Radrü Ngawang [Tib. dbra phrug ngag dbang] was a Litang (Khamba) monk who became a monastic manager/trader (Tib. Jiso) and then became one of the top military commanders in Chushigandru. In this interview, he discusses the organization of Chushigandru and the role of the Khambas. He describes the golden throne, as well as fighting between the Litangbas and the Chinese. He also briefly describes the false Khambas planted by the Chinese. Finally, he lists the ways in which Chushigandru raised money for arms and food, and divided military control.

Q

The golden throne was offered by the Chushigandru to help form the organization. Then it was also said that the Mimang did it. I don't understand this very well.

A

At that time, there was no named organization called Chushigandru. At first, when we discussed it, there was the Baligyesum composed of Litangba, Batang and Gyeltang [Ch. Zhongdian], since early on these were sort of 1 unit. The organization first discussed offering a large Long Life Prayer [Tenshug]. So when the discussion took place it was also said that all of the Khamba traders should do it together. Then it was also said that the Amdowas should be included. So this was how the discussions took place at Andru Jinda’s house. We would not be able to start immediately an organization called Chushigandru, right? So all of the traders united. The reason being that on the Kham side, the Chinese really made the people suffer so that there was nothing to show for this. Everyone was in an agitated state. According to Tibetan customs, religion is very important, right? In one’s own country, everyday, thousands were dying, and so at Lhasa, everyone thought about uniting together. Then it was said that we needed to ask His Holiness for a Kalachakra initiation and the Lam rim Chenmo rite,
and for that we should make a petition. It was made and agreed. So it was said that as an offering, we need to find a specially fine offering, one that never existed before in Tibet.

When a petition is made, a Saytri Nguding dru is offered. It was said that no pure gold throne exists in Tibet, so we said that one has to be made. So that is how the golden throne began.

So for the organization of the traders, Andru Gombo Tashi and Phara Sheysu approached Trijang Rimpoche and requested a name for the organization. He said that in history there was a name Chushigandru, and so this might be a good name. He divined that the name was good and he said to request Kyabji Ling Rimpoche, Radö Rimpoche and whatever gods and lamas you have in mind.

Our main deity was Shungden and we requested this oracle. He said that this name Chushigandru is good and so that's how we used that name. So this was only for the Khamba and Amdowa traders. The People's Association was not involved in this. The reason for this is that Alo Chöndze and others started the People's Association earlier and the Chinese destroyed it, right? So for this reason the mimang could not be associated in this.

What the Khambas and Amdowas were saying was that they were making religious offerings because of the forced liberation done by the Chinese, and so it had nothing to do with politics. It needed to be purely religious. So this was also what the Tibetan Government was saying to the Chinese. One part of the Tibetan Government was thinking that the Chinese would never do anything good and wondered what the Chinese would do to the Dalai Lama and what would they make of Tibet.

Another section thought that now it was all finished and the Chinese had already suppressed us and so there was nothing to do but to go along with them. The former group, along with Chushigandru, and leaders Andru and others, were united with them. They thought the same. So whenever there were some meetings and discussions, the "government", the Trapchi Depön [Tashi Bera], the Gusung Depön Phüntso Tashi Takla and Phala Drönyerchemmo secretly were all one. There were monk officials in it and many others, no need to mention them specifically.

So Tsipön Namseling and Andru Jinda became friends, and internally, so did the Khembos (abbots) of the three great monasteries, the Khembos of the Lower and Upper Tantric Colleges, and many other Lings and Labrangs [the large incarnations].

For the sake of Religion and politics everyone was united, whether one speaks of the traders, the labrangs or the military.
In addition, contributions for the throne were received from all the mimang and traders, each one from their own sections (khung). The offerings were phenomenal, never ever done in Tibet before. For the prayers, 5-600 monks gathered everyday. Phenomenal amounts of contributions in grain came from Tsang, Phembo and the southern areas. From the Tsang area at Tashilhunpo the contributions were brought in about 18 Chinese trucks. Bapa Phüntso Wangye helped to transport these free of charge. The Chinese had many trucks going back and forth, right? So at the golden throne His Holiness used the term Chushigandru including the Amdowas”. So they were considered part of the Chushigandru. This was requested by Amdo Jimpa Gyatso.

So this is how Chushigandru came to be. The Mimang had nothing to do with it. Since I was one among those involved, this is the truth that I tell, and of course there are always situations where people do say all kinds of things, right? So there was no talk of the People's Association.

Later a situation arose where we had to secretly begin an organization for war. At first we did not have any plans for war. When the throne was in the beginning stages, we were all wondering what we should do now. It was at this time that from the Kham side there were so many people arriving from various regions. They said "Please tell the Tibetan Government to either send a messenger to discuss with the Chinese or help us with arms. Either one is fine." How this came about is that prominent people from various regions approached Andru Jinda and told him. Most of the new arrivals were from Litang. So what the Litangbas were doing was that Andru Jinda and Gyalo Thondup were sending people for wireless training and making plans for arms.

So the messengers that they were sending were telling the people [in Litang] that "Whatever you do, even if you cannot engage in a big battle, don't lose ground. The reason they were telling them this was that they were hoping to help on a large scale." So the Litangbas fought for a year or two with this hope in mind [i.e., that external help would soon be coming].

So likewise, messengers were arriving from Targon, Targye Gomba, Nyarong, Gaba, Derge, Chantring and Gyeltang. From all regions they were asking what were the plans of the Tibetan Government and the traders at Lhasa, and what the gods and lamas could do. That the Chinese were really not making any concessions at all. That we could fight. So we were arranging the offerings and making contact with the Tibetan Government.

Now the government cannot give arms outright, right? If the Chinese found out, that's dangerous, right? His Holiness was telling the Chinese that there was fighting on the
Kham side and this is not good at all. However, the Chinese were saying that these people did not like liberation and so they were being forcefully liberated. That this is the government policy. West of the Drichu there would be peaceful liberation and that east of the Drichu, if they did not do things properly, then it would be forced liberation. This was already decided early on. So after the Kalachakra, the Chinese were still not stopping the war and so, therefore, the traders made a firm decision to either go down [to Kham] and fight and try and procure arms from the government, or go someplace and start a war. So the organization at Drigutang was one composed of all the three regions of Tibet, while Chushigandru was an organization of Khambas and Amdowas. In this organization we made a firm decision, a pledge that all the Khamba and Amdo traders must be involved so that not one was left out.

In this organization, people from the various army regiments could not immediately go and join since it would be very dangerous if they did. Monks from the three monasteries also wanted to go but they had no arms and so without arms they were no help. Internally all were considered the same.

The monasteries said that when the traders left for Drigutang, if they were stopped or if Andru Jinda was arrested, then they would rise up. So there was such unity. So when we left for Drigutang, we left in groups of 100, 200, 300, 400, and 500. The Chinese were not saying anything [did nothing to try and stop them]. So this is how the organization came into being.

Q

Did you ever think about using some of the contributions [for the throne] to buy arms?

A

Not at all! Nothing. Each of the traders had their own capital, large sums. Andrutsang had his own horses, men and arms -- about 26 people. Likewise the other Litangbas had, take my example. I, as one family, had 13 men with horses and arms ready. Likewise, Gyadotsang, Shalo and each of the traders did that on their own with their own resources. If they got [additional] guns there were people available, like monks from the three monasteries, the dobdo types. So there was no plans at all to use the contributions, nor was any made. It was all used for prayers and the remainder was offered to His Holiness. The contributions were just phenomenal in terms of silver and gold. The blacksmiths worked and there was not even one small monastery that did not have some offering.
bowls. The silver donations amounted to boxes and gold, people came and gave their earrings, their bangles right off their ears and hands. For example we wanted to buy 200 sangs of gold from one Amdo trader, but we did not have to since he just donated it. The place where the contributions were collected was in the Barkor, the Kyamra courtyard near the Jokhang. When the pilgrims from all the regions of Tibet came and saw what great offerings were being made they gave without regrets. The people knew that what the Chinese were doing was no good and so they gave without any feeling of loss. They had firmly decided that money was now useless and had decided to sacrifice their lives. The traders at that time had no need to take from the miser. The traders had their own rooms and rooms full of wealth. Just tea amounted to thousands of boxes and there was no need to take even a penny from the misers, was there? So those who had made this firm sacrifice were really good. However, there were many others who came in the name of Chushigandru. Like monks and they did take clothes, horses and guns [from the people]. Then at one time the Chinese sent false Khambas. This we could tell very clearly. We saw it with our own eyes in Phembo and other places. They robbed families and took all of their belongings, did all sorts of things and even took thankas (scroll paintings) and images. If it was a true Khamba, a Tibetan, they would take the household wealth, but they would never touch thankas and images. So from this we knew they were sending false Khambas. Later when the Chushigandru fighting was expanding, they sent false Khambas. The sent spies and Chinese as well as Tibetans who were paid. This gave a very bad name to Chushigandru. At first when it was said that the Tensung Tanglang Magar was coming, whenever some riders came, people burned incense and prepared tea and food. Then as time passed, when things became difficult, it was said that they were making a lot of difficulties. Anyway, there were no plans to use the contributions for arms nor was it necessary.

Q

At one time many Chinese were sent down to China and it was said that even the Khambas and Amdowas would be sent. So I want to ask you about that and also, around that time, there were a lot of Khambas and Amdowas in Lhasa. What were the Chinese doing at that time? Watching? Keeping track?
Those Chinese were traders and they were sent down. Then spies were sent and they said that the Chinese had been sent and that they planned to send all the Khambas and Amdowas down also. That if they were not sent down, then Lhasa would not become an area of peaceful liberation. That if this was not accomplished, then the Chinese already had plans to forcefully control Lhasa. That there were plans for their artillery to fire on Trip, Drepung, Sera, and Lhasa. This was learned from the Chinese [military officer] Losang Tashi who surrendered to the Trapchi regiment. They could not keep him and so he was brought to Andru Jinda. Jinda consulted Panglung Gyalchen and the gods, and they said that he would not cause any harm and could only help, and to look after him well. So we took care of him and he revealed their plans. He was one of the main commanders of the artillery unit. He said that if things didn't go according to the Chinese plans and wishes, all was already prepared for shooting.

So immediately, Andru Gombo Tashi and Phala Drönyerchemmo were discussing and talked about the Tibetan government arms. The arms were at Shang Ganden Chöngor and also down in Shotalhosum at Tsa Pakshö, and some at Lho dzong. No one thought it appropriate to use the arms at the Lhasa armory. There were people like Samdru Phodrang and others who were the commanders, the main ones in charge, and they were sure that the Chinese had 100 percent control and so it would have been useless. Then there were others who thought that whatever it may be, we must do something. At Lhasa, the Trapchi and the Gusung regiments were all armed and their main arms depot was in the Potala.

Q

What did you get from Shang Ganden Chöngor?

A

I can't tell you how many bullets. But we got about 400 of the 303 rifles, 18 sten-guns, and 18 bren-guns. There were 2,500 rounds of bullets in each steel box and there were probably more than 100 boxes. There were so many. There were two large mortars of 16 mm. There were 6 small portable mortars.

Q

Did Phala inform the abbot khembo of the monastery that you all were coming.
Secretly they knew about it. We did not know about it, but when we forcefully entered the monastery, we met the abbots and they said, "You must tie us up. Tie us up. Tie us up." We said, "Please don't talk like that." But they said, "No, no, you must." So from this we knew.

Q

How were things organized at Drigutang, the magji, the tsondzin and the discipline/rules.

A

There were many groups comprised of various numbers from 5 to 100-200 fighters. So the larger ones had one to two magji and 2-3 tsondzins. The magji were in charge of the battles and the tsondzins were in charge of the various offices in different places. There were about 18 offices. In terms of law, there were the 27 articles of discipline in war and the protection of the misers. Whether one speaks of magji or tsondzin, Andru Jinda was the main one. Then there was Amdo Jimpa Gyatso who was the main one of the Amdowas. He was an assistant of Andru Jinda. Then Jagö Namgyal Dorje was another, but he did not join the base at Drigutang. The Jagötsang family was famous and there were many traders of Jagö who had come to Lhasa. And so relations were made with him at Lhasa. At meetings, he did not come but would send a representative. He was very clever. So they were sort of on equal terms. When Jinda had to flee north, Amdo Gyatso and Jagö were the main ones. At the office, Jinda gave authority to the ones who worked. The main ones at the office was Jangtsa Chöndze. He was the one who was in charge over all the office. Jama Jinda was the main one who was in charge of the secret organization.

Q

Now there were pön from various groups so it was not possible to be disciplined like in the army, right? With one taking orders from another. It must have been difficult to have an organization like that, wasn't it? Mainly there was Andru Jinda and -

A
The organization was like the army. There were 18 commanders and each group had gyagpöns. I don't recall how many. Then there were jupöns appointed by each group and not trained by the organization as a whole. When the orders were given by Andru Jinda, the magji met and gave the orders to the gyagpön. So everyone did not meet and discuss what to do. Orders were given regarding all matters like where to fight, and these were followed. At that time, there were no pön, since all were traders. For example, Jagö Namgyal Dorje was not a pönbo, but a steward of Jagö. Pönbo like Gyari Nyima and Trowo Pön were not there, but were still in their own "country". So in Chushigandru, the more capable, more articulate and better traders were appointed in their own groups.

Q

There was another person called Druk Kyamgön Chantsö or something.

A

It's not Druk Kyamgön, but Ganzi Kyamgön Chantsö. There were many Chantsö.

Q

While at Drigutang in terms of meat and grains, the government could not provide right? But did Phala Drönyerchemmo say anything about this? Or did people give donations in the name of religion and politics? Then you must have had to appoint nyerpas (stewards).

A

Let me tell you in short. Before leaving from Lhasa, Andru Jinda and others including myself, talked about what we were going to do about things like food. That it would be very shameful if the Tensung Tanglang Magar had to collect [take] food from the people. At Lhasa we had tea, cloth, silver, gold, etc., so we told Jinda that all this should be sent through the various traders. Jinda said not to worry about this. "Wherever we go, don't worry about supplies, you need not worry about this at all."

Later we went to Lhoka and there was something like 27 Dzongs there. They were all called to a meeting at Drigutang and we said that "The Tensung Tanglang Magar's cause is for religion and politics, and so you need to assist us with meat, grain, and butter." So they all fully agreed. We said that "If there is any stealing you must immediately report to us, or you can capture them and kill them." What Jinda said was that "The Tibetan Government has a lot of grain in storage and that they will give this to us. You must ask
nicely and not take it by force. Otherwise the Chinese will tell the Tibetan Government that you are providing for the fighters." So Jinda said to get from the dzong, as we are the same. This was definite. So from Lhasa there definitely seems to have been some order [agreement]. This is not an exaggeration, and though I can not speak 100 percent for Andru Jinda, I think I can speak 90 percent.

Later, when His Holiness came and started the new government at Lhüntse Dzong, he said that "We are the same and whatever the government has it is yours to eat or throw away."

Q

Some say that the discipline at Drigutang was different when Andru was there and when he was not. Some discipline was lost.

A

Should one say lost? The best fighters were going with the main base [at Drigutang and then Lhagyari]. The newcomers were assigned to various tasks, like fighting.

But the fight at Tsetang was unplanned. We said that if we could not fight and destroy the Chinese at Tsetang and if we resorted to small attacks, then the Chinese would be prepared and it would not be good. So we left it. So when it was said that we were fighting in the north, a certain section without the authority of the main command, through bravado, they discussed and attacked Tsetang. They were unsuccessful and had to retreat.

The main camp said that we did this without the knowledge of the main command. They would say such things right? So there was this friction. Then Atru Lama and others who were full of bravado attacked Tsetang. This too was unsuccessful.

The Chinese then gained confidence and thought that we could not dislodge them. So from this perspective there was some trouble. Now when one is writing a story, it is good if we write the truth, right? I was separated in the north right? Then I went to Lhasa and started a base at Pembo. We made a lot of plans at Lhasa about His Holiness coming out, [and] us preparing for this. This was with Phala Drönyerchemmo and Kelsang Yeshi [He was a tsendrön supposedly from Kham who lived near Trijang Labrang). He was the main helper of Phala. He died during the fight at Norbulinga.

So when I got to Lhoka, our base had broken into two factions. The way I see how this happened was that the Americans had made a few arms drops. This was for training and not for fighting the enemy. They dropped about 300-400 303 rifles, two cannons and 15-20
sten-guns. So Athar and Lhotse, it seems, told reliable people to come and collect the weapons, and did not trust everyone. So there was this talk that some were trusted while others were not. When the arms were distributed, Athar and Lhotse were guarding the place. They seemed to have kept about 8 of the best sten-guns.

They were staying in the village so they did not need these. So there were things said against this. Andru Gombo Tashi's group did not know at all about this since they were stranded in the North.

The ones that were left at Shotalhosum were saying through messengers that they needed these guns. So to this area, volunteers went, including Jagô Namgyal Dorje and crack fighters, about 600–700 riders. They were to go via Dakpo, cross the river and go east. In Dakpo, they were not immediately sure as to where to go, and so they stayed for a while. The main base was saying that "You should not stay at the expense of the local people there. You should go to where Andru Jinda is or return." They said that they wanted to know whether Andru Jinda was dead or alive and that they were not going to listen to the main base.

When I got to Lhagyari, they were divided into two groups. I was extremely disappointed. They were saying that they were not coming up while the main base was telling them to go down or come up and so there were bad exchanges between the two.

So we had a meeting. At that time, Sandu Lo Nyendra, with about 17 to 18 riders, came from Bhutan. Gyen Yeshi had come from Kalimpong to Lhagyari. Then I arrived right? I had about 100 riders and I had became famous because of our battle at Gongkar.

So when I got there they were very happy because of our determination in the north. So we met and in the meeting I cried. I said that I never thought about myself for one single day and was always worrying how Andru Jinda's main base was fairing. Now when I got here the situation was such, and I didn't know if it was the Chushigandru or the false Khambas but the misers were then running away instead of helping. So I said that "I will not stay in such a situation and I'm leaving. I'll take my fighters, and fight and die in some [other] place." So they said "Don't do this," and we met for 2 days. Finally, they said - "You Radrü Ngawang and Chamdo Dorzin, along with a few riders, should go to Andru Jinda and find out what he thinks." I said that "Gen Yeshe should also go" and I also told Sandu Lo Nyendra that he must come too. They said no and so the two of us went.

When we got to Dakpo, they had moved. Lo Nyendra and the base had moved and we heard that they were going to stay at Wooka dzong for a few days and then send messengers to see where they would go. Chamdo Dorzin and myself stayed for a night.
at [Namseling]'s estate. There [Namseling] and myself had some exchanges. He said, "I see, so you are the one that's called Radrü Ngawang." I said, "Yes, Kungö. I am the one and though I have heard of you, we have not met." He said, "You have fought well at Gongkar, however your not holding on to the area was a mistake." I said, "You are just sitting here and so don't talk like that. I am the one who was there and there were 105 Chinese vehicles and we destroyed 29 trucks in our ambush. There were 60-70 others behind us and however many Chinese soldiers were in those trucks. They were ready with cannons and circling, and so what you are saying is not appropriate." At that time I was show-offish and foul-mouthed. I said, "When you said I did well I was happy and then you speak like I did not do well. What have you accomplished? You are one of the main ones of Andru Jinda and now the base is split in two. What have you done and what do you think? The two of us were being sent by the main base to talk and is this alright or not? So we had this exchange.

He said, "Now I am trusted by one section of the people but another section does not trust me. The reason the two of us came here to Lhoka was really because of the government's plans and not for personal reasons. I said, "If this is the case, then if the plan was made when Andru Jinda was here it would have helped. Anyway, if you are sent by the government, then don't you think that along with the Chushigandru, the people and the dzongs, you should be at Lhagyari meetings and taking responsibility? You have not taken any responsibility and you are staying here at your estate in this area. The Chushigandru is split in two. So can we remain like this? I had to cry at the meeting out of disappointment and it was not at all shameful." So he said that "That is the reason for you to go and to do [it] nicely." So the next day Chamdo Dorzin and I, with 4 servants, went to where Namgyal Dorje was toward Wooka dzong.

Q

So you are saying that Namgyal Dorje was staying separate?

A

Yes, at the main base was Jomda Chöndze, Kyamgön Chantsö, Lodrö Chantsö and many others with nyerpas, prisoners, etc. They were the ones who had to provide the salary, make connections with the mimang, and people sent to get things. Then there was the other group who said that they were going to bring Andru Jinda. In this there was Namgyal Dorje, Litangba Andrutsang Lobsang, Amdo Alo Dawa, Baba Chantsö Tashi,
Bachung Thuthob, Amdo Chödrak and 600-700 riders. At first they were sent by the main base.

Q

To bring Jinda up, right?

A

Yes.

Q

I see, it was also said that they met some Chinese and started fighting?

A

No, they did not fight. They could not go and camped at Dakpo and stayed for about a month. The main base was saying that they should not stay but either go down or come up. They said that they were not coming back. They would either meet Andru or die.

Q

Then there was something about some 30-50 riders who went and came to a Chinese camp and decided to attack it.

A

That was in Kongpo. This was not about bring back Andru. They agreed to send messengers and from Andru's camp, soldiers were to be sent. From the main base some soldiers were to be sent and they were to fight in Po and Kongpo. Jinda sent his soldiers and there was an agreement reached with the militia of Po and Kongpo. From the main base, soldiers from Amdo, Derge and Ganzi were to go down. They entered the Chinese military camp not well prepared, and many lives were lost. So this is about this.

Q

So later a section stayed separately from the main base and they did not agree?

A
Then they got together. We went and discussed it. We said that it was a most dangerous time. I told Namgyal Dorje that "The situation in Lhasa is very precarious. It is a situation where His Holiness might not be able to stay in Lhasa any longer. If we don't make good preparations it is bad. It's true that Andru Jinda is important, but more important than him is the All Knowing One [the Dalai Lama]. What is most important is that we must make sure that the All Knowing does not fall into Chinese hands. But such a situation is almost at hand. So this is our responsibility." So for 5-6 days we met in Wooka monastery and continuously advised them. Namgyal Dorje said, of course this was definitely true, and we became united. Then we had a meeting and the [larger] Lhagyari meeting we had down at Rong Lhokhang Drukha. Then we prepared messengers to be sent to Jinda and divided the soldiers to go to Chushul, Tadong Drukha, Samye, and Kongpo, and said to fight as much as you can.

The fighting at Tsetang was said by the deity that it should fall on Radrü Ngawang. So I fought at Tsetang on the 12th Tib month, day 10. We made all the preparations. Though we needed 3 commanders, we made 6. So we surrounded and fought them. The Chinese were well dug in with water and food. So from the 12th month, day 10 to the 3rd month, we did not allow a single Chinese to come out. All the fighting was at night. So for 3-4 months we fought. Many were wounded and died. We could not dislodge them. We went in the tunnels and fought there. The tunnel was as big as a house. The battle became big.