

Tibet Oral History Project

**Interview #55M – Namgyal (alias)
April 11, 2010**

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INTERVIEW SUMMARY SHEET

1. Interview Number: #55M
2. Interviewee: Namgyal (alias)
3. Age: 77
4. Date of Birth: 1933
5. Sex: Male
6. Birthplace:
7. Province: Kham (Dhotoe)
8. Year of leaving Tibet: 1981
9. Date of Interview: April 11, 2010
10. Place of Interview: Kalachakra Hall, Doeguling Settlement, Mundgod, Karwar District, Karnataka, India
11. Length of Interview: 2 hr 08 min
12. Interviewer: Marcella Adamski
13. Interpreter: Tenzin Yangchen
14. Videographer: Ronny Novick
15. Translator: Tenzin Yangchen

Biographical Information:

Namgyal remembers the Chinese first appeared in his village on the 13th day of the 3rd month of the Tibetan Lunar Calendar of 1949. He was a 16 year old soldier of the local resistance group at that time. He recounts how the Chinese misled the poor people by bribing them with *dhayen* 'Chinese silver coins,' food supplies and false propaganda making the people believe that socialism would bring much happiness to them.

Namgyal speaks in great length about the resistance movement Tibetans attempted against the Chinese invasion, how ill-equipped the Tibetans were in terms of both men and weapons and his own involvement in this effort. Namgyal and one other fighter were captured by the Chinese after the rest of his group was killed. He was sentenced to 20 years in prison.

Namgyal served rigorous imprisonment for 13 years and forced labor for the rest of the time. He talks about those horrible days when the prisoners were tortured by different methods, so much so that out of 8,000 prisoners at Pongdha Lungten, only 1,000 survived. Indoctrination attempts were also carried out among the prisoners through books on communism. Namgyal was labeled as a "rebel" and the Chinese tried to coerce him to confess to crimes he did not commit. They threatened to kill him and also tried to convince him to commit suicide.

Topics Discussed:

First appearance of Chinese, invasion by Chinese army, resistance fighters, imprisonment, brutality/torture, forced labor, life as a refugee in India.

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Interview #55M

Interviewee: Namgyal [alias]

Age: 77, Sex: Male

Interviewer: Marcella Adamski

Interview Date: April 11, 2010

Question: Please tell us your name.

00:00:18

Interviewee #55M: Namgyal.

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 permission for the Tibet Oral History Project to use your interview?

#55M: Yes, you can.

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

00:01:23

#55M: [Smiles]

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

#55M: Okay.

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

00:01:43

#55M: Okay.

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

#55M: As I told you earlier, if I face any problems for the cause of Tibet's independence, I have no regrets.

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

00:02:28

#55M: Okay.

Q: *Gen-la* ‘respectful term for teacher,’ could you please tell us about the first appearance of the Chinese and what happened?

#55M: Would you want me to talk about the period after 1959 or before that?

Q: About the time the Chinese first appeared.

00:02:55

#55M: The Chinese first appeared on Tibetan territory in the 3rd month [of the Tibetan lunar calendar] of 1949.

Q: Did you see them when they first arrived and what did they look like?

#55M: I was a soldier at the time the Chinese first appeared. I served as soldier on account of the monastery. It was on the 13th day of the 3rd Tibetan lunar month that they arrived in my village. Then we lost our territory. After the territory of Chamdo fell, it was said that everyone had to surrender and that was what we did.

Q: Did the Chinese first come into your village?

00:04:01

#55M: Yes?

Q: Did you say that they first came to your village in the 3rd Tibetan month?

#55M: It was in the 3rd Tibetan month perhaps corresponding to April of the Western calendar. However, we never used the Western calendar in our region. It was on the 13th day of the 3rd month that we had to surrender.

Q: What year would that have been, *gen-la*?

00:04:46

#55M: I think it was in the year '49.

Q: That Chamdo was conquered?

#55M: It was in '49 that we lost for good.

Q: *Gen-la*, how long had you been in the army? How large was the army and what were the duties of the army at that time?

00:05:19

#55M: [The army] consisted of people of the regions who were defending their respective territories, but there were only 25 or 36 soldiers of the Tibetan government. [The Tibetan government] had sent them to sort of keep stock of the bullets.

Q: You mean 25-36 soldiers?

#55M: Yes, soldiers belonging to the Tibetan government. They were under the leadership of a *shengo* 'commander,' so I think there were 25 of them. I saw them on the mountain pass of Senu.

Q: How strong were the Chinese and what did you do when you had an encounter with them?

00:06:37

#55M: Many tens of thousands of Chinese had arrived and they filled the region. It was similar to what it is now and there was no end to their numbers. However, ours was a small village and there was no space for them to arrive in full force. They had to come through narrow accesses, which enabled us to defend ourselves. I was 16 years old then.

Q: Were you able to resist them? What were they trying to do in your region and were you able to resist them?

#55M: When they first appeared, they gave food supplies and white *dhayen* 'Chinese silver coins' to everyone. They lived there by deceiving the people. The soldiers helped [the people] in their work. What they did not do was that wherever they stayed, they did not pay house rent. However, they paid for the firewood they used and water was free in Tibet. Nobody charged them for it [water] nor did they offer to pay. Thus they lived in that way deceiving and being gentle until 1959.

They misled the poor and bribed them by giving money. They caused internal friction that way. Then the event took place in 1959 until the democratization of liberation process. They formed the Rangrik [?] Committee and then the People's Commune, which was followed by Dhangma Chenmo. This was supported by the implementation of socialism. It used to be said that following socialism would bring much happiness for the people. That was their main advice to the people.

00:09:41

Until 1959 they said that they would do great things for Tibet by implementing the 17-Point Agreement and advised the poor people, "You must rise up. Do not listen to the wealthy people." They lived there for many years to give such advice to the people. They used the power of the white *dhayen* and advised the people in that way for many years.

Later when they announced that they were implementing socialism and communism and that was not accepted, they attacked Tibet in 1959. In my village...if I speak about this, they [the Chinese] will come to know that this is me. So...

Q: Can you tell us about the attack, please *gen-la*?

#55M: The attack began in 1957. An attack took place at Bhuyongang in 1957. From then until '59 they [the Chinese] were not able to occupy the country. Then in '59, they destroyed everything and occupied the country and prepared to launch the democratization of liberation process. So due to this reason all the people had to flee to the mountains.

Q: In this region, you were in the army at that time. What army was that that you were serving in?

00:13:15

#55M: The army was the *Tensung Magmi* 'Defend Tibet Volunteer Force' which was a part of the *Chushi Gangdrug*.

Q: In 1949?

#55M: In 1949, one should call it [the army] of the Tibetan government.

Q: Was it the army of the Tibetan government?

00:13:41

#55M: The army of the Tibetan government was present at each region.

Q: Were you a soldier of the Tibetan government army at that time?

#55M: [The army] came under the district and [I] belonged to the Gongka Lama District.

Q: Was that a volunteer army or a Tibetan government army?

00:14:15

#55M: One can call it an army of the district.

Q: When it was an army of the district, did the people join it voluntarily or was it a sort of tax?

#55M: It was the one called *thokoe* 'make a list.' The monastery made a list and said, "You have to go or you have to go [points in different directions]."

Q: The monastery would give a kind of a requirement.

[Interpreter to interviewer]: Yes.

[Interviewer to interpreter]: To send some son to join?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: Yes.

#55M: All those above the age of 18 and below the age of 60 were collected under the army. However, they [the monastery authorities] pointed out who from the group would have to take an active part in the war.

Q: Was it the *Chushi Gangdrug* resistance or was this the Tibetan regular army?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: It wasn't the Tibetan regular army. It was formed by their district to resist the Chinese.

Q: Were you successful in resisting Chinese anytime?

00:16:02

#55M: [Shakes head] It was very difficult.

Q: Were Tibetans killed in the resistance?

#55M: Yes, they died.

Q: Would there be a killing of anyone else? Was there anyone from any other region in the area that was killed by the Chinese at that time?

00:16:56

#55M: There were. I do not think I will be able to speak clearly [about it]. They were there in Ba, Tsiku and our village. However, to give you an account of them, if I do not relate the story in depth, that would be useless. Allow me to think about it and tell you later.

Q: Can you tell us what kinds of weapons were the Tibetan men able to carry into battle against the Chinese?

#55M: The Tibetan government distributed each monastery with five short-barrel rifles. The bullets were divided among the units by the 25 soldiers [of the Tibetan government army] that arrived. I think there were 100 soldiers [of the Tibetan government army] under a *dapon* 'colonel' and they collected at the district [headquarters] and the district [authority] dispatched them to constricted areas to launch attacks. Bullets for the short-barrel rifles were made available by the Tibetan government. However, bullets were scarce for the other rifles called *trelldha*, which belonged to the tax payers and had originated from China long ago. There were not many arms and ammunition.

Each group of resistance fighters possessed only 150-160 *trelldha*. The other [kind of rifle] was *khamdha* and then there were swords, spears and rolling down boulders. [Laughs] When the Chinese arrived, [we] rolled down boulders.

Q: Were they able to slow down the Chinese a little bit or did they feel this guerrilla tactic were preventing the influx of more Chinese?

#55M: [Nods "Yes"] Until the order came to surrender after the fall of Chamdo and Lhasa, the Chinese were not able to step into our village. Then all the 25 soldiers of the Tibetan government [army], arms and the spare ammunition were handed back [after the surrender].

Q: Handed over to whom? The Chinese?

00:21:08

#55M: They were given back to the *dapon* and *rupon* 'captain,' the two leaders of the Tibetan government [army]. They were returned at Markham.

Q: Do you remember what your thoughts were about surrendering weapons?

#55M: We were not among those who surrendered, but among those who were captured.

Q: Yes?

00:22:21

#55M: [I] was captured by the Chinese, but I think it is better to just mention that [I] surrendered. It is the same. From there I was directly taken to prison. I was interned at Tsawa Dayi Prison. Later I was put in Markham District Prison by the Chinese. After that I was jailed in Tsawa Bhema Prison and then Tsawa Pongdha Prison.

Then I was sent with other prisoners to construct road at Powo Yulgang. Later I was incarcerated at Powo Tamo, the Number 2 prison. I was locked up in all these prisons for a total of 21 years, from 1960 until I was released in 1980. I think it was about 20 years. When I reached here, the year was 1981.

Q: *Gen-la*, would it be possible for you to tell us about your prison experience? What happened in prison and what it was like? I know this is a very painful memory and so if it's not possible I understand, but if you would like to tell us about it, it would be very important for us to know.

#55M: If I were to speak in general about every prison, the interrogation and the punishments for the prisoners and the public were [different]. Of course, it must be different in every country but under the Communist, it was more extreme. They said they would put into action *misay*, *mika* and *midhang* [?] but that was out of question.

After an interrogation, when one was tied and suspended in the air, in some cases one was tied with a rope here [gestures off camera] and pulled up until one touched the beam of the roof. Below him chili was burned with the door and windows shut. He was thus suspended for two or three hours. For example, if the interrogation was completed and [the prisoner] was suspended at 11 o'clock, he was left that way during their [the Chinese] lunch which they ate at one o'clock. He was brought down an hour after lunch. He would be almost dead except that he was still breathing.

00:26:59

The reason for burning the chili was that when the chili started burning in the iron basin below, [the prisoner] was brought back to consciousness by its fumes. When someone was tied, there was a rope which was knotted here [touches back of shoulder]. It was a sort of round rope which was put on [the prisoner] and there was a noose at the back. Each end of the rope passed round and round each arm [starts at the shoulder and gestures around arm down to the wrist] and the ropes were knotted here [shows wrists]. Then the arms were pulled backwards until the hands met each other. The legs were then pulled through the noose. The hands were pulled until they reached just under the shoulders [at the back]. The person lost consciousness. And then he was suspended.

Once the arms were pulled back like this [puts arms behind], the shoulders reached the same level as your head. When that happened, [he] was brought down. [He] was brought

down to the ground and the co-prisoners were told to take him away. He was taken inside and cold water splashed on his face.

00:28:32

Old and experienced prisoners brought the prisoner down slowly and did not untie the hands immediately. After some time had lapsed, they slowly untied the ends of the rope [shows wrist] little by little. In five or six years, you were able to use your hands. After five to six years, one could use the hands well except that the joints were slightly bent. The younger ones did not have that kind of knowledge and believed it was better to do it [the untying] quickly. They immediately brought him down and untied the ropes quickly and the hands became like this [gestures hands hanging lifelessly]. Such were the punishments that were meted out in the prisons.

However, what they claimed orally was that they would [implement] *misay, midhang, mika* and do great things. The prisons were made to look beautiful from the outside. What was the food from 1960 to 1974-5? It was only a mug of *tsampa* 'flour made from roasted barley,' like this [cup] here, which was rationed per person per day. If one made *pa* 'dough made from *tsampa* and tea or water' out of it, the size was only so [joins fingers together and points to half the size]. It was just about enough to keep a person barely alive.

When I initially arrived at Pongdha Lungten, how many people [prisoners] were there? There were eight rooms and it was said that each room consisted of 1,000 [prisoners]. From this number, how many prisoners survived finally? Only a little over 1,000. How were the bodies taken away? There were wheelbarrows which the Chinese called *laten* and six men ferried the corpses of 8,000 people. They ferried every day, and yet, it used to be said that a room was full of fresh corpse.

00:30:45

The people of Pongdha protested that bodies should not be dumped that way. The bodies were dumped behind the village of Pongdha, next to the motor road. They were eaten by dogs and pigs. Birds flew over the village dropping bits on to the village. The villagers could no longer bear it and complained to the prison authorities. Later they [the bodies] were covered by a layer of dust. People protested that wolves were devouring them. During winter the ground froze and pits could not be dug. They could not dig the dry ground. So the corpses were dumped on the mountain behind Pongdha where the wolves could eat them. That was one.

Secondly, during the interrogations, if your answers did not match, you were killed in the end. If a prisoner obeyed them [the Chinese] and reported news of the [other] prisoners to them and if another prisoner attacked him [the prisoner who was a Chinese informer], he [the other prisoner] was immediately killed in cold blood. One was Dayab Wangdak. He was not in the wrong. He was not liked [by the Chinese] and charged with causing brawls and was killed in cold blood in Powo Tongdho.

What occurred in Powo Tongdho was that five people jointly claimed that some [prisoners] had broken the rules and one day 13 men from my group were killed. They were shot dead in a row. Orally they [the Chinese] claimed that there was freedom and leniency, but when

it came to the real matter, they killed in cold blood. During a killing spree, they shot 12-13 people just like cutting down trees. It was said to set an example for others. There were 13 prison groups that assembled and then the killing occurred in the arena.

As for death from hitting and beating, they were countless. [The victims] did not die immediately and were brought back into the prison and some died in a day or two. That was it.

Q: *Gen-la*, you spoke of sufferings of many people. Were any of the sufferings that you described, were these things that happened to you directly?

00:37:09

#55M: Naturally I suffered. I was thrice categorized among the rebels. However, I will relate these later. It is difficult to talk clearly about it here now. I want to think it over.

Q: *Gen-la*, why were these people in prison? Was there any sentence that they had done some criminal activity? What was the reason and how long were the sentences given for?

#55M: Yes, such [sentences] were made. Some were for life, which meant they had to stay there until death. Some were sentenced to 20 years, 15 years, 10 years, 8 years, 5 years or 3 years. These were the sentences that they [the Chinese] handed out. They claimed that [the sentence] depended on the gravity of the crime. If someone killed a man, it was compulsory to remain in prison for three years.

Public offences and...were different. [A person who] committed an offence against the democratization process was the enemy. They [the Chinese] said that the implementation of their policy was mainly aimed at the enemy. The offence in regard to [the process of] democratization was termed lesser. However, the punishment was the same when one happened to be a Tibetan.

Q: What did they say was the offence committed by those many people?

00:39:52

#55M: That is what I told you earlier. Some were imprisoned because they had committed an offence within the people [local]. Those like me were grouped among the rebels. All those prisoners held between 1959 and '60 were said to be those that had rebelled against the country. That was the reason. The prisoners who were there for offences committed after they [the Chinese] had occupied the country were not charged as enemies since they considered the people as their subjects. That was treated as a local crime. Are the prisoners being considered as local offenders these days? Are they being killed or not? That is something for you to think over. Are they not killing the leaders of the demonstrators? Are they treating it as a local crime?

They claimed that the offence committed locally would be tried under *misay*, *midhang* and *mika*. Orally they said that the sentence for stealing or killing someone would be a certain number of years unlike the sentence for those people of '59. However, one can clearly see how they are putting that into action.

00:42:08

When the country [China] does not have empathy and kindness, everything depends on their willful action, thoughts and speech. They published a newspaper called *Boeshung Nyiray Tsakpa* 'Daily News of Tibetan Government.' If someone protested they said, "If you read the newspaper, [you can see that] it is only a day's paper. It is *Boeshung Nyiray Tsakpa* and not a permanent one." Whether it is to publish the country's constitution or whatever the day's news, [the Chinese] said that they could be altered. They said that what is published in the newspaper is...That is just an example and one is helpless.

Earlier there were three small books namely, Siwang Genzin, Rangmoe Ringluk and Socialism. The People's Siwang Genzin was for the enemy. Those who were against Socialism among the people...[not discernible], changes would be brought about in the system of democracy. There were two books that were published by them. Rangmoe Ringluk was meant to think for the cause of society. However, it was up to them to either execute it or not.

The prisoners were made to memorize these books and were taught them. What are they executing now? Those people who were for Socialism were imprisoned, beaten or killed with us. As for the Siwang Genzin, [the Chinese] were always doing it. You might know about those books that they had published. If you do not, the older people would tell you about them. I do not know if they have cancelled these now. They used to sell these. They were sold from the time of Mao Zedong. The principles of Socialism, how to embrace Socialism, the methods of executing its policies among the people, the resultant happiness, the importance of communism...[not discernible]; these were mentioned in the books.

00:44:50

Rangrik Committees were formed among the people and their [riches] collected. Blaming feudalism and such, they emptied the rich farmers and leadership holding families of their wealth and properties. Then they said that the Rangrik Committee and the Commune were not needed. Then they said they would privatize. They dissolved the units and each one had to stand on his feet. That was being implemented just before I left.

First they formed the Rangrik Committee, collected [all the wealth] and used it. Then the People's Commune was started and they took away the people's wealth. They formed these organizations and collected all the wealth together as if it belonged to one family. These were sold to the government. Later it was said that socialism must be formed. However, the capital to start socialism in Tibet had been taken away by them. So how could the people form socialism? Then it was announced that socialism could not be implemented and that [the collected wealth] must be divided among the individuals. The share each family received was not even a cow, perhaps a goat or two. Such things occurred in some places. That was the policy they [the Chinese] executed in the end.

People are forced to protest these days. [The Chinese] claim to have brought happiness and constructed roads. The roads were meant to take away the wealth of the people and to transport the natural resources of Tibet to China. Even the firewood for China is taken from Tibet. That was it. Besides that, their objective is not to bring any benefit to the

people [of Tibet]. They claim that there is progress in the people's livelihood but what development is there? Which holy images of Tibet can be seen? If I were to go on with all the sufferings, there is no end to it. Those are people who do not execute their own policies but one cannot criticize. If we cannot fist-fight, I feel it is certain that they will not budge. [We] have to fight them with our fists, otherwise...[not discernible].

Q: *Gen-la*, did you ever receive a personal sentence yourself that would tell you how many years you were going to be in prison?

00:49:43

#55M: I was in prison for 20 years.

Q: Was that sentence given at the beginning?

#55M: Yes.

Q: What was the charge against you personally?

00:50:05

#55M: The charge was fighting against the Chinese. Starting from 1956, due to fear of remaining in the village I lived in the mountains. There were 53 members in our group. Finally there were only two of us left in 1960. The rest were killed by the Chinese. The two of us survived and were captured.

Q: Did you start to fight the Chinese in 1956?

#55M: That's right. We were termed as *singtuk* 'insurgents' meaning that we caused conflict between China and Tibet. That [sentence] was the punishment for four years [of fighting them] from 1956-1960.

Q: When you were fighting the Chinese and you could see a convoy coming on the road, you said you had very few weapons, what did you do to attack the Chinese or press them?

00:52:18

#55M: Like their country...our people were scattered and all [those who carried] good weapons were killed. Once in 1959, they killed 42 people during one encounter and at the same spot in my region at Manzi Zampakha. Likewise people were killed in Kamdha village. Similarly many were killed in Guru. At a place called Nekongtusha 47 people were killed. No longer were there men and weapons. Then [we] had only a few [weapons]. Our group of 53 people possessed three *treltha* and 10-11 *khamdha* [rifles]. The rest carried swords and axes. It was difficult to carry a spear in the jungle. It was cumbersome and later nobody carried a spear; perhaps one or two but most carried swords.

When they [the Chinese] came close, we clashed. We were forced to fight. So we fought and killed. We lost men in that way. We fought and then we retreated. The 100-200 bullets that we carried on our backs were over. Finally there were three guns and no bullets left for one gun. So we improvised by packing lead into the nozzle and fired because there were none

left. For the [other] two guns, there were three bullets for one and two for the other. The three people had guns but no bullets. [Smiles] We used our swords and finally it was left to the two of us. We were overpowered by the Chinese in a canal of a field. We were smothered. There had been 52 people and except for the two, the rest of 50 were killed. That happened in my very village. All the 52 men belonged to the same village.

Q: So the 42 were killed and then there were 10 left. Were the 42 killed, were they shot? Were they shooting at the Chinese and the Chinese shot back? Is that how they were killed?

00:56:38

#55M: Yes.

Q: Was that the only tactic they could use to fight the Chinese or did they try to block roads or anything else?

#55M: We converged on the path of the Chinese. However, the Tibetans were small in number and the Chinese had reinforcements arrive again and again. So the Tibetans were surrounded and killed until there were none left. There might be one or two who managed to escape by leaping depending upon the accessibility of the area.

I told you that my region was like this [gestures off camera]. If one went like this, there was nowhere you could go except forward. One could not flee towards the right or left. So some people leaped over the precipice and some jumped into the water. There were many instances when someone grappled with a Chinese and both of them fell over a precipice. That happened in '59. It was at the Mekong River where they arrived on the main road.

00:58:13

Those that were able to escape proceeded to a region where there was a rocky path and waited [shows upright palm and points to the middle part]. Their plan was to roll down boulders and stop [the Chinese] from climbing up. They went and waited there. However, the Chinese possessed weapons to launch an attack and arriving from the other bank of the river hurled *phow* [?]. The rocks shattered. They [the Tibetan fighters] that had managed to cross the river were present there. Not a single person survived. Thirty-eight men were killed at the same spot. I do not know if some of them leaped or fell into the Mekong River. There were 38 corpses.

On the mountain, in general there were those who were going to roll down boulders and women from rich families who were fleeing and altogether 88 people were burned. [The Chinese] possessed bombs to set fire to the mountains. They fired the gun called *phow*. There was a patch of forest on the rocky mountain and [the Tibetans] were hiding there. They believed they could block [the Chinese]. However, they arrived from another route and when they [the Tibetans] tried to flee, the whole mountain was set on fire. Entire families consisting of parents and children were burned. I heard later that 83 people were burned.

Q: Could you see the fire burning and the families in it or did you just hear about this?

#55M: I was with them [the previous] night. The Chinese were... We were camped on either side of the river. Our group was in the village on this side. They [those who planned to ambush] went across the river. They included all the best people of the village. They hid there to block [the Chinese] and all of them were annihilated. I was with them. I did not surrender to the Chinese and was traveling with them [the ambushed group] the [previous] night.

Q: Were you near the mountain that was set on fire?

01:02:25

#55M: Yes, I was. We were on mountains facing each other. I was on this [points one way] mountain and they were on that [points in the opposite direction] side. There was a river flowing in the center.

There was no way for escape. It was a cliff and the only way down was the one you took to climb up. They [the Tibetan group] had made space in the incline to sit and roll down boulders. Guns were not necessary for that. From below the men who carried guns were moving up and then the Chinese arrived there [points to mid-palm] and attacked. They had arrived from the other side of the river and annihilated everyone.

Q: Did any of the women and children escape from that fire that was set by the Chinese?

#55M: Escape was impossible because only a very narrow path could be fashioned out in the rock that was just wide enough for a person to go across the cliff. There was not any road and once that rock shattered, there was no way left. No one that went up the path could escape successfully.

That day [the Chinese] cleared the region of any humans. It's another tale that there were four families of the region that survived, though I do not think any of the elders survive now.

Q: In general the area we are talking about is in Kham. Is that correct?

01:05:03

#55M: Yes.

Q: You said earlier that 42 of your fellow soldiers were killed, so 10 were left. What happened to the next group of 10?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: They were also killed later on until two were left. They were captured.

Q: When you were first captured by the Chinese where were you taken? What happened to you?

#55M: Where else would they take me but to a prison?

Q: But there were no prisons in Kham. How did these prisons all of a sudden come about that they could hold thousands and thousands of people from Kham?

01:06:23

#55M: There were the forts of the Tibetan government of olden days and the houses of the heads of the villages. Those were huge and [people] were imprisoned in them. [The prisoners] were dispatched to whichever district they belonged to.

Q: Before you were arrested, had any oppression happened to your family or relatives of yours?

#55M: You mean when the Chinese initially arrived?

Q: Prior to your fight against the Chinese. You fought the Chinese in 1956. Did they oppress the people of the village prior to that?

01:07:37

#55M: Prior to that, until the peaceful liberation of Tibet...The fact of the matter is that they [the Chinese] said Democratization of Liberation Process should come about. [We replied], "If His Holiness the Dalai Lama accepts the Democratization of Liberation Process and the Tibetan government executes it, we shall follow it in the province of Kham. If the case is otherwise, we shall not implement it." That was our decision. So that was where the root of the matter rested. They stressed that it was a must to accept it and that they would arrive to execute it in every region.

So one day they [the Chinese] attacked Lhasa and His Holiness' escape was planned. The *Chushi Gangdrug* [Defend Tibet Volunteer Force] began to collect [men] from a very early stage. Then [this man] from Lithang—what's his name—the one called Gyalo Dhondup came to Kham and...

Q: Do you mean Andrug Gonpo Tashi [founder of *Chushi Gangdrug*]?

#55M: ...[the *Chushi Gangdrug* guerrillas] were destroyed at Chara Penpa and managed to flee and reached India.

Q: *Gen-la*, are you talking about Andrug Gonpo Tashi?

#55M: Yes. I have never met Gonpo Tashi. I could not meet him because we were like [in different areas]. He made announcements through letters and notices from as far as the north and had made plans for [the men] to gather at [Chara] Penpa. Only those who lived around the vicinity of Penpa could assemble while we who were located far away could not reach there. I have not met him.

They [*Chushi Gangdrug* guerrillas] came towards Lhozong and we arrived at Tsawa Pongdha. The Chinese were able to push through between us and that was how they destroyed Penpa by airplanes.

Q: Did any members of your family go to prison or just you?

01:10:38

#55M: Let this story not be [told].

Q: Is there anything else that you think would be important to tell us to tell the children of Tibet about what happened in those prisons? Is there anything else you think that we should know for history?

#55M: I have told you what I remember of my prison experience, the sufferings perpetuated in the prisons and the happenings in the community. Besides that, there are many stories left to be said but I cannot remember everything now. I will reflect over them and...I have stories of my relatives, my sister and others. It is difficult if [I] do not leave aside some of them.

Q: Can you at least say why you could not tell us, so we can understand why that is important that you don't tell us?

01:13:14

#55M: I have to think over the repercussions and today I would like to talk only about my thoughts as due to my old age, it is very difficult for me. I am not in a position to answer you immediately. That is one.

Secondly, I do not have to tell [you] that the Chinese society and the Tibetan society are opposites. There is never anything but oppression from them. Such oppressions exist, whether it concerns religion or whatever. However, they talk sweetly but the core of the matter is that they do what they like. They do not carry out [what they say] and [I] think this is something that is known to everyone. I do not have to talk about it in detail. However, if the unsaid part of today's' story regarding each village and each region will serve your purpose and if you have the facility to publish a book, I will talk about it step by step. However, time is a constraint today and I am also not feeling well.

Q: When you were given the 20 year sentence, were you keeping track and looking forward to getting out of prison or did it seem like you would never get out?

#55M: I served rigorous imprisonment for 13 years. Then I was taken out and dispatched to serve hard labor for the rest of the 7-8 years of the sentence. In order to cook and purchase provisions separately, there was a remuneration of 24 *yuans* per month. That was the wage for the labor which was meant for the upkeep of one month's food, clothing and all other expenses. Except for water, [I] had to pay for firewood and electricity. The salary paid was 24 *yuans*.

Q *Gen-la*, can you tell us what kind of work you had to do and was that forced work, forced labor or voluntary?

01:17:32

#55M: The work entailed digging the earth, all kinds of field work, bringing down wood from the mountains to be used as firewood for the soldiers and the offices. Moreover, their

[the Chinese'] vehicles did not return empty. If they had nothing to carry, they loaded [the vehicles with] firewood and took it to China.

Q: Was it volunteer work or was it forced...?

#55M: [Interrupts smilingly] What volunteer! There was no choice for volunteer or anything. [All prisoners] were separated into groups and ordered, "Today this group of ten will go here or this group of hundred will go there." Everyone was divided into groups of ten or hundred, whether you were a prisoner or...

Q: You were moved many times. You mentioned different prisons, so were you still in the general Kham area or did you move out of that area?

01:19:30

#55M: Yes, [it was in Kham area]. The name was Tsenrab Number 2. Number 2 was the name of the [prisons] under Chamdo. Lhasa was Number 1 and Chamdo was Number 2. Powo and such came under [Chamdo]. I moved twice in Powo. Tsawa Pongdha also came under Chamdo. All the Tsenrab [Number 1] came under Chamdo.

Q: *Gen-la*, were there women and nuns and monks in prison or just soldiers?

#55M: I do not think there were women and nuns in our prison. I cannot say about where I was but in general there must be [women]. I suppose the women were sent to Lhasa. Only one or two were retained for a few months.

Q: Any reason for that?

01:21:07

#55M: [They were taken] to Drapchi Prison. Perhaps they grouped all the women together and formed a separate unit. I do not know. I think all those who were sentenced for a fixed number of years were in Chamdo and Lhasa. Later all those who were given life sentences were imprisoned only in the prisons of Chamdo and Lhasa. They were not allowed to be jailed anywhere else. Those that were awarded sentences of 20 years and life sentences were all jailed in these two [prison divisions].

Q: When you were doing the outside labor, you bought your own food with that 24 *yuan*? Were conditions better, like at night did you have to go inside of the prison or where did you sleep and who guarded you?

#55M: That was not in the prison. There were external and internal prisons. The rule was that one could not remain outside after six in the evening. The Tibetans called it [the prison as] *tsenga* and the Chinese term was *tikung*. I do not know what it meant. Whatever it may be, the fact of the matter was that [the prisoners] did not have political rights.

Q: From these prisons, did you or other people ever think of trying to escape and did anybody ever escape?

01:23:42

#55M: [Speaks before question is interpreted] In Chinese language it is *chiwuya tikung*. There were two types [of prison] called *chiwuya tikung* and *tikung*. [Prisoners from] one of them was allowed to interact with the community and they drove horse carts and vehicles. It was said that they did not have “caps.” They were supposed to have had their “caps” taken off. They received a higher salary. However, they too could not remain the night outside with the people.

Q: In the 20 years that you were in prison, did you ever think of trying to escape and did anybody ever escape?

#55M: I never ever thought of that. The reason being that initially I possessed weapons, a horse, my late mother's necklace of *dzi* 'special beads made of agate stone,' my father's *gawu* 'amulet with image of god within,' gold and silver. I walked carrying them. I gave away [my] asset where it was necessary [and pleaded], “Please take me along with my weapons across the river. If [I] can step into India, I will give you everything except the clothes on my body.” I made every effort in Tsawa Zayul but however much I tried, I did not succeed in escaping.

Likewise I went towards the direction of Tsawagang, but failed in my attempt. Then I went towards Gyamo Nguchu 'River Salween' and failed. So later when I was imprisoned I had lost all hope. I felt it was useless to try. I was sure of death and just wished to try to die at the earliest. Even if someone told me [about escape], I replied, "There is no way for us and we will not succeed." I told them that and that was also my conclusive thought. I never ever mentioned to any colleague about fleeing to the mountains. I told my relative too that it was useless to try.

Q: You wished you could die but was there anything, any thoughts that enabled you to endure the suffering?

01:27:51

#55M: I told you earlier that when I arrived in Lhasa at the age of 16, it was the period when the Chinese had prepared to invade Tibet and was attacking it. I went back [in the village] and as a new monk, I was obliged to join the fight. I was included in the list of fighters and I think I was around 17 years old when it was '49. I do not know how many years or months it was that [I] was sent far away to wait for the Chinese and block their route. We continued doing that for a long period. During that period we made a lot of promises.

And secondly, in the year 1959 the previous incarnation of His Holiness the Trijang Rinpoche [His Holiness the Dalai Lama's tutor] came to our village on his way back from China. That night we made our pledge. We placed mats on the ground, brought out our guns and filled a cup with tea. We touched [the tea] with a finger and then [puts finger to mouth] our mouths. [We] licked the gun [and swore], "Whoever it may be that died, one would be rendered helpless if a Chinese held both the hands. Other than that, [we] shall die together." I was there when everyone took part in the swearing ceremony.

[Later when captured] I told the Chinese, "I will not break my pledge nor will I drink poison." And secondly I would never commit suicide. I told that to the Chinese. They took me thrice to the cemetery and gave me a revolver saying, "You have to kill yourself." [I replied], "You can do the firing. I will never commit suicide. It is easy to commit suicide. You do not have to lend me your revolver for that. I know how to kill myself but I will never do it. I shall only accept that truth is truth and black is black. I will never commit suicide. I will never do that." I was totally determined.

01:31:07

I think many people who know this story have arrived in Dharamsala presently. I heard about it though I have been to Dharamsala only once. There were others who reached Dharamsala before me. Some of them had been in prison with me. The Chinese hung a piece of paper over my neck and took me to Drapchi, Lhoka and Kongpo. I was taken thrice around these places. I was taken with a board on my neck announcing that I was to be killed. However, when [we were] back, there was no one who killed me. The reason being that I never accepted anything but the truth, wherever they might take me. I speak the truth. I told them that I would accept only what I knew was the truth and nothing else, irrespective of what my colleagues did.

There were many others who pretended to have seen [when they had not]. I told them [the Chinese] that I could never accept such things. [I said], "What I accept is that I have complete faith in His Holiness the Dalai Lama. Please kill me on account of that." I was resolute in my decision and I think to this day the Chinese would still have in their possession documents to that effect, which I am sure exceeds a load [a person can carry].

During the Cultural Revolution I was charged with nine offences. They tied me up and took me along with 13 people who were to be killed. It [the killings] was carried out just close by. The *thongso* 'Chinese army official' would say, "Today I have given you your life." I knew whether he was giving me life or not. I knew that if I did not accept [the charges], they did not have the basis [to kill]. Whether it was due to our good luck or otherwise, I and a lama were not [killed then]. Well, I [have spoken too much]. I will speak about this experience later.

Q: Have you ever told anyone these details about your history in prison and your life?

01:35:51

#55M: Long ago somebody came here. He enquired regarding the number of people that were killed. I heard he was from...[not discernible] organization. His questions were different in the sense that he wanted the number of people killed in each region. He asked many such questions and I spoke to him. Besides him, I have not approached anyone to speak about it nor did anyone come to ask me.

Q: *Gen-la*, what is it like to tell us about these very important moments of your life and the history of Tibet?

#55M: This [story] which is a part of Tibetan history is worth publishing but to do it personally, I do not have education or the financial means. I am an unlucky man as when I

reached here my relative passed away. So except for living here as a caretaker of the house, [there are] no facilities available [to publish the story]. It has been 26 or 27 years since I arrived here and during this period, I have never approached the Tibetan government for assistance for the struggle I have undergone, since then and until now.

The Tibetan government has to strive for independence and I feel that even if I have to struggle a little but can manage a hand to mouth existence that is fine. That is the only reason. My relative's older son in Dharamsala told me that he wished to write a book on the experience. Writing this book should serve the purpose of the Tibetan government. However, if an error occurs, leave aside serving the purpose of the government, it could raise a lot of controversy. So I asked him not to do it. Well, when I think about it, these things need not be in here.

Q: What do you think would be important if you do write a book? Why do you think that would be important or if we show your story to other people? Can you tell us why you think that would be important for Tibet?

01:40:48

#55M: For one, I do not have education. Writing a book would be just telling my experience and I do not think it is going to be any importance for the Tibetan government. Long ago I informed someone called Kungo Tara who travels with His Holiness the Dalai Lama and this was what transpired, "If you were to write a book about your old experience, these days there are innumerable [such] books in foreign countries. It is not necessary and the government will not be able to lend any assistance. It will be a waste as this is not necessary. However, in case you need any help..." At that time my late relative was alive and I did not request for any aid, so I said, "I will not seek any aid today." My relative had assured me that he would take care of me until his death. Since then...

This is not something I thought of recently. The child [nephew] told me about it when he came here from Dharamsala. His Holiness the Dalai Lama is propagating the unity of the three provinces and even if we [wrote the book] bearing that in mind, it might go against that principle and so I felt that instead of serving any purpose, it would be trouble for me. That was what I really said and that was what occurred to me.

I do not think relating this today will be any problem for me. I have been treated with hostility. So I have never ever spoken a word to the Tibetan government. A few years back someone came to seek some information regarding the [number of] dead and I gave him two pages of information. Other than that I hardly find time for it.

Q: But if you had enough opportunity and if someone could help you write a book about your experiences, would you be willing to do that?

01:44:04

#55M: If a book could be written, it is good. The nephew says that he will write it. However, I do not see any benefit in that. In this country, a book is criticized. If a person is not in the right, he should be questioned and that should be published in a book, but that is

not the case. I do not have any wish for that. From my personal point of view, I do not have the wish. Later I might be slapped on with a “black cap.”

If His Holiness the Dalai Lama asked me to write a book, I would say "Yes." I would not entertain it if anybody else approached and pleaded with me to write a book. There is no use writing a book about the experience of one family. The same thing is happening in the world. I am told that things much more serious than that are happening in the world. So it is best to remain humble and have faith in His Holiness the Dalai Lama and carry out his advice. [Not discernible] I never ever have any thought of writing a book. However, it is necessary for the sake of our history, whether it is a big part or a little one. The government says that it has enough of such [stories] and of course, that must be as there are more educated people than me in Dharamsala. Some of them may be still alive and some not.

Q: What do you think should have been done to help the people of Tibet?

01:46:57

#55M: The main help the Tibetans need is said to be political [support]. However, these days in my opinion the main thing is that unless the country of Tibet is independent, high political awareness will not get back Tibet. It is said these days that the society must be knowledgeable in science, but I think that science alone will not get back our country. To put it briefly, if we do not find a way to confront China with the strength of an army, I feel it is very difficult. Perhaps one would have to wait hundreds of years to regain [independence], otherwise it is difficult. Even if we receive help from outside, it will be in the form of politics. If one has his own country and if one is politically aware, then I think one can bring development in his country.

I related you this story because you asked me to. His Holiness has propagated no other way but the way of democracy, and fearing that I might go against his words, I dare not speak to anyone. If I were to relate my real feelings, the reason I feel let down after I came here from Tibet is because I do not think that politics or holding demonstrations and shouting slogans will [bring any result]. If other countries will lend us assistance, I feel that [we] should confront them [the Chinese] and that will make it easier for other countries to support us. However, that is difficult to carry out. So in whatever way [we] apply our mind, it is difficult.

When I came here, that was my hope. I wanted to take revenge for my parents and my sister. I thought, "If only I could escape to India, though I am 50 years old but until I turn 60 or 70, I can act and take revenge, flesh for flesh and blood for blood." [Smiles] However, once I reached here, [laughs] my hope has come to an end. Now one has to strive for politics only and to do that, let alone anything else, I do not even know the language [in India] to take care of myself. So that's how it has come about.

Q: What kind of revenge would you like to take on the Chinese?

01:51:00

#55M: I thought that if there was an army, I would join it as I was capable enough to kill a few of the Chinese to avenge the death of each person that were killed until my last breath. Considering my past activities, [I] would certainly be provided with weapons. I hoped that I would be able do that much if I was not dead. That was my main hope. As I told you earlier, except for abiding by the words of His Holiness the Dalai Lama, I have nowhere else to go. I am 77 years old now and though I may make fine talk, this is all that is there to it.

When [we] met the Chinese, we encountered 3,000-4,000 of them. A total of 1,500-1,600 was the least number of Chinese that marched on the road. When we encountered such [an army], three or four [of us] killed five or six Chinese. It was “kill and flee” and not a proper encounter as such. Some got killed [during these encounters]. I believed that the situation [in exile] would be such that there would be help from outside countries and that the Tibetan government would have organized some preparation [to fight back] after its existence in India for 20 or 30 years.

If I keep on talking, time will go by. I do not have anything to speak on the internal matters. When I came out of the prison, I reached India with that single hope. When I look back these days, I feel that I must fervently pray to His Holiness the Dalai Lama. The struggle I underwent during the journey has not been of any benefit. I had come with the thought of vices like *dhoechak* 'passion,' *shedhang* 'rage,' *thimuk* 'stupidity' and killing in my mind and I realized that it is useless [to dwell on such thoughts]. That is what I think sometimes and at times I feel, "Alas, when I die I have not managed to avenge the death of my father, my mother, my brother and my sister." Such thoughts do occur in [my] mind.

But when I listen to the words of His Holiness the Dalai Lama [shuts eyes in reverence] and reflect over them, then I truly realize that that would only take one to hell. Now I have come to a situation when the body is no longer capable.

As I said earlier, take my village for example where hardly two or three people survived [the Chinese onslaught]. Except for my sister, none of the youngsters have seen me and so they will not recognize me.

Q: And when that was not so, what did you think about that there was no plan to attack the Chinese? What did you think, *gen-la*?

01:55:45

#55M: That's what I said. After I arrived here and learned about the country and heard the teachings of His Holiness the Dalai Lama, I felt that that those were the thoughts of the “rebels” as the Chinese used to say. I too felt that I should not go against the words of His Holiness and realized that I was at fault. I realize that thinking such things is of no use. One must live in an alien land, in India and start life afresh which is difficult.

Secondly His Holiness the Dalai Lama teaches about saving not just human lives but the lives of insects and is starting a fresh democratization in the world. When I reflect on such things, I realize that I have erred in my belief, but at times I feel, "Alas, before my death I

shall never hear the news that Tibet has regained independence." Such thoughts come to my mind at times.

Q: *Gen-la*, given what the Dalai Lama has said "it is better not to even kill an insect let alone a human being," what is your attitude towards the Chinese now?

#55M: [Laughs] I think that unless the Chinese are faced head-on in a powerful manner, [I] do not think we will regain [independence] in many more years to come. I do not think politics alone will make them give us [independence] easily. Whatever it may be, there is no chance to confront them. If we could deal face to face with the Chinese, then it is possible that the countries of the world may come to our assistance soon. I think then the assistance from all the supporters will bring about a result.

01:59:44

I think it is very difficult to gain complete independence which [the Chinese] will not give us easily. To put it in brief, if they do not give it, in order to attempt to get it, [we] must try the way of democratization as advocated d by His Holiness the Dalai Lama and there is no one who can go against that. Other than that I do not have any plans to implement. To start an organization, I do not have the finances to do that. In fact, I do not have anything that I can call my own. The little amount that I had when I arrived here has been used to make religious offerings.

However, to be very honest, "unless one hits the dog with a stick, it will not retreat." [Similarly] unless they meet their match, I do not think they [the Chinese] will let go easily. Anyway, the Chinese might give [Tibet her independence] in the long run but it is impossible in two or three years. I do not think the Chinese will give Tibet her independence or the Middle Way in my lifetime. I am certain that it will not occur.

If [we] can form democracy and implement democratization, [we] might lose or win. However, if [we] could engage in war with the support of the world, it is impossible that a result will not come about after so many years. Take for example the Union of Soviet Socialist Republic. How many countries did it break up into? After the war and until now, how many countries did it become? In India too, how did they win in the end? Definitely there is victory for us too. But I think that will be difficult to achieve. If Tibet does not gain independence on the strength of His Holiness grace, there is no way they [the Chinese] will give it to us if we went and begged of them. I relate what I think from the depth of my heart.

Q: If it was possible to go back to Tibet and Tibet was free, would you return?

02:03:41

#55M: If only I could reach my village tonight. As I told you earlier, since the time I left and if we do not get [independence] soon, entire generations have passed away. Prior to 1959 [we] did not have any deaths in our village except for a few widows in the whole region.

Q: Would you go back to Tibet?

#55M: If I could reach Tibet, it would be difficult to find someone who would recognize me or understand my language. And another thing, if I returned to Tibet, the people of Tibet have no reason to belittle me as far as the issue of Tibet is concerned. However, I do not have any...[not discernible]. However, as I told you earlier, a person who has no choice, a person who has no finance is helpless. One can just spend one's time in religious practice and prayers.

In my village we were two brothers who joined the fight. There is one thing which is extremely difficult [for me] to describe and that is the story about [us] three brothers. It is one day's...[not discernible]. It is very difficult. Now power lies in the hands of other people, so what can be done now?

Q: *Gen-la*, thank you very, very much for this important interview.

02:06:31

#55M: Okay.

Q: I want to ask, if this interview, you've given us much information. So I want to ask you again, if this interview was shown in Tibet or China, would this be a problem for you?

#55M: It is not a major concern if I face any problem. If the cause of the Tibetan government can be achieved, I do not have any regret. [The Chinese] might cause problems for my sister. The old lady will face problems. However, there is nothing that can be done. Due to the grace of His Holiness the Dalai Lama, [she will overcome it]. I am one who has given up everyone in the family.

Q: Can we use your real name for this project?

02:08:07

#55M: Yes, you can use my name.

Q: Thank you for sharing your story with us.

#55M: Okay. [Smiles]

END OF INTERVIEW