

## Interview H0000: with Setrong Wangye [tib. gser grong dbang rgyal], (China, May 1993) : Part No. 5 of 7

*Setrong Wangye was a member of a rich shungyupa (government taxpayer serf) family [tib. gshung rgyugs pa]) in Tülung [tib. stod lung] district. His family had large land holdings with its own miser [tib. mi ser] or bound peasants/serfs and also held the position of Gyatso gembo [tib. rgya mtsho rgan po] for the district. He discusses taxes and an interesting law case between the miser and the district head [tib. rdzong dpon] concerning harvesting Dechen district's fields including how the case was settled in Lhasa. He also details the duties of the district's tsodrag [tib. gtso drag] and dingpön officials and discusses Lungshar's reinvestigation of land and taxes.*

Q

The uprising against Gabde was also just before the revolt, and it was a big peasant's revolt, right?

A

Yes. they formally appealed to the government. It was a big law case.

Q

What was the reason for the revolt?

A

It must be something like that [an irrigation dispute]. I don't know the details. After the revolt the song and dance troupe did the a lot of performances about this.

Q

Can you tell us some other examples of conflicts between [miser](#) and lords and how they were settled?

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A

I have had many experiences, although it is hard to find ones that were cleanly and easily settled to tell you about. One case was in Dechen district. It involved 40-50 households and the district head, who at that time was a monk official who was the shabdöpa of the Ex-Governor of Kham, the Doji Dzasa called Chamba Thubten [tib. byams pa thub bstan].

Q

He died.

A

When?

Q

He was the older brother of Phuntso Yügye's [tib. phun tshogs g.yu rgyal] wife.

A

After he was imprisoned and released, he was in the Municipality Political Consultative Conference [ch. [shi](#) zheng xie]. I heard that he is staying in Surkhang. It was the time when he was the district [head].

Q

This must have been in in 1947-47 just before the Chinese came, right?

A

Yes, it was around that time. Actually, his term was 3 years, but he was removed after 2 years, one year before his term was over. The reason why he was removed was that when he was the district head, there was a large area of fields that belonged to the district. When it was time for the harvest, these 40-50 [miser](#) in the area had to come every year to harvest the district's field for 3 days. This was called the three days "lord's harvest" [tib. dpon btsas]. During this three days, all of the people who were able to do labor had to go and in principle, the district's harvest would be completed in three days. They received food and a wage of 3 [sho](#) per day. The previous district head was [Dombor](#) [tib. gdong por]. Since his household was rich, he slaughtered a yak at this time and gave all the meat to

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the [miser](#) during these three days, as well as an abundance of [tsamba](#), dishes made from radish and potatoes and also very good tea. They treated the [miser](#) very kindly. Chamba Thubten, however, was too stingy. He was really ridiculous and didn't give food to the [miser](#) saying, "Now, the [tsamba](#) hasn't been ground, so first bring your own [tsamba](#)." Then I heard that the [miser](#) said, "If so, please give us tea." However, the [miser](#) were saying that he gave them a tea that was like the plain boiled water used for slaughtering pigs. I am not sure whether he had added tea leaves or not. Probably he didn't. He also didn't pay them wages. So in the 2nd year [of his term], when he summoned the [miser](#) to work, some of the household fathers [household heads] living below the Dechen District said, "We are not going to harvest because you treated us like this [badly] last year. First give us the last year's [tsamba](#) which is 4 [dre](#) and 3 phul for three days and the wages and of course you have to give us the [tsamba](#) for this year." He [the district head] said, "It would not be alright if you don't come to harvest." And then he pulled out a pistol and waved it at the [miser](#) and said, "Are you coming or not coming tomorrow." That evening some of the [miser](#) leaders came to me about this. I said I will try to help you tomorrow morning. So I went with them the next morning to the district. I met the district head and said, "You shouldn't do this. Give them last year's [tsamba](#) and wages. If you do not have the [tsamba](#) ready, if you give them barley it will be all right. You should give them the wages and good food. During the [Dombor](#) era, that was done. You should give them the [tsamba](#) and the tea with some more butter and I will make them harvest the fields."

The [miser](#) had a list of people who went and it was about 200-300 person for three days. So that came to about 60 [khe](#) of barley [that they were owed]. However, the district head was too stingy and didn't want to give the barley, so he said, "I don't have the barley to give them right away. After the harvest, I will give it to them gradually. First, have them do the harvest." I said, "I can't say that." I tried to convince him, but he refused and said only that he will give the grain slowly later to them. So I went to tell the [miser](#) this and we discussed what they planned to do. That night there was a big discussion and they decided to send one person from each household to Lhasa to make an appeal. They asked me to come with them and I agreed, but I said there is no need to send one person from each household, 7-8 people will be fine. So they agreed. There was a person called Papa Trinley who was a tough person and I told him, "You should lead the [miser](#) and look at the fields and when the time comes to harvest, harvest your own fields and probably the district might not provoke you. In case the district again provokes you, just say you are sorry and do whatever you can do like running away, but do not get beaten. Just go ahead

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and harvest your own fields and leave the district's harvest." So the next morning we went to Lhasa riding horses. The [miser](#) left early that morning and there were 7-8 of us. I wrote a petition according to the system to be submitted to the Kashag.

Q

How would you submit the petition to the Kashag?

A

Usually Gadrung Dumra [tib. bka' drung ldum ra] [one of the Kashag's aides] was a person who would always scold people a lot, but since I had to go to the Kashag many times, he would treat me very nicely and he was a nice person. So first I went to Gadrung Dumra and showed him the petition and told him about the case and I said, "Please submit this to the Kashag and I am going to come to the Kashag tomorrow."

Q

Did you have to give him one kind of gift?

A

Normally, all the petitions would be submitted through either the [gadrung](#) or the [gandrön](#) [two kinds of aides]. I gave him a [khata](#) and an envelope with some money and requested him to submit the petition. He gave me back the [khata](#) and money and said, "It will be alright, this is a case related to the [miser](#), come tomorrow morning to the Kashag." The next morning, I went with some of the household heads of the [miser](#) to the Kashag. He [Gadrung Dumra] took the petition and asked me, "How many representatives do you have here?" I said we have this number of people. He said, "You people just go back right away as you have to do the harvest. I will make sure you have a response in 2-3 days." Then I told the others to go back and I will stay.

The next morning when I went to Dumra. He said the case had been transferred to the [Yigtsang](#) [Ecclesiastics Office] so I should go there to pursue the case.

Q

It was because he [the district head] was a monk official, right?

A

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Yes. So I went to the Potala to the [Yigtsang](#) Office and they said, "Yes we have the case and it will be decided immediately. Just wait for today, and we will make the decision."

Q

Who was the Yigtsang's secretary (tib. yigtsang [nyerpa](#) [yig tshang gnyer pa])?

A

He was the one nicknamed Kamtragla [tib. skam skrag lags]. I knew him and he was also a nice person. So I went the next day and they said, "We have sent the edict. You are the Gyatso Gembo, so you go back and take the responsibility and make the district head pay the [miser](#) the wages and [tsamba](#) for the previous year immediately. As for the next district head, we will send a real person."

Q

Did Kamtragla say that?

A

Yes. He meant that Chamba Thubdenla was not like a human being.

Q

He really was not like a real man.

A

He didn't have any ability.

Q

But he was the boy friend of Jawtang [tib. lcog steng] [a famous Trunyichemmo].

A

That's why he was given to the Doji Dzasa and he got all the inheritance of the Doji Dzasa. That day I returned home and the next day I went to the district. That day the district's 12 [nangsen](#) were harvesting the crop and the district head was there overseeing them. I dismounted my horse and saluted to him by taking off my [hat](#). He asked where

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have you been. I said to Lhasa. He said, "The [miser](#) are not coming to harvest, so I am planning to do it by myself."

Q

He was just saying that in a sarcastic manner, right?

A

Yes. Then I said, "Sir [tib. Kungö]! Most probably you will receive an edict from the [Yigtsang](#). They made a decision about the harvesting." He said, "What happened?" I said, "I don't have any details to tell you. When the edict arrives, you will know."

The edict came the next day. It had been sent through the post till Dongkar [tib. gdong dkar] and then through the pony messenger from one district to the next [tib. rzdong skyel rta shad]. I got a message to come to the district. The district head was sitting reading the edict and he had a long face [tib. zhal ras glod]. I just went through the motions of asking him what was in the edict. He gave it to me and I read it. I said, "Oh, I see. If this is the case, will you give them the [tsamba](#) and wages for the previous year tomorrow or the day after that?" The district head said, "Well, first I will think about this." Then I told him there is not much to think about it because it is time to harvest the fields. Usually, many [miser](#) would harvest the district's fields, but this year they could just harvest a little bit. He asked me, "How shall we do the harvest for this year?" I said, "If you give them food, I will tell them to come, if not, I can't tell them that. You have to give them last year's barley first." Then on the next day, I counted the barley for last year which was 1 [dre](#) and 3 phul per day. The total was about 60 [khe](#) of barley. I made him pay that to the [miser](#) one by one. Then I told the [miser](#) that you have to do the harvest of the district tomorrow. The district head said that he hadn't ground the [tsamba](#), and will pay you the barley [instead of tsamba] after the harvest. I will guarantee that he will pay it. The next day, early morning, I got it from the district head and gave it to the [miser](#). This time they did the district and miser's harvesting simultaneously as it was late. The district head was withdrawn after his second year because of this, and then Gyentsen Phüntola took over the district from him. Wasn't that the time when the district was managed by the government?

Q

No. This was long after that in 1954.

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A

Oh yes. this was in 1954. Then probably the short monk official nicknamed Tsogmila came.

Q

What are the tsodrag's duties?

A

They were established by the 13th Dalai Lama. Although there used to be just a name of that, but they couldn't [answer not finished]

Q

Under the [tsodrag](#), there was the [dingpön](#), right?

A

Dingpön was a term used in the border areas like Nyan [tib. gnyan] and Lhuntse and it is equivalent to the Gyatso Gembo. The duty of the [tsodrag](#) is to be the miser's representative. If there is any trouble to be settled in that area regarding the taxes or law cases, in the edicts they would normally write that the district head and [tsodrag](#) should jointly make the decision. It was the person who would discuss things with the district. In our Tsede district, there were 6-7 households who were tsodrag: The aristocrats Changöba, Ringang, Kündeling, and the Tshurphu and the Para Estate plus 2-3 from [shungyupa](#) households including me. But this is just said verbally and is written in the document, but in reality, the head of the district settles the issues himself. The [tsodrag](#) have no power. They were called for meetings, etc. They would call the [tsodrag](#) from everywhere when they do things like collecting grain from the [babshi](#) [tib. 'bab zhib] tax. A district head or his representative would come from the district and they would make the [tsodrag](#) do the jobs like measuring grain and that stuff. The most power would be the district head or his representative. The [tsodrag](#) didn't have power at all.

Q

Did the [tsodrag](#) get a salary?

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A

No. They also brought their own food.

Q

Under the district, there were the Gyatso Gembo and [tsodrag](#), right? Who else were there?

A

The [gembo](#) (village headman).

Q

Are the [gembo](#) appointed by the [dzong](#) or the [miser](#)?

A

The [miser](#) would appoint them.

Q

I think the [gembo](#) was done in rotation.

A

No. There were different kinds of systems [for selecting gembo]. The [miser](#) would say that we should do it by rotation. But if the household whose turn came up didn't have a capable people, they will discuss it. Although at that time we didn't call it an election, normally most of the [miser](#) would request that an older and better man in the village be the [gembo](#). This was done by the [miser](#) themselves. For example, nearby there was a village called Gyatö [tib. rgya stod] which had 7 tax fields or [tregang](#) (tib. khral rkang). They required a [gembo](#) for their 12-13-14 households and they got together and insisted and asked that one capable man called Tsedrug [tib. tshes drug] be the [gembo](#) because they had trouble when they did the rotation. They decided to divide some portion of his gangdro [tib. rkang 'gro] taxes among the other [miser](#) [as payment]. So he got a kind of wages for doing the [gembo](#) job and he accepted. Some of them also did it on rotation where the estate made the order of the rotation and they did the [gembo](#) in terms of a year.

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We government taxpayer serfs or [shungyupa](#) [tib. gzhung rgyugs pa] actually had two kinds of tax fields or [gang](#) [tib. rkang]. One was the "existing [gang](#)," or degang [tib. bsdad rkang] and the other was the 7, 33 "extinct [gang](#)," or donggang [tib. stong rkang]. The donggang had a little bit of concessions on the gangdro taxes because only the man and the land was linked on that and there wasn't any animal [transport taxes]. Regarding this, the aristocratic and religious estates used to complain that [shungyupa](#) had a lot of land, but they didn't have to work much for taxes. During Lungshar's time, he did an investigation and made a new tax called shiphar [tib. zhib 'phar] which was an extra tax made after his investigation of the aristocratic and religious estates that involved a large amount of barley to be collected. They also set up an office to collect it.

Q

The Iron-Tiger Year Land Enumeration was not done by [Lungshar](#), right?

A

Right. It was made in 1830. There used to be many land enumerations like the Fire-Sheep Year Enumeration, but those were partially done in some areas and weren't done completely, and it was inconvenient to impose the taxes and there was a lot of chaos among the [miser](#). Then, after the 9th or the 10th Dalai Lama passed away, during the Tsomönlung [tib. tshe smon gling] Regent, he made the Iron-Tiger Land Enumeration. There were a few people who said that this was very good, but the majority were saying that it was not fair. Finally, [Lungshar](#) did a thorough investigation and, for example, he made [Sambo](#) pay 5,000-6,000 [khe](#) of barley for the [new] "babshi" [tib.'babzhib] tax.

Q

Did [Sambo](#) have to pay this as an extra tax each year?

A

Yes.

Q

So this became income for the government, right?

A

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Yes. Similarly, the other aristocrats had to pay 1,000-2,000-400-500 [khe](#) of barley.

Q

So this was Lungshar's accomplishment, right?

A

Yes. Therefore, during the time when the 13th Dalai Lama was alive, the Kudrak couldn't handle [Lungshar](#) because he was capable and he could report whatever he wanted to the Dalai Lama. In the archives, I saw many of his reports to the Dalai Lama when he went to [Tsang](#) for the investigation [of land and taxes]. He would get the approval of the Dalai Lama for whatever he reported. He was a very capable person who thought about the government and probably there wasn't a single aristocrat who didn't have to pay the [additional] shiphar [tib. zhib 'phar] tax. They set up an office called Shiphar Lekhung which collected large amounts of barley. Therefore, all of the aristocrats were badly hurt and as soon as the 13th Dalai Lama passed away, [Lungshar](#) was destroyed. Actually, [Lungshar](#) didn't do anything wrong, but there was a lot of talk saying that there were some internal and external [factors] [tib. phyi nang gnyis]. Finally, they gouged out his eyeballs and confiscated his property and decreed that his children were not allowed to become government officials. Lhalu was Lungshar's son, but they said that his father was Shelkar Lingpa [tib. shel dkar gling pa] so he was able to become a government official.