

Interview H0215: with Shakabpa, Wangchug Denden [tib. zhwa sgab pa, dbang phyug bde ldan], (India, 1983) : Part No. 13 of 13

W.D. Shakabpa was a very prominent aristocratic government official who held the rank of Tsipön. He is the author of "Tibet: A Political History." He discusses the official delegations that went to greet the new Dalai Lama coming from Qinghai and their return to Lhasa. He also discusses the Tsondu meeting to reward Reting for discovering the new Dalai Lama and the fall of the lay official Khyungram for his comments at that meeting.

So, that day, everyone was in their best dress. It was known that Bonshö was on the reception team and other officers were to be selected by the Kashag, although internally it had already been decided who was to go to receive the incarnation of the late Dalai Lama.

Q

The Trungtsi might have known when it was announced, right?

A

They must have known about it, but we did not know about it.

Q

They Trungtsi must have known about it because they were all present when the medium gave his predictions about the new reincarnation.

A

The [Nechung](#) [protector deity] predicted that the new incarnation is in the east. This was heard by all the Trungtsi. Kungö Liushar used to recite the four lines that the medium predicted. The Tsondu had to affix the general seal declaring that it recognized the new incarnation. The following day, we were called and were given preparation work like organizing the pitching of tents. We were shown different tents that had to be pitched for

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different rank officers such as [letsenpa](#), [rimshi](#) and the ordinary officials. Then the [Shape](#) came and inspected the tents. We were also told what dresses we had to wear.

Q

What dress did the [Shape](#) have to wear?

A

They did not wear the [khagön](#) but the dzogos. The Letsenpa rank officials wore the [khagön](#) but the [senampa](#) did not wear [khagön](#). Normally, the fifth ranking Letsenpa, Tshipöns and the Chandzö wore the [khagön](#). But at that time all the entourage accompanying the high officials engaged in the preparation work had to wear [khagön](#) coats and changta hats. Normally, on the [khagön](#) dress, we wore the Bogto [hat](#). That time it was all different. It must be a convention from the past. All the monk officials had to wear a flat white [hat](#) called shakar. The reception team started from Lhasa with great pomp and show.

Q

When this was announced in the Tsondu, was it assumed that it was known in the Lhasa area too?

A

It can be assumed that it was known by all. After the announcement, the recruitment of officials for the preparation work and also for the main ceremony was done. Normally, the Kashag Party was in the 8th Tibetan month but at that time since Bonshö had to go to receive the new incarnation, he gave the Kashag Party much earlier and then left with the reception team. The officials traveled in palanquins up to Dromdö [tib. 'brom stod]. On the night of our arrival in Dromdö, a messenger came from Nagchu and told us the date on which His Holiness would arrive. His Holiness was due to arrive in Gabchi nagachemo and we had to reach there before dawn on that date. All the officials were told to go on their horses as soon as possible, not necessarily in a retinue procession up to Gabchi nagachemo. The day we met His Holiness for the first time it was grand procession and we had to wear Gyaluche [tib. rgya lu chas] dress. But the following two days, on our way to Reting and Dromdö, we had to wear Khagön. Then from Dödguthang to Lhasa, we had to wear Gyaluche again.

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Q

You must have mentioned them in detail in your book. Kusangtse's book also mentions it.

A

Yes, I mentioned it in my book. We reached Gabchi nagachemo at daybreak and reached Nagchu around 3 or 4 o'clock. As soon as we reached there, we washed our faces and had tea and dressed ourselves in the Gyaluche dress. When we reached Gabchi nagachemo at daybreak, His Holiness had already arrived there with his retinue. The whole area was covered with tents and the huge palace of His Holiness. His Holiness had arrived there before daybreak in a mule drawn palanquin. Then Bonshö offered his scarf and Dombo too was there. He was at that time a [Trunyichemmo](#). There was one [Shape](#) and a Tsipön. I was at that time only a Tsipa. The main ceremony was to be started at about sunrise so we waited. Soon the ceremony was started and the infant Dalai Lama was brought on the lap of Kungo Khyenrab and His Holiness' mother too was with him. At the ceremony, His Holiness was presented the document bearing the seal of the Great Tshondu that affirmed and recognized His Holiness as the reincarnation of the late Dalai Lama.

Q

His Holiness' father and a few others must have known that their son was being recognized as the reincarnation, right?

A

It seemed they knew about it when Kusangtse went to them and had talks with them. In the beginning, His Holiness' father and mother were in their ordinary dresses. After the ceremony here, the whole retinue left for Nagchu. During this journey towards Nagchu, I filmed the whole procession. I took very good film shots of His Holiness' father and mother, but I could not take any photos of His Holiness. Then after leaving Nagchu, when we reached Medroshar, I was able to take film shots of His Holiness. Gyalo Thondup was very small at that time and His Holiness' father and mother were dressed in their native dress of Siling. I filmed all their dresses and also when the great mother climbed a mule drawn palanquin and the father rode on a horse. The mule drawn palanquin had a round seat with a saddle on it placed in between two mules. The mules had to be trained for this

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purpose. We reached Nagchu at night and did not notice much, but when we woke up the next morning, we saw that many people from Siling had already come there to receive His Holiness. The distance between Gabchi nagachemo and Nagchu must be about five or six miles. At Nagchu too, a grand ceremony was organized.

Q

How many days did you stay in Nagchu?

A

I think we stayed for not more than three or four days. His Holiness stayed in Nagchu's Shapten monastery. Then from Nagchu we reached Nerdozha, and then from Nerdozha, we reached Sangzhung the next day. When we reached Umathang, the Regent, Reting, came with a large retinue to receive His Holiness. Reting Rinpoche came up to Naglung Karmo, a place very near to U-ma-thang, to receive him. From there the whole retinue came to Umathang and a grand function was organized. Many government officials had come with Reting Rinpoche. His Holiness' Mother had changed dress in Nagchu and when we reached Reting from Umathang, she was wearing a brocade dress with a brown [hat](#). I heard that at Reting, His Holiness' mother was presented a Lacham's dress, the traditional dress of the high aristocratic ladies, but she refused to wear it. This special dress along with the ornaments of turquoise, coral and pearls had been sent from the Trelde Treasury Office (tib.'phral bde las khungs] in Lhasa. But I heard that she did not wear them. His Holiness' father was wearing a brocade dress with a Bokto [hat](#). The great mother too put on a new set of clothes.

Q

Was it presented by Reting Labrang?

A

I don't know who presented this new dress... At Reting a prayer ritual called Küchodpa was performed. It was normally performed on the 15th day of the 4th or 5th month of the Tibetan calendar, but that year it was an exception because of His Holiness' presence. After the traditional ceremony at Reting and after about three or four days staying at Reting, we reached Phenpo Ganden Chökhör. The Sösum Chösum had come to Dromdö and from there we left for Rigya. A special ceremony was held in Rigya which it seems

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was a tradition from the past. At Döguthang, all the Monk and Lay officials had come and the biggest and most special tent called Ugur Mahachemo was pitched there.

Q

Was it a very special and extraordinary tent?

A

This was a very huge tent where the ceremonies were held. Since the tent was very spacious, it could accommodate a large number of people very comfortably during the ceremonies. This tent had inner and outer chambers. His Holiness' room was in the inner chamber and on both sides of the room there were places to take meals. Just below this room, there were the rooms of the Drönyerchemmo and Nendrön facing each other. This Ugar Majachemo had two main circles or fences. The Regent's room was in the outer circle and the Kashag's rooms were on the right and left side of the Regent. Behind the Regent's room were the rooms of the [Yigtsang](#) and Tsipön. Then there was another circle in which the Dzasa, Theiji and the high Lamas of Sedregasum had their room or tents. Close to this circle, there was another circle of tents for the Letsenpa. This line of tents was perhaps the outermost line. I was in the Letsenpa line. Each Minister (Sawangchemmo) had about four or five tents for themselves and their attendants. We the [letsenpa](#) were entitled to two tents each. The ordinary officers and the incarnate lamas of [Sendregasum](#) had their tents behind the Letsenpa. All these tents were in lines and all had their separate routes. The army regiments were stationed at the front of the tent. The Letsenpa's tent was called Tasung. The Rimshi too had this tent but with Yokhor designs. The Sawang's tent was called Tarthangri. It was round shaped. So there were so many varieties of tents for different ranks and offices that it is difficult to remember them all. The [Tsendrön](#) and Nendrön made frequent inspections of all the tents to check if anyone was drinking alcohol or indulging in misconduct.

Q

In your book, the date of His Holiness' arrival in Lhasa is mentioned as October 28, 1939. However, this date does not tally with the date given by Kusangtse. Can you explain the difference? Your dates must have been calculated according to the Western calendar.

A

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My dates are similar to that of the dates mentioned by Richardson and others. I have put the Western dates in brackets after the Tibetan dates.

Q

If your dates confirm to the dates of Richardson, then it must be reliable, because they always kept record of these dates.

A

I used to meet Richardson very often. At that time I composed a song which became very popular and was even sung during the lay official summer picnic (tib. Drungkhor Yarkyid [drung 'khor dbyar skyid]) and the monk official summer picnic (tib. Tsitrong Yarkyid [rtse drung dbyar skyid]).

Q

Was it a political song?

A

No. It wasn't a political song. It was about His Holiness' journey to Lhasa and his subsequent enthronement. I have forgotten it completely now. The tune of the song was based on a Chinese song, but the words were written by me in Tibetan. After the grand ceremonies in Döguthang, His Holiness left for Lhasa. He was enthroned on the 14th day of the first month of the Tibetan calendar in the Iron-Dragon year. His Holiness first went to Ramoche and from there he went straight to [Norbulinga](#). Finally His Holiness went to the Jense Phodrang [tib. spyan bsal pho brang] Palace and there also a ceremony was performed. During this ceremony His Holiness cried a lot.

Q

Why did His Holiness cry so much?

A

I don't know why. His Holiness' mother was called to comfort him and quite him. His Holiness was then only a small child. Someone remarked humorously that the tall bodyguard cried and one of his tear drops wet his monk's lower-dress. Somehow, we too felt sad. Then Reting Rinpoche performed the 'Hair-cutting' ceremony at the [Tsuglagang](#)

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Temple. This ceremony was attended by a huge retinue of government officials in a grand procession. During these processions, the Dzasa rank officials had to wear the Gyaluche dress of Tsarong. It was obvious that everyone recognized Tsarong's dress. [??] During the ceremony, only the Ministers were inside the [Tsuglagang](#). All the other officials of the Dzasa and Theiji ranks and below were not allowed inside.

Q

The following year, on the 14th of the first month of Iron-Dragon year, His Holiness was enthroned, right?

A

During the enthronement ceremony, the Chinese representative was called Wuwu. The Indian representatives were Sir Basil Gould and Rai Bahadur.

Q

Did the Chinese representative come to Lhasa by the sea route [through India]?

A

Yes, he came by the sea route and his assistant officials came through Kham.

Q

Was it Sir Basil Gould's first every visit to Lhasa?

A

I don't know for certain.

Q

Rai Bahadur arrived in Lhasa before Sir Basil Gould. They came a little before the Tibetan New Year. His Holiness was enthroned in the first month of the Iron-Dragon year.

Q

So the same year [the year of the enthronement], the [Khyungram](#) trouble came up, right?

A

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I am not certain about the year. It might be the same year.

Q

How did the [Khyungram](#) trouble start?

A

The [Khyungram](#) trouble came up in the meeting which was held to discuss what rewards should be offered to the Regent for the successful recognition of the incarnation of the Dalai Lama and for bringing him to Lhasa. The ecclesiastical segment in the meeting said that the rewards should not be minor but should be reasonably large. At that time, I was one of the clerks of the Tsondu whose job was to record the meeting's deliberations. Kungö [Lukhangwa](#) came up with the suggestion that such a large reward should not be offered and further said that we have to "pull hair from inside our noses." He did say these words. Then one talk led to another, and in the midst of heated words and sentences, [Khyungram](#) said that "even after drinking the ocean, the thirst cannot be quenched and even after devouring the mountain, one's hunger be satisfied." [Khyungram](#) did say these words but I do not think this statement was directed against anyone in particular.

Q

It seems Khyungram's statement was not a direct accusation against anyone, but Bomtö Chöndze took its meaning literally.

A

Yes, because of this a lot of trouble ensued in the Tsondu.

Q

When [Lukhangwa](#) said that we have to 'pull hair from inside of our noses', he meant to suggest that all the government officials should contribute something individually for the reward to be offered.

A

Yes, he said something like that. The Tsondu was drafting a resolution to reward Reting Rinpoche which stipulated the renovation of Reting monastery and giving a few estates to Reting Rinpoche.

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Q

Was it three or four estates that were to be given to Reting Rinpoche?

A

The estates offered were Bodong Trekhang and Chushul Lhagön. Finally the draft resolution was made. But prior to this a lot of arguments ensued in the meeting. The Tsondu met for two consecutive days.

Q

Who was the most vocal during these meetings?

A

All the Trungtsi were there. They spoke in the meeting very well.

Q

Did they speak for or against the idea of rewarding Reting Rinpoche with a large number of estates?

A

Maybe they spoke against it. From among the lay officials, [Lukhangwa](#) and Kamikhang spoke very vehemently. Finally the meeting was concluded just before sunset and the resolution of the meeting was recorded on the [samtra](#) and the seal of the Tsondu was affixed on the Samtra. I was in charge of the official documents of the Tsondu and Ngawang Thondrup was the calligrapher who took down the dictations and wrote them on paper. So the two of us were told to come to the Tsondu very early the next morning. We came the following day early in the morning and waited for them ready with pen and papers. Suddenly, [Kapshöba](#) came and told us to bring the [samtra](#) to him. [Kapshöba](#) was a Tsipön at that time. We normally have to keep the [samtra](#) on the table. [Kapshöba](#) came and broke open the seal on the Samtra and made some changes on it by rubbing off something and then rewriting on it. While [Kapshöba](#) was busy doing this work, another Tsipön came, but he did not notice what [Kapshöba](#) was doing. Then after sometime, Chömphe! Thupten also came in and saw [Kapshöba](#) fiddling with the [samtra](#). He looked very furious, but didn't say anything. Chömphe! Thupten saw this, but he didn't tell us to

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take anything down on paper. [Kapshöba](#) had already made the changes on the [samtra](#). By this time, most of the members of tshondu had assembled and tea was served followed by [tsamba](#). Then Dombo [Trunyichemmo](#) came and took the [samtra](#) with him. He sat down and started taking his tea and while he was kneading his [tsamba](#) in his bowl, his hands were shaking with rage when he came to know that [Kapshöba](#) had made changes to the [samtra](#). Dombo raised his hand and pointed towards [Kapshöba](#) and shouted, "Hey You, [Kapshöba](#). Your hands need to be cut off. Why did you make changes to the decisions made by the Trungtsi yesterday?" [Kapshöba](#) at once said, "I'm sorry. I'll rub off the changes I made." At this time the whole Tsondu has assembled. This incident I witnessed myself since I was in the Tsondu. The resolution was read out to the Tsondu and it agreed on the resolution unanimously, however nothing was said about changes made by [Kapshöba](#). Later, Ngawang Thondrup and I tried to see what changes had been made by [Kapshöba](#), but we could not make out anything.

Q

Did the resolution of the Tsondu mention that certain additional estates would be added to the reward for Reting Rinpoche, or did it mention that more estates will be considered in the future?

A

I don't remember everything in detail. The Tspön and the [Trunyichemmo](#) knew about it. Chömphe! Thubten became very furious, but did not say anything. We, me and Ngawang Thondrup, saw [Kapshöba](#) making changes on the [samtra](#).

Q

Were Khyungram's remarks "even after drinking the ocean one's thirst cannot be quenched" directed against Rinpoche?

A

Khyungram did make this remark but it wasn't clear whether his remark was directed against Reting Rinpoche. However, Bomtöd Chöndze insisted that it was directed at Reting Rinpoche. Then the Tsondu argued that it was not said against Reting Rinpoche and more arguments followed. But finally the debate came to the conclusion that the remark was directed against Reting Rinpoche.

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Q

I heard that [Khyungram](#) himself did not deny that what he said was against Reting. He even told the Tsondu that they may do whatever they like.

A

He never said it like that. He would never dare to say that.

Q

Khyungram had told Bomtöd Chöndze that he had not said it against Reting Rinpoche, however if you chose to take it that way, you may do so and do to me whatever you want to do.

A

He never said that. Nobody would dare to say such things in the Tsondu.

Q

Actually, Bomtö Chöndze was the Töpa Khenpo of Sera. Before him, one abbot, either of Töpa or [Me](#), was to be appointed, and the monks refused to accept him. Right?

A

Yes. There was such talk about the [Me](#) Abbot. During the time of appointing the new abbot of [Me](#) College, the monks created some trouble.

Q

Was it Bomtö Chöndze who was to be appointed as the new Abbot?

A

I don't know who that abbot was. I heard that the nomination for a new abbot was called and the monks of [Sera Me](#) heard that the [Yigtsang](#) has nominated a candidate that the monks of [Sera Me](#) refused to accept. So some trouble arose on that issue.

Q

What happened at that time?

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A

I don't know exactly what the trouble was about. It was an internal trouble. The [Yigtsang](#) knew about it. Actually the trouble had originated from the abbot of [Me](#) college.

Q

What was the final outcome of the [Khyungram](#) trouble? They could not accuse him for making those statements.

A

Yes. They could not accuse him on those grounds. What happened later, according to the rumors in Lhasa at that time, was that [Bönshö](#) Sawang Chemo's only son, who was a Theiji at the time, had spread the word that the 39 counties of Hor had filed a petition to the government in which they accused [Khyungram](#) of causing them hardships and harassing the people of that area.

Q

I heard that the petition was made by [Kapshöba](#). Who instigated them?

A

I heard that it was not [Kapshöba](#) himself, but his secretary who did it. But I am not sure how far that is true. Then the case was investigated, and during the investigation, [Khyungram](#) prepared a petition to [Sendregasum](#). This is quite true. So, [Khyungram](#) went to Bonshö [Sawangchemmo](#) and requested him to make corrections on his draft petition, which Bonshö flatly declined. In the end Gajan Tempa made the corrections.

Q

What was Gajan Tempa that time?

A

Gajan Tempa was related to [Khyungram](#). He did not have any official rank at that time. He was living as an ordinary citizen. He was a very intelligent person. He made the corrections on Khyungram's draft petition. As a result, when Khyungram's house was sealed by the government, the petition came into the hands of the officers who came to

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seal the house. When they looked at the petition, they saw the corrections on it. When it was said that the corrections were done by Bonshö, he denied having made any corrections. In the end Gajan Tempa was exiled to Sangnga Chötsho on the charge that he made those corrections. [Khyungram](#) was sent to Yuthok. He was lashed.

Q

I heard that he refused to appear before the investigation team?

A

I don't know about it. However, I remember seeing him being taken by soldiers. He was taken on foot from the [Barkor](#) during the day time. He had to go on foot from Odöshinga to Reting with army escorts. Then he was given his demotion. His house was sealed, his 'hair-knot' was taken down and was made to ride on an ox. Many people saw him being taken under custody from the [Shöl](#) Office. He was a Theiji and quite advanced in age at that time. It was ironic because he was among the main people who requested Reting Rinpoche not to resign from the Regency. However, unfortunately due to some personal folly it happened like that. However I am just telling you what I heard, and it is difficult to tell in detail about these events.

Q

Was the [Khyungram](#) incident the saddest incident during the Regency of Reting?

A

It was the saddest incident.