I wish to go to India where all the all-knowing His Holiness the Karmapa and His Holiness the Sakya Gongma Rinpoche live. I wish to see [them] and embark on a pilgrimage.” [I] gave all the possessions to her and left. I had no wish to remain in the vicious cycle of existence. [The Chinese] had announced that one could go on pilgrimage and practice religious freedom. So I left.

Q: We’re going to wrap this up now but what was it that appealed to you about being a monk and following the Buddha dharma as a monk? Why did that interest you?

01:24:31

#41D: When I was a small child around the age of 7, 8 or 9, there was a monastery in our region with lamas and monks. The families used to invite [to their homes] the lamas and monks who performed prayers. I used to feel sad, “How I wish I could be like them!” I went home and told my mother, “I want to be like them. Please allow me to go.” Mother would reply, “Unless you are 13-14 years old, you will not be able to abide by the monastery’s rules or study. [I] will let you go there then.” Mother agreed to send [me] and so did father. However, the attack took place and times changed. And then one could not even chant the *mani* ‘mantra of Avalokiteshvara.’ It was such that one could not even hear the sound of religion.

Mao Zedong died in the year ’81 and there was religious freedom from ’82 onwards. One could chant the *mani*, offer butter lamps and circumambulate. One had the freedom to circumambulate or not circumambulate. If one did not wish to, [he/she] could not be forced to circumambulate and should one wish to circumambulate, [he/she] could not be forced against it. One could go on pilgrimage and to Lhasa and be issued travel permits.

I ardently wanted to become a monk and felt that living in the vicious cycle of existence was useless. I shed tears. There were a few monks to be seen then. I wanted to become a monk and not live in the village. [I] told [my] wife, “I want to go. If you wish to, we can leave together.” She refused saying that she would die of starvation and would not be able to endure the difficulties. [I] told her, “I wish to go. From our possessions I shall not take even a needle and thread. You can have everything. I am going away.” It was like that.

Q: What is your most precious teaching of the Buddha that you wanted to practice from the Buddha dharma?

01:28:51

#41D: People talk at length about the Nyingma sect, the Kagyu sect, the Gelug sect and also about the respective lamas and practices. However, during my young days when the policies of Mao Zedong were in effect, [I] swear I never forgot [the dharma?]. One was forced to utter that Mao Zedong was good and the Communist Party was good, but in [my] heart [I worshipped] His Holiness the Karmapa who I had heard about. I had never seen [him] since there were no pictures then. I had heard such.

During the time of religious freedom, whenever possible I went to see lamas whether [he] was a Kagyu lama or a Gelug lama or a Sakya lama. [I] journeyed to wherever [I] heard

that there was a teaching. Whenever [I] heard that an empowerment was being given, [I] went there. Certain people remark that [he] will attend a teaching only if it is given by a [lama of a] particular sect and not if it is otherwise. However, I have no such prejudice. Even now I feel no difference for all monks. His Holiness [the Dalai Lama] is the all knowing and parents to all the sentient beings of the six realms. There is none more precious than [him].

Q: Thank you very much for this interview. We appreciate your sharing with us and we...I appreciate your sharing with us and we wish you many opportunities to keep practicing the dharma.

#41D: [Joins palms] Thank you. I do not need titles and ranks nor wealth and finance. I am overjoyed if I have the freedom to practice the Buddha dharma. I have nothing more likable or happier than the opportunity to practice the dharma. I do not need titles and ranks, wealth and finance or anything else. I wish for nothing else but to practice the dharma.

I pray from the depth of my heart not that only I attain Buddhahood or only I find happiness. I chant the *mani* and pray for all sentient beings and having experienced [myself, I] feel saddened and shed tears when I see a poor person. If only I had the power and the political influence to alleviate their sufferings or provide for them! When I come across someone poorer than me, I give what I have.

01:32:36

Presently at the Home for the Aged, [I] have the opportunity to see His Holiness the Dalai Lama; the elders have the freedom to practice the dharma, to circumambulate and chant *mani*. I feel [I] should not waste time. I have a full stomach, a warm bed, nice clothes and every facility at the Home for the Aged. I do not waste even a minute. Except during eating hours, I chant *mani* and circumambulate.

Since the years '58, '59 until now numerous people have died for Tibet, some of whom might have taken rebirth thanks to the All Knowing while others might not. And whenever I circumambulate, chant *mani* and prostrate I dedicate my prayers to those that laid their lives for Tibet and to all sentient beings in the realm of hell that my prayers should be able to save them.

I am alone. I do not hope that I receive good food or expect people to praise me because I am a dharma practitioner. I request you to give me support because I still have problems...[not discernible]. I think of nothing but the Buddha dharma and I pray for your well being in this and the next life.

Q: Please pray for us.

#41D: [Joins palms] Okay. Thank you. Thank you.

END OF INTERVIEW