

## Interview H0223: with Depa Lang [tib. sde pa glang], (India, 1983) : Part No. 1 of 1

*The interview tells how his late uncle Champa Chösang was in charge of the Trapchi Leygung at the time of Kujar and how he became the Drönyerchemmo and then the Simpön Khenpo of the Dalai Lama. The subject also tells about being appointed as the Serjog Estate Manager by the Kashag and how he worked in the Tibetan Government's Trade Mission and also the Custom Office in Gyantse. The subject discusses the work of the custom's office and also tells about the Panchen Lama who fled to China and the problem he had about returning to Tibet.*

Q

During most of time, you stayed in Lhasa, right?

A

Yes, when I was young, I stayed in Lhasa till about the age 25. I lived in the house called Gönseshar [tib dgon gseb shar].

Q

This was near our house, right?

A

Yes. Before that we used to live in the house in the teaching grove (tib. [chöra](#) [tib. chos ra]).

Q

That was the [chöra](#) of Tengyeling [tib. bstan rgyas gling], right?

A

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Yes. Later Demo Rinpoche asked for Gönseshar and I was there when the house was built and we moved to Gönseshar after the house was built.

Q

I didn't know that we were kind of related to each other. When you were 25 years old and staying in Lhasa, was the former Dalai Lama alive?

A

He had already passed away for the benefit of others [tib. dgongs pa gzhan don du gshegs] when I was 16 years old.

Q

So this must be at the time of the Regent Reting, right?

A

Yes.

Q

Do you remember any thing about the troubles of [Trimön](#) [tib. khri smon] and [Lungshar](#)?

A

After [Lungshar](#) started doing things, I heard a little bit about how the 13th Dalai Lama had instructed [Lungshar](#) about doing reforms and how after the Dalai Lama passed away, his personal attendant and favorite, Kujar [Künphel](#) la [tib. sku bcar kun 'phel lags] and [Lungshar](#) came to misfortune one after another.

Q

At that time, [Trimön](#) was there, right?

A

Yes.

Q

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If you stayed in Gönseshar, at that time was there was a monk official called Kongtrugla [tib. kong phrug lags]?

A

There was a monk official called Lokela [tib. blo skal lags] who was our neighbor.

Q

He used to live in Tengyeling.

A

Probably, he belonged to Tengyeling.

Q

This is correct. But did Kongtrugla stay somewhere near by?

A

I don't have any idea about that, but Lokela also came to misfortune along with Tengyeling.

Q

Yes, it was related to Chubsang [tib. [chu](#) bzang], right?

A

Yes.

Q

Do you remember about how Kujar came to misfortune?

A

Yes, I remember that. At that time, I was in Lhasa.

Q

How did that happen? I heard that the Kujar's father and Kujar met when they were banished [their paths crossed as they were being taken out of Lhasa].

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A

When Kujar was building the house in [Trapchi](#), our late Kungö was the one in charge of building the house [tib. ar po'i do dam].

Q

Who do you mean by your late Kungö?

A

My maternal uncle Champa Chösang [tib. byams pa chos bzang]. He was the personal attendant of the Dalai Lama who was in charge of clothes. His post was called Simpön Khenpo [tib. gzim dpon mkhan po]. We were in the same monk's household [tib [shag](#) tshang]. In the beginning, he was the one in charge of the construction of the Power Station in [Trapchi](#) [tib. grwa bzhi] when the main one in charge was Kujar.

Q

Later, there was Tsarong there, right?

A

Yes.

Q

He was the Simpön Khenpo living in [Shöl](#) [tib. zhol] and he was among the search party for the Dalai Lama, right?

A

No. The one in the search party was called Lobsang Tsewang [tib. blo bzang tshe dbang].

Q

Did he serve the Dalai Lama after he came to Lhasa?

A

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No, he didn't. It was after a while when [Taktra](#) became the Regent that he worked as the Gyantse Palchö [tib. rgyal rtse dpal chos] and Noryön [tib. nor yon] of [Tashilhunpo](#).

Q

After that, he became the Simpön Khenpo, right?

A

No, he became the Drönyerchemmo.

Q

Then he became the Simpön Khenpo, right?

A

Yes.

Q

Was this the Simpön Khenpo who taught the Dalai Lama the Tibetan alphabet?

A

Yes. I heard that he taught him a little bit of the alphabet. Our late [lord](#) was kind of a learned person and the Dalai Lama also liked him.

Q

Later, he got a stroke and resigned and another Simpön Khenpo was appointed, right?

A

Yes.

Q

Do you remember anything about talking with your late Kungö regarding the trouble between Reting and [Taktra](#)?

A

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This happened later on and at that time I was not in Lhasa but in [Tsang](#) [tib. gtsang] so I don't have much to tell you about that. After Reting died, when the Sera war took place, I was in Lhasa for a short period.

Q

Were you in Lhasa then?

A

I was in Lhasa for short period. Otherwise, I stayed in [Tsang](#).

Q

What did you hear about the trouble between Reting and [Taktra](#)?

A

I don't have much to tell you about how the trouble started, but later it became like that.

Q

Where did you stay in [Tsang](#)?

A

I stayed in Gyantse.

Q

At that time, the British were in Gyantse, right?

A

Yes.

Q

Were there any problems from the British?

A

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Yes. Since the trade between the British and Tibet [tib. dbyin bod tshong lam] was opened, the Tibetan Government set up a Trade Mission [tib. tshong don las khungs] in Gyantse. It was also called Custom Office [tib. 'gag sgo'i do dam].

Q

What was the duty of this office?

A

The duty of the Custom Office was to supply the necessities for the British Military and Civil officers who were staying in Gyantse. They had to sell them firewood, hay, sheep and goats. The Custom Office would collect English [Indian] rupees for selling that stuff and this money was used for buying the electric equipment for the [Trapchi](#) Office. [tib. glog 'phrul khang]

Q

The British didn't pay with Tibetan currency, right?

A

Yes, whatever they paid for was with British [Indian] rupees.

Q

You didn't get much money for that, right?

A

We got a large amount. About 300,000-400,000 rupees per year.

Q

Did you get that much?

A

Yes.

Q

Were there many British there then?

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A

There were over 200 people.

Q

This was one of the major duties of the Custom Office, right?

A

Yes.

Q

Did they have to deal with and supervise the trade?

A

A fourth rank monk official, a Khenjung from the government, and the monk official Gyantse Palchö were the staff officers. And there was also a position called Serphün Lendzin [tib. ser phun las 'dzin]. I was from the Serjog [tib. ser lcog] Estate and I had another partner who was from Phüntsoling [tib. phun tshogs gling]. These two were approved by the Kashag after the plan was submitted to them and these officials were in charge of supplying the necessities to the British. I worked on that for about 7 years.

Q

At the time of the previous Dalai Lama, the previous Panchen Lama had a problem and had to go to China and there were a lot of problems regarding whether or not he could come back to Tibet, right?

A

Yes.

Q

At that time, Kachen [tib. bka' chen] Rimpoche and Tingkye [tib. gting skyes] Rimpoche and the [Trunyichemmo](#) of [Tashilhunpo](#) stayed in Lhasa and talked with the Tibetan Government, right?

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A

Yes.

Q

I heard that at that time the Panchen Lama sent many children to China to study. Do you have anything to tell me about this?

A

At that time there weren't many children. There were just few children who went down to China after the Panchen Lama left. Probably, they didn't send any children especially. If they had sent children, I might have known a little bit because at that time we were managing an estate called Drakhü [tib. brag khud] Estate that belonged to [Tashilhunpo](#). So I would have known what happened in [Tashilhunpo](#). I knew that [Tashilhunpo](#) sent the first and second group of people to welcome back the Panchen Lama. When the former Panchen Lama was staying in Tibet, whatever the cause of the quarrel, the Panchen Lama had to go to China.

Then after he went down to China, [Tashilhunpo](#) asked [the Tibetan Government] for permission for the Panchen Lama to come back and they sent an invitation. I remember that the people going to receive the Panchen Lama were sent according to land tax units (gang and [dön](#)).

Q

At that time, the Tibetan Government did not allow the Chinese bodyguard soldiers [accompanying the Panchen Lama) to enter Tibet along with the Panchen Lama, right?

A

Probably, in the beginning, they didn't have the plan [to take the soldiers]. But I heard that probably people caused trouble in between. I heard that the Panchen Lama planned to buy some fashionable things [tib. dpe gsar] that were not in Tibet like military trumpets and offer them to the government as a gift, but when the military trumpets reached the border those things were checked out as they [the government] was suspicious.

Q

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How could there be people checking the things that belonged to the Panchen Lama? Did the government give an order?

A

I heard that they got checked. I think probably this was a kind of [sign] that there would be misfortune [tib. gegs dbang] all over Tibet. The Dalai Lama and the Panchen Lama didn't get along well.

Q

When the estates of Tengyeling were taken by the government (tib. tenla shungchö [bstan bla gzhung chod]), the government [income] sort of doubled in size. All of the estates that belonged to the Agriculture Office [tib. so nam las khungs] came from tenla shungchö. There were so many estates that belonged to the [Tseja](#) and the [Laja](#) offices. Later, Reting Labrang belonged to the government, but Tenla Shungchö was two times larger than Reting. It was much more than the [income of] the [Trapchi](#) Leygung. Did the government give a kind of special order? What I heard was that the Panchen Lama sent a kind of notice letter [tib. brda yig] which many government officials disliked. At that time, the Regent Reting was putting 100% pressure on inviting the Panchen Lama back to Tibet. Therefore, the Three Big Monastic Seats guaranteed that even if the Panchen Lama would bring the [Chinese] soldiers [with him], these bodyguard soldiers would go back after staying for only a short time in Shigatse. So the government told the Panchen Lama to come back. Do you have anything to tell me about this?

A

I knew about sending the invitation and those things, I just heard that the cause of the hindrance [tib. dgag rkyen] was because their talks couldn't get finalized [tib. bka' mol sne ma 'phrod pa]. The people who went to receive the Panchen Lama were also delayed in China for couple of years.

Q

Finally, the Panchen Lama passed away for the benefit of others and his remains was brought back, right?

A

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Yes.

Q

It was said that regarding the matter of bringing back the remains, the officials didn't get along well and some of them said that they had brought up the remains like taking it away by force or like stealing it, right?

A

Yes.

Q

What really happened at that time?

A

At that time, I heard that the main thing was that all the (monastic) [tratsang](#) (colleges) and [khamtsen](#) (residence halls) of [Tashilhunpo](#) Monastery unanimously requested bringing his remains back. I heard that the people were glad and were saying that we got the time to see the remains of the Panchen Lama.

Q

How about the officials of Labrang?

A

Yes. All of the officials also said that.

Q

Where were you staying when this Panchen Lama came to Tibet?

A

I was in Gyantse.

Q

How did this Panchen Lama come up? There were three main candidates, one from Pagshö [tib. dpa' shod] and another, right?

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A

Yes.

Q

At that time, didn't they say that the candidate born in Pagshö was the real one?

A

I heard that there were three candidates and from down there [the Panchen's officials in China] said strongly that the present Panchen Lama was the real one and I also heard that the divination done by the Dalai Lama also approved it.

Q

When the communists came, you were in Gyantse, right?

A

Yes.

Q

How did the communist come? Please tell me in detail? They came from Kham, right?

A

Yes. It was probably in 1947 when they came to the border.

Q

This was the time of the Communist Long March [tib. [gung](#) phran rgyang skyod]. [He is incorrect]

A

In 1949, Lhalu [tib. lha klu], the Governor of Kham, the Doji, finished his term and handed it over to Ngabö. After Lhalu came up [toward Lhasa], I heard that he was told to go back again and his return was kind of delayed. Then the Chinese arrived at Chamdo in 1949 [actually 1950] and the Dalai Lama went to [Yadong](#) probably in the 11th month.

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Q

When the communist came up, did they come up while making war?

A

Probably, sometimes they made a little war and most of the time they made war at some part of the border where the Shigatse Regiment was stationed.

Q

The Depön was Muja [tib. [mu](#) bya], right?

A

I heard that there was a Rupön or a Gyagpön who fought a little bit.

Q

It was the Rupön Bükhang [tib sbud khang], right?

A

Yes. Otherwise they came up like driven by karmic effect [tib. las kyis ded pa] and they didn't make much war while coming up.

Q

During the old and new Doji, they caused the local subjects (miser) to have a hard time. I heard that probably because of that, the militia in Kham didn't do much when the communist came up. How did that happen?

A

According to what the soldiers who went down there said, there weren't many taxes imposed in Kham like in the central and western, Ütshang [tib. dbus gtsang] Tibet. There wasn't even one fourth of the taxes that were imposed in the [Ütsang](#). But when the Tibetan Regiments arrived in Kham one after another, the Khambas had to [do corvée] work for the taxes. For example, I stayed in Gyantse. The areas within the mountain pass Phari Dangla [tib. phag ri dang la] belonged to Gyantse Dzong and it was the crossroads of five roads. The [miser](#) had to send the horse and pack animal corvée to Rimpung [tib.

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rin spungs], down to Panam [tib. pa snam] and up to Phari and to Wangden [tib. dbang ldan] and also to Nangkarste [tib snang dkar rtse]. But in the Kham area there hadn't been much taxes and when the soldiers came they imposed new kind taxes, so they were not to blamed. They became kind of intolerable.

Q

Not really tolerable, I heard that when the Chinese told the Khambas, "From now, your stone cap is removed. You don't need to send the horse corvée and work for the taxes and you, the poor [miser](#), have stood up and there is no [lord](#) [tib dpon po]." So the [miser](#) thought that was true. Especially in the Chinese territories like Derge [tib sde dge], they also slightly acted like a guide for the Chinese and showed them the roads, right?

A

Yes, I heard that also. The late [rupön](#) of the [Chadang](#) [tib. cha dang] Regiment died in Darjeeling.

Q

Who was that [rupön](#)?

A

He was the hunchbacked Rupön. He said that he had fought with the Chinese three times in battle.

Q

I heard that he was arrested and beaten by the Chinese and became a hunchback.

A

Yes. He said in the past when we made the war, we could just crawl ahead and seize the territory. But we didn't have any power to seize the territory. He said, "When the Chinese reached Chamdo, I got the order that the cannon regiment should go to Kham as soon as possible so we went to the place called Sangan [tib. sa ngan] in Kham day and night because he thought that place was an important strategic place. I had confidence, but when we got there, it was a Tuesday and I checked the astrology about the situation of the enemy (tib. drakar [tib. dgra skar]) and did some worship and made offerings to the

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protective deities. At that time, a monkey came out from the forest and some of the people said that we should shoot it and some said we should not. We should just watch from where it came and where it went. Then it just appeared that the monkey went from the higher place to a lower one and then it was lost."

Then all of them were wondering about the monkey and sent two riders as sentries one day ahead of the others to make a survey. They told them, "We will seize the mountain tops [tib. rtse ri] and try to hold the Chinese here." After that, the riders met a woman who looked familiar. She was coming up while doing her handwork and she asked them, "Where are you going? They told her, "We are going to survey whether the Chinese are coming or not. Do you have anything to say about this? She told them, "Perhaps the Chinese had reached up there. You just keep on going down." When the riders went down, they returned back and thought of asking the woman again. By that time, the woman appeared to go down from the higher place to the lower and she was lost. Then the two of them returned back and they were wondering who was the woman and searched for her everywhere, but they didn't find her. On the next day, they knew that they [Chinese] were shooting from up there. And there wasn't any way to shoot back.

Q

They [Chinese] had already got to the top, right?

A

Yes. The woman seemed to be the miracle sent by the protector deities and she should have told us not to go down. They were supposed to face downwards and block the Chinese, but since they got shot from behind, they didn't have anything to do except to run away and they didn't get the chance to fire a single shot. He said, "I think this was because the protective deity [Nechung](#) [tib. gnas chung] didn't like it [the government policy about killing Lamas] Anyway, it happened like this. We went to make war, but at that time, we didn't get the chance to fight." He also said, "I fought in the war in 1959, but I could not make a war in which I was satisfied." When we sought the advice from him, he used to tell us such stories.

Q

Are there soldiers who had been to Kham and joined the Sera war?

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A

I think there are some soldiers of the [Trapchi](#) Regiment and the Gyantse Regiment.

Q

Who are they?

A

There were some Gyantse soldiers present when they made the war against Sera. I will try to find someone. There isn't anybody in Darjeeling.

Q

When the soldiers [Panchen's bodyguards] who were mixed with the People's Liberation Army came to Shigatse, they were sent to the estates, right?

A

Yes, they were sent to the estates. They sent soldiers who were trustworthy to [Je Jigme](#) [tib. ce 'jigs med] and they also sent a soldier called Shang Tobgye [ch. shang tib. stobs rgyas] [shang is a name of the title] with his wife and two other soldiers to the Dragü Estate which I had managed.

Q

Did they send the soldiers to their own serf owners [tib. mi bdag]?

A

Not really serf owners. They were just sent to the estates that belonged to [Tashilhunpo](#) to be estate managers. This was said to be how they took care of those soldiers who worked hard and came up.

Q

The estates already had managers, right?

A

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At one time, there were government officials like Kyabying [tib. skyabs dbyings] who were in charge of [Tashilhunpo](#) Labrang. The estates managed by those government officials had to be handed over to the Labrang and the soldiers were sent as their replacement.

Q

All of the estates were handed over to the Labrang, right?

A

Yes.

Q

Those were the soldiers among the People's Liberation Army, right?

A

Yes.

Q

Altogether, how many of them were there?

A

Probably, there were about 100 of them who were the older ones among the bodyguards.

Q

What did they do with the younger ones?

A

They were kept in the regiment. Those soldiers had the title Shang [tib. shang] and they were called Shang Thubten [tib. thub bstan] and so on.

Q

Those were the estates taken over [by the Tibetan government] during the former Dalai Lama and managed by Kyabying, right?

A

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Yes. Kyabying and his staff had been sent by the government.

Q

Did the government take over some monastic estates from [Tashilhunpo](#) Labrang?

A

Yes. Gyantse's Dragü Estate, Lhan Estate and Jei [tib. bzhad] Estate were taken over. These were the main estates. Lhan Estate had 16 branch estates and Gyantse Dragü had 13 branch estates and Jei Estate was bigger than those two. At one time, those estates were managed by the Tibetan Government. Later, the estates were given to the officials of Khyabying for their salary estate [tib. thab gzhis]. After the Labrang took over the estates, it was managed by the Labrang itself.

Q

At that time, did the government retire Kyabying?

A

Yes. Kyabying resigned. Finally, except for the Senior and Junior Officials in the Labrang (tib. [dechang](#) dreshön [tib. lde 'chang bgres gzhon]) all of the government officials resigned.