

BOOK REVIEW

AN AUTOBIOGRAPHY

*SON OF MOUNT EVEREST*

BY

DHINGRI NGAWANG

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A COMPILATION OF A SERIES OF PROGRAMS

ON

RADIO FREE ASIA

TIBETAN SERVICE

BY

WARREN W. SMITH

*SON OF MOUNT EVEREST*

By Dhingri Ngawang

Dhingri Ngawang was a former Tibetan Army soldier who was arrested two days after the beginning of the 1959 revolt against Chinese rule over Tibet simply because he had been in the Tibetan Army. He had not been involved in the revolt in any way. He was in various prison and labor camps from 1959 until 1980. He was distinguished for his refusal to adhere to Chinese demands that he reform his way of thinking, which led to his repeatedly receiving extended sentences. Even in 1980 he was supposed to remain as a retained worker at his former prison. However, when given a two-month pass to visit his home for the first time in 20 years he instead escaped to Nepal and from there to Dharamsala in India. His autobiography was published in both Tibetan and English by Gu Chu Sum, the exile organization representing former Tibetan political prisoners.

Ngawang begins his book by stating that the ancient history of Tibet demonstrates without any doubt that Tibet was an entirely independent country. He describes his autobiography not only as a memoir of his life but as a testimony to the brutality that he and many Tibetans experienced and that some still continue to experience. He hopes that his story will bring to light the strength and perseverance of Tibetans in their aspiration for survival as a nation and in their quest for freedom. He says that the world will ultimately judge whether it is acceptable to brutally repress a peaceful nation in the name of “liberation” while the rest of the world seeks human rights, equality, and democracy. No one has the right to rule over another, he says, especially if the victim is weak in military strength but peaceful in its lifestyle and tradition. He hopes that some Chinese might learn from his book what really happened in Tibet and that his book might inspire those who believe in a peaceful world where people might live without suppression from an alien unwanted guest.

His family is known as Gara Kangshar from the town of Dhingri (more often spelled Tingri) in the To region of Tibet, west of Shigatse and just north of Chomolungma, or Mount Everest, which is why he titled his book (in English) *Son of Mount Everest*. As a part of their tax obligations to the Tibetan Government, the family sent Dhingri Ngawang’s grandfather, Dawa Gyalpo, as a soldier in the Chadhang Dhingri Regiment of the Tibetan Army. His grandfather lost his life in 1912 after the fall of the Qing dynasty when Chinese soldiers were being expelled from the area. His place was taken by Dhingri Ngawang’s father, Lhakpa, who was sent to defend Tibetan territory in Kham against the Chinese. His father returned with his regiment to Dhingri with a wife, Tsomo, from Derge Gaje and while there the couple had a daughter, Ugyen, in 1929 and a son, Ngawang, in 1932. The Dhingri Regiment was again sent to Kham, where the family was increased by two more children, both boys, Pasang and Tamdin.

In 1942 his father took ill and died at age 38, leaving the family without any means of support. They existed for about a year, then living in Drayab, in Kham, by doing odd jobs.

Then the commander of his father's regiment came to them and offered to take Ngawang into the regiment as his father's replacement. His father had asked his army comrades to help his family and this was the way that they did so. Even though the minimum age for the army was 18, Ngawang was given a position when only 10 years old in recognition of the service of his father and grandfather. He was not the only child of a deceased soldier in the regiment, although he was the youngest. He had lived all his life as the child of a soldier and was thus already familiar with much of the military lifestyle. He was made a bugler and signaler.

At that time the Tibetan Army consisted of four regiments, the Khadhang Drapchi, the Ghadang Shigatse, the Ngadhang Gyantse, and the Chadhang Dhingri regiments. In addition there was a Kadhang Bodyguard regiment that provided security for the Dalai Lama. Altogether the Tibetan Army had about three thousand soldiers. In 1946 when he was 14 years old his regiment was sent back to Dhingri where his mother and siblings had already settled. In 1947 his regiment was sent to Nagchu. In 1949 they were sent to a place near Chamdo to defend against a possible Chinese attack. When the Chinese attacked in November of 1950 his regiment was overwhelmed by the superior Chinese force, although they fought bravely while retreating toward Chamdo, where they were ordered to surrender. They were retained by the Chinese at Chamdo until after the signing of the 17-Point Agreement in May of 1951, after which the remnants of his regiment were sent back to Nagchu.

His regiment was supposed to assist the Chinese PLA in entering Tibet through Nagchu. About 1,000 Chinese came to Nagchu from the north from Qinghai while another 1,000 came from the east through Chamdo. The Chinese told the assembled Tibetan soldiers that they had come to Tibet only to help the poor Tibetan people and that they would leave when Tibetans could take care of themselves. The Tibetans were treated to dance and drama performances by the Chinese about how they were all liberated thanks to the selfless assistance of the Chinese Communist Party. The Chinese troops carried portraits of Mao and Chu De, the PLA commander, wherever they went. They professed brotherly love for the Tibetan people, but they sent out spies everywhere who asked questions about all the people.

The Chinese troops stayed in Nagchu for about a week, after which they left for Lhasa. About two months after that the Panchen Lama came through Nagchu on his return to Tibet. Since Ngawang was from the Tsang region he was very interested in getting a blessing from the Panchen Lama, which he did. He came away convinced that he was the genuine reincarnation of the previous Panchen Lama, although the people of Lhasa and the Tibetan government had disputed his selection because his predecessor had been in exile from Tibet and under the protection of the Chinese. The Chinese Communists had recognized his reincarnation while the Dalai Lama and the Tibetan government had done so only under pressure from the Chinese.

Ngawang's regiment remained at Nagchu for another nine months until they were put on leave and told to return to Dhingri. They travelled through Shigatse, where he visited the Tashilhunpo Monastery. He noticed a large new Chinese army encampment. In Shekar Dzong they turned in their weapons. In Dhingri there were two Chinese PLA camps with about 200 soldiers in one camp and 400 in another. He says that the Chinese soldiers visited Tibetan homes and provided them all sorts of help, including bringing water and helping in the fields. At the same time they made enquiries about all the people of the area in regard to the social and economic status of each family, who had worked for the Tibetan Government, who were traders, and who were the most capable.

While he waited to see if his regiment would be reactivated, Ngawang traveled to Shigatse for a *Kalachakra* empowerment conducted by the Panchen Lama. After that he engaged in a small trading venture in which he made a small amount of money. However, he lost it all playing Mahjong. Since he had lost all his profit and was unable to even repay the principle that he had borrowed to finance his venture, and at the same time his regiment showed no signs of being recalled, he was in a difficult situation. His mother and siblings were in Dhingri but he could not return there, having lost all his money. Therefore, he decided to go to India where he hoped to get work.

Ngawang had to borrow 10 Indian rupees just to get to Gangtok in Sikkim, where he hoped to get work as a porter carrying loads from there to Tibet. He began by carrying loads short distances to the border with Tibet. He then met with someone who carried loads by mule for the Yutok family, who offered Ngawang a job being a muleteer for the same family. He could also take other mule loads for his own profit. He was always to say that the loads belonged to the Yutok family since they had relations with the royal family of Sikkim. He says that the porters and muleteers on this route were mostly aimless itinerants like himself. Each was more rude, violent, and ill-tempered than the other. Fights often broke out between muleteers trying to pass each other on narrow sections of the trail or between muleteers and shepherds with large flocks of sheep and goats. There were also bandits in the mostly lawless frontier region.

After some time Ngawang was asked if he could arrange for the transport of an automobile belonging to Demo Rinpoche. He went to look at the car to see if it would be possible to carry it, disassembled into the smallest parts possible, over the narrow trail to Tibet. He determined that it could be done with sufficient men carrying the parts on slings attached to bamboo poles. He recruited 12 men from the place where was staying and they allied with another 12 from a different place. Together the 24 men could transport the entire automobile, he figured. Ngawang was in charge of the whole group.

The 24 men in Ngawang's group were mostly former Tibetan Army soldiers who did not care for military discipline or former *dob-dobs*, or "fighting monks," from various monasteries,

who were disinclined to study scriptures. Others were single men who did not care to settle down to raise families or farm land and tend livestock. They were all strong and tough and they carried swords, knives, and large sticks. They were prepared to fight to avoid being pushed off the trail with their difficult loads. Indeed, on the first trip they encountered a group of muleteers who refused to make way for them. Ngawang's group gave them a sound thrashing. They met altogether nineteen caravans of mules on this first journey and had to fight with each of them, winning all the fights. They eventually transported 40 vehicles the short distance from Gangtok to Sharsingma on the border with Tibet. They became well-known on this route and all others knew to give way to them. Ngawang himself became famous as a fighter who never backed down and who never lost a fight.

In late 1956 Ngawang's brother arrived from Dhingri to bring him back home. His family had heard of his exploits as a load carrier and leader of a group of men that had engaged in many fights. This reputation was not pleasing to his mother or family, who feared that he could not long survive in this lifestyle. They wanted him to return to Dhingri. He finally agreed to go but some of his men were so distraught at his leaving, and also fearing that their enemies might take out their resentments on them in Ngawang's absence, that they begged to go back to Tibet with him. Ngawang agreed to take them with him and they organized some goods to trade and then returned to Dhingri. He and his friends managed to do two more trading trips to Gangtok shortly thereafter.

During this time tensions had increased between Tibetans and the Chinese. Ngawang still hoped that his regiment would be recalled, but it did not happen. Instead, he thought to join a local Tibetan resistance group that was fighting against the Chinese. In preparation for doing so, he purchased three swords, a pistol and a rifle, and ammunition. He attempted to organize some friends to attack Chinese troops they had observed coming into the area, but none of them dared to attack the numerous and well-armed Chinese. Ngawang was later to regret being unable to attack the Chinese since this turned out to have been his only chance to do so.

On 12 March 1959 some Chinese soldiers came to the door of Ngawang's house to invite him to play football, which he had done before many times. However, this time when he emerged from his house he was immediately surrounded by armed Chinese troops and arrested. The Lhasa uprising, of which the Chinese were aware but the local Tibetans were not, had begun two days before. The Chinese had immediately begun to arrest any Tibetans who were former soldiers or who were known to be anti-Chinese. All of those with whom Ngawang had conspired to attack the Chinese troops were soon arrested, although some resisted and were killed, sometimes along with their families. The arrested Tibetans from Dhingri were taken by truck to Shekar Dzong where more Tibetan Army soldiers were added to their group, making more than 100, who were then taken by truck to Shigatse. They were told that they would have to undergo

reform through labor and thought reform to align themselves with the new reality in Tibet after the revolt.

After about a month the 100 former Chadang Dhingri Regiment veterans as well as some 400 from the Ghadang Shigatse Regiment were sent to do labor on the Nachen Trang hydroelectric power project on the Kyi Chu just to the east of Lhasa. Many Tibetans arrested in Lhasa after the revolt, as well as many of the former Lhasa upper class, both men and women, were forced to labor at Nachen Trang. The former soldiers were told that their time at Nachen Trang would be determined by how well they reformed their minds during their labor there. At the work site they saw what appeared to be an ant hill of swarming workers. The workers were divided into sixteen units with two sections within each unit, one for daytime work and one for nighttime. The work consisted of breaking rock boulders, done by the strongest men, while the resulting rubble was carried on the backs of the rest to an embankment along the river. The work was very hazardous and there were many accidents in which workers were injured or killed.

After a few months the Chinese began political indoctrination and struggle sessions (Tib. *thamzing*). They had recruited some Tibetan collaborators to actually conduct the *thamzing*. The Tibetan Army veterans were told that their former leaders would be brought before them to be subjected to their criticisms. They were given written slogans that they were supposed to shout at their former leaders. Several of their former commanders were brought before them and they were made to shout threatening slogans accusing them of being responsible for the abuses of the old Tibetan society. They were each made to closely approach their former leaders and shout these slogans. A few of the former soldiers who had been recruited and trained by the Chinese engaged in physical violence during the process, including pushing, shoving, and beating. This degenerated into such violence that one former officer (*Rupon*) of the Ghadang Regiment was killed on the spot and another was injured. However, the veterans of Ngawang's Chadang Dhingri Regiment refused to participate in the humiliation and beatings of their former leaders. They surrounded their leaders and succeeded in preventing them from being harmed.

The Chinese at Nachen Trang instructed the Tibetan laborers that the policy of the Communist Party was to reward sincere confessions of guilt, while refusal to confess would be met with severe repression. They were accused of past exploitation of others or for opposition to the Chinese. There was an assumption of guilt and therefore no possibility of anyone being innocent. If one had been arrested then he must be guilty, since the Chinese Communist Party could not be admitted to have made any mistakes. Most of the Tibetans did not believe the Chinese promises, so they did not make any confessions.

After several months the Chinese officer summoned all the prisoners and read out a long 10-page confession written by a former chief of Rinlung Dzong. The confessor stated that he had never done any actual work himself but had subsisted all his life entirely by exploitation of

others. He confessed to living off the taxes extorted from his subjects and exploiting them for transporting all his goods. He had also imposed harsh punishments on them and had actually decreed the execution of three people. Because he had sincerely confessed he was released immediately.

This encouraged other workers to write confessions in the hope of being released. They detailed all their crimes of exploitation of others from an early age and confessed to all their resistance activities against the Chinese, including having killed Chinese soldiers. Many even confessed to things they had not actually done. Ngawang says that as many as 400 of them confessed to having been the one who, in a well-known incident, had killed a notorious Tibetan collaborator in front of the Norbulinka at the beginning of the revolt in Lhasa. However, most of them had not even been in Lhasa. Their confessions failed to convince the Chinese to release anyone. Instead, those who had confessed to having killed Chinese soldiers were sentenced to long prison terms. Ngawang was one of the few who did not make any confession. He did not trust the Chinese and was proven right when it was revealed that they had released one person only to get others to confess. Ngawang says that the honest but foolish Tibetans had been duped by the Chinese Communists who had perfected the art of deception by long practice of it.

Work at Nachen Trang went on day and night. Each of the workers had to earn 200 points every day. One point was given for each trip carrying stones, regardless of the distance, which varied. Stronger prisoners could earn more points by carrying larger stones. However, most of them had to run around at a frenzied pace just in order to meet the daily quota. There was no regard given to safety. Explosions took place frequently, even when workers were nearby. Stones rained down and prisoners were frequently injured or killed. They were often not even allowed to come to the aid of those who had been injured. Former Tibetan Government officials or aristocrats, and those who had fought against the Chinese, particularly many Khampas, were treated the most harshly. They were collected into a separate unit that suffered the worst conditions.

By this time the food situation had become worse due to the famine that had resulted from Mao's disastrous Great Leap Forward. Ngawang says that as many as eight to ten prisoners starved to death every day. Despite the reduced food and the weakened condition of the prisoners, the work requirements were not reduced in any way. At this time some of the former soldiers who had not fought against the Chinese and had reformed their thoughts to the satisfaction of the Chinese were allowed to go home. However, others were sent to the notoriously harsh mining camp in the Changtang at Tsala Karpo. Others were sent to the forest camps in Kongpo. Ngawang remained at Nachen Trang.

One day Ngawang rescued a fellow prisoner who had fallen into the river and could not swim. This happened again when Ngawang, who seems to have been one of the few prisoners

able to swim, was called upon to rescue another man who had fallen into the rushing water. It happened yet again when he rescued a third man. One day two Chinese in a boat were trying to fish in the river. The Tibetan prisoners warned them that they were getting too close to the hazardous section of the river where it became turbulent. However, the Chinese ignored the Tibetans' warnings and, predictably, their boat capsized. Again, everyone, especially the Chinese cadres, called on Ngawang to rescue the Chinese man. However, he reflected upon the fact that the Chinese were free men while he was a prisoner, and also that the Chinese had been repeatedly warned but arrogantly refused to accept the advice of the Tibetans. Ngawang therefore refused to rescue the men, both of whom drowned.

The Chinese criticized him for this, saying that he had rescued three Tibetans without any regard for his own safety but had refused to rescue the Chinese. He was accused of ethnic discrimination and told that he would be kept there for a long time and forced to do the hardest labor, day and night. Food rations were also barely adequate to sustain life. His situation became so difficult that Ngawang decided that he had to try to escape. He arranged with another man to escape and to meet with their wives at a cave on a nearby mountain. Ngawang's wife had come to Lhasa from Dhingri in order to be near Ngawang and to help him if she could.

Ngawang managed to disappear and went to the arranged spot where his wife and his companion's wife were waiting. However, the companion had been interrogated because he was acting suspiciously. He had revealed the whole plot. He was brought to the escape spot bound tightly in chains and Ngawang was arrested. They were both subjected to *thamzing*, with the worst treatment going to his companion, who seemed to be blamed by the other prisoners for spoiling Ngawang's escape. Ngawang was more gently treated and asked only to explain why he had tried to escape. He said that he had been arrested and sent to do hard labor at Nachen Trang for no reason. He had not exploited others in the past nor had he been involved in the revolt. He had been forcibly removed from his peaceful life and only wished to return to it.

Both Ngawang and his companion in the failed escape attempt were bound in chains by their hands and feet and kept in solitary confinement. After some time he was released briefly in order to meet with his wife. She had come to tell him that she was returning to Dhingri because she was no longer allowed to bring him any food and he seemed to be unlikely to be released anytime soon. He agreed that she should leave and further advised her that his future was so bad that she should get a new husband in order to have a happy life.

In 1962, when the Nachen Trang hydroelectric dam was finished, most of the remaining prisoners were sent to prisons in their home districts. Ngawang was sent to Karkhang Prison in Shigatse, where there were about 600 prisoners. There he learned that the Chinese were preparing for an expected war on the border with India. The Chinese had recruited all able-bodied Tibetan men and women between the ages of 18 and 40 to help them with their war



preparations. They were designated as people's militia and required to carry weapons and supplies to the Chinese troops on the border. Most of them hoped that India would defeat the Chinese and deliver independence for Tibet. They only reluctantly worked for the Chinese and were harassed by them to carry their supplies. Many Tibetans of the so-called people's militia thought that in the event of war they would be pushed in front of the Chinese troops and made to die first to protect the Chinese.

A year later in 1963 Ngawang was sent to a prison labor camp in the Shigatse area known as the Nyari Phagdrong Prison Labor Commune. There were two other prison labor communes in the Shigatse area, namely Narthang and Emagang, the first of which was the site of the Narthang Monastery, famous for its woodblock printings, now completely destroyed. Each of these labor communes was engaged in vegetable gardening. Here the usual Chinese prison rituals continued, including indoctrination, thought reform, and mutual criticisms. In the winter months they had to do political study and write their own life histories to search for exploitative activities in the past. There were meetings in which each prisoner was required to examine himself and his work and each was criticized for his failings. There were increased prison terms for those who failed to reform and even some executions.

In 1965 he was sent back to Karkhang Prison where he became a released worker. He was required to work at the prison but permitted freedom of movement during the daytime. He was allowed some limited personal freedom but was not allowed to leave his job, for which he was paid a very small salary and given a small ration of tsampa, tea, salt, and butter. Most of the salary was deducted to pay for the food rations. Some prisoners were released at this time, but the Chinese seemed to have suspicions that Ngawang was guilty of killing three Chinese, even though there was no evidence and he was innocent.

One day he visited the Tashilhunpo Monastery where he saw a display of the Panchen Lama's supposed crimes. Some Tashilhunpo monks were there, sitting at a table and reciting a list of the Panchen Lama's offenses. The first item in the display was an Indian newspaper with a photo of the Panchen Lama with Indian Prime Minister Jawaharhal Nehru. The implication was that the Panchen had conspired with India during and after the 1959 revolt. However, the photo could only have been taken in 1956 when the Dalai and Panchen Lamas visited India, with Chinese approval and close supervision during the visit. On this visit the Chinese had insisted upon equal status and honors for both lamas, in order to promote the Panchen as equal in status to the Dalai Lama within Tibet. To imply that the Panchen was somehow conspiring with India was obviously ridiculous to knowledgeable Tibetans.

The second of the Panchen's supposed crimes was that he had stolen a "voice emanating" (speaking) Dolma statue from Tradrug temple. However, the reality was that the Panchen Lama had removed and saved many Tibetan statues and other works of art from the destruction

accompanying the Chinese Democratic Reforms campaign after the revolt. Third, there was on display a silver Tibetan *tamka* coin, now banned by the Chinese, which was supposed to prove that the Panchen Lama hoped to resurrect the old Tibetan society.

The fourth item was a copy of his famous 70,000 character criticism of Chinese policy in Tibet, which had been intolerable to Mao, and which was now considered evidence of his opposition to Chinese reforms in Tibet. The fifth item was a display of a typical meal that the Panchen enjoyed in contrast to a much poorer meal that most Tibetans ate. Ngawang says that there were altogether eleven displays of evidence of the Panchen's crimes. At the end of the exhibition there was a book that everyone was supposed to sign, presumably indicating their approval. Ngawang refused to sign, claiming that he knew nothing about politics.

Clearly, Ngawang was not convinced that the Panchen Lama was guilty of any crimes, nor were most Tibetans. In fact, the Panchen Lama had previously been considered a Chinese puppet, or even a false reincarnation of the previous Panchen. Now, however, since he had challenged the Chinese about their policies in Tibet and had suffered as a consequence, most Tibetans had more respect for him. Chinese propaganda about the Panchen Lama's supposed anti-China activities led most Tibetans to respect him more rather than less.

Later in 1965 he and about 40 of the prison workers were told that they would have to participate in the destruction of nearby Tsedong Gompa. Ngawang was very reluctant to do this because of his religious convictions. He tried to pretend to be sick but was told he would have to go anyway. When they got to the Gompa they found that it was almost completely destroyed already. Only the buildings remained; all of the contents had been removed or eradicated. They were unable to do any real destruction, so Ngawang was relieved. The purpose of taking the prisoners there seems to have been to make them, like all other Tibetans, complicit in the destruction of their own monasteries. The Chinese pretended that Tibetans had destroyed all their own monasteries after they had realized that religion was the source of their exploitation. The final destruction of religious monuments, images, artworks, and even the buildings was supposed to be a cathartic exercise for Tibetans to teach them about the illusory and powerless nature of their gods.

In July or August of 1965 Ngawang and some 60 "retained workers" from Shigatse were sent to Lhasa and then from there to the site of a destroyed monastery called Ngomtho Gon monastery in the eastern part of Lhodzong in western Kham. Along the way one of the trucks in which the prisoners were being carried fell off the road at a place called Sherongsher and one of the Tibetans, a former Tibetan Army soldier from Ngawang's Ghadang Shigatse Regiment was killed.

While trying to get the truck back on the road, Ngawang had a conversation with two young local Tibetans who informed him about the situation there. They said that in their area before 1959 there was plentiful food, the local monastery was rich, and its monks were devoted to the *Dharma*. They were happy and their well-being was assured. However, after the Chinese took over, happiness and well-being were turned into empty words. Local Tibetans had to do whatever the Chinese said, working for them all day and then having to attend indoctrination sessions every evening. Despite this and other hardships they were required to praise the present situation and denounce everything from the past. They were divided into several economic classes, which included serf owners and their agents, landlords, rich peasants, middle peasants, and lower peasants. Only the lowest class was considered to be free of past exploitative activities. In addition to economic class divisions, there were political classes which included reactionaries and counterrevolutionaries. Those of the former upper classes and those with bad political labels were not even allowed to raise their heads when talking to any Chinese.

At Ngomtho Gon Ngawang was put on one of three teams sent out to surrounding villages and nomad camps to buy farm animals like yak and horses for each of the communes. His team went to the Ngoshoe area. On the way they saw other Tibetans who were laboring on road construction. These Tibetans were formerly of the upper classes but were now so poor and politically repressed that Ngawang and his group of released prisoners actually appeared to be better off than the road workers. Some of them had been at one of the last places where the Tibetan resistance had been concentrated, at Palbar. They described the airdrops of men and weapons to them at Palbar, although they said that the American-trained Tibetans did not organize the locals well or provide them with the weapons that were available. They were surrounded by the Chinese and were surprised when they attacked.

Ngawang's team bought 31 horses for their commune. No one could refuse to sell to them at whatever price they offered. They were instructed to pay less to class enemies and more to those of the lower classes. Altogether the three teams bought 99 horses and 34 yak and *dri* (yak-cattle hybrid). They also bought grass fodder under the same terms, paying very little or sometimes taking it by force. One poor Tibetan asked them to take poorer quality grass rather than the best since he needed to feed his draft animals without which he could not plow his fields. They wanted to do so but their leader, a Tibetan CCP cadre, insisted that they take the best because the farmer was a class enemy who deserved no consideration. They managed to take some of the best fodder and some of the worst, but when the Tibetan cadre found out he was angry, and when they returned to their commune site he called a meeting with the intention to force them to undergo *thamzing*. However, Ngawang argued that even the class enemies were part of the people who should benefit under communism and used a quote from Chairman Mao to that effect to prove his point. Since he used quotes from Mao the Tibetan cadre could not argue with him.

Ngawang says that the Tibetan cadre constantly told him that local Tibetans of the poorer classes were experiencing greater prosperity than ever before. However, Ngawang said that even the former poor classes were now poorer than before, while the former upper classes were even worse off. Even though the Tibetan cadre knew that this was true he denounced Ngawang for his erroneous thinking. This Tibetan cadre was an example of those Tibetans who had entirely adopted the Chinese Communists' propaganda and were willing and enthusiastic converts and collaborators.

In November, after four months work on the commune site, the Chinese said they had decided that the soil there was not fertile enough for farming, and therefore the plans to establish a commune there had been abandoned. They were then sent to the Talung camp in Po Tramo, one of seven large labor camps in Kongpo. In the Talung camp there were some 80 former prisoners, mostly newly designated as retained workers. Even though they were theoretically released from prison, they were required to remain there and were not allowed to go outside the work camp without permission. They were also not supposed to have any contact with local Tibetans. This camp was engaged in the cutting of trees, carpentry and paper making, growing apples, and making small hydro turbines.

Ngawang was aware of the beginning of the Cultural Revolution in 1966 but only from reading newspapers. The Cultural Revolution was publicized as a campaign to eliminate rightists and revisionists in the CCP. This was supposed to be accomplished by means of popular criticism, led by the Red Guards, who were mostly young activist students. The Red Guards quickly divided into two factions, each claiming to be more loyal to Mao than the other. Participation was encouraged, as an exercise in popular democracy; however, prisoners, released workers, and those with a bad class label were not allowed to participate. Ngawang had little understanding of what was happening in places like Lhasa, where factional conflict degenerated into street fighting. He also did not know that the campaign was initiated by Mao primarily to eliminate his enemies within the Party.

Ngawang and his fellow prisoners had some time to themselves when they could talk and compare experiences. Most of them had been arrested for opposition to or fighting against the Chinese. Most had already completed their prison sentences but had still not been released. They thought that that they would never be released and therefore they decided to make plans to escape. Most wanted to continue fighting against the Chinese, although they thought the best plan was to try to escape to India to get arms and then return to Tibet. They soon heard about the chaos caused by the Cultural Revolution and thought that this might provide an opportunity for them to escape. Many of the workers at Ngawang's camp joined his group and they started making simple weapons like knives and axes and collecting other supplies. He also managed to convince Tibetans in all the other camps in Po Tramo to set up similar resistance organizations.

Both the chaos of the Cultural Revolution and their own plans for escape gave them new hope to improve their situation and that of Tibet.

Despite their sense of opportunity offered by the chaos of the Cultural Revolution, they saw that its immediate results were entirely negative. Red Guard factional fighting spread to Po Tramo and other Tibetan towns and many people were killed or persecuted for no reason. Although almost all of Tibet's monasteries were already depopulated and looted by the Chinese, a primary theme of the Cultural Revolution was the destruction of the old culture, represented in Tibet mostly by the Buddhist religion. Therefore, the Chinese and Tibetan Red Guards eradicated everything left in the monasteries, including all statues, murals, *thangkas*, (scroll paintings), texts, and wood blocks for printing texts. Private religious shrines were also raided and Tibetans had to give up almost all religious artifacts that they could not hide. Even personal ornamentation like jewels and precious stones were confiscated. Every aspect of Tibetan culture, including clothing, hairstyle, home decoration, and even the Tibetan language was attacked.

Ngawang describes the Cultural Revolution at the Talung camp as an endless series of political campaigns of mutual criticisms and denunciations that created nothing but an atmosphere of distrust and suspicion. In order to appear to be in adherence to the constant demands of the Chinese that they reform their thinking, Tibetans had to prove that they were more reformed than others by denouncing the failures of others. They thus filed false charges against each other that led to public criticisms and *thamzings*. In particular, they denounced each other for unreformed attitudes, especially the retention of religious faith and the hope for the return of the Dalai Lama and the restoration of Tibetan independence.

During one struggle session a former lama was accused of having such hopes for the restoration of the old society, and he openly confessed that he hoped that the chaos of the Cultural Revolution would create opportunities for Tibetans to regain some of their lost freedoms. The Chinese cadres present accused him of setting up a resistance organization within the prison, saying that they had information from others that he was guilty. Actually, they had no such information, but this was a common Chinese tactic to try to elicit confessions. He denied having anything to do with any such organization and said that all he knew was that he had been told by another prisoner that there was some chaos in the outside society. He gave that prisoner's name, and then that person became the subject of the Chinese interrogation. Since that prisoner was actually involved with setting up a resistance organization within the prison and since he did not think that he could withstand Chinese interrogation and torture, he and eight of his friends committed suicide by jumping into the river.

Because the Tibetan prisoners had been relentlessly indoctrinated with Communist ideology and forced to memorize the sayings of Chairman Mao, they learned to refute the Chinese with arguments based on their own ideology. Ngawang defended one prisoner who had

been criticized for saying that they had been told much about how prosperous China had become under the leadership of the CCP but at the same time their own rations had been cut. The prisoner was accused of criticizing the Chinese nation and had his rations cut even further. Ngawang said that it was reasonable to assume that if the nation were so prosperous that even lowly prisoners such as themselves should receive some small benefits. He quoted Mao to the effect that anyone could speak out about the truth. For this he was accused of trying to damage China's reputation and was subjected to violent thumping by his fellow inmates, all of whom secretly agreed with him but were under great pressure to conform to the Chinese ideology and to pretend to be reformed.

Since Ngawang was known to be clever in the way that he resisted the Chinese ideological reforms, he was summoned to meet the Chinese commander of the Po Tramo camp complex. The camp commander told him the usual Chinese political line that there were only two paths, that of the socialists or that of the reactionaries. There was no middle ground, so Ngawang should either fully reform or forever be labeled as a reactionary and treated as such. He said that Ngawang's long hair alone identified him as one who refused to change and who hoped for a restoration of the old society. Ngawang had been criticized for his attitude by the other prisoners and he must make a confession of all his reactionary thoughts. Ngawang replied that the Chinese constitution granted the right to preserve local customs and traditions. Also, knowing that it was a Chinese tactic to get someone to confess by claiming that they already knew all about him due to the complaints of others, Ngawang challenged anyone to confront him face to face with any such criticisms.

Ngawang was then confronted about his refusal to kill small animals like frogs and insects because of his religious beliefs. And he was reminded that he was the only one in the camp with long hair. However, Ngawang said that no one should lose their personal freedoms because of pressures to conform to an ideology. This argument was unacceptable to the intolerant cadres, who immediately subjected him to a public cutting of his hair. He was also criticized for his religious belief, which was denounced as impractical idealism, and told that he must adopt the communist ideology, which was characterized as pragmatism. However, Ngawang countered that their ideological pretensions were also a kind of impractical idealism of a future socialist society, a society that was very different to what the Chinese had actually imposed upon Tibetans.

Ngawang defended his respect for the lives of small animals and insects as nothing more than a realization that all beings value life and that to deprive them of it hurts them but does not affect anyone else; so, why should they care if he did not kill insects and small animals? He defended his recitation of the *mani* mantra as something that all Tibetans learned from childhood and recited without thinking. He cited Chairman Mao that such remnants of the old society were to be expected and therefore were no big deal. However, he had angered the Chinese because he

had exposed the contradictions of their ideology. As punishment they forced him to write a confession that his refusal to kill insects and frogs was because of his blind faith and was a violation of Mao's thoughts.

Ngawang told the story of one Tibetan at the prison camp, Tsering Topgyal, from Gyatsa county in Lhokha, who worked as a blacksmith. He was summoned by a Chinese cadre to fix his motor vehicle. The Chinese got angry at Tsering Topgyal for not doing the job to his satisfaction and slapped him on the face. This so angered Tsering that he struck him on the head with a hammer and killed him. He was caught by other Chinese who suspended him in the air and began beating and interrogating him. Knowing that what he had done had doomed him to torture and probably execution, Tsering Topgyal poured out all his complaints about Chinese rule over Tibet.

He said that the Chinese, who accused others of being fascists, were, based upon his experience of their behavior, fascists themselves. He accused them of executing Tibetans, torturing them, and starving them, all with the apparent intent to eliminate Tibetans as a race. China had stolen the precious wealth of Tibetans collected in their monasteries as well as in their private homes. They had extorted their labor by means of collectivization and confiscation of agricultural produce. They had confiscated the possessions of relatively wealthy Tibetans and distributed to poor Tibetans only those small things that they did not want themselves. They had destroyed the cultural monuments of Tibet, including monasteries, temples, *chortens*, and *mani* walls, all in the name of their political campaigns like Democratic Reforms and the Cultural Revolution. They had used the sacred mani stones to pave footpaths and toilets so that Tibetans would have to desecrate them. All this was done for the purpose of teaching Tibetans that their religion was useless and should therefore be abandoned. He then accused the Chinese of being guilty of the same so-called Three Atrocities, namely "Burn All, Kill All, Loot All," that the Chinese had accused the Japanese of during the Second World War. Was that, he said, what they meant when they explained to Tibetans the supposedly perfect thoughts of Marx, Lenin, and Mao?

Tsering Topgyal's accusations completely infuriated the Chinese, but also confounded them with his accurate recitation of their crimes in Tibet and their hypocrisy in claiming to be doing exactly the opposite. They continued torturing him until he fell unconscious, then splashed water on him to revive him so they could continue the torture. This continued for three days until Tsering Topgyal died. Despite his torture, Tsering Topgyal never begged his torturers for mercy. Instead, Ngawang said, he died with tremendous dignity, impressing his fellow Tibetans with his courage and defiance.

This story illustrates the reality of Tibetan existence under Chinese rule. Tibetans were made to conform by merciless repression for any resistance in contrast to favorable treatment for

cooperation. They were constantly harangued by the Chinese about the backwardness and inequality of old Tibet in contrast with the supposedly progressive character of Chinese socialism. They were forced to learn and to repeat Chinese propaganda and the sayings of Chairman Mao even though they could see with their own eyes how the Chinese claims differed so completely from reality. They were forced to denounce their own family members for any deviation from Chinese ideology or any reverence for old Tibetan society, including any religious sentiments. They were forced to subject their friends and revered lamas to violent thamzing lest they be subjected to the same process themselves. Tibetans were forced to pretend that the Chinese were benevolent and generous when in fact they were exploiting and abusing Tibetans. However, sometimes under pressure they broke and spoke the truth, even knowing that it meant their own painful death.

One prisoner, Wangduk of Drayab, who feared being exposed for his participation in the prison resistance organization, sharpened a steel rod and attacked several of the Tibetan pro-China activists. Wangduk was overpowered and subjected to interrogation and torture. Like Tsering Topgyal, he took the opportunity to criticize the Chinese for their hypocrisy because of the difference between what they claimed to be doing in Tibet versus the reality. He accused them of creating class divisions and animosities in Tibet solely for the purpose of increasing their own control.

Wangduk himself had been sent to study in China and had been told that Tibetans would benefit by being part of China, but when he returned he had found that Tibetans had been repressed and impoverished. Formerly rich Tibetans had been made poor, but the poor had not become any richer. The Chinese took most of the harvest, while Tibetans received an inadequate grain ration. The same was true for nomads, who had almost all of their produce taken by a variety of taxes. He himself had been imprisoned for no real reason except that he was unwilling to participate in Chinese reforms. He was angry at those Tibetans who had become activists and who persecuted other Tibetans, even those already in prison. It was because of his anger at the Tibetan activists that he had attacked them. The Chinese responded with their usual propaganda that he had failed to reform and had taken the side of the Tibetan exploiters against the people. He was then executed.

In May 1970 the Chinese at the Po Tramo prison camp complex called a meeting of all the prisoners and workers at which they announced the exposure of an underground organization and the death sentences of 13 Tibetans who were to be publicly executed. This was at the time of the Nyemo revolt when many Tibetans were executed for their involvement in the revolt against the Chinese. The Tibetan prisoners and workers were surrounded by Chinese soldiers and the supposed crimes of those to be executed were read out to the assembled prisoners. Others were given increased sentences. The condemned prisoners were taken to a pit already prepared for their burial and each executed with a pistol shot in the back of the head.



This mass public execution, like those at the same time all over Tibet at that time and before, were meant to intimidate Tibetans so that they would not dare to revolt against the Chinese. At Po Tramo the intimidation had its intended effect, as Ngawang and those who had tried to organize resistance decided to abandon their attempts to organize resistance or even to try to escape since they thought their chances were so poor to do so successfully. However, Ngawang says that those executed for participation in the resistance organization had not actually been members of it.

Ngawang often heard stories about conditions outside the Po Tramo prison camp when he went out of the camp to cut trees. He was told of a nearby village of 65 families and a little over 300 people that had been made into a commune. The villagers had to work long hours to produce a harvest that was then taken away from them in a variety of taxes. They were allotted a ration that was inadequate for the whole year, resulting in their having to borrow grain from the commune stock and then having to repay the next year. They then had even less for the next year. They said that the Chinese were trying to get the maximum work out of them while allowing them the absolute minimum of food.

In this commune, the so-called class enemies, those of the former upper classes, were not allowed to join the commune and so got no ration at all. They and even their children were subjected to constant *thamzing* and forced to labor on land that could not support them. In addition, this was the time of the campaign to increase production by trying to achieve the same success as a commune in China known as Dazhai. This was an impossible task that resulted in Tibetans being overworked and many suffering poor health or even dying from overwork. Later it was learned that the Dazhai commune had been provided with all conceivable advantages including machinery and tools, but even then its reported production was falsified.

In 1972 two prison inmates, Tenzin Nyima of Lhasa and Gewang Tendar from Chuga in Ngamring County, were subjected to *thamzing* because they were reported to be planning to try to escape. This only increased their intention to escape and they made an attempt to do so one night. Other prisoners were sent out to capture them, which they did after about a week. They were then put into chains and subjected to even more violent *thamzing*. One of them, Gewang Tendar, confessed that he wanted to escape in order to get a gun and kill as many Chinese as he could. He said that he had been guilty of no other crime than being a relatively successful farmer but he had been imprisoned for five years. Even when his term was up he was not released and had labored at Po Tramo for another six years.

Gewang Tendhar did not give up his attempt to escape and approached Ngawang to provide him with a hacksaw to cut his chains and a small amount of provisions for his escape. Ngawang did so even at a great risk to himself, and Gewang again escaped. This time the search

parties failed to find him but he returned to the camp to try to free his friend Tenzin Nyima. He was discovered in this attempt and again fled. Another search party was sent out to find him and did so, beating him so badly that he died while being taken back to the camp. His friend Tenzin Nyima was given an additional prison sentence of five years.

These stories illustrate that Tibetans were starved, overworked, and repressed whether in communes or in prisons. Tibetans were driven to desperation just to try to survive these conditions. In addition, they had to deal with the Tibetans who were the accomplices of the Chinese. Some of these Tibetans were of the former lowest classes who had been elevated to positions of authority over other Tibetans, while others were those who, as children, had been taken to China for indoctrination and had been converted by the Chinese propaganda. And, as the Chinese constantly told all Tibetans, their options were limited to cooperation, for which they were rewarded, or opposition and resistance, for which they would receive merciless repression.

In 1973 the resistance group that Ngawang had organized at his camp and other camps at Po Tramo was finally exposed. One of its former members was interrogated due to another offense and betrayed the existence of the organization and the identity of its members in order to save himself. The resistance that Ngawang had organized at the beginning of the Cultural Revolution was intended to take advantage of the chaos of that political campaign in order to escape from the prison and flee into exile in India. However, although Ngawang was able to recruit members of the organization at each of the camps at Po Tramo, no opportunity came to escape. Some of the members were exposed during that time but committed suicide rather than reveal the names of others. Ngawang had not been exposed in 1970 when 13 Tibetans had been executed for involvement in the Nyemo revolt, but he and his group had given up their attempts to organize resistance at that time.

In 1973 Ngawang was finally exposed as the leader of the resistance organization even though it had been disbanded three years previously. Several of the other members had been exposed and some of them named Ngawang as the leader. He was interrogated by a Chinese cadre who demanded that he confess his involvement and give the names of all others involved. However, he knew that it was a Chinese interrogation tactic to claim that they already knew all the facts. In this way they would get prisoners to confess facts that they actually didn't know. Ngawang therefore refused to admit to any crime until he found out how much the Chinese really knew. He was placed in solitary confinement in the prison and told to think about his crimes. After a week he was interrogated again and confessed only to his own involvement. He was threatened with death if he did not reveal any other names. He was put back into solitary confinement for another week, this time without any food.

During this time, despite being in solitary confinement, he received secret communications about how much the other prisoners had confessed and whose names had been revealed. He then confessed about the involvement only of others who had already been exposed.

He then demanded that the Chinese adhere to their stated policy of leniency for full confession. However, they wanted him to confess that he not only wanted to escape to India but that he intended to organize resistance there in order to return to Po Tramo to liberate the other prisoners. He told them that this was ridiculous, since to escape from prison and reach India was implausible but to then return to Tibet and free the prisoners at Po Tramo was impossible. He was told that he would be subjected to violent *thamzing* until he confessed to this also. He was subjected to interrogation and *thamzing* for about two months. By this time he was sure that he would be executed.

Ngawang was kept in solitary confinement for more than eleven months. One day he read in *Tibet Daily*, which even in solitary confinement was intended to continue his ideological indoctrination, that a new more liberal policy for political prisoners would be implemented. This was one of those periods when Mao was restrained to some extent by other CCP leaders like Zhou Enlai and Deng Xiaoping. Ngawang then thought that he might not be executed after all. In fact, even though the prison authorities had in fact already decided that he should be executed, he was given a further five years in prison instead of a death sentence due to the new more liberal policy.

In 1974 Ngawang met a young Drokpa (nomad) of 22 years of age who was in prison because of his involvement in the Nyemo revolt. The youth was from the Pelbar area of western Kham, which had been a center of the revolt. This area had also been one of the centers of the 1959 revolt and one of the last places where CIA airdrops were made. Tibetans had been surrounded there at that time and many were killed and captured in what was one of the last major battles of the 1959 revolt. The youth said that much the same thing had happened in 1969. The people of Pelbar, Riwoche, Khyungpo Tengchen, Sog, and Driru had risen up and had defeated several Chinese PLA units sent against them. The Chinese then sent troops from Chamdo, Qinghai, Lhasa, and Powo and surrounded the Tibetans. Although the Tibetans surrendered, the Chinese were so angered, due to the deaths of many of their troops, that they massacred some 200 Tibetans on the spot and arrested some 10,000 others.

The youth said that more than 100 of the 200 Tibetans executed on the spot were from his home area of Pelbar. He emphasized that their reasons for revolt in 1969 were the same as in 1959. They were not involved in any of the factional Red Guard divisions that caused violent conflict in places like Lhasa. Their complaints were not about any specific Chinese policies. Their revolt was simply due to their rejection of Chinese rule over Tibet. He said that their fathers had sacrificed their lives in the defense of their country in 1959 and that they did the same in 1969 in order to not be a disgrace to their fathers. They felt that the 1959 revolt had told the world that Tibet was not China and that Tibetans were willing to fight and die for their freedom and independence. They wanted to say the same thing by their resistance during the

Nyemo revolt in 1969. He said that he and other Tibetans were determined to maintain their opposition until the Chinese were expelled from Tibet.

Ngawang says that during the 1970s, Tibetan prisoners were occasionally executed for activities in prison like engaging in religious practices or otherwise resisting what the Chinese called reform. All these executions were meant as intimidation. He was aware that he himself had not been executed in 1973 due to a relatively liberal period of Chinese politics when opponents of Mao had temporarily prevailed. However, Mao once again overcame his opponents after that and policies became harsher until Mao died in 1976. All prisoners were supposed to mourn, and one Tibetan was executed just because he had smiled when hearing of Mao's death.

Despite their obvious exploitation of Tibetan prisoners and virtually all other Tibetans as well, the Chinese still claimed that they had liberated Tibetans from their own misrule and that the Chinese government was now taking care of them better than they had ever been treated before. The Chinese endlessly talked about how Hans and Tibetans were brothers. However, he says that he and other prisoners worked for little more than starvation wages and suffered from more repression and worse jobs more than any Chinese, even some Chinese prisoners at the same camp. Some Chinese camp administrators forced the Tibetan prisoners to make furniture and wooden boxes for them that they used to carry back to China the loot they had collected from monasteries and the upper classes in Tibet. Even some Tibetans who collaborated with the Chinese were able to collect furniture and other items made for them by the Tibetan prisoners. They and the Chinese also collected from them any musk or medicinal herbs that they found while laboring outside the camps.

Ngawang tells the story of Bhenlog Tulku Jampa Khedup, who had been at the Talung labor camp at Po Tramo up to that time simply for the crime of being a *tulku* (reincarnate lama). He was previously sentenced only to what the Chinese called reform through labor, which meant that he was like Ngawang and the other released workers, but had recently been sentenced to one of the prison camps. Ngawang asked what he had done to get a prison sentence in 1978, even though Chinese policies at that time had become more liberal. Bhenlog Tulku said that in 1977 he had received permission to visit his home at Khyungpo Tengchen because his father was seriously ill. He arrived there only a few days before his father died. He then carried out private death rituals for his father, which he was allowed to do according to recent Chinese promises that Tibetans had religious freedom. However, he avoided taking donations from local Tibetans because he feared he would thus be accused of "exploiting the masses." But he gave in to their repeated requests that he conduct an empowerment ceremony for them, since they declared that they had been deprived from having any religious rituals for such a long time but now they had been told that their religious freedom had been restored.

Just as he had feared, when Bhenlog Tulku returned to the Talung labor camp he was arrested and accused of having exploited the people of Khyungpo Tengchen by accepting their religious donations. He was also accused of trying to spread religion and thus to resurrect the old society. He was shown a letter supposedly written by the people of his home accusing him of these crimes. He was then tortured to make him confess to these crimes and for having failed to reform his thoughts despite his education at the Talung labor camp over many years. For this supposed crime he was given a 20-year prison sentence. This was despite the policy of respect for religious freedom that was written in the Chinese Constitution and that had been reiterated by the Chinese since the liberalization of policies in Tibet since 1973. What the fate of Bhenlog Tulku showed was that the Chinese could repress any Tibetans for anything they wanted, especially for religious practices or for supposedly trying to revive the old Tibetan society, without any regard to their own laws or stated policies.

Ngawang writes that 1978 was the year that the more liberal faction of the CCP under the leadership of Deng Xiaoping finally gained full control of Chinese politics after the death of Mao. He read articles in the *Tibet Daily* newspaper in which the previous emphasis on class struggle was blamed for the alienation of Taiwan from China and for the revolt in Tibet and the exile of the Dalai Lama. Reading the *Tibet Daily* had always been part of the prisoners' indoctrination in prison camps, and Ngawang was a regular reader. Now, it was thought that by abandoning the leftist policies of the Mao era such as class struggle, reconciliation might be made with those of the upper classes who had been purged and persecuted, that Taiwan might be convinced to reunite with China, and that the Dalai Lama and many of the Tibetan exiles might be enticed to return to China. Many of those who had been imprisoned were released at that time, and some former Tibetan government officials who had been imprisoned since 1959 were also released.

1978 was the year of the meeting of the CCP at which these post-Maoist reforms were officially adopted. As a part of the reform policy it was announced that so-called released workers who were still retained at prison camps could return to their homes if they wished. At the same time, many of the prisoners at the Po Tramo camps were released, but retained as workers at the camps. Their political labels that had defined them as enemies of the people were also removed. This political labeling was very important to the Chinese, who considered this a generous gift of forgiveness to the Tibetans. However, to the Tibetans, whose only crime had been to oppose the Chinese conquest of Tibet, this was mostly meaningless. The political rights supposedly restored by the removal of the former labels were also mostly meaningless. However, there might be some economic benefits such as increased grain rations or eligibility for employment.

Despite the announced policy that the released workers were to be allowed to return to their homes if they wished, the camp authorities attempted to deny them that right. The camp

authorities, many of whom by this time were Tibetans, held a meeting at which the Tibetan workers were asked if any of them wanted to return to their homes. Almost all said that they did, which was not the answer that the camp authorities wanted to hear. They accused the workers of having failed to reform, the evidence of which was that they selfishly wanted to go home rather than remain at the camp to participate in socialist construction. They declared that the camp work was too important to allow all the workers to leave and so all but the old and infirm would have to stay. Some of the oldest Tibetans no longer had any homes to return to and actually preferred to stay at the camp but were not allowed. Thus it transpired that those who wanted to leave were required to stay while some who wanted to stay were made to leave. Ngawang writes that the benefits of the Chinese state and the interests of the CCP cadres, even if they were Tibetans, were the only thing that was important, while the personal freedoms of individuals were of no importance at all.

By 1979 Chinese policies in Tibet were liberalized to the extent that the Dalai Lama was no longer being denounced. Ngawang noticed that the *Tibet Daily* had announced a visit by the Dalai Lama to Russia and another to Mongolia. Previously the *Tibet Daily* had made no mention of the Dalai Lama's activities in exile. Now he was referred to not as the "head of the exile Dalai clique," but as the "world respected Dalai Lama." He later learned that China was trying to finally resolve the Tibetan political issue by enticing the Dalai Lama to return. The Chinese Government had agreed to allow delegations from Dharamsala to visit Tibet to see for themselves how much Tibet had progressed and how content Tibetans were under Chinese rule. They had convinced themselves that Tibetans no longer had any reverence for or allegiance to the Dalai Lama, but to be sure they instructed Tibetans that anyone who made any complaints to the delegations would suffer the consequences later. Tibetans were reminded that the delegations would be there only for short periods of time but that the Chinese Government and Communist Party would be there forever.

Tibetans at that time had hope that the Dalai Lama would be able to return and that Tibet would at least be able to have some sort of real autonomy under his leadership. Ngawang heard that the first two delegations that came to Lhasa had been mobbed by Tibetans who poured out their stories of suffering to them and called for the return of the Dalai Lama and the independence of Tibet. The Chinese, who tended to believe their own propaganda that Tibetans had given up any hope for independence and were now loyal to China, were shocked at the ecstatic reception that the delegations received.

Ngawang hoped that the delegations would come to the Po Tramo prison camp, where he and other prisoners and workers were prepared to tell them about how they had suffered under the Chinese and how they rejected the legitimacy of Chinese rule over Tibet and wanted Tibetan independence restored. He later found that Tibetans in many places had hoped to meet with the delegations and to tell them similar stories but were disappointed that they went to only a few

places. In other places such as Shigatse, where one delegation did visit, Tibetans were so threatened with repercussions if they said anything negative to the delegation members that they were unable to speak freely with them.

At this time the Chinese released 18 prisoners from Po Tramo who had been sentenced for their involvement in the 1969 Nyemo revolt. They were fully exonerated, including having all labels removed. They also exonerated the names of the 13 Tibetans who had been executed at Po Tramo for their participation in the Nyemo revolt. Ngawang says that this so-called exoneration was done just to obscure the nature of the Nyemo revolt. However, this could not restore the lives of those executed or give back the years in prison for the 18 prisoners released. By exonerating those involved, the Chinese attempted to construe the Nyemo revolt as simply a factional conflict between different Red Guard groups during the Cultural Revolution rather than as a conflict between Tibetans and Chinese. However, Ngawang says that the Nyemo revolt was definitely a conflict between Tibetans and Chinese, and was a continuation of the 1959 revolt, because Tibetans continued to reject the legitimacy of Chinese rule over Tibet.

In early 1980 Ngawang had his political label of counterrevolutionary removed and he applied for permission to visit his home. He received permission for two months but only after filling out many forms and making assurances that he would return. As he travelled from Po Tramo to Lhasa he found that he could only stay at government lodging and that he had to check in with the public security police at every place. They confiscated his travel permit at every stop and only returned it the next day when he had paid for his lodging. At each stop he found that Tibetans were discriminated against in contrast to the Chinese.

In Lhasa, Ngawang toured all the religious sites and saw that only the Potala and Jokhang remained intact while all other monasteries had been damaged or destroyed. He looked up several of his former prison mates and heard stories of what had happened in Lhasa and other places in Tibet while he was in prison. They told him of the destruction of monasteries in Lhasa and elsewhere and saw that Tibetans were now beginning to reconstruct some monasteries and religious monuments with their own efforts.

They said that the Chinese had concentrated their efforts on consolidating their military and logistical control over Tibet by building roads and airports and by digging tunnels everywhere, especially along the Indian border, in anticipation of conflict with India or revolt in Tibet. He was told that no Tibetans, not just those in prison, had any personal freedoms, even after the Chinese had promised a liberalization of their policies in Tibet. Farmers and nomads had no freedom to make any decisions on their own, with the result that their harvests were poor and animal husbandry was mismanaged. Whether the harvest was bad or good, the Chinese still took most of it in a variety of taxes.

Ngawang stayed in Lhasa for nine days and then took a bus to Shigatse on the way to his home in Dhingri. He saw that there was much damage to the Tashilhunpo monastery in Shigatse even though the Panchen Lama had been cooperative with the Chinese communists. Shekar Dzong was also extensively damaged, as was his home town of Dhingri. These sights made Ngawang reflect on the freedom that he knew in Tibet before the Chinese came, in contrast to the lack of any freedoms under their control. Previously, Tibetans had the freedom to do virtually anything they liked. They were all devoted to their religion and their lamas, and their society was peaceful as a result.

In Dhingri, Ngawang was encouraged by a Tibetan CCP cadre to write to his relatives in exile and convince them to return to Tibet. Chinese policy was now to resolve the Tibet issue by securing the return of Tibetan exiles, including the Dalai Lama. They imagined that their new liberalized policies in Tibet would be attractive to Tibetan exiles. Ngawang wrote to his relatives, and indeed two of them, a brother and sister, came as fast as they could to Tibet to see him. They were met by the Tibetan CCP cadre, who attempted to persuade them to stay by promising the return of their property and positions in the local government. However, they had no intention of staying. Ngawang told them that they could believe none of the promises of the Chinese. They returned to Nepal and Ngawang himself, while pretending to be going back to Po Tramo, escaped over the Nangpa La mountain pass into the Khumbu region of Nepal.

Ngawang travelled from Khumbu to Kathmandu, where he met with his brothers and sisters. He visited the sacred pilgrimage sites in Nepal such as Svayambhu and Bodhanath stupas. He had a feeling of personal and religious freedom such as he had not experienced since 1959 in Tibet, where the Chinese had treated any expression of religious belief as a criminal offense. He felt that the previous deprivation of his religious freedom had created a spiritual illness in him that was now finally cured in Nepal, a country where there was freedom to practice any religion one desired.

In Kathmandu, Ngawang also found that his family, friends, and other Tibetan refugees were now living better lives than almost any Tibetans back in Tibet. They had worked hard and had been rewarded with a degree of success and prosperity that was far greater than that possible for most Tibetans still in Tibet. This was in contrast to the constant Chinese propaganda not only about how prosperous Tibetans had become under Chinese rule but also about how destitute the Tibetan exiles were supposed to be. The Chinese told stories about how Tibetans in India and Nepal were starving and were exploited by Indian capitalists. Ngawang found that the reality was exactly the opposite of what the Chinese said about this, as well as much of their propaganda about China's success under the communist system compared to democratic and capitalist countries. He found that there was exploitation in any economic and political system, but that the main difference was that the democratic countries had individual freedoms that the communist countries did not. These freedoms were more important than anything else.



