

Interview H0030: with Phu Gyakpa [tib. phu rgyags pa], (India, 1991) : Part No. 1 of 1

Phu Gyakpa first discusses his father's role as the acting Dzongpön (District head) of Lhari dzong and how they settled in Metro Rinchenling managing an estate. He also describes the arrival of the People's Liberation Army and Chinese programs such as road building. He discusses Chinese policies in Tibet and Tibetan attitudes when the Dalai Lama went to India and China.

Q

Where were you in 1950?

A

In 1950, we were in Metro Rinchenling [tib. mal gro rin chen gling].

Q

Where is that?

A

It is east of Lhasa and took two and half days [by horse]. By car it takes about four hours.

Q

Did you originally come from Chamdo?

A

Initially my parents....There was an aristocrat in Lhari Dzong called Kamekang [tib. dkar me khang] who had the rights to the [dzong](#). When he left for Lhasa, my father was left as his representative. After his term at the [dzong](#) expired. and we came to Lhasa. We then made Metro Rinchenling as our home. The lower part of Metro Wöse Kyang, [tib. mal gro 'od zer kyang] and the upper part of Jagdragkhang [spelling ?] belonged to the

Library of Congress

Tibetan Oral History Archive Project (Asian Division)

[Tseja](#) Treasury Office and we had to pay a yearly lease of sixty [khe](#) of barley which went to Ganden Monastery. At that time I was small, but saw quite a bit of work being done in the fields. But I have not actually worked in the fields.

When the Chinese first came I was in Metro. At the time many soldiers arrived looking very tired and worn out. They set up camp about twenty meters away from our place. At that time I was young and remember going out to look at them. At that time there had been incidents where they had slaughtered horses for food and I was very cautious. Our feeling was that they were going to Lhasa. But instead they would double back and stop just before they reached town. The following morning they would march again. The reason for this was to give an impression of many soldiers coming. There were villagers who had seen the same soldiers going back and forth.

Q

At the time how old were you?

A

I was about sixteen or seventeen. Right now I am 64.

Q

When the Chinese came to Chamdo, what were people talking about where you were living?

A

The poorer people thought that the Chinese would improve their livelihood. They would make the rich poorer and the poor richer, and most people said that there would be equal distribution of wealth. At that time we were duped and did not know any better. There were soldiers in blue and khaki. The ones in blue worked on road constructions and were sent to various districts in groups of 20 with a leader. It was said there was no difference between ordinary soldiers and their leaders and that ranks didn't mean anything as they supposedly ate the same food and did the same work. But this turned out to be completely untrue. The leaders ate better than the soldiers who merely had to subsist on rice and soup. Regarding work, the leaders would merely do a little work here and there, but the bulk of the work was done by the ordinary soldiers.

Library of Congress
Tibetan Oral History Archive Project (Asian Division)

Q

After Chamdo was lost in 1950 and eventually when the 17-Point Agreement was accepted, did the Chinese have problems with food?

A

They had problems. At the time we were in Metro Rinchenling there was a monastery and a Labrang. There was no lama in the monastery, so we, the Labrang, were the authority there. Down below, there was Karkhang [tib. bkar khang] who was related to [Lukhangwa](#) [tib. klu khang ba]. We were the two leaders in this district. We were the head of the monastery and they took charge of the [dzong](#) and had control over the estates. However, they were not the real Dzongpön. The real Dzongpön was in Metro Gungkar [tib. mal gro [gung](#) dkar]. At that time the Chinese asked the Karkhang and the Labrang to give them barley, wheat and whatever they had, since they faced much hardship coming from China. They would pay whatever the going price was, but we must supply whatever food, whether it is wheat or barley. This I remember.

When supplying them with barley, they would not prepare it the way we would. Instead they would grind the uncooked barley and make it into cakes and bake them in the oven. They would eat them by peeling off the baked parts-the barley did not seem to affect their stomachs. The reason for this was that the first group of Chinese that had been sent had been picked for their gentle nature and tolerance. They were said to tolerate things even if someone were to beat them. As for food, they had been trained to eat barley and wheat whether it was cooked or uncooked. These people didn't get sick. But as for us, if we ate uncooked food we would become ill. And whatever we sold them they paid us. Later each district had a Payroll Office (tib. phokhang, [phogs khang]). The function of the payroll office was that any types of wheat, barley and even yaks, sheep and goats would be paid for by this office. And they paid good prices for the foodstuffs. Later, as they got to know things better, they would not take animals that were too thin and would demand better animals. These people were recent arrivals and their character was quite different from the first group. The later batch of soldiers was more demanding.

Q

Were there only Chinese working at the Payroll Office ?

Library of Congress
Tibetan Oral History Archive Project (Asian Division)

A

There were also interpreters who were from Chamdo and Kham.

Q

Did they set up a Payroll Office in Metro?

A

Yes, they did.

Q

What did you have to supply?

A

We had to supply barley, wheat and any other types of food supplies.

Q

Did the [dzong](#) ask you to supply them?

A

They would ask the acting Dzongpön and us, and we would order people under our jurisdiction to supply these. Those with more animals should supply such and such and those with less, such and such since they would all be paid. Even after we issued our orders, the people would not bring their best animals. In such cases the Chinese would refuse to accept them. In the past they would accept whatever was brought to them.

Q

Did they pay for these animals?

A

At that time they were paying. Initially, they paid whatever was asked. Later they became more particular and would decline to pay the asking price for certain animals because they were too thin. And later they went on to set their own price and disregard ours.

Library of Congress
Tibetan Oral History Archive Project (Asian Division)

Q

During 1951 and 1952, a People's Association [tib. mi dmangs tshogs pa] was set up in Lhasa to oppose the Chinese. What was the main reason for this?

A

The People's Association was set up when the Chinese power and authority became stronger and stronger and the Sawangs and various government officials were following the path of the Chinese. The people rose up seeing that our government officials had no choice but to do the Chinese bidding. The people wanted to show their strength and to show the outside world, such as our closest neighbor India, that they have the rights. I think that was their plan. I cannot go too deep into this since I had no close contacts with this. But there were representatives from the [Big Three Monastic Seats](#). I think Shelkar [tib. shel dkar] Chandzö was there. And there was Jayang Dawa [tib. 'jam dbyangs zla ba] in Kalimpong who had come from Tibet to live in India. He was supposed to be a liaison between the government. For this purpose, there must have been about 3 other representatives. I don't think these people were under special government pay. Later they faced some hardships (economically). The outcome of what they accomplished while in India was to write to various monasteries asking them to oppose the Chinese. Even after they came here (India), they worked. While in Tibet, they had spent time in prison. The people who had been imprisoned were Kamekang [tib. dkar me khang] Chöndze, I don't recall the names. Jayang Dawa got out.

Q

Was he a member of the People's Association?

A

Yes. He had also spent some time in prison. Kamekang Chöndze had spent almost a year in prison at [Yabshi](#) Langdün [tib. [yab](#) gzhis glang mdun]. After that he was handed over to the local police station who were all Tibetans, they pitched American tents in there. So he did not suffer the pains of being handcuffed. While at [Yabshi](#) Langdün ('s house), he was bound in chains, both hand and foot. Even when he had to go and relieve himself, he would be led on a leash, and so he suffered much hardship. So when he was handed over to the police, it was a change for the better. My family supplied him with food for

Library of Congress
Tibetan Oral History Archive Project (Asian Division)

almost a year and a half. Eventually he was able to come to India via Bhutan and they were supposed to have come to build the road for the Dalai Lama.

Q

When the People's Association first started around 1952-53, had the road project started?

A

No, it had not. I am not sure of the years, but I have been to the sites. I went around to the road sites with my servants and around 50 to 60 loads of [tsamba](#) on yaks. We were paid monthly. We would give them [tsamba](#), and then from their wages, they would pay for the [tsamba](#).

Q

Whether it is road construction or buildings, did the Chinese pay well? Unlike the old days, didn't they [the workers] make a lot of money?

A

Yes. The manner in which they went about doing things was to create competition. For instance, they would have six people work on a plot of land that had been measured. And they would let others who were working on similar plots compete with each other. Every week there would be meetings and lectures. If one had finished the work, he would spend all day without work. But those people who were unfortunate to have lots of stones on the ground that they were working on and were unable to finish the task with the others, would have to attend lectures. At these lectures, people who had finished first would be praised. Because of this competitive atmosphere, some would get up around 4 or 5 at dawn to start work so that they would be able to accomplish their work. Once they finished their work, they would stop for the day without hesitation. So because of this, people were able to save their money as well as do a good job. There would be routine lectures praising that they have shown enthusiasm for the CCP by the good work they had done. They would go so far as to say that not only had people completed their work, but they also had time to rest. So this is the way they made people work hard and fast by making them compete.

Q

What sort of wages did they pay? Did they get paid more for more work?

Library of Congress
Tibetan Oral History Archive Project (Asian Division)

A

Yes. If one did more work, then there was more pay. Being one of the better off people in our region, Metro's payroll office gave me a red letter which said that whenever I wanted to go to Lhasa I could use one of their cars by showing them this letter. I don't know why, but I tried to use their car to go to Lhasa by showing them the letter, but nobody took me. Only once was I able to use the office's car. The car was a big truck. Only once was I able to go in the vehicle. They cautioned me that I was not permitted to carry money. The head of the payroll office was Wangtang Zhang. I thought that he was from a good family in China from his behavior. Sometimes when we ate [tsamba](#) with butter (tib. marpag [mar spags]), he loved eating it too. Sometimes he would inquire whether we knew majong. He said he played, but was not allowed to gambol. Later he was sent to [Tromo](#). He was a high ranking official.

Q

When the Chinese first came, for instance in Metro, what was their policy?

A

At first they were very gentle. During harvesting they would send their soldiers to help. The soldiers helped some of the poorer families who did not have many workers to do harvesting. They would not eat nor drink even water. After loaning their help, they returned to their barracks. They were trying to live up to their words which stated that they had initially come to help the people.

Q

At that time the traders were trading and the people were being paid well by the Chinese so were there many who were thinking about politics?

A

No there were not many. Deep down, the people had no desire to have the Chinese. But for their immediate gain, the people could not have been political since the government itself was in alliance with the Chinese.

Q

Library of Congress
Tibetan Oral History Archive Project (Asian Division)

At that time was the relationship good?

A

For instance, in our home we had a granary. I used to go twice yearly from Lhasa to Metro during the Autumn to collect the harvest, and once in the Spring to give people the seeds. We had loaned our house to the Chinese for use as a Payroll Office. For rent, they would pay whatever was the going rate. Since none of us were living there except for an old man who stayed there as a house-keeper with his wife and children, we were hounded everyday with their demand that we rent the house. Finally we had no other choice but to rent it. When we finally succumbed to their demands, we did not collect rent. To rent it had a condition whereby they would have to vacate the house when we needed the house. For the time being, they could have the house, except for the granary. We loaned them the house for almost two years. We did not get a single penny. Only in the third year when they had become more belligerent and aggressive, we demanded our house back. By that time, they were used to the area and had the means and ways of finding their way, so they were able to set up tents, etc, to live.

Q

After the Chinese came didn't business improve?

A

I am a business man. In the past when we did business I had a contract from the Chinese for 100 loads of hammers to break rocks, iron rods and shorter spikes. I gave them the goods they had ordered and the profit was not too bad. The Chinese were very clever. Then they placed another order for 200 loads and demanded quick delivery for building the roads. When I delivered the first 100 loads and then the second 100 loads, they said that their leader had left for China and that they knew nothing about this order. Since these goods have no use other than for road work, I was stuck with the goods for a number of years. That's the way they did me in.

Q

Was this in the beginning or towards the end?

A

Library of Congress
Tibetan Oral History Archive Project (Asian Division)

In the beginning their was no problem, this was around the end.

Q

Did it get worse around the end?

A

Yes, they got worse and worse and more obnoxious.

Q

At first the 17-Point Agreement was signed and they worked together in the beginning. Why did it get worse later?

A

Well, the situation got worse with the opposition of the people and also among the higher echelons, such as among the Sawangs and other officials. Some were paid two thousand [dayan](#) and some were paid 500 [dayan](#) for their salary. And once they were on their payroll, it seems that they would have to abide by what they say. Our Kyongla [tib. skyog lha] Rinpoche who was the principal of a school in Gyantse was also being paid. There were many who were being paid by the Chinese. Amongst the ordinary people, unless one did some sort of business, there were no other means of income. I think this inequality caused the situation to deteriorate from bad to worse.

Q

In the 50's wasn't there high inflation?

A

There was a huge increase because of the ever increasing number of Chinese troops, and this automatically caused the price of food to rise. I remember during my time 1 [bo](#) of barley was 15 [sang](#) but later it increased to 50. Do you remember your grandfather? I visited your house many times when I was younger. Your house used to have a lot of Chinese, from Yunnan and Sadam [tib. sa dam]. Regarding money, your family was the patron for most of these Chinese. At that time we had blue jeans and khaki cotton going to China and my father had contracted for 100 loads. So my father had to take the goods to Sadam. At Tsubutok [tib. tsha ba [bo](#) thog] he left them in a warehouse. By then, they

Library of Congress

Tibetan Oral History Archive Project (Asian Division)

were close to Sichuan. However, the monastery caught fire which caused some damage to the goods. According to our item list {tib. dzangtho [brdzangs tho]}, if the damage or loss was caused by fire or water, there was no penalty. But if the losses were caused by bandits or robbers, then the person taking the loads have to reimburse for the losses. When the Chinese were told this, they would not listen and said that we would have to consult Tsarong. We claimed that this was not something that we did, it was caused by fire and the monastery itself was destroyed by the fire. Therefore, we had done our duty of delivering the goods and are not obliged to meet the cost of the damages. For this reason I met with [Sawangchemmo](#) many times. Have you heard of Tsarong Tsering-la [tib. tshe ring lags] who used to be one of your traders?

Q

Yes, I have.

A

I've heard that he's still in Shigatse. He was a generous man and he told me that the Chinese were heavily in debt (to Tsarong) and that is the reason they are giving you a hard time. So if you plan to go to court, then you will face the Tsarong family instead of the Chinese. So the best thing that you can do is to try and settle this with Tsarong. This is what Tsering-la advised me. He worked for your family as a trader. If we were to reimburse all that was lost, it would have been too much for us and would have left us penniless. So we decided on giving 4 (load carrying) mules and some guns. To tell you the truth, what we gave was poor quality. Some of these we borrowed from friends. The guns too were not usable, and we had borrowed them from friends. Of course the better ones we keep ourselves. So finally we gave 4 mules and 3 guns and tore the contract up. I met your grandfather in India and he told me that we should go back to Tibet, saying that is our well-being more important or is the well-being of the Dalai Lama more important? So he said that we must go back. He said that if I was short of money, he would help and that we should go back together. At that time I had a brother who was with the [Chushigandru](#) and if I was to go back, the Chinese would surely brand me as being an Indian spy or whatever. I was grateful for his gesture to help me financially, but for the time being I was unable to go. So [Sawangchemmo](#) left and died [in Tibet].

Q

Library of Congress
Tibetan Oral History Archive Project (Asian Division)

Were you here [In India] in 1959?

A

Yes, I was. The uprising was just about to start, it was a matter of months.

Q

Chushigandru started in Lhasa in 1956, right?

A

Yes they did. At that time everything was done secretly. They met in Lhoka and Driguthang, [tib. gri gu thang]. I think these are included in the Dalai Lama's book. They were meeting secretly. They had great difficulty in meeting, so they had to do so under some pretexts. For myself, I was not a member of [Chushigandru](#), but my brother was.

Q

Around 1959, just before the uprising, what was the populace doing? When they invited the Dalai Lama to the show, prior to that were there People's Associations and representatives?

A

Yes, there were. They had many branches all over the country, such as in the monasteries, but the Chinese were not aware of that. Even the representatives in India had their branches. When the situation got worse, there might have been about 10% who sided or trusted the Chinese, but the rest of the people lost all faith in the Chinese and deeply hated them.

Q

When did this situation begin?

A

This is complex. When the Dalai Lama went to India everyone was extremely happy and even those who had only a little money followed him by the thousands and had been given permission by the Indian representative at Dekyi Lingka, [tib. bde skyid gling ga] to take Chinese [dayan](#) (silver coins) to India. So tens of thousands of people went to

Library of Congress

Tibetan Oral History Archive Project (Asian Division)

India for pilgrimage. Then when the Dalai Lama was invited to China, [Note: his China trip preceded his India trip] they pitched the Peacock Tent [tib. dbu gur rma bya chen mo] in Kunbumthang [tib. sku 'bum thang] (around this time of the year) when the river was at its highest point. There was no bridge and the wooden ferry with the horses head could not be used as they were stuck, so all that was available was the coracles for the Dalai Lama to cross. Kamekang Chöndze said at the time when his parents died, he had not cried, but on this occasion he did and countless older people had to be treated for anxiety/stress and many mourned. At the time I too cried when the Dalai Lama went to China. There was talk at the time why the people were so jubilant when the Dalai Lama went to India and why they were so saddened when he left for China. The trip to China was well prepared in every respect, yet the people were so mournful. The question that was being asked then was why at that time countless number of older people cried and fainted. Even the Dalai Lama's monk official bodyguard (tib. [simgag](#) [gzim 'gag]) after seeing him to the coracle fainted by the river. When holding the Dalai Lama's hand and taking him to the coracle, the Simgag must have done so with a heavy heart and much sadness. So there must have been some reason for all of this. Otherwise the Dalai Lama was going to China to hold talks regarding the country, but many were apprehensive as to what the future had in store. Later when the Dalai Lama returned after holding talks regarding the 17-Point Agreement, the people were extremely happy seeing that no harm had come to him. The people partied as never before.

Q

Two years after the Chinese [initially] came, the People's Association offered a 6 point article, and the talk in Lhasa was that the two Sitsab were also members of the People's Association.

A

Was it Sitsab [Lukhangwa](#) and Lobsang Tashi [tib. blo bzang bkra shis]? Who is the one in Lhasa right now? Is it Lobsang Phüntso? I don't know whether it's the truth or not, but he showed a lot of eagerness to discredit the Dalai Lama. I saw this on TV while I was in Lhasa for a little over a year. Here was Lhalu [Sawangchemmo](#) and [Tsendrön](#) Ngawang Gyentsen [tib. ngag dbang rgyal mtshan] at a meeting with many people. There was also this monk from Bomdila who had returned to Tibet or rather surrendered to the Chinese. [Tsendrön](#) Ngawang Gyentsen seemed to be the instigator at the meetings to discredit

Library of Congress

Tibetan Oral History Archive Project (Asian Division)

the Dalai Lama. All Lhalu [Sawangchemmo](#) said was, Yes! Of course. He showed no sign of saying anything negative. We had a TV that we watched every day and Lhalu [Sawangchemmo](#) always found a way to avoid saying anything about the Dalai Lama. I have never met him, but that was the way he conducted himself. Others too, likewise. When it concerned the Dalai Lama, they always found a way to avoid discrediting him. But [Tsendrön](#) Ngawang Gyentsen, it is hard to say what he was like on the inside, but he was the chief instigator to discredit the Dalai Lama.