

*TIBET UNDER CHINESE COMMUNIST RULE*

A COMPILATION OF REFUGEE STATEMENTS 1958-1975

A SERIES OF “EXPERT ON TIBET” PROGRAMS

ON

RADIO FREE ASIA

TIBETAN SERVICE

BY

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*Tibet Under Chinese Communist Rule* is a collection of twenty-seven Tibetan refugee statements published by the Information and Publicity Office of His Holiness the Dalai Lama in 1976. At that time Tibet was closed to the outside world and Chinese propaganda was mostly unchallenged in portraying Tibet as having abolished the former system of feudal serfdom and having achieved democratic reforms and socialist transformation as well as self-rule within the Tibet Autonomous Region. Tibetans were portrayed as happy with the results of their liberation by the Chinese Communist Party and satisfied with their lives under Chinese rule. The contrary accounts of the few Tibetan refugees who managed to escape at that time were generally dismissed as most likely exaggerated due to an assumed bias and their extreme contrast with the version of reality presented by the Chinese and their Tibetan spokespersons. The publication of these very credible Tibetan refugee statements challenged the Chinese version of reality within Tibet and began the shift in international opinion away from the claims of Chinese propaganda and toward the facts as revealed by Tibetan eyewitnesses. As such, the publication of this collection of refugee accounts was an important event in the history of Tibetan exile politics and the international perception of the Tibet issue.

The following is a short synopsis of the accounts. A few statements that contained little information were omitted while the most detailed accounts received greater emphasis.

Dorje Tsering

Dorje Tsering, a farmer and herder from Nangra, Amdo, reached exile in India in 1958. He says that when the Chinese entered Nangra and Hormokha on 25 September 1949, he and many of the local Tibetans resisted, proclaiming that Tibet was a separate and independent country. They said that they had lived in their own country for centuries and had no need for reforms to their society, especially reforms brought by foreigners. A Chinese spokesperson replied that the aim of the CCP was to control not only all of Tibet but to expand the communist revolution to the whole world; therefore, two small villages in eastern Tibet could not escape the communists' reforms. There ensued a standoff, with the Tibetans resisting the Chinese entry into their area and the societal changes they intended, while the Chinese continued to try to impose their authority.

The situation deteriorated until December 1949 when the people of Nangra and Hormokha decided that they had no option but to fight against the Chinese. They chose as their leaders Pon Wangchen of Nangra and Pon Choeje of Hormokha. They had about 6,000 fighters

and a considerable quantity of arms and ammunition. Their first battle with an estimated 5,000 Chinese PLA troops lasted for 15 days and resulted in 25 Tibetans and an estimated 60 Chinese being killed. The Chinese soon sent reinforcements from Rebkong. The next battle lasted for a month and resulted in the deaths of 40 Tibetans and an estimated 150 Chinese. In mid-1950 another 2,000 Chinese arrived and the ensuing battle lasted for two months in which 90 Tibetans and about 200 Chinese were killed. By 1951 there were an estimated 30,000 Chinese troops in Nangra, and in a battle lasting for three months 150 Tibetans and 200 Chinese died. In Hormokha, in a battle in February 1951, 350 Tibetans and 500 Chinese were killed and the Chinese gained control of the area. All estimates of deaths are those of the author. Presumably he was better informed about Tibetan casualties than those of the Chinese.

The deaths of so many local men caused many of the Tibetans, especially the women, to plead to the fighters to surrender to the Chinese in order to avoid further bloodshed. The fighters then decided to abandon their defense of the local villages and continue their fight from the surrounding mountains. During this time the Chinese continually sent Tibetan envoys to the resisters asking them to surrender, saying that they had no chance against superior Chinese numbers and promising that there would be no punishment for their resistance. However, the fighters refused to surrender since they could not accept the loss of their independence to outsiders. They thus vowed to fight until the end.

Due to their fierce resistance the Chinese began to call the Tibetan area of Nangra and Hormokha "Little Taiwan." Dorje Tsering says that there were indeed some former Koumintang refugees hiding in the area, and the Chinese Communists tended to attribute Tibetan resistance there to the intrigues of the KMT, but that the real reason for Tibetan resistance was to protect the Tibetan homeland from outside Chinese control. In April 1952 the Chinese sent a high-level official from Beijing who made a speech in which he said that the local Tibetans had resisted for three years and had killed many Chinese soldiers. Since they were a minority nationality, the PLA had made 18 separate attempts to negotiate with them. Nevertheless, they had continued to resist and therefore Chairman Mao had decided to send 32,000 additional troops to finally crush all resistance in the area. The promised PLA troops, in four divisions, were already in the vicinity and they attacked the very next day from all directions and soon surrounded the whole area.

Even against these hopeless odds some of the Tibetan fighters refused to surrender, since they could not accept the loss of their freedom and independence. However, they were soon separated into smaller and smaller groups and surrounded by Chinese troops. Many on both sides were killed. Finally, Dorje Tsering and a few others were surrounded on a high mountain for a month in freezing cold without food or firewood. The Chinese sent Lama Shabdung Karpo and Serti Rinpoche to convince the last 80 Tibetans to surrender. They were offered amnesty by the

Chinese even though they had resisted for more than two years and had killed many Chinese soldiers. This at last persuaded them to surrender.

The Chinese allowed the last of the resistance fighters to return to their homes as they had promised. Pon Wangchen of Nangra was even taken to Beijing to meet Mao, who praised him for his brave resistance and then made him head of the Nangra village government. The CCP's lenient treatment of the local resistance in Nangra and Hormokha indicates that they still thought that Tibetan resistance would not be widespread and could be overcome by the CCP's benevolent minority nationality policies. The Chinese did not persecute those Tibetans who had resisted, nor did they implement any of their promised reforms for a few years. However, in 1954 they began what they called Democratic Reforms, which involved the persecution of those of the upper classes who were identified as exploiters as well as monks and lamas, all of whom were called parasites. Democratic Reforms involved *thamzing* sessions in which Tibetans were required to denounce those whom the Chinese identified as exploiters or "enemies of the people." Dorje Tsering said that those Tibetans who were subjected to *thamzing* were sometimes beaten to death, summarily executed, or sentenced to prison or labor camps.

Many who had resisted in 1949-52 were also identified as opponents. Dorje Tsering knew that his past history of resistance made him a suspect in the eyes of the Chinese and that his arrest was probably imminent. He decided to escape to Lhasa where he knew that the Chinese had so far not begun any of their reforms. He managed to escape and reached Lhasa in October 1954. He stayed in Lhasa until 1958 under the name of Rinzin, until he was informed that the Chinese were looking for him. He then left for India.

Dorje Tsering's story and that of the Tibetan resistance in Nangra reveals that Chinese promises to Tibetans of benevolent treatment under their minority nationalities policies applied only to those who were not identified as class enemies and who did not oppose the Chinese in any way. The Chinese imagined that the Tibetan resistance in Nangra was due to the intrigues of remnant KMT agents and would disappear once the local Tibetans gained trust in the CCP. However, the CCP betrayed that trust by their so-called democratic reforms that persecuted many Tibetans, including revered lamas and monks, and spared only the lowest classes and those most loyal and subservient to the Chinese regime.

### Gyakar Gompo Namgyal

Gyakar Gompo Namgyal was a well-known Khampa resistance leader. He was born in Derge in 1929 and became the steward of the king of Derge. He was one of the earliest resistance leaders and fighters in Kham. He tells of the arrival of the Chinese in Derge in 1950 when they were preparing for the invasion of Chamdo later that year. In contrast to the claims of the Chinese themselves and of many Tibetans who say that the Chinese policy at that time was to

treat the Tibetans very well, Gompo Namgyal says that even at this time some Tibetans were arrested and imprisoned and some revered lamas were subjected to indignities. Sometime later, presumably after the beginning of Democratic Reforms in 1956, the Chinese instituted new rules which included the confiscation of the possessions of the relatively wealthy, forced labor on Chinese projects, sending of young Tibetans to schools in China, and mutual criticisms and denunciations in struggle sessions, or thamzing.

In 1956, after the inauguration in Lhasa of the Preparatory Committee for the Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR), leaders of the 21 districts of the Chamdo area were summoned by the Chinese for a meeting. The Chamdo area had been until that time administered by the Chamdo Liberation Committee as a separate political district, based upon its having been part of the former Chinese proclaimed province of Sikang resulting from the Chinese invasion of Kham in response to the British invasion of Tibet in 1904. Although theoretically a separate autonomous district under the administration of local Tibetans, it was actually controlled by the PLA. Now, however, after the creation of the Preparatory Committee for the Tibet Autonomous Region in Lhasa, it was designated as part of the future TAR. However, despite the Chinese policy of not yet instituting any socialist reforms in the TAR, the local Chinese cadres tried to convince the Tibetans to voluntarily request that Democratic Reforms be immediately begun in the Chamdo area.

Tibetan representatives from Jomda Dzong, Gonjo, and Derge, including Gompo Namgyal, were also at this meeting. Jomda Dzong and Gonjo were west of the Dri Chu and thus part of the Chamdo district of the future TAR, but were traditionally part of the kingdom of Derge. The Tibetans were told that the TAR would not begin Democratic Reforms but that the Panchen Lama was in favor of beginning reforms immediately; therefore, the Chamdo region could decide for itself what to do. This situation seems to reflect the competition between the two main PLA factions in Tibet, one of which was supporting the Panchen Lama.

The Tibetans at the meeting were divided into three different viewpoints. One group wanted reforms only at the same time as the TAR. Another group, mostly from Lhodzong, Shotarsho Sum, and Hortso Tatukpon, said that they had no objection to reforms being introduced immediately. The largest group, including those from Chamdo, Dragyab, Gonjo, Jomda Dzong, Markham, and Derge, said that they did not want any reforms at all. The meeting was ended by a Chinese PLA general who said that it had been decided to begin reforms immediately as desired by the Panchen Lama. What this really meant was that it had been decided by the Chinese.

Another meeting was called in Jomda Dzong, which was formerly a district of Derge. Gompo Namgyal was also at that meeting where the local Tibetans were told that they would join the Chamdo district in beginning Democratic Reforms immediately. They protested, saying

that they were aware of the suffering in Amdo where reforms had begun two years previously and that they did not want the same results. However, large numbers of Chinese troops soon arrived and surrounded the meeting place, compelling the local Tibetans to pretend to agree to begin the reforms. However, they waited until the Chinese troops relaxed their vigilance and then took the opportunity to escape in the night. Many of them then took up arms in resistance against the Chinese. In the face of this Tibetan opposition the Chinese decided to abandon their plans to begin reforms in the Chamdo district.

In early 1957 Gompo Namgyal and some of the resistance leaders from west of the Dri Chu were persuaded by messages from the Dalai Lama and from the queen of Derge to abandon their resistance. They were promised amnesty and told that Democratic Reforms had been postponed for five years in the TAR or for as long as they themselves decided. They were required to undergo training and to study textbooks on socialism. They were taught to oppose religion and the influence of lamas, traditional leaders, and counterrevolutionaries. The last category included anyone who opposed the Chinese. They were also required to organize Tibetan labor for Chinese projects, including cutting forests, building barracks for Chinese troops, and carrying baggage for the Chinese, and to collect traditional taxes, which were now paid to the Chinese.

During this time, Tibetan resistance east of the Dri Chu, where reforms had already begun, had continued and Tibetan refugees had begun to flee to the west. Chinese treatment of the local Tibetans had also worsened. In late 1957 Gompo Namgyal and other leaders of Jomdo therefore decided to resume their resistance. He led large resistance forces and engaged in many battles with the Chinese until 1960 when he and a few of his family and followers finally escaped to India.

Gyakar Gompo Namgyal's story reveals that the Chinese underestimated Tibetan resistance to their reforms and to their very presence in Tibet. The Chinese had been taught that Tibet had always been a part of China and therefore they thought that Tibetans already accepted the legitimacy of Chinese control over Tibet. They anticipated that there would be some Tibetan resistance but believed that it could be defused with patient education on CCP nationality policies. However, they found that most Tibetans were fundamentally opposed to Chinese control over Tibet.

#### Tashi Palden

Tashi Palden was born in Serdrag, Dragyab, Kham. In 1958 he was a monk in the Upper Tantric College at Ramoche in Lhasa. In October 1958 he began a three year meditational retreat (*tsam*) in the Tara Tsamkhang, which was on the top floor of the temple at the rear. He says that

from there he could see everything that happened shortly thereafter during the uprising in March 1959.

He says that the demonstrations at the Norbulingka and elsewhere in Lhasa in March were because of what Tibetans thought were Chinese threats to the safety of the Dalai Lama but also because of rumors that the Chushi Gangdruk resistance forces were approaching Lhasa and would soon drive the Chinese out. On March 17 some Ramoche monks returned from the Norbulingka, where they had been holding special prayers, and reported that the Dalai Lama had already fled Lhasa. On the 19<sup>th</sup> many gunshots were heard. Fifty Ramoche monks vowed to defend their monastery and armed themselves with whatever weapons they could find, including knives, axes, and even a few guns. They even made an unsuccessful attempt to raid the nearby Zimbook house, which was occupied by the Chinese, in order to steal more weapons. Some Tibetan policemen who were better armed also fired their weapons at the Zimbook house.

On the 21<sup>st</sup> the Ramoche was damaged by Chinese artillery fire and then attacked by Chinese troops. Several monks were killed, the Ramoche was set on fire, and the remaining monks were forced to surrender or flee. Tashi Palden managed to escape in the night to the nearby Tsomoling monastery. The next day the Chinese made an announcement by loudspeaker that the Norbulingka, the Potala, and Ramoche had all been captured and that the Tibetans holding out in the Jokhang should surrender so that it would not be damaged or destroyed. He and a few other Ramoche monks went back to the Ramoche to help put out fires. They took ceremonial scarves in hand with the intention to surrender to the Chinese. He saw that the streets were filled with the bodies of dead and dying Tibetans. They and many other of the surviving Ramoche monks surrendered to the Chinese at the Ramoche that day. They were told that they had killed an important Chinese general during their attack on the Zimbook house, but he thought it more likely that it was the firing by the Tibetan police that had killed him.

The Ramoche monks were taken to the Zimbook house. They were given wheelbarrows and made to collect about 40 dead bodies nearby. Then they and many others were marched to the Norbulingka where hundreds of Tibetans were detained. Along the way they saw many dead Tibetan bodies. They were told by a Chinese officer to look at their precious Potala, which now had Chinese flags flying from the top. The Chinese officer said, your precious Potala now belongs to us. At the Norbulingka they collected and burned all the dead bodies, which took three days. The Tibetan detainees were sorted out according to their former roles and positions. Government officials and Tibetan Army soldiers were taken away immediately. The rest were lectured by a Chinese officer who told them that they should not have opposed the Chinese, who had come there to liberate them, and that they had as much chance of getting their independence as seeing the sun rise in the west. Then Tashi Palden was told that he along with many others would be sent to work on a hydroelectric project east of Lhasa named Nachen Trang.

Tashi Palden reports that there were 3,700 Tibetan prisoners in his group at Nachen Trang, guarded by 500 Chinese soldiers. All the prisoners were men but there were also some women in hired labor camps already working there. The prisoners had no possessions except the clothes they had on when they were arrested. Their work was to dig out a channel adjacent to the river and to carry earth and stones to the dam construction site. At first the food was sufficient due to all the food supplies confiscated from the upper classes of Lhasa. However, food rations soon became little more than a handful of *tsampa* a day. They had to work all day and then attend propaganda meetings in the evening. They were questioned about their roles in the uprising and about who was responsible for it. Some learned to say that the reactionaries were responsible for the revolt, which was what they thought the Chinese wanted to hear, but most said that they were too confused to know what really had happened.

One day a former Gyumey monastery monk was brought before them to tell about how he had tried to join the Chushi Gangdruk in Lhoka but had been caught along the way. He was at first beaten but then decided to confess everything, after which he was congratulated and released due to his correct attitude in confessing. He was then sent to lecture to other Tibetans about the Chinese policy of leniency for confession as opposed to severity for opposition. The Gyumey monk was obviously better off and especially better fed than the prisoners so most of them decided to confess their attitudes toward the Chinese and anything they had done to oppose them.

One day some 25 former monks, including Tashi Palden were selected by the Chinese and then taken to Lhasa. They were given good monks' robes to wear and then taken to the ruins of Kundeling monastery where there was a Chinese film crew set up ready to film them. They were handed guns and made to enact mock battles ending with some pretending to be dead while others were shown emerging from the ruins of the monastery to surrender their weapons. They were told to participate realistically and threatened with punishment if they did not do so. They were also instructed to never tell anyone that they had been involved in the propaganda film. A few days later at Nachen Trang they were shown the same film that they were in, which the Chinese said proved that the revolt was caused by the reactionaries and that monks were involved in it. Everyone at Nachen Trang knew that the film was false propaganda, especially the monks who had participated in it, but this did not matter to the Chinese, who showed the film all over Tibet and in their international propaganda.

Prisoners were divided into companies of 100 and subdivided into groups of 25. Each group had a leader and an assistant leader chosen by the prisoners themselves. The group leaders were responsible for ensuring that everybody in the group worked strenuously without any rest. Each prisoner was required to carry at least 75 baskets of earth each day for varying distances. In the evening each group leader had to report to a Chinese supervisor how many baskets were carried that day. The best performing groups were praised while the worst performing were

punished with increased work or reduced food rations. Competition was thus set up between groups. Tashi Palden says that none of the workers at Nachen Trang ever walked; they were always running.

In their evening indoctrination sessions the prisoners were required to declare who was responsible for the revolt. They learned to say that it was the reactionaries who were responsible, but they were uncertain about who or what reactionaries were. Then they were told that they were not just prisoners but workers for the *Tang* [the CCP]. They were told that they would have to bathe in the water of liberty and offer their hearts to the *Tang*. Then a celebration was held called “Offering Your Heart to the *Tang*.” After that they were instructed about the need to oppose the “three big evils.” These were the social classes that the Chinese had defined as the exploiters of the Tibetan people. They were the feudal serf-owners, the Tibetan Government, and the monasteries. Then they were told about Democratic Reforms, which meant liberation of the serfs and relief from all debts owed to any of the feudal exploiting classes. The Tibetan prisoners learned to say what they thought the Chinese wanted, mostly just to shorten the length of the evening meetings, but they understood little of what the Chinese really meant, mostly because what the Chinese believed about Tibetan society corresponded to their ideology but not to the reality.

The most confusing question the Chinese wanted answers to was, “What is oppression and deception?” The correct answer was, “the old society,” because the old society was thought to be based upon deception and oppression. However, once they learned the correct answer they were asked about whom they had oppressed and deceived or who had oppressed and deceived them. They usually made up answers about minor injustices or abuses they had inflicted or received. However, the former monks replied that they had neither inflicted nor received any deception or oppression, since they did nothing but offer prayers for the betterment of others and were supported by society for doing so. However, the Chinese said that all these answers were insufficient since they had all agreed that Tibetan society was based upon deception and oppression; therefore, they must have inflicted or suffered from deception and oppression themselves.

The Tibetans were dumbfounded by this requirement to misconstrue their lives as well as the reality of Tibetan society in order to fit in with Chinese definitions. They were then required to reexamine their lives from an early age in order to realize how they had caused or had been the victims of the deception and oppression theoretically inherent in old Tibetan society. They thus learned to make elaborate, exaggerated, or false denunciations of the inequalities and evils in the old society and their roles as either perpetrators or victims in order to satisfy the Chinese. No one could avoid participation or maintain that there was no such oppression in the past or that they had no role in it. They thus learned to make elaborate, exaggerated, or false denunciations

of the inequalities and evils in the old society and their roles as either perpetrators or victims just in order to satisfy the Chinese.

Tibetans from outside Nachen Trang, mostly former serfs, were brought in to provide examples of the inequalities and evils supposedly inherent in Tibetan society. The former serfs were practiced in their accounts of their sufferings and were taken around from place to place to convince all Tibetans about the evils of their own society. Many of the former serfs lived on their ability to tell their stories, often elaborated to emphasize their sufferings. They became semi-professional complainers about the evils of the old society who were very popular with the Chinese since they confirmed what the Chinese thought were the evils of old Tibet, and they justified the Chinese role in coming to Tibet to liberate the Tibetans from their own exploitative society.

The Chinese soon introduced the process of *thamzing*, or mutual criticism. Tibetans were made to find fault in others and to conduct criticism sessions of others for their past or present faults. Everyone was required to participate in the criticism in order to show their own enthusiasm for change. Failure to passionately participate could result in being the next victim of the *thamzing* process. Tibetans thus learned to make up false criticisms of others and to fake passionate energy for change. The result of the Chinese revolutionary campaign to transform Tibetan society was that Tibetans had to falsely denounce other Tibetans and their own society and culture for some imagined evils as well as to falsely pretend to believe in the future that the Chinese promised. However, in reality, most Tibetans just went along with what they thought the Chinese wanted.

The result of the Chinese Democratic Reforms campaign was that Tibetans learned to speak falsely and to act falsely. Those best able to satisfy the Chinese with their false performances, or those actually convinced by the Chinese campaigns, became favored and were elevated to positions of authority over their fellow Tibetans. They then exercised an authority that usually involved coercion of others to conform to the Chinese campaigns or punishment for failure to do so. What the Chinese thus achieved was to introduce the same sort of deception and oppression into Tibetan society that they imagined had been inherent in Tibetan society all along, but that in fact they had brought to Tibetan society themselves.

At the beginning of 1960, when the Nachen Trang hydroelectric project was almost finished, Tashi Palden and the other prisoners were told they would be sent either to farms in Kongpo or to mines at a place in the Changtang called Tsala Karpo. Most hoped to go to Kongpo, since farming in the relatively warm climate of Kongpo was considered preferable to mining in the cold and harsh conditions of the Changtang. However, they were told that more people were needed for the mines at Tsala Karpo; therefore, everyone between the ages of 20

and 50 would have to go to Tsala Karpo. They were also shown warm tents and clothes that were promised to be provided in Tsala Karpo.

Tsala Karpo was located in the northern Changtang near the lakes Nagtsang and Pongog. The name usually refers to the common mineral borax, often found near salt lakes and used to make soap and other simple products. However, in this case the name apparently referred to the place where the mines were located since the mineral mined there was not borax. The Tibetans there were told that the mineral they were mining was more valuable by weight than gold. It was found in white, yellow, blue, and reddish lumps. Presumably the valuable mineral mined at Tsala Karpo was chromium, used to harden steel especially for military uses.

There was no food, fuel, or even water at Tsala Karpo. All had to be trucked in by the Chinese. There were no warm tents or clothing. Some wood for cooking could be found in the surrounding areas. Tashi Palden's group from Nachen Trang was about 500 prisoners. There were another 300 Tibetan prisoners from Nagchu and some 300 Chinese prisoners. They were watched by 500 PLA troops. The regime of work all day and political meetings at night was continued at Tsala Karpo.

Gradually the work at Tsala Karpo became more arduous and the food rations less. One day one of Tashi Palden's fellow prisoners approached him with a plan to escape, but he was afraid to trust him since the Chinese sometimes used provocateurs to test the loyalty of the prisoners. However, the prisoner did escape and Tashi Palden wished that he had gone with him. A few others also escaped, after which the Chinese resumed thamzings in order to find out who might have thoughts of escape. The Tibetans were even told that they could criticize the policies of the Chinese during the criticism sessions since this was part of Democratic Reforms. Tashi Palden took this promise seriously and criticized the Chinese for subjecting the Tibetan prisoners to such misery. He said that it was no mystery why some prisoners had escaped, because all the prisoners there were overworked, starved, and mentally tortured by all the Chinese political campaigns. The Chinese then tried to subject him to the usual thamzing process of beatings by his fellow prisoners but now, unlike at Nachen Trang, the Tibetans refused to participate in the process.

Despite his fellow prisoners' refusal to criticize or beat him, Tashi Palden knew that the Chinese would find some way to punish him. Therefore, he determined to escape. He was able to do so by pretending to be part of a group sent out to find firewood. He managed to escape and to reach Lhasa where he exchanged identity papers with and obtained a travel permit from his brother whose back had been broken at Nachen Trang. He went to Bathang and managed to get Rato Rinpoche and a few others to escape to India with him. They travelled by night and slept in the mountains by day and finally reached Bhutan in December 1960.

Tashi Palden's account is very revealing about the Chinese mindset in regard to Tibet and Tibetans. Tashi Palden did not take part in the revolt in any violent way, but some of the other Ramoche monks did. Many Lhasa Tibetans were arrested and forced to labor at Nachen Trang whether they had participated in the revolt or not. Some were there just because they were monks or of the upper class, who were most resistant to Chinese rule. Some of the Chinese were quite vindictive after the revolt, telling Tibetans that they should not have opposed those who had come to Tibet just to liberate them and that their precious Potala was now owned by China and that Tibetans could never hope for independence.

The Chinese had been taught that Tibet had always been a part of China and that the only Tibetans who wanted independence were the feudal lords, lamas, or government officials who did not want to lose their privileged status. The Chinese were also taught to believe that the idea of Tibetan independence had no basis in reality and had been invented by foreign imperialists just to divide China. The Chinese thus had no sympathy for Tibetan resistance to Chinese control over Tibet. They had come to Tibet thinking they would be welcomed, at least by most Tibetans, as liberators. But they had gradually come to realize that Tibetans regarded them as foreign conquerors and they had adopted the typical defensiveness of colonizers as a result.

#### Lobsang Wangmo and Rinzin

Lobsang Wangmo and Rinzin were both born in Tibet but had dual Tibetan and Nepalese nationality. They were nuns at the Nichungri monastery near Lhasa. They escaped from Tibet in March 1961. They tell about conditions in and near Lhasa just after the 1959 revolt.

The two nuns' first experience of the revolt was a month after it happened when four Chinese officials accompanied by a Tibetan interpreter came to their nunnery to ascertain if there were any reactionaries there or anyone who had participated in the revolt or assisted the rebels. They searched the whole place for weapons and then left. In June another Chinese official came and accused the two nuns of helping the Tibetan reactionaries during the revolt. He demanded that they reveal the names of those they had helped. The two nuns admitted that they had given some *tsampa* to the fleeing rebels but that they did not even know their names. However, they and all the nuns were accused of assisting the rebels. All the 70 nuns of Nichungri along with another 100 nuns of Khari Gompa, Nekhodung, and Chupsang monasteries were arrested and imprisoned at Drapchi for two and a half months. Then the younger nuns were forced to marry, while only 12 of the older nuns, including Lobsang and Rinzin, were allowed to return to their nunneries.

The treatment of Tibetan nuns and monks after the revolt reveals the anti-religious nature of Chinese policies despite their ostensible respect for religion and promises to protect and preserve Tibetan religious freedom as well as Tibetan cultural and religious autonomy. The two

nuns report that the Chinese soon began tearing down many religious monuments, including *chortens*, small temples, and *mani* walls. Religious images made of clay were ground into dust and religious manuscripts were shredded. Metal images were looted and trucked to China. By that time most monasteries and nunneries were empty because the monks and nuns had fled Tibet or had been arrested and forced to marry or had been sent to labor camps. Only a few of the older monks and nuns like Lobsang and Rinzen were allowed to remain in their monasteries.

The nuns report that the living conditions of the people of Lhasa were extremely poor. All shops were closed. Most Lhasa shops had previously sold items from India and Nepal, so now food and other provisions had to be brought from China. Many people in prisons in Lhasa and adjoining areas died from starvation. The two nuns witnessed cartloads of dead bodies being taken from prisons. No one was allowed to say that anyone had died from starvation.

The nuns report that in July 1960 the Chinese began their third re-checking program to identify reactionaries and opponents. This was part of what they called Democratic Reforms, which were supposed to teach Tibetans about how they had been exploited in the past, but were actually about identifying opponents and eliminating them. The two nuns were at a large gathering at the Tromsi Khang in Lhasa where the crowd was told that the Dalai Lama was evil and that they must all denounce him. One old man stood up and said that the Dalai Lama was good while it was Mao and the CCP who were evil. He was taken away and never seen again. By making such demands to denounce the Dalai Lama in innumerable mandatory meetings the Chinese managed to identify and eliminate their most resolute opponents. The identification of opponents continued during *thamzings* which were a part of the Democratic Reform campaign and which no Tibetans could escape.

The two nuns were eventually allowed to leave Tibet because they had Nepalese citizenship. Before leaving they were approached in secret by many Tibetans who implored them to tell the Dalai Lama to seek international assistance to free Tibet from the sufferings imposed on Tibet and Tibetans by the Chinese.

### Ashang Lobsang Jampa

Ashang Lobsang Jampa was a Ladakhi monk at Ramoche in 1959 at the time of the uprising. Although he was sick at the time and took no part in the revolt he was arrested along with all the Ramoche monks. He was taken to the nearby Sampo house where some 500 Tibetans, both monks and laypeople, were being held. They were then taken to the Norbulingka, where thousands of Tibetans already arrested by the Chinese were being held. The prisoners were divided into groups according to their monastic or governmental affiliation. There were groups from Sera, Drepung, Ganden, Gyuto, and Gyumey, Namgyal Dratsang, Nechung, Meru, Shaythay, Kundeling, Mentsikhang, and from the Tibetan Army and the common people. The

list of groups reveals that after the revolt the Chinese arrested anyone they suspected of being opponents because of their class or religious status or governmental role. Upper class Tibetans were also arrested solely because of their class status, while the common people that Lobsang Jampa mentions probably included the upper class as well as those of the lower classes who had participated in the revolt or who were suspected of participating.

At the beginning of May, 16 truckloads of monks, including Lobsang Jampa, were taken to the hydroelectric project at Nachen Trang. At first the work there was not too hard, but it quickly became more arduous as hours were increased, rations diminished, and pressures to achieve goals were intensified. The Chinese introduced competition between groups along with rewards and punishments. This led to frenzied activity and many accidents involving injury and even deaths. Many Tibetans also died of starvation and exhaustion. After a few months, Lobsang and some other more elderly monks were taken back to the Norbulingka where he worked for two months.

Then he was taken to Drepung Loseling where he and some 300 monks were kept in the prayer hall. Later they were all taken to the prison at Drapchi. Altogether there were 1,700 prisoners at Drapchi, including monks, lamas, and abbots of Sera, Drepung, and Ganden, who the Chinese considered to be the most dangerous prisoners. The prison regimen included beatings for any religious activities like saying prayers. Lobsang Jampa claims that between November 1960 and June 1961, 1400 of the prisoners died due to overwork and lack of food.

In June 1961 Lobsang Jampa was released from prison when it was discovered that he was from Ladakh and thus a citizen of India. He was told that the crime for which he had been imprisoned was his opposition to the Chinese government, presumably because of things he had said, for which he should have been executed but that the government would be lenient because he was from India. This explanation seems to have been meant to prevent him from saying in India that he had been arrested and imprisoned for no reason other than that he was a Tibetan monk. He had to sign a document praising the socialist system and the reforms that the Chinese had brought to Tibet. He was then driven in a jeep to the Indian border at Yatung.

Lobsang Jampa reports that when he was at the Norbulingka, presumably the second time, he saw trucks on the nearby road taking away the artistic and religious treasures of Drepung. Also, he said that food was scarce and religious practice was prohibited for all Tibetans even though the Chinese claimed that they allowed freedom of religion. Many Tibetans were in prisons and labor camps in Tibet and in China while Chinese settlers were being sent to Tibet. In Lhasa alone there were prisons at Drepung Loseling, Drepung Photang, Sera Jey, Gyalchay Khangchen, Ganden Shartse, Norbulingka, Drapchi, Magar Sarpa, Northoe Lingka, Taring house, Sampho house, Meru, Bhensui, Tsukla Khang, Dip Tscholing and Namgyal Khang. Lobsang Jampa's account reveals that after the revolt the Chinese focused their persecution on

monks and monasteries due to their belief that Tibetan Buddhism and the religious establishment were obstacles to Chinese rule over Tibet.

### Tashi Dorje

Tashi Dorje was a nomad of the Hor Yetar area. He was 17 years old in 1959 and experienced the outcome of the revolt only in June when Chinese officials came to his area. The local Tibetans were told that the revolt had been put down by the PLA in a short time since the revolt was supported only by the upper class reactionaries and not by the common people. They were told that the reactionaries had tried to take the Dalai Lama to India but that he had been captured. Similarly, those Tibetans who had already escaped to India had been returned by India. They were told that they should have no thoughts of fleeing because if they tried to escape they would be captured and returned immediately. They were also instructed to surrender any weapons in their possession.

The local nomads replied that they would not surrender their weapons and that they would obey the rules of the Communist Chinese only if they did not conflict with their local traditions, culture, and religion. This reply made the Chinese very angry. They said that the Tibetans would have to obey each and every rule of the new government without any questions and that they would return shortly to collect the Tibetans' weapons.

The local Tibetans had a meeting in which many spoke out against giving up their weapons. Some 600 of them vowed to continue resistance to the Chinese and left that same night for Damshung where they had heard that many resistance fighters were gathered. Only about 400 Tibetans, mostly women and children, were left behind but they also vowed to continue resistance. Tashi Dorje and those who left for Damshung reached the Sokchu river, which they could not cross because the water was high. There was a bridge near the Sokchu Dan monastery but it was guarded by the Chinese who were dismantling the monastery. They were told that some 30 monks from the monastery had already left for India. There they were joined by 27 nomad families who had with them a *dreng* from which a rope bridge could be fashioned. They were thus able to cross the river one by one. They were told that Chinese troops were looking for them so they traveled for 18 days with no break. They reached a place called Tsam Lung near Damshung where they stayed for three months. There were now some 900 in their group. They were told that there were as many as 20,000 Tibetans hiding in the area.

They were then joined by some monks from the nearby Patsang monastery who told them that all religious activities at their monastery had been stopped by the Chinese, who were now using the main assembly hall for political meetings and thamzing of lamas and monks who had not escaped. Almost all the formerly 500 monks were gone and the Chinese had taken away the monastery's valuable images in some 50 trucks.

They were joined by Tibetans who had fled from Chakra Palbar where they had been bombed by Chinese airplanes. Until then none of them had thought to escape to India. All were determined to stay to fight for Tibetan independence. Then in February 1960 his group was bombed by Chinese airplanes. Many were killed, but leaflets dropped by the Chinese calling on them to surrender also revealed that the Dalai Lama had escaped. The bombing continued for ten days and the group was reduced from 20,000 to only 12,000. They left that place and headed back toward Amdo, being constantly attacked by the Chinese and losing more of their number. Finally, Tashi Dorje and a few others travelled across the Changtang and reached Ladakh in February 1962, having fought against the Chinese for almost three years. His account reveals that most Tibetans, especially the nomads, resisted Chinese rule but that only a small portion of them were able to escape to India.

### Chomphel Sonam

Chomphel Sonam was a monk official of the Tibetan Government posted in Shigatse. He was arrested on 12 March 1959, only two days after the beginning of the revolt in Lhasa, along with all other Tibetan Government officials and soldiers and officers of the Ghathang regiment of the Tibetan Army stationed in Shigatse. For the next four months he was subjected to interrogations and *thamzing*. He and the other former government officials were forced to do hard labor with very little food. Many of them got sick or died.

After three years he was released but kept under close supervision. He asked to be allowed a small plot of land for farming but was told that he must set up a bicycle repair shop. He had to obtain a license from the Chinese authorities even for such a small enterprise and report to them about how many bicycles he repaired every month. He had to account for all his activities every day and show that he had been working all the time without any breaks. He was taxed at a high rate and fined for any days that he could not account for to the authorities' satisfaction. He was visited frequently by inspectors and, whenever he was found making tea or preparing a meal he was taken to public meetings for criticism of his bourgeois tendencies.

Chomphel Sonam's story reveals that all former Tibetan Government officials were arrested after the revolt and repressed thereafter without any regard for their actual role in the revolt. They were considered reactionaries due to their former function as government officials. The same was true of many monks, or at least those who remained monks. Other monks fled into exile or were forcibly secularized. Some were even forced to copulate with women in public in order to break their vows of celibacy.

Chomphel reports that he witnessed a *thamzing* of a monk of Degon Monastery, named Thubten, in January 1960. The monk was accused of being a leading reactionary and was publicly executed on the spot. Later that same year, Ngodup, the steward of the Tsarong family

estate, was accused of assisting the Tibetan resistance. He was taken to the village of Nedrak Jug where the local people were forced to stone him to death. Another man, Shalu Noryon, committed suicide by jumping off a cliff when he was unable to withstand constant *thamzings*. Eighteen monks of Tashilhunpo Monastery were also said to have committed suicide.

Chomphel Sonam says that most Tibetans retained their faith and their reverence for the Dalai Lama after the revolt even under Chinese anti-religious indoctrination. They continued to hope that he would be able to gain international assistance for Tibet and deliver them from their sufferings under the Chinese. Many religious activities were restricted due to the closure of monasteries and strict work requirements, but Tibetans managed to express their faith in ways unknown to the Chinese. Many would do religious activities such as reciting prayers, burning incense, or putting up prayer flags during times such as before dawn. Some Tibetans put up clandestine leaflets saying that Chinese reforms had reduced all Tibetans to a common state of starvation and destitution. However, the leaflets said, Tibetans would continue to resist Chinese anti-religious indoctrination and would continue to put up prayer flags and express their devotion to the Dalai Lama in any way possible.

After his release from prison Chomphel Sonam was allowed one visit to Lhasa in 1962, where he made many observations of conditions for Tibetans three years after the revolt. He estimated the number of Tibetans who had died under Chinese oppression at over 10,000. Presumably he means those who died after the revolt rather than during the revolt. He said that almost all monasteries except a few of the most famous had already been destroyed by 1962, long before the Cultural Revolution when it is generally assumed that most of the destruction took place. Almost all monks and lamas were gone, having been imprisoned or forcibly secularized, or having escaped into exile.

He reported that the monasteries had been stripped of their valuables and that all gold and silver images and other useful metals had been trucked to China. Clay images were destroyed while woodblocks were burned and *mani* stones used in construction, including in paving public outhouses with the intention that they should be thus defiled. Buddhist texts were used for utilitarian purposes, including as toilet paper. Many monasteries were then dismantled for their wood and stone while others were used for public indoctrination meetings, including *thamzings*. He reports a rumor in Lhasa that the most valuable Tibetan religious articles were given to the Soviet Union in repayment of debts.

Many monks as well as lay Tibetans were sent to do forced labor, particularly at the Nachen Trang hydroelectric project east of Lhasa. Many died there and at other forced labor camps due to starvation and overwork. Private traders in Lhasa were all either arrested or forced to buy only from Chinese state sources, with the result that there were shortages of food and other essentials in Lhasa. The Chinese had confiscated the houses of the wealthy in Lhasa and

used them for themselves while also constructing more houses and offices for the increased population of Chinese. Tibetans were closely supervised in innumerable meetings and subjected to constant inspections to see if they were in possession of any subversive materials, including religious items or images of the Dalai Lama.

Chomphel Sonam reported that Tibetans were suffering food shortages due to the Chinese famine caused by the Great Leap Forward. Tibet did not suffer any crop failures, but food, and in particular barley, peas, and butter, were being transported from Tibet to China. The Chinese claimed that they were taking food from agricultural areas of Tibet to feed the nomads in the north. However, nomads who came to Shigatse to buy grain denied that the Chinese were giving them any grain. Chomphel Sonam's reports reveal that many Tibetans had suffered directly due to Chinese repression of the revolt, while almost all suffered due to China's oppressive and exploitative policies after the revolt. Tibetan culture had suffered irreparable damage due to the depopulation of Tibet's monasteries and their looting and destruction thereafter.

In February 1963 Chomphel Sonam obtained permission to visit Phari on the border with India to collect some belongings he had left there. He spent a week observing Chinese border patrols and then managed to escape by night across the border into Bhutan. After a few weeks in Bhutan he was handed over to the Indian border police. He then travelled to Dharamsala where he resumed his Tibetan Government career by working in the Finance Department of the Central Tibetan Secretariat.

### Changchub Thargay

Changchub Thargay was a farmer from Shekhar Dzong in Tingri District. He reports that about a month after the March 1959 uprising the Chinese came to Shekhar to take control. They arrested all Tibetan civil and military officers and sent them to prisons and labor camps. The local commander of the Tibetan Army in Shekhar, Gyapon Tamdin, was shot dead on the spot. The abbot and leading monks of Shekhar Monastery were also arrested. The remaining Tibetans were made to attend meetings where they were instructed in how to conduct thamzing of upper class people and lamas. Everyone was divided into three classes: rich, middle, and lower.

Changchub Thargay was put in the middle class and was promised rewards by the Chinese if he would criticize others in thamzings and inform on any opponents to Chinese rule. He refused and was then declared a reactionary, his property was confiscated, and he was arrested and imprisoned. He was subjected to thamzings and accused of possessing firearms, which he says was untrue. He was first imprisoned in Shekhar, then in Shigatse, and was then sent to Drapchi prison in Lhasa.

Finally he was sent to Thaklung Drak where he and other prisoners were made to construct a barbed wire fence around Rhalo Monastery, which was then turned into a prison where he himself was imprisoned. The monastery had been emptied of its precious images, which had been trucked to China. Clay images were thrown into rubbish heaps and printed Buddhist texts were burned or used as toilet paper. While at Rhalo prison he and the other prisoners were overworked and suffered near starvation.

At some point Changchub Thargay was sent back to Drapchi prison in Lhasa. While there he and other prisoners were forced to pull carts laden with all the loot that the Chinese had stolen from Sera and Drepung monasteries. He said that the prisoners were forced to demolish the Gonsar Tse assembly hall at Drepung and the Gonsar Sho was turned into barracks for the prisoners. During the winter the prisoners were forced to dig canals in the cold waters of the Lhalu wetlands. Work was so arduous and food so scarce that of 187 prisoners only 7 survived.

In 1961 he was sent to a labor camp in Kongpo. No food or water was provided on the way and 12 Tibetan prisoners in his group died. In Kongpo the prisoners were made to fell trees and make charcoal. The hard work and meager rations caused further deaths. Anyone who could not work because of illness had his rations cut, thus causing even more deaths. Some of those who were ill were taken away, never to be seen again. Altogether, half the prisoners died.

Changchub Thargay was finally released in 1964 and allowed to return to Shekhar. However, he had no means to support himself. There was very little food available, he said, because everything was taken by the Chinese. Still, the local Tibetans were told that they were better off than those who had escaped to India who had no food at all to eat. They were asked to write to any of their relatives who had escaped, promising rewards and favorable treatment if they would return. Each village was required to send two children to China for education that was really indoctrination. Travel anywhere, even between villages, was not allowed without permission from the Chinese authorities. Finally he was able to get a travel permit from a Tibetan assistant to one of the Chinese and he used it to escape to Nepal in January 1965 with his wife, one son, and three daughters. He and his family were eventually resettled in Switzerland.

Changchub Thargay's story illustrates that Tibetans were persecuted after the revolt not only for their previous official roles or because they were monks and lamas or were of the upper class. They were also persecuted for any opposition to Chinese control, even just for refusing to be an informant for the Chinese against their fellow Tibetans.

### Lobsang Tempa

Lobsang Tempa, from Markham, Kham, was a monk of the Upper Tantric College at Ramoche. He was at Ramoche during the uprising in 1959 and helped to defend the temple

against Chinese attack. He was wounded in the fighting and then arrested and held with others at Norbulingka. His two brothers were also arrested and died in prison due to torture, according to him. He says that many Tibetans were killed at the Norbulingka and buried in mass graves there, but the bodies began to stink so he and others had to rebury them. The barracks of the Dalai Lama's bodyguards were turned into prisons and seven thousand prisoners were kept there. He was later transferred to a temporary prison at Chunju Magar in Cheton Lingka in Lhasa.

He, along with all other Tibetans in Lhasa, was forced to attend political indoctrination meetings. Those Tibetans identified by the Chinese as reactionaries were subjected to public criticisms and beatings. Tibetan prisoners had very little food but were forced by the Chinese to do heavy labor. Those who collapsed were struck with rifle butts and many died due to lack of food, overwork, and poor treatment. Monks were singled out to do things abhorrent to their religion, like destroying religious images and books.

Lhasa was divided into four districts and no movement between them was allowed without permission. Some Tibetans were appointed to ostensible positions of authority, but in reality the Chinese made all decisions. Chinese troops were stationed all over Lhasa, but when they came out of their barracks they dressed as civilians to give the impression that Lhasa was not under military occupation. He claims that many Tibetan women were coerced to marry Chinese soldiers. The Chinese told Tibetans that they had kept open the political position of the Dalai Lama, but when he did not return they removed him from his position. It did not matter, they said, because India would soon have a communist revolution, supported by the Chinese people, and the Dalai Lama would be returned to face his fate. The Chinese said that they would soon liberate Bhutan, Sikkim, Nepal, and the Mon areas of India. The 1962 border war was started not by China but by India, they claimed, but China won because the Indian people did not support war against China. Indian prisoners were paraded in Lhasa and Tibetans were told that they did not want to return to India, even though they looked like they were badly treated.

Lobsang Tempa says that during this time the Chinese took away almost all of the Tibetan harvest, leaving Tibetans only an inadequate grain ration. Tibetan families were coerced to send their children to schools in China where they were subjected to pro-communist and anti-Tibetan propaganda. The Chinese proclaimed freedom of religion, but they destroyed monasteries and temples, burnt holy scriptures, and looted or smashed holy images. Only the largest monasteries remained intact, but they were depopulated of their monks.

The Panchen Lama, who had been the main collaborator with the Chinese, was determined to be a reactionary after he criticized Chinese policies in Tibet. He was subjected to public criticism in Lhasa by both Tibetans and Chinese and then taken to prison in China. The Panchen Lama's primary crime seems to have been his refusal to denounce the Dalai Lama and his saying that he hoped the Dalai Lama would eventually return to Tibet. The Panchen Lama's

reputation rose among Tibetans after he opposed the Chinese, but the other Tibetan collaborators were hated by most Tibetans, as were the Chinese themselves.

Lobsang Tempa said that Tibetans hoped that the Dalai Lama and the refugees in India could secure international help to free Tibet from the Chinese. Escape from Tibet was difficult because the Chinese had spies everywhere, monitored all movements, and had many troops on the border. Nevertheless, Lobsang Tempa managed to escape to Bhutan in March 1966.

### Pema Lhundup

Pema Lhundup, from Lhodrak, escaped to Bhutan in 1967. He experienced both the Democratic Reforms after the 1959 revolt and the beginning of the Cultural Revolution. He reported that Tibetans were highly controlled in all their activities by the Chinese and forced to work on development projects like the building of roads toward the border with India and Bhutan. The Chinese told them that the roads must be built quickly because the people of India and other countries were anxiously awaiting their own liberation and Democratic Reforms with the assistance of the Chinese Communists. Tibetans were overworked and underfed since the Chinese took most of the Tibetan harvest in the form of many taxes. Those who were unable to work as much as the Chinese demanded were subjected to criticism and *thamzings*. The Chinese tried to convert pasture land to agriculture, but the crops failed after one or two seasons. Nomads who had their pastures converted had to continue to deliver the same amounts of meat and butter to the Chinese despite the fact that their pastures had been decreased in size and without regard to fluctuations in production from year to year.

Tibetans were divided into classes, and the former upper classes were subjected to punishments and restrictions including *thamzings* and beatings. Everyone was required to spy on everyone else about anyone who expressed any criticisms of the Chinese or who displayed any lack of enthusiasm for Democratic Reforms and the new political regime. Tibetans were made to beat other Tibetans during *thamzings*, but the Chinese were always the instigators. Tibetans were also made to destroy their own monasteries and temples, but the Chinese took away all the valuable images and gold and silver in advance. Tibetans were then made to destroy the remaining clay images and to burn religious texts and *thangkas*. Tibetans were thus forced to destroy their own cultural heritage in order to avoid being criticized by the Chinese as reactionaries.

At the beginning of the Cultural Revolution all aspects of Tibetan culture were restricted. Tibetans were not even allowed to wear their traditional clothing. Everyone had to memorize sayings from Mao's Little Red Book and repeat them on demand. It did not even matter if they understood them so long as they could recite them without mistakes. Children were also

subjected to indoctrination in schools and many were sent to schools in China. Parents had no control over what their children were taught.

During the Cultural Revolution the Chinese thought that there would soon be a new war with India, so they were stockpiling military equipment in the Lhodrak area. Tibetans thought that the Chinese were worried about India because the Dalai Lama was there and he was working on getting international support for Tibet. Pema Lhundrup got involved with some other Tibetans who planned to revive Tibetan resistance in case of war between India and China. However, he was found out because so many Tibetans were forced to spy for the Chinese and inform on other Tibetans. The leaders of the resistance plan were all arrested. Pema Lhundrup was subjected to *thamzing* and beatings but was not arrested, because the Chinese had no evidence that he was actually involved in any resistance. However, he was put under intense surveillance. He was eventually informed by some of his friends that he was about to be arrested, so he escaped, leaving his wife and children behind.

Pema Lhundrup's account is consistent with that of many Tibetans who were able to escape. They tell of Chinese repression of all opposition, persecution of the upper classes and lamas and monks, and the looting and destruction of monasteries. It is this consistency of accounts from all parts of Tibet that established the credibility of the Tibetan version of events in Tibet and challenged the Chinese version of what had happened under their control.

#### Wangdu Dorji

Wangdu Dorji was a farmer in Galing Gang, Dromo district, who escaped to Bhutan in 1968. His village had 700 people before the revolt but only 400 afterward because many had been arrested or escaped into exile. Many of the local children were sent for indoctrination in China. His family was persecuted after the 1959 revolt because they were classified as landowners. His mother was arrested as a reactionary along with 16 others from their village and paraded around and subjected to public abuse. Then his mother was taken away along with the others. In 1962 he heard that his mother was in prison in Lhasa, so he got a permit to visit her there. She was in Drapchi prison and was almost unrecognizable due to the hardships she had suffered. He was only allowed to see his mother but not to speak to her. He was allowed only this one visit and never saw her again.

Wangdu Dorji himself was not persecuted until 1961 when he was subjected to *thamzing* and forced labor in Phari for seven months, after which he was released. When mutual aid teams, the first stage of collectivization, were formed in 1962 his family was not allowed to join because of their class status. His family of nine was allocated a plot of land of poor quality and insufficient for their needs no matter how hard they worked. They managed to improve the land enough to grow some barley but, like all Tibetans, had most of their harvest confiscated in the

form of taxes. He thinks that the grain confiscated from Tibetans was used to feed the numerous Chinese troops. Dromo was on the border with India and there were many military camps nearby. The Chinese forced Tibetans to open up many former pastures to cultivation, but the yields were very low due to the climate and altitude. At the same time there was famine in China, and Tibetan harvests were taken to feed the Chinese in Tibet.

He reports that Tibetans were not allowed to travel anywhere, even locally, without permits, which were extremely difficult to obtain. He said that religion was not officially banned but that every possible obstacle was put in the way of its practice. People were forced to destroy sacred images in monasteries, but only after the Chinese had removed all gold and silver and precious gems and images made from metals that could be melted down and turned to other uses. During the border war with India in 1962 Tibetans were forced to build roads and carry supplies for the Chinese troops. The Chinese claimed that the Indian upper class reactionaries were opposed to communism but that the common people supported communism and Maoist ideology and were hoping for a proletarian revolution such as had happened in China.

At the beginning of the Cultural Revolution in 1966 he again faced persecution as a class enemy. He was informed that the Chinese would resume *thamzings* of upper class reactionaries such as himself when the Cultural Revolution began. He was also accused of having participated with insufficient enthusiasm in the destruction of monasteries. Everyone was required to memorize Mao's sayings and recite them by heart. The Chinese maintained that all truth was contained in Mao's sayings and Tibetans had to proclaim that truth and even to credit Mao with all improvements in Tibet. Even when Chinese programs failed spectacularly, as with crop failures due to collectivization, Tibetans had to claim the opposite and to credit Mao with the supposed success. The Chinese did not think that he would try to escape because he had a wife and children. However, he was warned that he would soon be arrested, so he decided to escape to Bhutan.

#### Lama Karma Tenzin

This account is a joint statement of eight Tibetans under the name of their spokesperson, Lama Karma Tenzin. They were nomads of Zurmang in Nangchen, Kham. They escaped to Bhutan in 1969 and were at the time of writing living in Bylakuppe, Mysore, south India. Lama Karma Tenzin says that until 1957 the Chinese in the Nangchen area limited their activities to deceiving local political and religious leaders by giving them money and presents. Then, in 1958, they precipitously began communization and everything changed. Tibetans had to work like animals and their religious activities and festivals were restricted. Tibetan resistance was immediate, with almost all of the people under the King of Nangchen rising up in armed revolt. The revolt lasted only three months due to the arrival of large numbers of Chinese troops. Those who surrendered faced virtual starvation for the next nine months, with many starving to death.

A few, including the group with Lama Karma Tenzin, refused to surrender and fled to the surrounding mountains.

Their group soon had to flee to Lho Dzong due to constant Chinese pressure. In Lho Dzong, Showa Do, and Palbar Dzong they found other Tibetans who were also continuing their resistance. However, by 1961 they had all surrendered due to a Chinese amnesty policy which promised to forgive all those who had resisted. They were then returned to Nangchen where they found that almost all of the young men were gone, having died in battle or by starvation. The remaining old men, women, and children who had survived were herded together onto communes in which all animals and all other possessions were collectivized. They were worked like animals themselves and fed barely enough to survive.

Although not arrested, Lama Karma Tenzin was classified as a landlord and therefore subjected to public thamzing once every month. When the Cultural Revolution began in 1966, and realizing that their existence was precarious, he and his friends decided again to try to escape. They went to Khyungpo Thangchen where there was a Gyenlok faction of Red Guards composed predominantly of Tibetans. They joined the Gyenlok and fought battles with their rivals, the Nyamdrel, composed of both Tibetans and Chinese. After some time the Nyamdrel faction was reinforced and the Gyenlok were forced to surrender. However, he and his comrades refused to surrender and fled to Gyeru Thang. They killed two Chinese soldiers along the way and took their arms and horses. They were soon informed upon near Sog Tsenden and surrounded by Chinese troops. They had to abandon their horses and take to the mountains once again. They fought with the Chinese and killed several. They then fled to Namling on the northern part of Changthang and then headed south, crossing the Tsangpo and arriving near Gyantse.

Gyantse was full of Chinese soldiers, and the Tibetans there were collectivized and short of food so their existence was again precarious. They had to abandon the horses they had acquired in battles with the Chinese and seek refuge in the surrounding mountains. They then encountered Chinese soldiers and engaged in battles with them. More Chinese soldiers arrived and they had to escape again. They travelled eight nights and reached Pampar. They bought food from some local Tibetans and learned that they were near the border with Bhutan. However, they were told that the area was closely watched by Chinese troops so they should escape quickly or they were sure to be discovered. They took to the highest routes and travelling by night, managed to reach Bhutan.

Lama Karma Tenzin and his companions reached exile in 1969, having fought with the Chinese and escaped their efforts to subdue them for more than ten years since they began their resistance in 1957. Their story is one of remarkable resistance to the Chinese imposition of control over themselves and their country.

Lama Karma Tenzin and his companions had several observations about the situation in Tibet during those years. They said that many young Tibetans had been sent to China for education that consisted mostly of Chinese language and propaganda about the backwardness of Tibet and superiority of China in every way. Most of them were returned to Tibet after three years and were given minor official jobs with no real responsibility since the Chinese controlled everything. After 1959 Tibetans suffered food shortages and starvation because the Chinese took most of the Tibetan harvest due to the famine in China caused by the Great Leap Forward. After that, the Chinese feared that World War Three was about to start, so they were digging tunnels and storing supplies and military equipment.

Communes were established in Kham and everyone had to join. All property and animals were collectivized without compensation and Tibetans were forced to work like animals. Tibetans were separated into groups according to their work capacity. Those who worked the most were given the largest rations, while those who could not work, like the very young and very old, were given nothing. The Chinese took most of the produce of the communes for their taxes and war preparations, leaving Tibetans with insufficient food to survive. Social committees were established for purposes of control and identification of opponents. Poor Tibetans with no education were recruited as ostensible leaders, but in fact the Chinese were in control.

In schools, Tibetan was taught only in the first few grades with a gradual transition to Chinese thereafter. Students were taught to despise the backwardness of their own culture and to praise everything Chinese as modern and progressive.

There were many Chinese troops in Tibet, especially near the Indian border. Since the beginning of the Cultural Revolution there had been factional fighting between rival groups of Red Guards. Many Tibetans were also involved and many, both Chinese and Tibetans, were killed or injured in factional clashes. Although the Red Guards competed in declarations of loyalty to Mao, some Chinese Red Guards were actually opponents of Mao's policies.

Lama Karma Tenzin and his companions said that most Tibetans still had hope that the Dalai Lama could get international help for Tibet and would return and free Tibetans from their sufferings under the Chinese.

### Yeshe Chopel

Yeshe Chopel, from Pannam in Tsang, was a monk of Gaga Monastery in Pannam. In 1959 he was studying philosophy and logic at Drepung in Lhasa. After the uprising he was arrested and then taken back to his home monastery and publicly accused of having been part of the so-called nest of bandits at Drepung and of having plotted against the state. He was not accused of any actual involvement in the revolt but simply of having been at Drepung monastery,

which the Chinese regarded as having supported the revolt. In fact, all the monks of Drepung were considered to have supported the revolt and were arrested or repressed accordingly. After this public accusation he was beaten severely and put into a prison that seems to have been the Pannam monastery itself. He was kept there for three years with 400 other prisoners, made to work in the fields every day, and was manacled in his cell at night.

After three years he was transferred to Taklung Drak Monastery, which was also being used as a prison, where he worked with 200 other prisoners on road construction. Prison food consisted of two small helpings of *tsampa* a day. He says that he almost died of starvation and overwork during his time at Taklung Drak. In 1965 he was released from prison and allowed to return to Pannam. He was allotted a small plot of land from which he was supposed to feed himself and in addition he had to do hard labor on road and housing construction projects.

Yeshe Chopel reports that communes were started in the Pannam area in 1967. All land, animals, and farming implements were placed under commune ownership. Compensation for confiscated property was promised but never paid. Each commune worker got a ration determined by how hard he worked. Most of the harvest was collected as “Patriotic Grain Tax,” while what remained was purchased by the state at a price that was never paid because it was said to have been used for commune maintenance. Since rations were insufficient, Tibetans asked to buy back some of their own grain, which was repeatedly refused until a small quantity was sold back at twice the price the commune members had theoretically got when they sold it. However, by the late 1960s no more grain was sold back since the Chinese claimed they needed it all for war preparations. Many Tibetans subsequently suffered starvation. The Chinese were sure that World War Three was about to start on the Indian border due to their rivalry with the Soviet Union and because India had allied with the Soviets.

In the late 1960s the Chinese started a “Class Cleansing Campaign” in which all Tibetans were forced to publically confess whether they disliked Chinese policy in Tibet, whether they had ever criticized the Chinese government, whether they had any plans to revolt, what rumors they had spread, whether they hoped for Tibetan independence, and whether they had supported the Gyenlok faction of the Red Guards. Tibetans also had to inform on and expose each other for any of these same things. Not only food but all consumer items like matches, kerosene, and candles were unavailable. The Chinese blamed the shortages on the disruptions of the Cultural Revolution and then on the war preparations.

Yeshe Chopel thinks that the main reason the Gyenlok faction of Red Guards was favored by Tibetans was simply because it had promised to increase the grain ration per person from 140 kilos to 165 kilos. Many Tibetans fought on the side of the Gyenloks. In Nyemo a mini rebellion was started by a nun named Thinley who was the local leader of the Gyenlok. They

killed several Chinese, after which Thinley and 15 others were captured and publicly executed in Lhasa.

Yeshe Chopel managed to escape to Bhutan in 1970.

### Thondup

Thondup, a farmer from Kyirong, escaped to Nepal in 1971 along with his wife and daughter. Thondup writes that he escaped from Tibet because life was getting more and more difficult and tension and fear of persecution was increasing every year. He said that his family had nothing that they could call their own. Everything belonged to the commune or the Chinese. But, he says, what was most unbearable was the unceasing hardship and mental torture.

He was classified as a middle-class peasant and continually harassed for so-called class crimes that he had never committed. He began to think of escape but somehow the Chinese came to know of it and he was accused of “turning away from the proletarian socialist revolutionary camp and following the way of the reactionary Dalai bandits.” He was given the alternative of either making a confession of his crimes and wrong thoughts or else facing public trials and possible imprisonment and torture. Since he could not change his thoughts, he knew that the only possibility was escape. He and his family fled one evening when other villagers were attending a nightly indoctrination session. They took to the mountains to avoid Chinese border patrols and reached Nepal in nine days. Normally it was possible to reach Nepal in two days.

He reported that the Chinese claimed that Tibetans were free to worship but that there was no such freedom in reality. No one was even allowed to say the mantra Om Mani Padme Hum. The three main images at Samdeling Monastery in Kyirong were gone. Those who said prayers were called ignorant and were continuously harassed to give up their superstitious beliefs. The Chinese also claimed that Tibetans were free to travel or go wherever they liked, but this was also untrue. No one could even go to the surrounding hills to collect firewood without permission from the authorities, which was always difficult to get. People were restricted from collecting firewood so that they would have to join the common kitchen. Everyone, except those with labels like reactionary or class enemy, were being pressured to join communes and common kitchens.

The Chinese demanded labor from Tibetans but took away most of the production from the land for themselves. The Tibetan people, he said, were like slaves of an alien conqueror. Food rations were insufficient and heavy taxes were levied on every article of daily need. He said that Kyirong was still fortunate compared to eastern and central Tibet, from which it was now almost impossible to escape.

T Tibetans were told to abandon their traditional dress, but this rule was impossible to enforce because of a shortage of cloth to make Chinese dress. The Chinese claimed that cloth was being sent to Nepal where there was a shortage of textiles because of Nepal's poor relations with India. Nepal was favored by China and in disfavor with India because the Nepalese were supposedly heeding the thoughts of Chairman Mao.

Like other Tibetans from Tsang and border areas, Thondup reported that the Chinese were sure that World War Three was about to break out on the Indian border because of China's tensions with the Soviet Union and India's recent alliance with the Soviets. Military convoys were seen on the roads daily carrying supplies. Tibetans were told to be on the alert and ready, but the Chinese seemed unsure Tibetans would be loyal if war broke out.

Thondup's account is consistent with others,' especially in regard to lack of freedom of religion and other personal freedoms, destruction of monasteries, persecution of class enemies and other opponents of the Chinese regime, food shortages due to communization and Chinese taxes, and Chinese preparations for a war with India and the Soviet Union.

#### Pasang Tsewang

Pasang Tsewang, a farmer from Phari, escaped to Bhutan in 1971. After the uprising in 1959 he was classified as a poor peasant, the most favored class in the Chinese Communist system. Because he was a young man at the time he was considered to be a candidate for training to become a cadre. He was taken to Gyantse for political indoctrination classes. There the Chinese instructor ridiculed Tibetan beliefs about the origin of life in Tibet. She substituted the Chinese Communist version, which was that life had evolved naturally but, as human society, had progressed until economic and social classes evolved that led to the exploitation of the lower classes by the more privileged. The intended lesson was that the lower classes should overthrow their oppressors, the upper classes, and institute a classless society.

After more than a month of lectures the 200 or so students were given a tour of the Gyantse monastery. There they witnessed the public *thamzing* of the monastery's abbot and its oracle. Some 200 monks and laymen were brought there from the town where they had been imprisoned to witness the *thamzing* as well as some 200 monks, all of whom were bound with ropes and chains. All the monks and laymen were obviously in bad shape and had been tortured. The abbot and oracle had obviously been beaten before the *thamzing* and were beaten again during it. The abbot and oracle were challenged to summon divine intervention to release them from their torments. This spectacle was supposed to convince all the Tibetans assembled there of the falseness and futility of their religious beliefs, but in most cases only impressed them with the cruelty of the Chinese.

Pasang was sent to Yatung where he served briefly in an office as a peon, but in 1962 the Chinese announced that the bureaucracy would be streamlined and the surplus people returned to agriculture. This was probably due to the famine caused by Mao's disastrous Great Leap Forward. Pasang was sent back to Phari to become a farmer.

In Phari, Pasang became involved with an underground organization formed by Tibetans to sabotage China and assist India during the 1962 border war. They had no opportunity to do so in 1962, but in 1967 another clash happened nearby on the border at the Tsola. Pasang was sent along with 60 Tibetans to assist the Chinese forces, but he acted on behalf of the underground anti-Chinese Tibetan organization to cut some telephone lines. The Chinese did not learn about the existence of this organization until the end of 1970, although they may have had suspicions for a long time. The leaders of the organization had been found out in 1966 and 1967 and had been tortured and executed, but they did not reveal the names of any others. The remaining members of the organization were revealed when one of their number was arrested and revealed the identity of the others under torture. The punishment of the 21 members ranged from execution to lengthy prison sentences. Pasang was tortured to confess like all the others, but his sentence was a relatively lenient 15 months because his cutting of the telephone wire in 1967 was his only involvement. He escaped shortly after his release.

Pasang Tsewang also reports that there was a heavy Chinese military presence in the Phari area from 1962 through 1971, when he escaped. They had stored a large amount of supplies in the area in buildings as well as in tunnels underground. Chinese officials constantly propagandized Tibetans about the need to prepare for war and to oppose and report any who were suspected of being disloyal. They were told that it was useless to think of escape to India since Tibetans there were suffering horribly under the repressive rule of the reactionary Dalai Lama and the Indian imperialists.

### Tashi

Tashi, a small businessman from Tingri, escaped to Nepal in 1972. Because he was a businessman he was put in the middle class category during the Democratic Reform class divisions. He was not allowed to join a mutual aid team or a collective because of his class status but instead was allotted a small piece of land that was insufficient for his family of seven. He said that life for himself and his family became increasingly unbearable because of Chinese social and economic policies and political repression during the 1960s. Since he was from an area close to the border with Nepal he was aware of many people, including some relatives, who had already escaped. As he got older he considered himself less useful to his family, so he escaped leaving the rest of his family behind. He said that most Tibetans' faith in the Dalai Lama remained unshakable and that he remained their only hope for relief of their suffering under the Chinese.

Tashi said that the State Grain Tax was the greatest burden on Tibetans. They were required to meet a set quota of grain every year without regard to the success or failure of the harvest. Tibetans had to pay the Chinese taxes even if it left them without sufficient food for themselves. He also reported on Chinese war preparations in the border areas. The Chinese were certain that foreign reactionary governments were determined to destroy Chinese socialism. Tibetans and their yaks were conscripted to help the Chinese carry their war supplies.

Tashi reported that Tibetans were assigned war preparation tasks according to age groups. Students aged 18 to 25 were supposed to destroy monuments reflecting the old lifestyle and to establish new ones. Tashi does not explain this, but it is hard to see what this destruction of Tibetan cultural monuments had to do with war preparations. It seems to have had more to do with the Cultural Revolution theme of cultural destruction. It is also important to note that no new cultural monuments were established, presumably because of the sterility and poverty of socialist culture.

Tibetans aged 25 to 35 were supposed to spy on others and to report on people thinking of fleeing or trying to flee the country. Those aged 35 to 45 were required to accompany the army wherever they went, presumably to carry supplies. Tibetans aged 45 to 55 were supposed to act as medical assistants. Those aged 55 to 65 were to march in front of the army as protection to the main force, to be sacrificed to protect the Chinese soldiers, presumably because these Tibetans were considered as otherwise useless.

During the establishment of communes in the Tingri area, which seems to have happened in the late sixties, simultaneous with the war hysteria, Tibetans were told by the Chinese that they knew that some Tibetans hoped that Tibet would someday regain its independence, but that that day would never come. The Chinese said that they had the support of many socialist countries and that the people of all countries wanted to join with the communists but were prevented from doing so by their leaders.

Tashi also tells an interesting story about the attempt by Mao's designated successor, PLA commander Lin Piao, to assassinate Mao. Tibetans were told many details of the coup attempt and asked their opinion. They replied that they could not understand how someone who one day was supposed to be a great patriot and loyal companion of Chairman Mao could the next day turn out to be a traitor. They were told that they did not have to destroy pictures of Lin Piao or his works, perhaps because the edition of Mao's little red book issued to most Tibetans had an introduction by Lin Piao.

Anonymous

The next account is that of an ethnic Tibetan of Nepalese nationality who wished to remain anonymous. He was allowed to leave Tibet in 1973 during a period of relative liberal policies because he was a Katsera, of mixed Tibetan and Nepalese parentage. The Katsera were mostly traders in Tibet, especially in Lhasa, where they kept small shops around the Barkor. Because they had Nepalese nationality they were allowed to leave in 1959, although some opted to remain. This person describes the situation in Lhasa in 1973 when Chinese policies liberalized slightly due to the revival of the political fortunes of Deng Xiaoping and the decline of influence of Maoist hardliners.

He focuses on the policies of the minor liberalization period that began in 1973 and lasted for only a year or so. He said that overseas exiled Tibetans were being enticed to return with promises that their property would be restored and that they could play a role in the administration of Lhasa and the TAR. He said that some Tibetans were said to have returned, but that if that were true he had not seen any of them. The main part of his account is about the restoration of the Jokhang, which the Chinese wanted to refurbish in order to erase evidence of the destruction of cultural monuments in the past and in preparation for the possibility of foreign visitors to Tibet. In order to find skilled artists and craftsmen to do the restoration work they had to release some of them from prisons and labor camps. Some of the most talented and famous artists were of the upper class and had been imprisoned primarily because of their upper class status.

At this time many of the murals of the Jokhang were repainted and other repairs were made, as it was a famous site. If Tibet were to be opened to foreign visitors they would presumably be confined to Lhasa and would be shown the Potala, the repaired Jokhang, and the undamaged sections of Drepung and Sera as evidence that the Chinese had preserved Tibetan cultural monuments. No doubt the now almost fully eradicated Ganden monastery would not be mentioned, much less shown to any foreigners.

He said that some Tibetans were taking advantage of the restoration work to sneak into the Jokhang for religious purposes. Some pretended to be workers in order to get inside while others just took advantage of the restoration activity, and the need to keep the doors open for that purpose, in order to sneak inside for worship. The Jokhang had been closed since 1959. Tibetans reported that several miracles had accompanied the Jokhang restoration work. One semi-miraculous event was the discovery of the lower half of the Jowo statue from the Ramoche that had been hidden in the Jokhang after the revolt or during the Cultural Revolution. The upper half was later found in China during the next liberalization period of the early 1980s and the fully restored statue was reinstalled in the Ramoche in 1985.

At this time, in the brief liberalization period in 1973, the Chinese promised that the Jokhang would soon be opened for worshipers and the CCP's policy of freedom of religion

would be restored. Some Chinese officials expressed regret for the destruction that had taken place in the past, including one official who said that he had protected Drepung from destruction. He was commended for this and Drepung was opened for Tibetans shortly thereafter. Another aspect of this brief period of liberalization of Chinese policies in Tibet was the rumor that the numbers of Chinese in Tibet would soon be reduced. Similar promises of reductions of the Chinese in Tibet were announced by the Chinese during liberalizations of the past, as in 1957, and would be again when a more permanent liberalization began in 1979. Such reductions were considered necessary in order that there should be at least the appearance of some Tibetan autonomy.

### Kunsang

Kunsang, a farmer from Tingri, escaped to Nepal with his wife and three children in 1974. He was classed as a poor farmer and hence did not suffer the same repression as many of those of the upper classes. Nevertheless, his family's situation became increasingly difficult during the late 1960s and early 1970s. He would have tried to escape earlier except that his wife had been in poor health for several years. Several of his children had died at or shortly after birth. In addition, there was a rumor that Tibet would soon get its independence back and therefore many Tibetans delayed or abandoned plans to escape. He said that many Tibetans were still clinging to this hope for independence. Presumably, the rumor that Tibetan independence would be restored was linked to Chinese predictions of an upcoming war with the Soviet Union and India beginning on the Indian border. Tibetans were apparently hoping for a Chinese defeat in that war.

Kunsang said that the economic hardships began with the introduction of mutual aid teams, which was the first stage of collectivization. This happened in the early 1960s and coincided with the famine and starvation associated with Mao's disastrous Great Leap Forward of 1959-1962. Private property in land and animals was all confiscated and given to the mutual aid teams. This was supposed to raise the standard of living of the poorest by sharing the relative wealth of the richest, but the actual result was to lower the living conditions of everyone.

During the Cultural Revolution the Chinese incited Tibetans to destroy their own temples, monasteries, and every aspect of their religion and culture. The Chinese gave the orders but Tibetans had to do the actual destruction. This allowed the Chinese to claim that Tibetans voluntarily eradicated these vestiges of the old cultural system because they had realized its exploitative nature and wanted to institute a completely new system. However, he reports that some Tibetans tried to prevent the destruction of temples and monasteries but that they were arrested by the Chinese. Some lamas and monks were tortured and arrested while others were forcibly secularized and made to marry. Many people had hidden religious articles like images and scriptures in the hope that they would be able to use them again once Tibet regained its

independence. The Chinese also banned traditional dress and hairstyles and the wearing of jewelry by women.

Communes were started during the Cultural Revolution, which brought added hardships to the people. Rigid systems of work hours and rationing of food were introduced. Each worker got a small ration of grain while all the rest was taken as a variety of taxes like “State Grain Tax” and “War Preparation Tax.” Those who could not work, like the aged and children, got no grain ration at all. This put an added burden on the workers whose food rations were barely enough for themselves alone. Indoctrination sessions were held every night. Tibetans were told that they had suffered greatly in the old society but that they were now liberated and the masters of their own fate. They all knew that this was not true but were unable to say so for fear of repression. After the inauguration of the TAR in 1965 Tibetans elected their own commune leaders but they had no actual authority. The Chinese retained all decision-making power.

Tibetans of the former upper classes were not allowed to join communes but had to subsist on their own on inadequate parcels of land. They were not allowed to associate with other Tibetans. The Chinese would occasionally appeal to Tibetans in exile in India to return to Tibet to enjoy the supposed situation of peace and prosperity. A few were enticed to return and were rewarded with small gifts of tea and tsampa, but they too were kept isolated from other Tibetans. They usually escaped again at the first opportunity once they found out the real conditions in Tibet.

### Wangyal

Wangyal, a farmer of Nyero, Tsang, escaped to Bhutan in 1974. Wangyal was born before 1950 in Amdo where his father was posted as a soldier in the Tibetan Army. His family later moved back to his father’s home village of Nyero, but the family separated and Wangyal went to live with his mother in Shigatse. In 1959 he was a monk at the Narthang Monastery near Shigatse.

Wangyal says that the Narthang Monastery was seized by the Chinese PLA after the revolt in Lhasa. Higher level monks and lamas were sent to the Karthang Prison. Monks with relatives nearby were sent home. Monks without any nearby relatives were allowed to remain at the monastery as caretakers and farmers. Wangyal was one of those who remained. They were told that their work would be hard at first but that the farm work would soon be mechanized and they would then have ample leisure time. The monastery would then become like a social club. However, the promised mechanization did not happen and the number of monks gradually decreased as some left to take up a secular life. Work for the remaining monks therefore increased. Wangyal himself left in 1964 when he discovered that he had a distant uncle in Shigatse who requested his help.

Wangyal experienced the Cultural Revolution in Shigatse. He says that there were Tibetan members on both sides of the Red Guard factional divide but that most Tibetans had little understanding of the political or ideological differences between the two factions. He says that most Tibetans joined one or the other Red Guard group mostly just for the excitement they provided in their constant campaigns and street fights against each other. Tibetan Red Guards were only allowed to carry knives and wooden lances while the Chinese had guns.

The Shigatse Red Guards directed local Tibetans to destroy the Narthang Monastery. Local Tibetans then looted the monastery of all its valuables not already taken by the Chinese and destroyed everything else. Wangyal describes a chaotic scene of destruction that was a characteristic of the Cultural Revolution. Narthang's famous woodblocks used to print the Tangur and Kangur and other Buddhist texts were taken for firewood. The printed texts were burned on the spot. Clay images were all smashed. Some of the structural timbers from the monastery were used to build a school and a community hall. The local authorities then demanded that any valuable or metal articles taken from the monastery should be turned in, but few local Tibetans complied. A search was then conducted to find all such articles, and valuable articles from household shrines were confiscated at the same time.

Tibetans were issued copies of Mao's Little Red Book in Tibetan and required to memorize its sayings. Anyone could be stopped at any time by Chinese and Tibetan Red Guards and asked to recite any passage at random. Wangyal says that he suspected that even many of the most zealous Red Guards did not actually understand Mao's writings.

In 1971 Wangyal went to live with his father in Nyero. He got a job as a cook in the local government office. He observed that Chinese officials ate far better than did Tibetan officials. Every local Tibetan official had a Chinese counterpart who had all the actual authority.

In 1973 during the Chinese New Year, Wangyal accidently set his kitchen on fire and caused some damage. He was accused by the top Chinese official of deliberately damaging government property at the instigation of reactionaries. He tried to explain that it was an accident but the Chinese would not listen. However, Wangyal knew that the Chinese official was secretly having an affair with a local Tibetan girl so he retaliated by accusing him of adultery. Because Wangyal knew the details of the affair the Chinese official ultimately had to confess. Wangyal does not know if the official was ever punished but he himself lost his job as cook. Knowing that he would be unable to get any other job he decided to escape.

### Ngodup

Ngodup was from a family of small farmers in Tingri. He escaped to Nepal in 1974. As a young man in Tingri, Ngodup was recruited by the Chinese Mountaineering Association for a planned expedition to climb Mt Everest in 1960. He was a porter along with another 350

Tibetans. There were hundreds of Chinese climbers and other support personnel and there were also some Tibetan climbers. The Chinese claimed that two climbers, one Chinese and one Tibetan, reached the top of Everest, which was at 8,800 meters. However, Ngodup says that they never got past 7000 meters. He claims that he himself carried equipment to the 7000 meter camp and that no one got higher than that. He was part of the group that tried to climb higher but were unable, so he is sure that no one climbed higher than 7000 meters. Nevertheless, the Chinese not only claimed that they had reached the top, but that no one had done so before them, particularly the British 1954 expedition in which the Tingri Sherpa Tenzin Norgay and the New Zealander Edmund Hillary reached the summit.

Shortly after that Ngodup was sent to the Minority Nationalities Institute in Gansu along with 500 Tibetans from all parts of Tibet. They were told that they would get a good education and be well fed but they found that the education was nothing but propaganda and food was so scarce that they almost starved. This was during the famine caused by Mao's disastrous Great Leap Forward. Some 80 of the Tibetan students approached the Chinese administrators of the school to demand to be sent home, which caused an open clash in which he claims that 52 Chinese and 18 Tibetans were killed. Some Tibetan students were then sent to prison but about 50, including Ngodup were sent back to Tibet.

He got a job at the meteorological station in Tingri but his wages were hardly enough to support himself and his family. He met a Sherpa trader from Nepal from whom he got 13 watches to sell. He sold them easily to Chinese but one of them resold his and then Ngodup got reported for unauthorized private capitalist activities. He was arrested and sent for three years in prison at the Emagang Prison near Shigatse. There were three types of prisoners: counterrevolutionaries, religious and political oppressors of the masses, and those who had participated in the 1959 revolt. They had to do hard labor all day and then had indoctrination at night, mostly about the evils of the old society.

One prisoner, a former monk, was serving an 18 year sentence for sending images from Sakya Monastery to Nepal. Unlike other prisoners he refused to obey the orders of the Chinese or follow their rules. He was sentenced to death and was publically paraded around Shigatse and then executed as a lesson to others. Many other prisoners had their sentences extended for failure to cooperate, but none had sentences reduced even if they cooperated.

Ngodup finished his sentence in 1967 but was not fully released. He was required to do menial labor around the prison for another five years. He returned to Tingri in 1972. There he found that everyone had been collected into communes. There was great scarcity of food due to communization and all private trading having been eliminated. Tibetans had to contribute everything they owned to the commune and the Chinese still demanded that they make more contributions of cash that they did not have. Personal freedoms were also greatly restricted in the

communes, and nightly indoctrination sessions were continued. Tibetans were told that they had been liberated and were now masters of their own fate, but all they knew was that they had no freedom at all and could not even travel to another village without permission. After being falsely accused of stealing grain from the commune, Ngodup decided to escape over the Nangpa La to Solo Khumbu in Nepal.

### Kunga Thinley

Kunga Thinley was from Lhokha Yarto, Yarsang Horma, in Western Tibet. In 1958 he went to Ngari to work under Khenchung Thubten Khenrab, governor of the district. After the 1959 uprising he and all other Tibetan Government officials were arrested. Khenchung was tortured to death in prison. Kunga Thinley was sentenced to prison along with thousands of others in the area, he said, and had to endure starvation and constant interrogation for two years. All the members of his family were subjected to public trial due to their association with Yongzin Ling Rinpoche. His father, Dorje Paljor, was arrested and all their family property was confiscated and redistributed to the poor after the Chinese took the most valuable articles for themselves. His father was eventually released, but the torture, imprisonment, and public criticism was too much for him and others in the family. His father, elder sister Namdrol, her daughter, and brother Lobsang committed suicide by jumping into the Yarla Shamchu river.

Kunga Thinley was released from prison in 1961 and sent to Lhasa to work on road construction. Then he was sent to the Kunsang Magar in Norbulingka where he was employed in the Zopa Menkhang as kitchen helper and gardener. One day he overheard two Chinese complaining about the dirtiness of the Tibetans. He told them that they should not have come to Tibet if they disliked Tibetans so much. He was reported to the Chinese head of the Zopa Menkhang and was told that he would have to write a confession and undergo an investigation for criticizing the policies of the Chinese government. He knew that this would probably lead to his imprisonment or at least to loss of employment, so he decided to flee Tibet. He went to Lhokha and from there escaped through Tsona with his cousin Jamyang Palden. They reached India in January 1975.

Kunga Thinley reports that Tibetans were made to work like animals and that they had no personal freedoms whatsoever. In an effort to keep up Mao's ideology of constant class struggle, Lhasa had been turned into a huge prison. Public trials, torture, and prison had become a daily feature of life. Everyone had to do labor by day and attend public meetings at night. Tibetans were subject to arrest for the slightest provocation and they lived in constant fear. During the Cultural Revolution there was a campaign to destroy everything old, including dress, language, culture, and religion. All valuable religious objects were taken out of temples and monasteries and transported to China. Clay images were crushed into powder and scattered on the streets so that people would have to walk on them. Bonfires were made of religious texts and *thangkas*.

Houses of the old aristocracy were raided and religious objects confiscated. A display in the Barkor was made of such private religious articles, and Tibetans were told that they had to hand over to the government all such objects in their possession.

Lamas, aristocrats, and former officials were publicly paraded and humiliated, including many former officials who had previously collaborated with the Chinese. Clashes between Red Guard factions caused the deaths of many Tibetans and Chinese. Even top Chinese officials were purged. In the subsequent anti-Lin Piao, anti-Confucius, anti-Dalai Lama campaign, most Tibetans were willing to criticize Lin and Confucius but refused to criticize the Dalai or Panchen Lamas.

In 1972 the King of Cambodia was supposed to visit Lhasa, so the Chinese hurriedly tried to repair some of the destruction they themselves had caused. They had to release from prison the artists and artisans necessary to repair temples and monasteries. In 1974 an international trade delegation was scheduled to visit, but Tibetans were told that they could not talk to any of the delegation members. Tibetan officials were dressed up in their finest clothes and made to appear like ordinary Tibetans going to picnic at the Norbulingka. They were photographed for the purposes of Chinese propaganda but their thermos flasks and baskets were empty.

### Jamyang

Jamyang, a farmer from Tingri, escaped to Nepal in 1975 along with his wife and five children and four other people. He said that land redistribution took place in Tingri only in 1960 because it was too late in the season to do it in 1959. There were few large private estates in Tingri so there was only a small amount of redistribution of property from the upper to the lower classes. Some of the upper classes were subjected to *thamzing* and imprisoned. Class divisions were made and most locals were put in the poor peasant class, the most favored class under the new system. Farming remained based upon each family.

In 1963 the land was redistributed again and a system called “two and eight” was instituted. Out of every ten parts of agricultural production only two parts had to be paid as tax while the rest was kept by the farmers. However, production was based on a Chinese estimate of production rather than actual production. Since the estimate was inflated, the two parts that had to be paid to the government was more like three or even four parts. In 1964 the poor peasants were grouped into mutual aid teams, consisting of seven families and later increased to an average of ten families. People of the former upper classes or reactionaries could not join the mutual aid teams. Each person who was able to work received a grain ration, but those too young or too old to work received none and had to be supported by their families. Working hours were long and everyone had to attend indoctrination sessions in the evenings that lasted as long as three hours.

In 1973 communes were begun. Young Tibetans who had been sent to schools in China were returned to start the communes. All of the land in Tingri was divided into four large communes. The head of each commune was Chinese while all the lower officers were Tibetans. Jamyang's commune was composed of 24 families with 124 people. They should have received enough land to take 385 *khel* of seed but got land capable of taking only 100 *khel*, so they were at an immediate disadvantage in attempting to grow enough food for subsistence. Each worker got a food ration, while again only workers got a ration and those unable to work did not. Those who were unable to work but had no families got a ration, but those with families had to be supported by their family. Workers' rations were also based on their working capabilities, the best getting eight points (*karcha*) per day, with the middle level getting seven points and the lowest getting six. In Jamyang's family of seven, only three were capable of work, so seven people had to survive on rations barely sufficient for three.

Each commune also had to provide ten young men for the People's Militia, which was established in 1969 and was intended to carry supplies for the PLA. Since war preparations along the border with India were intense, the Tibetan militia members were often away from home doing work for the PLA. Jamyang estimated that there were 5,000 PLA troops stationed in the Tingri area.

When the communes were established, Tibetans were told that they would have freedom of religion and of movement, but anyone who practiced religion was persecuted and only the poorest people favored by the Chinese had any freedom of movement. There were five towns in the Tingri area and each had a prison. He once got a permit to visit Shigatse and saw about 400 prisoners working at a coal mine. Another prison at Gyamtso Shar had 200 prisoners.

Jamyang said that Tibetans only heard rumors about whether the Panchen Lama was still alive or not. He also said that conditions in Tibet in the early 1970 were so bad that many Tibetans wanted to escape. However, they were influenced to stay by a rumor that the Dalai Lama would return soon and Tibet would regain its independence.

### Lodi Gyatsho

Lodi Gyatsho was a nomad from Gartse in Ngari. He and his wife escaped from Ngari to Ladakh in 1975. He decided to escape after some religious scriptures that he had hidden were discovered. He was subjected to *thamzing* for three days and knew that thereafter he would be persecuted as a reactionary. He said that conditions were bad for almost all Tibetans and that there was no freedom at all. They could not possess private property; they could not decide the fate of their children, who were taken away for indoctrination in China; and they were subjected to constant propaganda that they knew were lies but had to pretend to believe. They had to listen to the denigration of all their religious leaders, including HH the Dalai Lama.

Lodi Gyatsho said that he did not try to escape earlier because of rumors that Tibet would soon regain her independence. He said that this rumor was started due to several religious indications, including a vision said to have been seen by the Panchen Lama, presumably before he was taken away to Beijing in 1964. He was said to have seen a fight between a red swan from the east, obviously representing China, and a white swan from the south, presumably representing India, in which the white swan drove the red swan back to the east. The Nyemo rebellion of the early 1970s added strength to this rumor, as did factional struggles within the CCP leadership.

Lodi Gyatsho says that all the nomads of Ngari were required to join communes. They were paid in work points that were supposed to be redeemed for a certain amount of food, but the amount was always less than promised. In addition, each family had to take care of anyone who was disabled or was too old or too young to work. The commune and the government were also supposed to take care of such people but they never did so. Production of wool, cheese, and butter actually increased in the communes because Tibetans were forced to work hard but, as in agricultural communes, most of the production was taken in a variety of taxes. Tibetans were also forced to labor on a fruitless effort to grow grain at high altitude.

He says that a widely reported liberalization in Chinese policies in 1973 was mostly fiction. Mao was supposed to have said that Tibetans had the right to express their own opinions, to freely practice religion, and to wear their own dress and speak their own language. Instead, he said, none of those rights was respected. Those who confessed their political crimes or mistakes were promised pardons but instead were subjected to *thamzing* and persecution. Nightly indoctrination sessions were continued to discuss the work of the commune, to study the works of Mao, and to oppose capitalism, and during which self-criticisms and *thamzings* were also held. Tibetans were required to find fault with all former officials or traditional and religious leaders in order to demonstrate the injustice and exploitation of the old society.

For a long time Tibetans did not know what had happened to the Panchen Lama after he submitted his 70-character petition to the Chinese leaders in 1962 and was publicly criticized in Lhasa and then taken away to Beijing in 1964. Before 1962 most Tibetans had little respect for him because he was considered a Chinese puppet. In a photo of Mao with the Dalai and Panchen Lama taken in 1954 Tibetans were used to cutting out Mao and the Panchen and saving only the photo of the Dalai Lama. However, since the Panchen Lama had criticized Chinese policy in Tibet and had been arrested as a result, his reputation had risen. The Chinese had accused him of plotting a revolt and demanded that he confess, but the Panchen had said that he would testify about conditions in Tibet only to the United Nations and not to the Chinese Government.

The Chinese claimed that Tibetan exiles in India were all starving so there was no use for anyone to think of escaping.

## Summary

To summarize this series of Tibetan refugee accounts, their credibility is established by their consistency. These refugees came from different parts of Tibet and from different social classes, and none knew any of the others, but they all emphasized the same facts without any differences. All of the refugees denied Chinese claims that Tibetans had any freedoms at all or that they had been anything but victims of China's so-called peaceful liberation of Tibet, liberation of the serfs, or Democratic Reforms. All accounts were consistent about the culturally repressive and destructive effects of Democratic Reforms and the Cultural Revolution. All said that the revolt against Chinese rule had the support of most Tibetans and that the result of China's repression of the revolt was Chinese control over all aspects of Tibetans' lives rather than any semblance of Tibetan self-rule as the Chinese claimed.

All the Tibetan accounts were consistent in saying that Tibetans had no freedom of any sort under Chinese rule. Tibetans could not even move between different areas of Lhasa after the revolt or from village to village in other parts of Tibet. Religion was severely repressed, and monks either fled or were killed during the revolt or were arrested thereafter. Lamas were subjected to public humiliations and beatings and then imprisoned. Monasteries were looted by the Chinese during Democratic Reforms and the empty buildings were then destroyed during the Cultural Revolution. Many of the accounts mention the nightly indoctrination sessions during which opponents of the Chinese were identified and subjected to the *thamzing* process by which the Chinese eliminated all opponents. All say that there were food shortages and even starvation due to the CCP's irrational communization policies and their confiscation of most of the Tibetan harvest for their own use.

The Tibetan accounts consistently say that the Democratic Reforms campaign after the revolt was mostly about identifying and repressing Tibetan resistance. Property confiscated from the wealthy and the monasteries was mostly taken by the Chinese while Tibetans were given only the cheapest items. Most remaining monks were forcibly secularized. Valuable articles from monasteries were systematically confiscated by the Chinese and taken away, while clay statues were smashed, and religious texts and *thangkas* were burned and prayer stones were used for utilitarian purposes like public toilets. Tibetans report that food shortages started when communization began and was primarily due to Chinese confiscation of most of the Tibetan harvest.

Many of the refugee accounts describe the destruction and cultural repression of the Cultural Revolution, during which most Tibetans were victims of Chinese political campaigns that they did not understand. They describe not only the destruction of almost all cultural monuments but also severe restrictions on other cultural aspects like dress, household decoration,

religious practice, and language. Tibetans were made to conform to Chinese ideology by having to memorize the sayings of Mao and repeat them on demand. Intensive indoctrination continued for most Tibetans, with ideological conformity strictly enforced. Tibetans were repressed for any indication of opposition to Chinese rule. Communization produced the greatest degree of Chinese control over Tibetans' lives, with Tibetans having no freedom to determine their residency, occupation, lifestyle, or daily routine and having the produce of their forced labor confiscated by the Chinese for their own use. Tibetans had no say over their lives or even those of their children, which were determined by the CCP.

Many of these accounts say that escape was difficult and that many more Tibetans would have escaped if they could. Many delayed escape attempts in the late 1960s and early 1970 due to rumors that the Dalai Lama would return and Tibet would regain its independence. The fate of the Panchen Lama at this time was unknown, but his reputation had risen because he had criticized the Chinese.

One story illustrates the ideological conformity enforced by the CCP and the mendacity that was the result. The Chinese claim to have climbed Mt. Everest in 1960 was refuted by a Tibetan who was with the expedition. He said that he was a witness to the fact that they did not reach the summit but reported that they did due to their fear of punishment for failure.

## Appendix

As an appendix to this book there is an editorial article from the *Tibetan Review* from June 1975 that examines the issues of why Chinese propaganda substantially prevailed until the publication of such credible refugee accounts in the 1970s and the opening of Tibet to the outside world in the 1980s. The editorial, by the Tibetan review editor at the time, Dawa Norbu, also examines the issue of why there were not more refugees if conditions in Tibet were so bad. This is important to the argument because the relatively small number who fled Tibet, some 80,000 immediately after the revolt, is cited by the Chinese as well as some foreign commentators as evidence that not all Tibetans were opposed to Chinese control over their country, or at least not so opposed that they felt compelled to flee their homeland.

Some of the answers to the last question are contained in the refugees' accounts themselves, particularly that there were hopes and rumors of a return of the Dalai Lama and a restoration of Tibetan independence that convinced many Tibetans to stay in Tibet because they thought that the situation might soon dramatically change for the better. Also, flight from the eastern parts of Tibet was always difficult and the Chinese made great efforts to prevent Tibetans from fleeing when they began their reforms there from 1956 to 1958. Many Tibetans were killed trying to escape, including in massacres of large nomadic groups captured before they could reach the TAR. Once the Chinese gained complete control over Central Tibet after the 1959

revolt, escape was equally difficult from there. Dawa Norbu, who himself escaped from Sakya in late 1959, mentions that the Chinese pursued more moderate policies in Tibetan areas close to the borders of India, Bhutan, and Nepal, precisely so that Tibetans from those areas where escape was easiest would not feel compelled to do so.

Chinese propaganda tries to denigrate those Tibetans who did escape by claiming that they were mostly the former feudal lords who had the most to lose during Chinese reforms. However, Dawa Norbu cites statistics showing that almost all refugees were common people who were the most favored by the Chinese and who presumably would have the least reason to flee Chinese reforms of which they were supposedly the beneficiaries. Many refugee accounts say that Chinese propaganda told Tibetans that those who had escaped were living in poverty in India, which may have convinced some to remain in Tibet. Another, and perhaps the most important, reason is that to leave one's home and country and flee with only the possessions on one's back to seek an uncertain future in exile was an extremely traumatic experience that most Tibetans were very reluctant to take. Many no doubt hoped for the best since they had no idea of what Chinese rule would mean for them.

As for why Chinese propaganda essentially prevailed at least until the 1970s or 1980s, the Chinese claimed that Tibetans were happy under Chinese rule, even singing and dancing to celebrate their liberation, which was corroborated by many Tibetans who were coerced by the Chinese to echo their propaganda. Also, most of those who escaped immediately after the revolt had no experience of Chinese reforms and could not describe or even really comprehend them. Only when Tibetans who actually experienced Chinese rule over Tibet began to escape in the 1970s could the true story begin to emerge. The Chinese and some of their foreign sympathizers also tried to blame Tibetan opposition to Chinese rule as having been aroused by lamas and aristocrats and by foreign instigation, particularly by the American CIA. Since the Chinese Communists claimed that they were in Tibet only to liberate Tibetans from a brutal feudal system, which was corroborated by some Tibetan former serfs, and since those who resisted or fled could be characterized as tools of feudal lords or lamas or of foreign imperialists, their propaganda was not adequately contradicted until Tibetans themselves began to tell a contradictory story.