

Tibet Oral History Project

Interview #4M – Penpa
April 6, 2010

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INTERVIEW SUMMARY SHEET

1. Interview Number: #4M
2. Interviewee: Penpa
3. Age: 73
4. Date of Birth: 1937
5. Sex: Male
6. Birthplace: Dayab
7. Province: Dhotoe (Kham)
8. Year of leaving Tibet: 1959
9. Date of Interview: April 6, 2010
10. Place of Interview: Home for the Aged, Doeguling Settlement, Mundgod, Karwar District, Karnataka, India
11. Length of Interview: 2 hr
12. Interviewer: Marcella Adamski
13. Translator: Tenzin Yangchen
14. Videographer: Pema Tashi
15. Translator: Tenzin Yangchen

Biographical Information:

Penpa was originally from Dayab in the Kham region. His mother passed away when he was just 6 or 7 months old and his father moved to Kongpo in Utsang. There he was brought up by another family for whom his father worked after his father was sent to join the army as a form of taxation. He explains the three different types of taxes and payments required.

Penpa herded the family's animals when he was young and performed other chores as he got older. He gives a very detailed account about grazing the animals and protecting them from predators. He describes the various kinds of dogs and the grazing laws in effect before the crops are harvested.

Penpa recalls the news about the fall of Chamdo and the appearance of the Chinese in his region. He narrates the circumstances that led to him working on the road construction begun by the Chinese. He was paid with Chinese silver coins and Penpa also explains the different denominations of Tibetan currencies. Later Penpa went on pilgrimage to Lhasa and was privileged to see His Holiness the Dalai Lama during the Monlam festival. He also talks about the role played by the guerrillas of the *Chushi Gangdrug* Defend Tibet Volunteer Force in combating the Chinese army with poor quality weapons.

Topics Discussed:

Childhood memories, taxes, herding, invasion by Chinese army, life under Chinese rule, forced labor, thamzing, pilgrimage, Chushi Gangdrug guerrillas, escape experiences.

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Interview #4M

Interviewee: Penpa

Age: 73, Sex: Male

Interviewer: Marcella Adamski

Interview Date: April 6, 2010

Question: Hello. Please tell us your name.

00:00:25

Interviewee #4M: My name is Penpa.

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?

#4M: Yes, you can use it.

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

00:01:33

#4M: Okay.

Q: During this interview if you wish to take a break or stop at anytime, please let me know.

#4M: Okay. It's not necessary.

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

00:01:59

#4M: There will be no problems at all.

Q: If you do not wish to answer a question or talk about something, let me know.

#4M: Okay.

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

00:02:20

#4M: Okay. [Smiles]

Q: *Gen-la* 'respectful term for teacher,' please tell us where was your family from?

#4M: Originally my father was a Khampa [person from Kham province of Tibet]. My mother passed away when I was very young and my father came to Kongpo. I can only tell you about [my life] in Kongpo. My father was from Dayab in Kham.

Q: How old were you when your mother died?

00:03:08

#4M: My mother passed away when I was a baby. I must have been about 6-7 months old when she passed away.

Q: Who raised you?

#4M: It was my father and another person who raised me. I heard that my father became ill and someone took care of me. However, since the time I can recall, I lived with my father. My father took care of me when I grew older. I was around 6 or 7 years old when I lived with my father.

Q: Who was it who took care of you when you were a baby?

00:03:43

#4M: I heard there was a family who brought me up, but I do not know who they were as I was very young. When I grew older, my father took care of me and we lived with a family.

Q: Do you know what caused the death of your mother?

#4M: I do not know clearly. Perhaps it was a fever. When I was young, I was only told that she passed away but not the cause.

Q: In your family home, from 6 or 7 on who did you live with?

00:04:40

#4M: [Continues without waiting for interpreter] The reason I do not know the cause is that my father left Kham when he was quite young and came to Lhasa. Once he went towards Lhoka and then, onward for a pilgrimage to India. My father met my mother in Lhoka and on the way back from the pilgrimage, she passed away. That is why I do not know the cause.

My father was a trader. Then my father wished to go back to his village and arrived in Kongpo. I can only recall Kongpo. I lived in Kongpo when I was young. My father planned to go back to his village but he could not. By then times changed.

Q: When you were a 6, 7 or 10 year old boy, who was in your home besides you and your father?

#4M: I have only seen a few relatives from my father's side and no other relatives.

Q: Who were in your home?

00:06:10

#4M: The family in whose home we lived was a *trelpa* 'tax-payer'.

Q: Who did you have in the family?

#4M: I only had my father.

Q: How did you spend your days as a child when you were 6, 7 or 10?

00:06:43

#4M: I grazed the animals and played. When one is around 8, 10 or 11 one must look after the animals. I used to herd the animals of a family. I worked and looked after their animals. I did not study much. My father sent me to study but I could not learn. They sent me to graze the animals and did not teach me.

Q: Where did you go to study?

#4M: There was a family [person] who taught the alphabet. Instead of teaching, he sent me to graze his animals [laughs].

Q: Did you want to learn the alphabet instead of watching the animals?

00:07:57

#4M: I did not think much as I was just a child. I did wish that he would teach me a little because I was sent to learn. Instead I grazed the animals and played in the hills. I did not give it much thought.

Q: Was the place you stayed...was it far from your father's home?

#4M: It was not very far, about a mile away.

Q: What was your father doing during the day?

0:08:45

#4M: [Continues without waiting for interpreter] He belonged to an eminent family and taught the alphabet to people. At the same time, he gave them work to do.

[Question is repeated.]

#4M: My father worked for other people. My father knew the scriptures and mainly read the scriptures [for other people]. Then when I turned 13, we came to a *trelpa*'s house and since then started living there. They were *shungyur trelpa* 'tax payers to the government.' In Tibet there were three [tax paying] divisions: 1) Those paying taxes to the government, 2) Those paying taxes to the monasteries, 3) Those paying taxes to the respective *dapon*. There were three types of tenants.

Q: What is *dapon*?

00:09:42

#4M: *Dapon* means the noble families, [holder of the] estates and districts. We were *shungyurpa* and paid taxes to the government. Whatever the government required, the *shungyurpa* paid it. Others paid their taxes to the private families. In case of a war, everybody joined in.

Q: Why were you paying taxes to the government instead of to the monastery or the noble people?

#4M: We paid to the government because the land on which we farmed and grazed the animals belonged to it. So, whatever the government required, we had to pay. There were many different kinds of taxes we rendered. You know the tail of cock; even that must be paid. One must pay all the different kinds like *sitsa*, *mutsa*, *wangdak*, every kind must be paid. Of course, grains and such were naturally paid. Besides them, there were many other taxes.

Q: Was that because you used the land that belonging to the government?

00:11:30

#4M: That is right. We were *shungyurpa*. The *trelpa* family was called Khujakhung.

Q: Was that you or the family with whom you lived [who paid the taxes]?

#4M: My home, the home where I lived.

Q: By home you mean your father?

00:11:43

#4M: Not my father, but the family I lived with. My father went to join the army on their account. Soldiers were called for when the war against China was about to begin. I was staying at this house.

Q: As a bridegroom?

#4M: I was not a bridegroom. I was left under their care. My father left me with them and I worked for them. I was like their child.

Q: Where did your father go?

00:12:05

#4M: He joined the army.

Q: Your father?

#4M: Yes.

Q: Which army?

00:12:14

#4M: When the war against China...[interrupted by sound of gong].

Q: Before your father went to war, you stayed with that first family for how long in your childhood? How many years?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: Before father left, he was living with his father. When the father left, he went to stay with a family who paid taxes.

[Interviewer to interpreter]: The people that he stayed with during the day...he would go home at night to his father?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: No, his father had already left for the army when father made him stay with this family.

[Interviewer to interpreter]: The family who was going to teach him the alphabet?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: That's different.

[Interviewer to interpreter]: That's what I'm asking. How long did he stay with that family?

#4M: I did not stay long with them; only for about two or three months.

Q: And then your father left for the army. What was he fighting?

00:14:05

#4M: He did not join the army; it was the government tax [to send a person to the army] from the family. I was left with the family and grew up with them. I grew up in this *trelpa* family. I lived with this family until Tibet was occupied.

Q: Do you know what your father did in the army?

#4M: He returned from the army. He returned when Tibet was defeated and stayed at home for a year or two. I went on a pilgrimage and then Tibet was occupied and we came to India.

Q: Where did your father go to war?

00:14:57

#4M: He went to Sok Tsendengang. It was in the direction of Gyamdha through Kongpo. The army unit which came from Kongpo was called Badhang army. The army was made up of people from Kongpo who were taxed.

Q: Who were they fighting?

#4M: They went to resist the Chinese at Sok Tsendengang. It was said that the Chinese were arriving from Chamdo and the army known as Badhang Army, consisting of the people of Kongpo was there.

Q: What happened to them when they tried to resist the Chinese army?

00:16:21

#4M: They encountered the Chinese, but were ordered by the government that they were not to fight them. So they returned. It was said that an agreement had been reached with the Chinese because Chamdo had fallen by then. There was to be no fighting and the people were sent back. I think they were sent back but I was a child then.

Q: Do you have any idea why the Tibetan government said, "Don't fight the Chinese?"

#4M: It was said that an agreement had been reached and that there should be no war. All the people who were given weapons by the government returned them and they were sent back to their respective villages. That's what my father told me.

Q: Do you have any idea what year that might have been?

00:18:15

#4M: I might have been around 14 or 15 at that time. I think I was 15 or 16, I am not sure.

Q: That would have been about 1952.

#4M: I see. Perhaps 1954?

Q: That was before Lhasa was taken?

00:19:00

#4M: Yes, that was before Lhasa was taken. The Chinese had not come into central Tibet then. They had not come into Lhasa. The Chinese had not come to our region. They were in Chamdo then.

Q: What thoughts or concerns did you have about your father if he was off trying to prevent the Chinese from invading?

#4M: I was just a child and did not have many thoughts. When he returned he told me those stories.

Q: Can you tell me about life with the family that you grew up with?

00:20:14

#4M: I led a happy life. They treated me like their child. The family is still there. Most of the eminent families' members are no more, but a few people belonging to the smaller families live in Bylakuppe [another Tibetan Settlement in south India].

Q: Were there other children in the family?

#4M: Yes, there were children—some older to me and some younger.

Q: What were some of the things that you enjoyed eating when you were a boy growing up in that family? What kind of food did you like?

00:21:06

#4M: I was a child then and we were given *tsampa* 'flour made from roasted barley.' I ate a lot of powdered wheat. [Laughs]

Q: How did you eat powdered wheat?

#4M: I liked eating bread made out of powdered wheat. I did not enjoy eating *tsampa*.

Q: Really! That was unusual for a Tibetan.

00:21:31

#4M: [Smiles] I liked bread better.

Q: You said the family treated you well. What were your chores in the family when you were a teenager?

#4M: As I grew older, I had to perform any tasks that the family required to be done. Whether it was gathering firewood or whatever work the family could not handle, I did them. That was my duty and I must do them. The children were young and they could not work. The father stayed at home. I lived with the family until Tibet was occupied.

Q: You mentioned about grazing animals.

00:22:22

#4M: I grazed animals when I was younger and not when I grew up.

Q: Were you older when you gathered firewood?

#4M: I was much older when I gathered firewood.

Q: Tell me about grazing the animals. Did you do that alone and what was the size of the group you were herding?

00:22:58

#4M: There were many people. The family owned many animals; pigs, goats and sheep. Goats and sheep were about 200 in number. There might have been about 40 pigs. Likewise the family owned about 11 horses and 15-20 cows and oxen.

Q: Which of those animals did you have responsibility for?

#4M: When I was very young I looked after the sheep and pigs, and then the cows and the various other animals. In the wintertime, someone else watched these animals while I grazed the horses. I took the horses to the hills and brought them down. The horses were let loose in the hills and they must be brought back in the evening. Horses and cows grazed in the hills and they were housed in the sheds at night.

Q: Everyday?

00:24:15

#4M: Yes, mostly. At times someone else might do it.

Q: When you were younger, what did you do for responsibility with the animals—the sheep, the pigs and the cows?

#4M: I took them to an open field like that [points outside] and then we played as we watched them. [Laughs] They were left loose.

Q: Were these children from other families? Were you the only one in charge of your family's animals?

00:25:27

#4M: There were other children.

Q: The children of the family [you lived with]?

#4M: Yes, sometimes we went together. When I was younger, I was the one mostly sent with the animals. Later when I grew older, the others went to graze the animals.

Q: Did you go for the whole day or for a week at a time?

00:26:00

#4M: One must get up very early in the morning. The animals were let out to the pastureland at the break of dawn and they must be brought back in the evening and counted. This must be continued throughout the four seasons where the goats and sheep are concerned. However the pigs needed watching only during the summer.

Q: All day long you were out in the hillside and the fields. When you were playing, was there anything else that you did besides play?

#4M: There was nothing else to do. We let the animals graze about and played as children do. If the animals ventured too far away, we rushed to bring them back. The hillside was open grounds. We had to watch out for wild animals that might attack. We could see our animals from afar and brought them back if they wandered too far away.

Q: What did you have with you to protect the sheep, pigs and cows from wild animals?

00:27:42

#4M: We did not have anything with us. We shouted and if there were dogs with us, they chased them away. We did not carry any weapons. There was an animal called wild dog in Tibet, which sometimes killed one or two [of our animals]. They killed even as we shouted.

Q: What kind of animals did you actually see with your own eyes?

#4M: Wild animals?

Q: Yes, wild animals.

00:28:14

#4M: There were different wild animals like, leopards and wild dogs, which looked like dogs and came in *chu* 'packs.'

Q: *Chu*?

#4M: *Chu* meaning many. They came in droves of 10-11 or 8-9. If we did not watch out, they could kill many animals.

Q: What would they do if they got near your sheep?

00:29:05

#4M: We would shout before they came close. The sign that they were nearby was the vultures hovering above. The animals [the sheep and goats] also panic and we start running. If there were dogs with us, they would start chasing. They [wild dogs] ran away if they heard us. We have what is called the sling-shot.

Q: Vultures would be hovering around in the sky?

#4M: Yes, vultures hovered in the sky when they [the wild dogs] came.

Q: Did you bring dogs of your own and what were they like? What size, what type?

00:30:30

#4M: The dogs were medium sized, like the ones we have here [Mundgod, India]. They had pointed ears and we called them *shakyi*. There were dogs which had droopy ears and many other types of dogs. The dog that went with me had pointed ears and was red in color. It was not a large dog. The large dogs were tied up at the house. In Tibet, the dogs that were tied at the house were the grandest dogs with long hair and large mouths.

Q: What was the size of the huge dogs in your house?

#4M: They must be this high [indicates height with hand] and very hairy.

Q: About four feet, it looks like.

00:31:42

#4M: The dogs were huge with droopy mouth and looked grand. I do not know if they exist these days, but in the olden days they were there.

Q: Why did you keep such big hairy dogs?

#4M: That was like an ornament for the family. It was the custom to tie a dog at the gate. I do not know if it was like an ornament. The dogs had a grand bark and were kept tied with chains and fed.

Q: Were the dogs also used for other reasons besides show?

00:32:35

#4M: [Continues without waiting for interpreter] I heard the nomads used them as protection for their animals. We were farmers, so they were like ornamental.

Q: Was there a danger that someone would break into your house?

#4M: That could be one reason. No one would dare enter with such huge dogs around.

Q: How many months of the year would you go out everyday with the animals, like five months of the year or nine months of the year—spring through summer?

00:33:42

#4M: We were farmers and our animals were daily brought home.

Q: You did not go away at a stretch?

#4M: No, we did not. Those that did go far away were the nomads and they were different from us.

Q: Which months did you do that [taking animals out and bringing them back in the evening] every year?

00:34:20

#4M: We did that during the summer, while we could let the animals loose in the winter time. In summer the fields were sown with crops and one must watch the animals. Each family must send a person, whether a family member or a hired help to watch the animals.

Q: When did you let them loose?

#4M: From the 15th day of the fourth month to the 15th day of the 8th month of the Tibetan lunar calendar [the animals had to be watched]. The summer law was relaxed on the 15th day of the 8th month. In the event that the harvest was not complete by then, the nomads met once again and the rule to watch over the animals was extended. So the summer rule came into being on the 15th day of the 4th month and the rule expired on the 15th day of the 8th month.

Q: After that you were allowed to let your animals loose?

00:35:07

#4M: One was allowed to let them loose, but the villagers hold a meeting and if the harvest was still incomplete, one could not let the animals loose.

Q: So it sounds like during the summer months, when the crops were growing, you couldn't take your animals out to graze?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: You had to go with the animals to graze them, while in the winter months when there were no crops in the field, you just let the animals go anywhere.

Q: I see. You mentioned that you took slingshots sometimes to scare away the animals. What were they made of and what did they look like?

#4M: They were made of goats' hair and spun wool. There were different kinds: some had stripes and some had eye-like designs on them. Some people around here might have one. [Makes lassoing movements]

Q: A long string and you threw it like a lasso.

00:37:07

#4M: It was like a cord with a stone placed in the center and twirled around.

Q: Were you very good at that? Could you use a slingshot?

#4M: Yes, I was quite good at it [laughs].

Q: Were there other sports like horse riding or anything like that that you did that you were good at?

00:37:50

#4M: I have not done any horse racing. However, we did ride a lot. I have not taken part in horse racing events, but we rode horses wherever we went.

Q: You said that when you got older, you took care of the 15-20 horses. Can you tell me about that? What were your duties on a daily basis?

#4M: A year or so after the Chinese arrived; I went on their road construction. The family [interviewee lived with] was obliged to pay a tax in the form of a person. However, the Chinese paid a salary. I was about 6-7 months on the road crew. Then I went on a pilgrimage and on my return, the times turned over.

Q: Before we get to that, I want to ask some more questions. When the animals came home at night, the sheep, the pigs and everything; where were they placed on the farm?

00:39:38

#4M: The horses were left outside, while the cows were brought within. The goats and sheep had a separate shed. The cows were kept within the boundary fence without a roof. They were kept beneath the haystacks. The horses were left further away in an enclosure. If a horse had work [the next day], it was tied in the horse-pen and given grass and feed.

Q: When you and the rest of the family were done their work for the day, what did people do in the evening when work was finished?

#4M: In the evening, there was the evening work. The [evening] work was less in the autumn because one had to start field work early in the morning. During winter, after the firewood was gathered, women did the wool work. And the men wove [animal] hair. Even the children were given the task of combing the wool; no one was left idle! [Laughs]

Q: When you were weaving, what kinds of things were you making? Did you know how to weave and what were you making?

00:42:02

#4M: I learned to weave but did not do it much. I learned to weave *nambu* 'woolen cloth' on the looms. I did not particularly weave much.

Q: What did you make?

#4M: We made different things out of wool in my village. The material for making clothes was called *nambu*. This was made from wool. I know a bit of tailoring.

Q: Was there ever a time when people could finish their work and just relax together or did they work right till they went to bed?

00:43:00

#4M: At around 10 at night, we drank some *thukpa* 'noodle soup' and then went to bed. Those who were responsible for cooking woke up very early in the morning, around 3 o'clock and the rest got up at around 4 or 5.

Q: Did you work until you went to bed or did you stop earlier and...

#4M: No, after we stopped work, *thukpa* was served and after the meal, we had to go to bed.

Q: That was a long day.

#4M: [Smiles]

Q: Which meal was the main meal during the day?

00:44:13

#4M: As a child I did not think about it and I was not exactly particular. However, the grown-ups drank a lot of *chang* 'home-brewed beer.' [Laughs] *Chang* was made from grains and they drank a lot of it. In fact they drank an equal quantity of tea and *chang* or perhaps more of *chang*! Those who did not drink *chang* were provided butter milk. It was one's choice if you wanted to dilute it or drink it straight.

Q: Which did you prefer?

#4M: I drank more buttermilk because I did not like *chang*.

Q: You mentioned that there was a law that the animals could not graze freely. So who wrote those laws in the village?

00:45:51

#4M: The law was made by the village group. All the villagers met together and made the decision.

Q: Who was in charge of the village?

#4M: The leader was called *genpo* and people took turns. A person called a *she-ngo* was appointed to look after the fields. He had the responsibility of imposing a penalty on anyone whose animal strayed into the fields. The penalty was either in the form of grain or any other kind. The field in-charge took his wages from it and the rest was enjoyed by everyone by holding a get-together or an incense-burning ceremony.

Q: Who would do the fining?

00:47:10

#4M: The people [of the village] appointed a person in-charge of looking after the fields. His term started when the law came into effect, from the time the fields were sown to the time of harvest in the 8th month. He was paid wages in grains and his food was taken care of in turns by the villagers.

Q: Did the community think this was a good law to fine people whose animals strayed into their grasslands?

#4M: It was important to obey the law because the fields must be protected.

Q: You were about 15 or 16 when your father returned from the army, did he live in the house with you?

00:48:51

#4M: He lived with the same family. We lived there until Tibet was occupied.

Q: What was your father doing in this family?

#4M: He did whatever work the family needed done. He had to do something, so it was any kind of work that the family wanted done.

Q: Was he considered like a servant in the family or just a paid helper?

00:49:48

#4M: There was no specific salary as such. My father arrived there long ago when the family was established. They were a newly admitted *treipa* family. He was there when the family's house was constructed. I think we reached there when I was a very small child as I cannot recall it.

Q: So was he considered part of the family?

#4M: Yes, they considered us as part of the family.

Q: This was a large family that paid taxes to the government. How many people were in this family?

00:51:06

#4M: There were about 18 members including the hired help. That was during summer when helpers were hired from outside to work in the fields. Normally there were about 12 people living in the house.

Q: How many family members were there?

#4M: There were about 13, including all of us.

Q: After you get a little older, you take care of the horses and then what happens next in your life?

00:52:06

#4M: After the Chinese arrived, I had to work on the road crew as told to do so. When the Chinese first appeared, preparations had to be made for them. The District [administrator] ordered that we must provide provisions, animals or whatever we had, to them. Later we were told that we must attend road construction work and would be paid. We had to carry our own food with us.

Q: Were you the only one from the family who had to go on road construction?

#4M: Yes, I was the only one.

Q: And why were you selected?

00:53:22

#4M: I wished to go and told them so. They provided me with food. Since they [the family] were levied this tax, I volunteered to go.

Q: Was there any reason why you wanted to volunteer?

#4M: I was a child and enjoyed it when many people worked together. Everybody was going and I wished to go too. Anyway, one person from the family was obliged to go and so I left.

Q: Were you able to receive any salary for your work on the road?

00:54:26

#4M: We were given a salary. The Chinese gave us a lot of advice. First they measured an area of about 100 feet. Around 20 people were required to work on this area. Whoever completed his work the fastest was rewarded with what they called *pesang*, a higher wage. The payment was made in the form of *dhayen* 'Chinese silver coins.' The normal wage was one or two *dhayen*; I think it was two *dhayen*. The better workers got paid three *dhayen* or three and half.

Q: What were you required to do on the 100 feet of land?

#4M: We had to construct a road on it. Everyday the Chinese advised us to work very hard. People from the region, who were there in large numbers, were divided into groups.

Q: Was it two silver coins per each person?

00:56:08

#4M: I do not remember clearly, but it was one or two silver coins per person per day.

Q: How valuable was silver coins in Tibet? How many hours or days would you have to work to get a silver coin if you were paid for a job in Tibet?

#4M: One silver coin was equal to the value of 15 *sang* of the Tibetan currency at that time. The younger ones [Tibetan children in exile] would not know that. I cannot estimate how much its value would be in Indian Rupees; perhaps 8 or 9 Rupees. I have with me the [Tibetan] currency called *shapay*. Ten of that was equal to one *sang*.

Q: Where is the currency?

00:57:37

#4M: It's in my home. It's called a *shapay*. Then there is the *gyalo*. The Tibetan currency had different denominations; *sang*, *chечay*, *ngul-sang*, *chu*. Some were not of pure silver. I have a *gyalo* and some coins I can show you now. If you like, I will offer them to you.

Q: We would like to see that. Were these coins from when you were working?

#4M: These are not Chinese currency, but Tibetan ones.

Q: What would that silver coin...what would we get in rupees today? I'm just curious.

00:58:44

#4M: These days the value would not be much. However, the price of silver has risen. It [dhayen] was made of pure silver and weighed about one and half or two and half tola [11 grams in weight]. I cannot remember clearly; it was quite big. Some people might still have them. It resembled the old English coin.

Q: Which English coin?

#4M: There was a type of pure silver coin. When we came from Tibet, this English coin was being used in India. It became non-existent after we came here.

Q: *Gen-la*, would you like to tell us about the Tibetan currency you are holding in your hand?

01:00:04

#4M: [Holds up the currency note] This is a *gyalo* 'a hundred unit.'

Q: Where does it come from...what time in Tibet's history?

#4M: I do not know since when this was in circulation. It must be written on it. I heard that the paper currency was prevalent since long ago. There used to be a pure silver coin a long long time ago. And then the paper currency came into being. Long ago, it was either pure gold or silver. They were very thin. I have seen them. They were no longer in use.

Q: When you were a little boy, was this kind of currency was in existence?

01:01:16

#4M: This was in use. It was the same throughout the length and breadth of Tibet. There were different currency denominations.

Q: When the Chinese invaded, was this money still in existence?

#4M: We used it until [Tibet was] occupied. After that, they took away the coins. Nobody asked for these [the notes] because they were to be burned. All the coins like this [holds up coin] were taken back and the people were told that they would be compensated. I do not know if they [the Chinese] did it or not.

Q: The silver coins were taken back by the Chinese?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: Not the silver coins, but the coins that the Tibetans were using.

Q: The Tibetan coins were taken away by the Chinese. Did the silver coins still stay?

01:02:42

#4M: The government might have sold the silver coins. The [Tibetan] traders sold theirs to the Indians. I do not know much, but I heard the traders sold them to the Indians. Whatever [dhayen] we had received, we already exchanged them. A *dhayen*'s value was equal to that of 15 *sang* and later the exchange rate rose to 20.

Q: You exchanged your *dhayen*?

#4M: Yes, we exchanged them with the paper currency like this one here [points to the note]. Fifteen *shopay* equaled one *dhayen*.

Q: Let us go back to our discussion. You were on the road gang—about what age was that when you started working on the road construction?

01:03:55

#4M: I might have been about 17 years old.

Q: How many months or years did you work there?

#4M: The first time I worked there for three months. I cannot recall clearly but I think it was for 6 to 7 months the other time. That was in the place called Chindha. My father was the one who went there.

Q: So you were there for 3 months the first time and the second time?

01:04:39

#4M: I heard that people from every region of Tibet were there at Chindha for building roads. Chindha was close to Lhasa.

Q: Did you go there?

#4M: My father went there. I did not go.

Q: Did you or your father go to Chindha?

01:04:57

#4M: My father went there.

Q: You only went once?

#4M: Yes, I went once. That was to construct road in the direction of Kongpo Nyitri.

Q: Can you describe what the duties were that you did on the road construction?

01:05:28

#4M: [The Chinese] measured the site and we had to construct the road, blasting away the rocks and clearing the ground. Lines were drawn after measurement and we had to make drivable roads. The roads were for vehicles to pass through. If one performed well, they gave various rates of wages, so that people were encouraged to work harder and complete the construction sooner. They played movies for us everyday and made announcements. They told us that if we worked hard at building the roads, there would be much in store for us.

They said, "The Liberation Army will bring about development. You are selling your leather and wool outside the country. Now we are here and we will set up industries and bring progress. There will be much happiness." That's what they said at first and later, of course, there was nothing. When they rewarded the people [good workers] with *pesang*, it was in the form of cigarettes, towels and soaps. That was given to the head of the group. The others in the group, whether they were 20 in number or whatever, were awarded a red triangular flag each. The red flag was accompanied by a raise in the wage.

Q: Did the people on the road construction crew...what did they think of these promises?

#4M: The people continued to labor hard for whatever duration it took to complete the work. They [the Chinese] praised us for it. They made a lot of promises of what the liberation army would do in order to bring development.

[Question is repeated.]

01:08:50

#4M: The people were made to construct the roads by the District Administrators. The various District Administrators ordered the people that they participate in constructing the roads, which was why they did it. That was how the people first began working on the road crew. It was a sort of force or order. The Chinese gave their orders to the District officials and they in turn, ordered the people to participate and [told them] that they would receive a salary.

Q: And you volunteered to go from the family. Tell me about your day. What happened? What time did you have to get up to do the work? What did you do to break up the road or make it smooth? What did you actually have to do?

#4M: I think it was about 7 o'clock that we woke up and the work began at around 8 o'clock. It was your choice what time you wished to stop work in the evening. If one worked really hard and completed the construction faster, you were rewarded.

Q: What did the work entail?

01:10:44

#4M: If the ground was hollow, you filled it and if there were rocks, you blasted them. The road had to be wide enough for a vehicle to pass. Until very much later, stones were not laid on the road. The road was straight and just wide enough for a vehicle.

Q: How were the rocks blasted?

#4M: Men used hammers to drill a hole in the rock and dynamite was used to blast it. At that time there were no machines to blast the rocks.

Q: *Gen-la*, did you learn how to use dynamite and set off a charge?

01:12:07

#4M: Yes, I learned that.

Q: Was anybody hurt during this kind of work?

#4M: No, no one was hurt. A whistle was blown before the blast took place and people ran away. Then the dynamite was lit.

Q: Before you went to work, were you given food to eat in the morning by the Chinese or did you have to bring your own food?

01:13:06

#4M: We cooked and ate our own food. No one provided us with food. We had to bring provisions like *tsampa* and wheat flour from our home.

Q: How long did you work all day?

#4M: There were five-minute breaks every half hour or so. One must be up in five minutes when a whistle was sounded.

Q: Was there anything to drink during the hard work all day?

01:14:11

#4M: No, nothing until we went back home. If there was water, we would drink it.

Q: Did you go back to your own home?

#4M: Tents were set up beside the road and that was where we stayed.

Q: Did people have access to water during the day?

1:14:57

#4M: No, there was no water.

Q: What months are we talking about when you said three months?

#4M: Perhaps it was around the ninth or 10th months of the Tibetan lunar calendar.

Q: How was the weather condition?

01:15:57

#4M: The weather in Kongpo was good. If it did not snow in winter, the weather was good; it was warm. It was not cold.

Q: You lived in tents. Who provided the tents and was there an evening meal and where did you get it?

#4M: I wonder who provided the tents. Perhaps it was the Chinese. I am not sure. Some people had brought their own tents.

Q: Was there an evening meal?

01:16:38

#4M: We cooked our food for the evening. We made tea and cooked what we wanted to have for dinner. Then we ate and went to sleep. The next morning we made tea, ate our food and started work.

Q: Until what time did you have to work each day?

#4M: I think we worked 8 to 9 hours. Yes, it was about 9 hours that we worked.

Q: Until 9 o'clock at night?

01:17:19

#4M: No. We continued to work until the sun set. That must be 3 or 4 o'clock in Tibet while in India it might be around 5 or 6 o'clock.

Q: Around 7 o'clock.

#4M: Yes, around 7 o'clock. We worked until the sun set and then stopped.

Q: In terms of the make up of the group, about how many people were in this consortium? How many men and how many women?

01:18:21

#4M: There were not many women. It was mostly men and they were around 300.

Q: There were no women at all?

#4M: There were just a few women.

Q: Had all of these men been ordered by their district to go?

01:19:03

#4M: Yes, all of them were ordered to go. Each family was ordered to send a man.

Q: But the orders came to the district from the central Tibetan government?

#4M: I would not know that. Our District Administrator was appointed by the Tibetan government. So, we had to follow his orders. People must abide by the law.

Q: When you were working on the roads, were the people happy, angry or were they irritated? What were the experiences of the people who were having to do this hard work?

01:20:32

#4M: People had different thoughts. There were some who worked hard. And there were others who resented the Chinese and spoke against them. People were of many kinds and it's difficult to say. Some people remarked that the Chinese forcefully entered our country.

Q: What kind of category did you fit in?

#4M: Whatever work was allotted to me, I did it well. Since they proclaimed the onset of development, I believed that they would do great things. In the end, that did not happen.

Q: When you came together at the end of the day and had your evening meal, did people discuss the different concerns or beliefs they had about what the Chinese were saying? Were there a variety of opinions? What was it like?

01:22:35

#4M: We were not allowed to discuss too much. The group did not encourage that. People did speak in secrecy but we were not allowed to speak out against the Chinese at that time.

Q: Were there informers or spies?

#4M: I would not know if there were spies or not. In general, the leaders told us not to speak against the Chinese.

Q: You were there three months. Were you ever given a day of rest in three months?

01:23:53

#4M: If you wished, you could take a day off, but there were no special days of rest. If you said you did not wish to remain, you could leave.

[Question is repeated.]

#4M: There were no holidays. We were told that in a week, there was a day of rest but we did not avail that. The road was completed in great urgency.

Q: Was there ever a chance to take a bath or shower to refresh yourself in this long three months?

01:24:50

#4M: Close by was a huge river in which we washed in the evenings. The custom of washing did not exist in Tibet. [Laughs]

Q: How far was this place from where your village was?

#4M: It was a day's journey away; maybe a little over a day's journey from my village. If not for the river, it would take just half a day. However we had to cross the river in a boat and so it took over a day.

Q: You mentioned custom of taking baths in Tibet that wasn't a usual custom. Tell me what was the custom and how did people take care of their bodies? What was the custom?

01:26:16

#4M: To be honest, we took a bath during *Karma Richoe*. We did not have the habit of washing much. Now-a-days of course, times have changed. In the olden days there was hardly any time for washing or sitting leisurely. Each one was occupied with his work. We did not much notice the dirt.

Q: What is *Karma Richoe*?

#4M: *Karma Richoe* is an auspicious time. It was said that washing on this day was very good. So everyone bathed and washed their clothes on this day. It is observed even now.

Q: What was that special time called again?

01:27:19

#4M: *Karma Richoe*. In some regions they called it *Karma Dhepo*. Each region has a different name for it. In my village we called it *Karma Richoe*.

Q: Was it an auspicious time?

#4M: It occurred at the end of the 7th month of the lunar calendar. The water was believed to be blessed [on this occasion].

Q: I bet the water was not only holy, I bet it was a little warmer.

01:28:07

#4M: The weather was moderate at that time in Tibet. The water froze in other parts of Tibet, but not in my region. The water was warm in Kongpo.

Q: You said the Chinese told you that they would develop Tibet but did the Tibetans have a desire for any kind of development? Did they have a wish for their country to be developed?

#4M: People might have thought that [they needed development]. The Chinese were very good when they first arrived. The Chinese were patient and bore it even if they were beaten! If our people fought with them, they endured it. They acted very patient in the beginning. They said, "We will teach you many good things, bring about development and then we shall go back."

Q: That's what they said. Aside from the Chinese even coming to Tibet, do you know if you, your father, your family, did they ever talk about wishing Tibet could be developed for jobs or education or medical care? Was there ever a wish for development from the people?

01:30:25

#4M: I have not heard anything like that. Generally speaking, to be honest, the Tibetan people's intellectual level was very low during my time.

Q: Why do you think the standard of intelligence was so low at that time?

#4M: The standard of knowledge was poor as there was no opportunity for education. The absence of schools led to the low level of knowledge. But, that was not the case with religion. The Tibetans have monasteries and monks. However, the monks studied only their subjects. With the common Tibetans, it was just farming and such kind of work. People were very spiritual.

Q: When you finish your tour of work on the road construction, what happens to you next?

01:32:14

#4M: Then I returned home.

Q: What happens to you and your family and your village next?

#4M: For a year or two, I worked on the farm and then I embarked on a pilgrimage towards Lhasa on foot. I went from Kongpo to Dhakpo and then on to the pilgrim site in Lhoka. From there, I went to Lhasa and back to Kongpo. We saw the many holy sites of Dhakpo and then the *Tensung Neysung* at Yarlung. From there we went to Chushul to see the *Chaksam Chuwori*. Next was Lhasa.

Q: Was that the first time you saw Lhasa?

01:33:32

#4M: Yes, that was the first time. I went there on foot.

Q: Was it possible to see the Dalai Lama when you were visiting Lhasa?

#4M: I saw him once on the 15th day.

Q: Of which month?

01:33:58

#4M: The first month of the lunar calendar.

Q: What was that experience like for you?

#4M: I was still a child and just prayed to him. I thought I was very fortunate. However, I did not possess much knowledge to think besides that.

Q: How was it possible for a person on pilgrimage to have access to His Holiness?

01:34:48

#4M: During the *Monlam* 'Great Prayer Festival' in Lhasa, there was a huge gathering at the Sungchoe Rawa. People and monks assembled at the Sungchoe Rawa in the morning. I saw His Holiness then.

Q: Where?

#4M: At the Sungchoe Rawa, right in front of the *Jowo* 'a statue of Buddha Sakyamuni.' His Holiness arrived at the Jokhang [the cathedral in Lhasa]. The Nechung oracle was also consulted there. There was a huge crowd and we, who were on pilgrim found it very hard to get through. Monks filled the place. I was able to see His Holiness during this time.

Q: Did that festival happen every year?

01:36:12

#4M: Yes, it happened every year. I got to glimpse His Holiness only during the *Monlam*. I heard that there were many other ceremonies later, but I do not know about them.

Q: Was there something that prompted you to want to go on pilgrimage?

#4M: [Speaks without waiting for question to be interpreted.] There must be about 40,000 to 50,000 monks present at the Sungchoe Rawa.

[Question is repeated.]

01:37:00

#4M: We Tibetans believe that going on a pilgrimage is very precious. We believe it is good to view all the pilgrim places. We returned home after visiting Lhasa. Mainly we considered seeing the *Jowo* [as most important].

Q: What year are we talking about? You are about 20 years old roughly?

#4M: That is right. I was about 20.

Q: When you returned home, was there any thoughts about getting married and having a family?

01:38:02

#4M: I did not give it much thought, though there were lovers. [Laughs]

Q: What stopped you from wanting to get married?

#4M: There was no time because the Chinese said that I was to join school. In general, I did not very much like the Chinese and did not want to go [to the Chinese school]. This was why I prepared to escape to India. I wanted to escape to India and then Tibet was conquered. It was solely my decision to flee to India.

Q: So before you escaped to India, how were things in your village? Did anything happen because of the Chinese presence?

01:39:29

#4M: Tibet was lost just before I escaped. They [the Chinese] made a list of all the valuable things like, swords, guns and silver items belonging to the wealthy families. They took the permits of the swords and guns and burned them. They did that and I witnessed it. They were in a group, mainly consisting of Tibetans who were Chinese students.

Q: Were the swords and guns taken away?

#4M: Yes, they took away all the swords and guns. I heard that the influential people were later captured. While I was there, they were not captured, but were evicted and deprived of their possessions. Their possessions were given to the poor who worked for them.

Q: What possessions? The houses?

01:40:29

#4M: Yes, the houses were given to the servants of the families.

Q: Where were the wealthy people sent?

#4M: The rich were deprived of their possessions. They were just given food to eat but had no power. I heard that they were not allowed into their houses.

Q: That was after you left?

01:40:46

#4M: Those things happened before I left. I saw it happen with my eyes. Later a *thamzing* 'struggle session' was conducted on a person called Thamnyen Sangay Dorji. It took place at a monastery named Trichenling in another village. I was in that area to visit a flour mill. There were many flour mills in that region.

The Chinese had called a meeting and I heard that Thamnyen Sangay Dorji was subjected to *thamzing*. At that time he was not being beaten, but was accused of oppressing the people and depriving them of their riches. He was a trader who loaned grains and recovered interest on it. So, in the dealings something might have occurred. I witnessed the opposition. I heard that later he was beaten and killed but I did not witness that.

Q: Who were hurling accusations at him?

#4M: They were the people of his village to whom he used to loan grains.

Q: What kind of accusations were they making?

01:43:25

#4M: They accused him of depriving them of their riches and of oppressing them.

Q: Depriving them of riches?

#4M: The people might have pledged their ornaments to him, which they were accusing him of having taken away by force. Actually it was not by force, but given as a form of security when the loan was received. So, he was subjected to *thamzing* and shouted at for having oppressed them. That was during the first *thamzing* but I did not witness the next one. I was not at the *thamzing* site but close by and I heard it from the people.

Q: Did you know this man individually, as a person?

01:44:40

#4M: I knew him as he lived around the same region.

Q: Did you know him personally?

#4M: We recognized each other, but I did not know him very well. He was a person living in our region. We did not interact but in general knew each other.

Q: After you saw that man being *thamzinged*, what did you decide to do?

01:45:19

#4M: I felt that the Chinese were not good. Whatever they had told us earlier about doing good to us was all lies. That was what I thought.

Q: What kind of lies?

#4M: All the time they had told us how much good they would do for us and that turned out to be lies. Then people started bad mouthing the Chinese. They [the Chinese] told us that the Americans were paper tigers. This was what happened at that time.

Q: What did that [paper tigers] mean?

01:46:29

#4M: The paper tiger is grand to look at but if it became wet, it dissolved. That was their description.

Q: Why do you think the Chinese wanted to make the Americans sound weak?

#4M: They said that we must not run away. When the *Tensung Makmi* [guerrillas of Chushi Gangdrug Defend Tibet Volunteer Force] escaped, they claimed, "You cannot escape anywhere under this sun. We are there everywhere under the sun. America may be a famous country but it is just a paper tiger. One day we will conquer them." That was what they said and also stated that, along with Russia, they could conquer the whole world.

Q: Where would you hear these kinds of statements?

01:48:32

#4M: I heard these statements on the day of the *thamzing* of Thamnyen Sangay Dorji. After the *thamzing* got over, they concluded the session with prayers and shouts. That was

when I heard it. It was at Theckchenling. They also spoke about the rebels. By rebels, they meant His Holiness the Dalai Lama and the *Tensung Makmi*.

Q: Did you know any of the rebels who were fighting for the Dalai Lama?

#4M: They [the Chinese] considered all those who did not like them as rebels.

Q: Did you know any of them?

01:49:38

#4M: I knew the Bachung Pon and the others because the *Tensung Makmi* arrived and stayed in Kongpo for about three months. At the time Tibet fell, they were camped there. When the Chinese arrived [in Kongpo] from Lhasa, which I saw, a division [from the *Tensung Makmi*] was sent towards Chamdho and another division of the *Tensung Makmi* under Bachung Pon came to our region. They fought for about half a day and made their escape in the middle of the night.

Q: Where did they fight?

#4M: The place where the Chinese was camped was called Anki Thingka, which is in the region of Theckchenling. The name of the place was Anki Thingka. On the other side was the place called Thanza. The *Tensung Makmi* was camped at Thanza and this was where the encounter took place.

Q: Did you see the encounter or were you a part of it?

01:51:28

#4M: I heard the sound of gunfire but did not witness the encounter. I could hear the sound of gunfire. I heard that six Chinese corpses were found after that. We did not lose anyone from our side, except a horse.

Q: If you could see this, you were rather close to the event. So what effect did it have on you when you saw how close the Chinese were coming?

#4M: We were fighting and I thought we would win in the end. They [the guerrillas] left through the upper region of Kongpo towards Tsari and then onwards to India. I heard that they fought several battles.

Q: The Chushi Gangdrug?

01:52:50

#4M: Yes. They had several encounters at Yaragang and other places. I heard that during some encounters, they killed 50-60 Chinese [soldiers] and at other times two or three. They faced two or three encounters, but the first one was at Anki Thingka. At that time people were required to join the army [the *Tensung Makmi* or Chushi Gangdrug Defend Tibet Volunteer Force] and told that they would be provided with arms. Local-made poor quality arms were supplied to the 500 people. The Dickey Khangsar's son Pema Tsewangla was

appointed the leader. He was the Commander but there were no arms to distribute because they [the Chushi Gangdrug guerrillas] lost the encounter at Yarlung.

Q: Who promised to provide the arms?

#4M: The Chushi Gangdrug promised to send arms from Lhoka. It used to be said that the United States of America was going to drop arms, but I do not know. [Smiles] I did not see that. I think there were around 500 people. Since weapons were not provided, some continued their journey with the Chushi Gangdrug, but most of them stayed back.

Q: Were you in the group?

01:54:32

#4M: Yes, I was. I was among the Khampa.

Q: When you didn't get weapons, what did you do then?

#4M: I had to stay back home. While the *Tensung Makmi* went along to fight, we stayed back as we did not have weapons. Those that possessed weapons joined them. They went to Lhoka and from there escaped to India. They faced several encounters on the way and then left towards the direction of India. In upper Kongpo, there is a place called Tsari. They fled to India through Tsari.

Q: What happened to you next?

01:55:39

#4M: Then I made my escape. It was within a year that I escaped. There was a double sixth month in the lunar calendar of that year. We harvested the crops and stored them at home. Then I did not wish to stay, while my colleagues did not want to go. I found a person who was going to India and left with him.

Q: To go to India?

#4M: At first people said that if we tarried six or seven months in the tribal region, we would get back our independence. I believed Tibet would regain independence. We were not allowed to remain in the tribal region.

Q: Mon Tawang [in Arunachal Pradesh, India]?

01:56:56

#4M: Not Mon Tawang. It was called Manipur [an Indian state] and inhabited by tribesmen. The journey took us around six days from my village to this region. We crossed many mountains. The people spoke a different language and their costume was also unlike ours. They mostly remained naked! [Laughs] Their custom and language was different but we stayed for a month or two there. Then we were told that we must continue and go to India. An airplane flew us to Missamari [in Assam, India].

Q: After having worked on the road construction and when you saw what the roads were used for by the Chinese, did you have any feelings or thoughts about having built those roads for the Chinese?

#4M: I believed that constructing the road was beneficial for people to walk on, but it turned out to help the Chinese make progress. Earlier we thought that by building the roads, it made things easy for people.

Q: We are going to have to end the interview now, so I want to ask if this interview were shown in Tibet or China, would this be a problem for you.

01:59:10

#4M: No, there will be no problem. I do not have any relatives [in Tibet]. Though I do have distant relatives, I have no contact with them.

Q: Can we use your real name for this project or do you want to use an alias?

#4M: Yes, sure.

Q: Thank you for sharing your story with us.

01:59:38

#4M: I wish to thank you.

[Interviewer presents interviewee with a gift.]

Q: *Gen-la*, we would like you to have this as a gift.

#4M: It is not necessary to bring a gift. Thank you.

[Interviewer and interpreter pose for photographs with interviewee]

END OF INTERVIEW