

Tibet Oral History Project

Interview #8N – Paya (alias)
April 8, 2015

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

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

Copyright © 2016 Tibet Oral History Project.



TIBET ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

www.TibetOralHistory.org

INTERVIEW SUMMARY SHEET

1. Interview Number: #8N
2. Interviewee: Paya (alias)
3. Age: 73
4. Date of Birth: 1942
5. Sex: Male
6. Birthplace: Derge
7. Province: Dhotoe (Kham)
8. Year of leaving Tibet: 1956-7?
9. Date of Interview: April 8, 2015
10. Place of Interview: Hotel Norbu Sangpo, Boudha, Kathmandu, Nepal
11. Length of Interview: 0 hr 55 min
12. Interviewer: Marcella Adamski
13. Interpreter: Tenzin Yangchen
14. Videographer: Dhiraj Kafle
15. Translator: Tenzin Yangchen

Biographical Information:

Paya was born in Derge in Kham Province. There were seven members in his middle-class nomadic family. Paya recalls herding their 50-60 yaks and over a hundred goats and sheep with a few other children. In the nearby forests lived blue sheep, musk deer and Tibetan brown bears. Paya describes their life as self-sufficient—they acquired food, clothing and shelter from the animals that they raised.

Paya describes the changes in his village after the Chinese appeared. The Chinese employed various tactics to deceive and subjugate the Tibetans. They befriended the leaders by presenting them with *dhayen* ‘Chinese silver coins’ and the farmers by giving them new tools. The Chinese took the leaders to China on a “tour” from which they never returned. The Chinese then demanded the villagers hand over their guns and horses. Then the Tibetan people rebelled and escaped.

Paya explains the long and arduous journey to Nepal that took about three years for the group to complete. His family was forced to beg for food and later Paya joined the *Chushi Gangdrug* [Defend Tibet Volunteer Force] in Mustang. He served as a guide for three years after which Paya returned home to take care of his mother and sisters. Paya talks about his present life and shares a few of his daily prayers.

Topics Discussed:

Kham, childhood memories, first appearance of Chinese, escape experiences, guerrillas in Mustang, life as a refugee in Nepal.

TIBET ORAL HISTORY PROJECT
www.TibetOralHistory.org

Interview #8N

Interviewee: Paya [alias]

Age: 73, Sex: Male

Interviewer: Marcella Adamski

Interview Date: April 8, 2015

Question: Please tell us your name.

00:00:12

Interviewee #8N: Paya.

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?

#8N: Yes.

Q: Thank you for offering to share your story with us. During this interview if you wish to take a break or stop at any time, please let me know. If you do not wish to answer a question or talk about something, let me know.

#8N: Okay.

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

#8N: There will be no problem.

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

#8N: Okay.

Q: *Aku* 'paternal uncle,' can you please tell me where you were born?

00:02:08

#8N: My birthplace is Derge in Kham.

Q: What year were you born or how old are you now?

#8N: [I] am 73 years old now.

Q: What did your family do in your birthplace? What did they do for a living?

#8N: [My] family members in the hometown may perhaps be raising animals or cultivating lands. I have not been to the hometown; have not been to the hometown lately. Since Tibet was lost [I] have not been back.

Q: The question is when you were living in Tibet as a little child, what did your parents and family members do for a living?

#8N: We raised animals, raised animals and used animal products. [We] raised animals: yaks, sheep and goats.

Q: How many people were in your family, *aku*?

#8N: There were father, mother, two sisters and three brothers. There were around seven.

Q: Was your family very well off or moderate income?

00:04:27

#8N: Moderate, neither very rich nor very poor.

Q: Do you have any memories of your childhood that you could share with us?

#8N: [I] remember herding yaks while living in the hometown, herding yaks and other animals. [I] have a little memory but not much. I was little then.

Q: When you were herding, were you by yourself or how many yaks did you take care of?

#8N: [I] herded around 50-60 yaks and over a hundred goats and sheep.

Q: What age were you doing that?

#8N: I was little then, maybe 8, 9 or 10 years old. I could run after the yaks.

Q: For those Tibetan children who have never been to Tibet, can you describe what was the scene? What did it look like? What did you see when you looked around your herds?

00:06:38

#8N: Some areas were entirely grasslands while some were forested.

Q: Were there any animals in the forest?

#8N: Yes, there were blue sheep.

Q: What kind of animals?

#8N: There were blue sheep and musk deer. There were blue sheep, musk deer and deer.

Q: Blue sheep, musk deer and...?

#8N: Deer.

Q: Did your family or any of the people in the area—did they kill these animals for food or for clothing?

#8N: A few were killed but not many. One or two were killed. There were the hunters that were a different set of people.

Q: Were they permitted by the government to...or by the village to kill the animals? Was that legal?

00:08:40

#8N: There was no permission as such. They did it on their own. There was no permission as such.

If a deer or a musk deer was killed except for consuming the meat, one could not sell the horn or the musk.

Q: Did you have any exciting experiences when you were a young boy and you were herding? Anything scary or dangerous that happened?

#8N: That would not happen because we went in groups of 2-3 children playing around. Nothing scary happened but the adults recounted that sometimes during summer Tibetan brown bears appeared, Tibetan brown bears.

Q: When did [the bears] appear?

#8N: In summertime.

Q: Did you ever see one?

#8N: [I] have. [I] have seen from afar but not at close range.

Q: How big are they?

00:10:22

#8N: Tibetan brown bears are not very large. [They] are *rawa* 'hairy' and from a distance are darkish like yaks, and *rawa*.

Q: What's *rawa*?

#8N: *Rawa* means...

Q: Hairy?

#30N: Long-haired. There are some without such fur but I have seen only from afar and not at close range.

Q: Did you have a favorite season when you were herding the animals that you liked?

#8N: The favorite season while herding goats and sheep was autumn. There was plenty of grass for the goats and sheep during autumn and [we] need not go far and they grew plump. They ate for a little while and then rested. There were no problems during autumn.

Q: How did your family make a living because they had this herd? How did it help them survive?

00:12:06

#8N: The female animals were milked. The milk was made into curd and the curd churned to make butter and cheese. Such were made.

The yaks have fur and the sheep have wool. The wool was spun into yarn and woven to make *chupa* ‘traditional dress.’ The yak [fur] is called *tsipa* that was made into tents. The nomads do not have houses, so [*tsipa*] was woven to make tents.

Q: Your nomadic family life sounds very peaceful. Were there any changes that occurred in your life that were significant?

#8N: It changed later when the Chinese arrived and one could no longer raise animals or do anything. It changed. Earlier one lived by raising animals. Once the Chinese came one could not do that.

Q: How did they come to your area?

00:14:10

#8N: Long ago around the time I was not yet born, Chinese soldiers appeared suddenly and fought with the elders. It was said that there was a fierce fight and the Chinese went back. They went back to their country unable to overcome the people of Kham.

Q: Then what happened in your life that was a big change?

#8N: During my time the Chinese came gradually and in small numbers as traders selling stuff and gave grains and rice to the nomads in deception. [The Chinese] presented the leaders with *dhayen* ‘Chinese silver coins’ and the farmers with hoes and various kinds of implements to dig the earth. They came in small numbers.

For instance, I am from Derge. [The Chinese] presented many *dhayen* to the leaders of Derge and also vehicles and guns saying, “You are our friends.” [The Chinese] made friends. Once the leaders had been presented with vehicles, motor roads had to be constructed. The people were made to construct [roads] this way and that way.

Q: How old were you when you began to see all this? What age?

00:16:55

#8N: I might have been around 8, 9 or 10. They [the Chinese] told me to come to the meetings. Though I could not speak they gave a candy or two and patted [me] on the head. I attended the meetings.

Q: What happened in the meetings?

#8N: In the meetings...They had already deceived our leaders by giving away wealth. Whether one is a rich man or a poor man, there is not anyone who does not like being given wealth or money. There is not anyone who does not like it. They took the influential people to China saying, "Come on a tour." [The Chinese] saw to it that they did not return, the leaders. Then to the smart people they said, "You do not need to keep guns because our guards are there." They took away all the guns. [To those that owned] good horses they said, "Give us these." They seized the horses. All the senior and influential people were taken on a tour of China and did not return. It happened like that.

Q: Did you know or your family know any of the leaders who were taken away and did not return?

00:19:08

#8N: [We] knew. There was Chagoe Namgyal Dorjee. There was one called Chagoe Nyepa who was the senior-most leader. He was taken on a visit to China. He was sent back with 2-3,000 soldiers who were said to be his bodyguards but were monitoring him. He returned bringing 3-4,000 soldiers. He was not allowed to speak or meet anyone. [The Chinese] said, "These are your bodyguards."

Q: Did he go there and return?

#8N: [He] returned once and then was taken again and never returned. They [the Chinese] claimed that he [Chagoe Nyepa] was appointed a senior leader. The topmost Chinese leader was called Mao Tushi. He [Chagoe Nyepa] was called Cha Tushi. [The Chinese] said he was conferred a title but was not seen again.

Q: Was he someone in your village that you knew or your family knew?

#8N: He was a big leader but [we] did not know him [personally]. His name is famous. [We] did not know him [personally].

Q: I see. And then what happened to you next, excuse me, as the Chinese were coming into your area? What is your story?

00:21:21

#8N: And then they told us to attend meetings. "Come to the meeting and surrender your guns to us. Surrender all the horses and saddles." We had been rearing animals to which [the Chinese] said, "Do not kill your animals for meat and such. If you have to, slaughter only one or two of the very old ones. You must keep working, digging the earth and rocks and cultivate new lands." In that way they advised.

Q: And then what happened?

#8N: Now they had taken away the good horses, the good guns and the influential people that never returned. “Now this is not good.” Saying so we rebelled and ran away.

Q: Who was “we”? Was that your family or other people?

#8N: There were family members and people of the village, those that were sturdy. The old ones could not come and stayed behind in the hometown. The sturdy ones escaped.

Q: Did the old want to stay behind or did they have no choice?

00:23:53

#8N: Some were unable to flee. Some, though they wished to flee could not on account of old age while some said, “Whether in death or life [I] will stay back.” There were many that stayed back. It was not for a day and [they] had no idea where to go. There were many that were left behind.

Q: How old were you when you left your village? How old?

#8N: Maybe aged 10, 11 or 12.

Q: Do you remember what that experience felt like to have to leave your land and the people you knew? What did that feel like?

#8N: I was a child then and did not have any particular feeling. [I] had no feelings like, “How sad that [I] am leaving these behind,” or “How good that I get to escape.’ When the adults fled, one must go along.

Q: What happened to the family? What happened next in the story?

00:25:57

#8N: There were many families that fled. There are 15-20 families in Jwalakhel [Nepal] that came with us and 8, 9 or 10 families in Bir [Himachal Pradesh, India]. There were only around four families with me, most of who have passed away. Most of the elders have passed away.

Q: Where did your family go, *aku-la*?

#8N: [We] escaped all the way through the north. [We] journeyed through Jang Nyechen Thangla and Jang Namchu. After crossing Jang Tsakha [we] arrived in Mustang of Nepal.

Q: Why did your family pick Mustang?

#8N: [We] reached there after fleeing from the Chinese. [We] came because Nepal is a foreign country.

Q: Was that a destination that you wanted other than going to Nepal or India?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: Mustang is in Nepal.

Q: Rather than going to India you chose to go to Nepal?

#8N: All those that could proceed to India and those that could not were given aid by the Red Cross and were resettled in Jwalakhel, Pokhara and other places. As for me [I] stayed right in Mustang. I remained in Mustang because I had an aged mother then who said [we] would die in the heat [of India]. There were the sisters and [we] did not know the language and so remained in Mustang.

Q: How many... Were you able to take any animals with you? Did you have to leave everything behind?

00:29:33

#8N: [We] drove a few animals. They had to be left along the way due to scarcity of grass and when they developed sores on the hoofs. A few had to be driven along for food. When in need they were slaughtered and some had to be left behind along the way. When [we] encountered the Chinese, they seized them. That was how the journey was.

Q: *Aku-la*, how many people were in your party leaving from home? How long did it take you to get to Mustang?

#8N: We were around three groups. For instance, the Khasumdawa [group] is in Bir in India. Then the Yurukrawa [group] is in Jwalakhel. Then with us were four families. All those that were with us have passed away except for an old lady in Yangsa in Pokhara. Then I was in Mustang. There were four families who are no more; some died and some were lost.

Q: How long did it take from the village to Mustang?

#8N: It took around three years.

Q: Did you have any encounters with the Chinese during that long journey?

00:32:14

#8N: [We] could not put up any fight as such because they had a great number of arms and soldiers while we were not many. [We] made every effort to flee except when [we] were cornered and there was no choice but to fight. Most of the time [we] were on flight.

Q: Was anybody captured or killed by the Chinese?

#8N: Some were captured. Some were captured and taken back. Some were captured and could not flee. Some were killed. There were countless numbers.

Q: So when you...Three years journey...So you must now when you arrive in Mustang what would you be, about 17? 16, 17?

#8N: [I] might have been 15, 16 or 17, perhaps 16 or 17.

Q: What was Mustang like compared to the area where you came from in Kham?

00:34:18

#8N: Mustang in comparison to my village...except for a little bit of resemblance to the Tibetan language and way of doing things, compared to our hometown it was so *ngoreng* 'bare' that one thought living there would not be good. However, after living for a long time and becoming acclimatized it was quite good.

Q: What did you say the area was like?

#8N: The area was *ngoreng*, the mountains looked strange in the absence of grass and rocks. The area was *ngoreng*.

Q: Does *ngoreng* mean devoid of grass?

#8N: It is an area where there are sparse growth of grass and no forests. It was strange.

Q: *Aku-la*, what did your family do to survive when they got to Mustang?

#8N: Initially, [we] did not know anyone and asked to be given *tsampa* 'flour made from roasted barley'; it should be described as begging. [We] had nothing and begged. Much later [we] engaged in petty trading when [we] became acclimatized. [We] also worked for others and received wages. That is what [we] did. Initially we begged for *tsampa*, not knowing the language or the people.

Q: What happens next in your life?

00:36:47

#8N: Then as [we] lived there the *Chushi Gangdrug* [Defend Tibet Volunteer Force] arrived. The *Chushi Gangdrug*, a Tibetan military unit, was established there. [I] did some trading and lived there in that manner.

Q: How old were you when you first heard about the *Chushi Gangdrug*?

#8N: [I] was around 17, 18, 20, around that.

Q: Seventeen, 18, 20?

#8N: [I] do not know exactly.

Q: Did you join the *Chushi Gangdrug*?

#8N: I was asked to join the *Chushi Gangdrug* but there was Mother and 2-3 little siblings. So someone was sent in my place; someone else was paid to join. Later [I] was again asked to join and did so for a short while. It is better to speak in brief.

Q: How long were you a member?

00:38:38

#8N: [I] was there for only around three years.

Q: Three?

#8N: A little over three, around three years.

Q: Three years. Where did the *Chushi Gangdrug* operate? Was it in Mustang primarily or did they go other places?

#8N: [The *Chushi Gangdrug*] went to other places, went to various places like Nupri, Nyeshang, Dolpa and from Dolpa to Mukhum, Limi and such places.

Q: Can you describe any experiences you had when you were a member of the forces, *Chushi Gangdrug* forces?

#8N: The experience as such...when they [the soldiers] moved around, since I had reached there earlier; I was more knowledgeable about the routes. So [I] acted as a guide showing the routes. I was there for a short while showing them the way here and there. Other than that there was not anything else.

Q: What did you think about the efforts of the *Chushi Gangdrug*? What was your attitude or your belief about what they were doing?

00:41:01

#8N: The *Chushi Gangdrug* struggled hoping there would be a good outcome in regard to the Chinese. Later there was a change and it was dissolved. Later when it dissolved [I] felt very sad and bad, felt sad. One knew it. Later [the *Chushi Gangdrug* men] were not allowed to remain. [I] felt sad and that was it.

Q: You said you were in the *Chushi Gangdrug* for three years. Did you leave on your own or because it was dissolved?

#8N: I left earlier on my own because there was an aged mother and others at home. I left on my own since there was not anyone earning [for the family].

Q: How much longer you lived in Mustang...You said the *Chushi Gangdrug* was dissolved? Do you remember what people's reactions were, the soldiers who were members of that?

00:43:10

#8N: [Speaks before question is translated] After leaving [the *Chushi Gangdrug*] I met a woman of Mustang and remained there for good with the woman.

Q: The *Chushi Gangdrug* was dissolved while you were there. What were the soldiers' reactions?

#8N: [The soldiers] were not allowed to remain and were taken to the place called Zong Sarpa. No one was allowed to stay back.

Q: Taken where?

#8N: To Zong Sarpa where there was the district's administrator. [The soldiers] were taken there once, two or three times.

Q: What?

#8N: [The soldiers] were taken there and then told that [they] were excused for 2-3 months or a year and released. Then once again were told [they] could not stay and taken [to Zong Sarpa] and then released. Much later the men had taken women from the region and had become like the people of the region. It was reported to government authorities that [these men] were hard working, good people and were later allowed to remain.

Q: What was the attitude of the men who were in the *Chushi Gangdrug* when they were told to dissolve? What was their reaction?

00:45:18

#8N: They felt that [they] had failed to fight the enemy outside and there were problems within, which made [them] sad. Later His Holiness the Dalai Lama said, "It should not affect the mind. Nepal is like a rented dwelling. Being a rented dwelling if they say [you] cannot remain, that is okay. Surrender all the things to them. Come away if they say so." A letter came from His Holiness the Dalai Lama. It was like that.

Q: *Aku-la*, what was your reaction to that letter?

#8N: One cannot go against His Holiness the Dalai Lama's advice. It being His Holiness's advice, all the men in tears surrendered the things and left as told by them [the Nepali authorities]. As for me there was not any other thought but to do accordingly. I was ready to leave if ordered but [my] wife sought help from people and managed to prolong [my] stay for short durations, and this continued to lengthen.

Q: At that point, did you have any children, *aku-la*?

00:47:31

#8N: I do not have children, no children. It has been two years since the wife died. I moved here and spend time chanting *mani* 'mantra of Avalokiteshvara' and doing circumambulations. [I] have nothing else.

Q: Why do you want to...it sounds like you wanted to go back to Tibet. What do you hope to do or see?

#8N: There are a few relatives to meet that [I] may not recognize because those of our generation are dead. There are a few descendants. [I] can talk to them about what it had been like. The main thing is to go on a pilgrimage to Lhasa and Mount Kailash. [I] wish to go on a pilgrimage, which is the most important thing.

Q: What do you think about the situation in Tibet these days? What are your thoughts and feelings, ideas about it?

00:49:32

#8N: What would I know about the situation in Tibet? [I] only have the thought of seeing Tibet once before [my] death. There is not any other thought. [I] have the desire to see Tibet once before [my] death.

Q: It sounds like you receive a great deal of comfort and satisfaction by praying and doing the *koras* 'circumambulations,' right? So could you...maybe we could hear one of your favorite chants before we finish this interview? Before we even do that, is there anything else that you wanted to tell us or talk about today?

#8N: I do not have anything to say besides this. [I] have spoken about life in the hometown and today. What else should [I] talk about? That is about it.

Q: Before we finish today...it seems that praying and doing the *koras* give you a great deal of comfort and satisfaction. Hence, after you chant a prayer that you regularly do, we will conclude the interview.

#8N: Okay.

Q: Okay. So I'm going to finish with this and then finish with the chanting after that.

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

00:52:02

#8N: There will be no problem because I have only spoken the truth; I have not lied. If one told lies...one should not do that anywhere in the world. [I] have not spoken about anything other than what I saw with [my] eyes and heard with [my] ears.

For instance, if the Chinese learn [about this interview] all the older people will think, "He is correct." Presently [the Chinese] are deceiving the Nepalese by providing a large amount [of funds] to construct roads and for water with the ultimate aim of it falling into their hands. We can understand all of that. When it comes to money it is like that with everyone.

Q: *Aku-la*, maybe could you please help us hear and value the chant that you do as you do the *koras*, maybe if you could chant one of your favorite chants?

#8N: I normally chant the Dolma ‘Praises to the 21 Taras.’

Q: Is it a chant he could do right now in his own voice?

#8N: It is.

Q: Can he do the Dolma?

#8N: [I] tend to miss some parts. It is the same if [I] chant another one, right? What do [I] chant?

Q: Which prayer do you chant normally during the circumambulations?

00:54:17

#8N: [I] chant the Dolma and mostly the *kyapdo* ‘refuge prayer,’ which is:

Lamala kyapsu chewo
Sangayla kyapsu chewo
Choela kyapsu chewo
Gedunla kyapsu chewo

**‘I take refuge in the lama
I take refuge in the Buddha
I take refuge in the dharma
I take refuge in the sangha’**

It is chanted like that.

There are various [chants]. Then there is the prayer to Guru Padmasambhava:

Hung Orgyen yul gyi nupjang tsam
Pema gesar dongpola
Yatsen chok gyi ngodup nye
Pema jungnay zhesu drak
Khordhu Khando mangpo kor
Khyekyi jesu dhak drupkyi
Jingyi lapchir sheksusol
Guru Padma siddhi hung!

Naychok dhiru jinphobla
Dupchok dhagla wangshi kur
Gegdhang logden bharchay sol
Chogdhang thunmong ngoduptsol!

**‘On the northwest border of the country of Orgyen
In the pollen heart of a lotus**

**Endowed with the most marvelous spiritual attainments
Renowned as the lotus born
Surrounded by a vast retinue of dakinis
Following in your footsteps
I pray, please come forth and grant your blessing
Oh Guru Padma, bestow siddhis upon me!**

**Bestow blessings upon this supreme place of practice
Confer the four empowerments upon me, an excellent practitioner
Dispel the obstacles arising from obstructing forces and misguiding spirits
Please grant the common and supreme spiritual attainments!'**

One must chant like that.

Q: *Aku-la*, thank you very much for sharing your story with us today. Thank you.

END OF INTERVIEW