

Tsering Tashi

Tibetan Children's Village

June 23, 2011

Interviewer: Emily Tharp

ET: Can you tell me when you were born?

TT: I was born in 1988

ET: 1988?

TT: Yeah

ET: Can you tell me where you were born?

TT: Eastern part of Tibet. Is called Amdo.

ET: Ok. And do you have brothers and sisters?

TT: I have one brother and one sister but they are in Tibet

ET: They are in Tibet? Can you tell me what your parents did?

TT: My real father died when I was small. My mother is a farmer.

ET: Farmer?

TT: Yeah.

ET: Can you describe a little bit what day to day life was like?

TT: [Incomprehensible] Summertime they are just working in the fields doing the [incomprehensible]

ET: [to off camera] Do we need to stop Robyn?

Off camera: Yeah there is someone screaming in the distance. It's overpowering

ET: [to off camera] Ok... how does it sound now?

Off camera: It's good now.

- ET: So... So can you tell me a little bit about your education in the Chinese school?
- TT: Yeah... I haven't been in school in China.
- ET: Ok.
- TT: Yeah, but I have been private school of Lama taught in Tibetan.
- ET: Ok. Ok... so...
- TT: I learned Tibetan from that school for two years.
- ET: For two years? How old were you?
- TT: At that time I am six or seven.
- ET: So... can you tell me how you learned Chinese?
- TT: Yeah, I learned Chinese when I was thirteen years. I left my home. There was no more work to do. So I just left my home and go in city of China.... just go there and learn with them.
- ET: Did you work?
- TT: Uh, yeah I work... like a waiter. Working in the train. Anything. Any work I can find.
- ET: How long did you do that?
- TT: I have done that for almost two and a half years.
- ET: Two and a half years?
- TT: Yeah.
- ET: Ok. So can you tell me or describe what it was like being a Tibetan in a Chinese city. I guess... interactions with the Chinese people.
- TT: Yeah. The way is really different because inside the Tibet whenever there is happened bad things the consider because of karma. In China if you... if bad things happen they don't consider because they not much religious person but when we were... I was in China because they consider us very low class.

We are nationality different. They consider us some kind of bad person... sometimes like this.

ET: Ok, so is that why you left?

TT: No. I left because of my grandmother. She suffer so I just return back from China and I just stayed with her for almost one month, I think. Then she requested me and she tell me that it's better for me to go to India because the China is not good. Though she is not educated she know something about the Dalai Lama, you know. So she requested me go to India. That's why I just left Tibet.

ET: When did you leave Tibet?

TT: I left Tibet from year 2003.

ET: And can you tell me about your journey?

TT: From my home to Lhasa it by only bus and by truck. But from Lhasa we... I with 45 members... with a group. We have one guide and we have to pay 2,000 Yuan. And from Lhasa we took... we start a journey took almost 45 days to cross Himalaya to reach Nepal. Yeah and on the way at daytime we are sleeping but nighttime we are walking.

ET: Ok, can you tell me about any hardships?

TT: The most because of shortage of food. But these are not problem. The real problem is when you cross the camp of army of China. Sometimes one or two of our friends caught by them. This is the hardest problem I ever faced but... because we for two days didn't have food and water... but we considered that's not a big deal, you know, because two of our friends caught by them. They are not reaching Nepal so they are not safe.

ET: Were they sent back?

TT: Yeah, they are sent back. Definitely.

ET: So can you tell me... you arrived in Nepal?

TT: Yeah.

ET: And then did you decide to come to Dharamsala?

TT: After reach Nepal there is not any problem. In Nepal there is Tibetan reception. I stayed there for one week. After they send me to Delhi and Dharamsala and my school.

ET: Ok... so you went to school here?

TT: Yeah, my old school is TCV.

ET: Can you describe the experience of going to TCV?

TT: First time I came to the school it's not much for pleasure you know... so I can not understand what they spoke because Tibetan has many dialects. So I speak my dialect, they speak their own dialects. I cannot understand what they are talking. Especially for the teachers' side. I don't understand English and the Tibetan. I don't understand anything because they are speaking with their own dialects, you know. So first time I don't feel much comfortable. After that I came to realize it is very nice because I know some of them from my hometown, you know. So we can make start conversation. After that the teacher is nice. I think the best compared to TCV... all TCV are the same. Though I am living as my old school... the whole sutra is my everything, you know because whatever I am now is because of the sutra, I think.

ET: So how did you learn English?

TT: From one... two we are teaching English. After that, teacher is teaching and we are learning. Usually I just... during wintertime like to talk with my teachers, you know. Is my best time to learn English.

ET: Ok. So you didn't attend any school in Tibet?

TT: I attended private school organized by Lama.

ET: Ok. So can you compare the education from here with Tibet?

TT: It's very difficult because at that time I am very small. I don't remember anything about that.

- ET: What... Can you talk about... I guess your political views. If you think that it's more effective to seek autonomy for Tibet or independence?
- TT: Autonomy is better, I think. Because this is the decision making by His Holiness. So whatever his decision is right. Whatever he is doing, I just follow. [incomprehensible]. I don't know. My personal point of view, I believe whatever he decides.
- ET: And what are your thoughts about the newly elected Prime Minister, Lobsang Sangay?
- TT: This is [incomprehensible] exiled government. This is what His Holiness is expecting from the youth of Tibet. Also this is showing the Chinese that we are following democracy too.
- ET: So you support...?
- TT: Yeah.
- ET: What do you think about His Holiness recently retiring from political leadership?
- TT: First time I heard... just disbelief. During his speech... he give three speech in Dharamsala. I continue to attend. After that I think, 'Oh, it's right,' because right now the prime minister is getting some kind of practice—training. If he makes some kind of mistake His Holiness is always there. It's good training.
- ET: It's good training?
- TT: Yeah.
- ET: So you follow his Holiness's speeches and kind of keep track of everything that he says?
- TT: Whenever there is a teaching or Buddhist function of His Holiness, I try to attend because if I can get special leave from my school I will attend because my school... study is not... actually study is very important but as compared to His Holiness's teachings... I can leave my study. I have to definitely go to teaching.

ET: So do you consider yourself a Buddhist?

TT: Yeah.

ET: Definitely. Are you engaged in any other kind of political involvement?

TT: Whenever there is 10<sup>th</sup> March we definitely participate in that. Also political we can say that when I was in my old school we are in Human Rights club. I am also the Vice President of that club. Yeah. I like to do this you know Because of that... last year I went back to Tibet, I got a little bit of problem in Tibet.

ET: You went to Tibet last year?

TT: Yeah last year [incomprehensible] we have two months. After, yeah, almost six years I haven't been Tibet. I didn't know about my family, but I got only one news is that my grandma is not feel good, you know. So I promised that I will go definitely to see the last face of my grandma. That's my only wish, my hope. I don't care anything about... I just left from here to Tibet.

ET: Can you talk more about that? How did you get there? How long did it take?

TT: That process... the Chinese embassy gave me some kind of passport, you know. It's not illegal from India's point of view. I am not sure but if you cross the border of Nepal you can show that and they will ask many questions. They ask me when you left Tibet and when you studied. I told them I left Tibet in 2006 [incomprehensible]. My family have to survive. From India I never have been in any school. Just working everywhere. But when I reach my hometown I just spend one month with my grandma. After that two informal guy come to my home. That time I was at my home. My mom told me your friend is coming just go and... I don't know... they just come in their informal uniform so they just ask me are you TT: Tashi? "Yeah," I say. After that they, "ok, you have to go with us." After then they just took me to their headquarters. And after city of China and ask many questions.

ET: Did they hurt you or did they just ask questions?

TT: They are first not only questions. After that I just told them when I left and everything. But they just have a thick file. They just know everything about me. “You left Tibet in 2003 and you studied in TCV for five or six...” I don’t know how they got this information. My old photo is always there. Also a friend’s photo is already... I don’t know how they got it. Because of maybe my school website is not protected... I don’t... every information is there.

ET: And then they let you go?

TT: Yeah they just took me to the [incomprehensible] and sent me to the prison. I don’t know where their jail is exactly but I only know that they took me. And they just try to beat me, you know? With electric shock. There is two kind of... one is very small I think. It’s not problem but when I deal with big one they hit just there [gestures to ankle] and I’ve just shocked. I know nothing about it.

ET: Were they asking you questions?

TT: Ask me questions about Tibet and about the youth of Tibet in India. “You’re some kind of spy of Tibet? You come to India?” Because they say that I was with my grandma I decided to go [incomprehensible] you know. And last year where the place [incomprehensible]... because one of my friend is there... tried to go there and see the situation. And the police come to me and “Why you go there? Do you want to spread religious situation?” They didn’t allow me to go there. My hometown. And they just... “You have to stay. You got a passport that’s [incomprehensible]. But if we split that passport, it’s not a passport, you know. It’s not real passport,” they said... like one of them is Tibetan and two of them are Chinese. And after that I spend one week in the prison and my parents try to get me out of there. They spend lots of money—about 60,000 Yuan. They give them it then I just [incomprehensible] from the prison.

ET: They let you come back home?

TT: Yeah.

ET: So you went straight from the prison to India?

TT: Yeah because... tried to... didn't go to my home to [incomprehensible]... the place near to Lhasa. There is one of my sister... my sister is work... doing business there. And after that I come to Lhasa because one of my friends... old friend. He is classmate of mine. So he is there. I just call him and he help me to get home.

ET: Can you talk more about the human rights club that you are in?

TT: We are special human rights club. [indistinguishable]... We are organizing activities like during birthday of Panchen Lama. And we are organizing some essay competition of human rights. We are organizing drawing competition of Panchen Lama. All of these things. Also we are writing some human rights members of Tibetan NGO. And we are organizing some kind of quiz... quiz session.

ET: Ok. Do you actively pursue the practice of non-violence? Do you think that's important?

TT: I just agree that. It's just very difficult for me to practice it, you know. My real life. Especially for when I heard some kind of bad news from China. I just hate and feel hate to Chinese. You know. So I actually agree with it but in real life it is very difficult to practice.

ET: What do you think is the future for Tibet? Do you see yourself going back or the Dalai Lama ever going back.

TT: For the future of Tibet I definitely believe it solved very soon. His Holiness always told us that in his life Tibet will prove itself. I believe that. Yeah, I believe this.

ET: Do you think you will go back soon?

TT: I'm not going to go back anymore... Tibet... yeah. And until we got autonomy or free independence until I don't want to go anymore.



ET: Do you still get news about your family?

TT: Right now I got good news that all of my family they are fine. That's enough. Now I have some... when my last face is enough if now we didn't get to see each other anymore then is ok. I don't want to go that risk.

ET: How do you communicate with them?

TT: Sometimes through the phone. Telephone.

ET: Do you have anything to add to this interview?

TT: The situation of Tibet I think is not only the news from Tibet. Last time went before... First time I came to India... the situation of Lhasa, the capitol city of Tibet... and the last year I went to there is totally different. And because that time when I first come to Lhasa it is my first time to reach Lhasa. Everywhere and every monastery we can go and we can get in every time from morning to evening. But after last year, I went to there and the temple [incomprehensible]. I went to there and only for morning session the temple is open and the 24 hours the army is [incomprehensible], you know. Every part of the important places with a camera whatever we do. It is very dangerous. After I know the history and real life of Tibet, I don't feel some kind of peace in Lhasa. Is no longer a holy place.

ET: Can you talk more about the difference between Lhasa when you first saw it and last year?

TT: First time I reached I just feel that, "Oh it's holy place." You can go to monastery whenever I like. And then we can talk with any of the people. Also there is lots of foreigners over there... tourists, I mean. And the situation... if you go to the market you see many Tibetans are selling some and doing their small business. After this last year there are very few tourists. I stay there for three or four days... I have seen only three or four tourists from western... And when doing their business the good places are mostly occupied by the Chinese. And the road... for example in McLeod Ganj there is road Jogiwara, road Bhagsu, right. Every road of the Lhasa they are named by the

city of China. It's not real, you know. If we are go that road over there we have to name that road in Tibetan like [incomprehensible]... like this. At that time I interviewed with some Taxi drivers—with a Tibetan taxi driver and a Chinese taxi driver. I ask them, "How many salary you got?" and he says, "We are Tibetan so we got only 2,000 Yuan" and for the Chinese people they got 2,500 Yuan. They are different. I have viewed many interview by my mobile phone but I lost that... delete by my friend in Nepal because the mobile phone is in Chinese so he don't know Chinese and he from it just deleted it. Otherwise, I have very good interviews of China. I have many... as compared to first there is many [incomprehensible] in Tibet as compared to first time I come. So right now the train is open... very fast train. From my personal point of view the train is... if I go Lhasa is very easy. But political point of view it's not good. One day there is maybe, suppose we say there is 10,000 people to reach Lhasa. Out of them 9,000 of them is from China. It's not good, you know.

ET: So it feels more like a Chinese city?

TT: It is Chinese city. Totally fit Chinese city. From morning when you go the temple there is everywhere the Chinese army with weapon, you know... with huge weapon. That weapon I never seen in my life.

ET: Did you witness a lot of intermarriage between Chinese and Tibetans? In Lhasa, did you see any of that?

TT: Yeah, I see some of them and also in my hometown I see that. From that time I also connection with Chinese people, you know? But I have some very good friend of Chinese. You know, student of China [incomprehensible]... Beijing. They study over there. We can share our views political and also personal. We of India life and China we can speak like that.

ET: So you have a lot of Chinese friends?

TT: Yeah through mail. Whenever I got my free time I just went to internet... chatting with Chinese people. One way is better learn my Chinese. Another way is to share with the day information of Dalai Lama. Some of them listen... just some of them not listen and just feel angry.

ET: So a lot of the Chinese people, you know... What is their viewpoint on the Tibetan situation?

TT: The only problem, main problem is that the real situation of Tibet is not known by them. They don't know the real situation of Tibet because they only get news permitted by China. That's the main problem. So they just... their brain was washed by the government. So they consider our Tibet is [incomprehensible]. That is why we cannot communicate with them better.

ET: But you think the internet is how you can communicate with them?

TT: Yeah, if they agree that we can continue our communication, ok, welcome. If you don't like, ok... just leave it.

ET: Do you think that the internet will be very useful in spreading that information to the Chinese?

TT: Yeah. So very useful to especially communicate... to know... If you want to know what the Chinese government is saying about Tibet and about His Holiness. You can open some the news channel of China. You can see how they criticize our Tibetan exiled government. That's why the internet is very useful. For us very useful. When I was in Tibet, you know, I cannot open G-mail. You cannot open YouTube. Cannot open BBC... all these things.

ET: And that's only in the Tibetan region?

TT: only in Tibet I can go... the only search engine is only Baidu, you know. Baidu is only there. No more YouTube, no more G-mail and no more websites of internet, you know. BBC is not there.

ET: Wow.

TT: I cannot open this.

ET: Can you tell... was Facebook blocked?

TT: Yeah Facebook also not... blocked. Is not possible.

ET: Can you talk more about how the Tibetans are treated differently than Chinese in Tibet. You talked about the pay difference from the Taxi drivers. Is there more like that?

TT: Yeah. Every place is the same, I think. They consider those Chinese who from the real China city. They are not getting good selling in Tibet—in China, you know. So they just send into Lhasa. They paid much more salary as compared to Tibetan. When I was just walking over there with the road of [incomprehensible]... just one small business doing of Tibetan and Chinese... they are just fighting, you know. I just wonder why they are fighting. Because of the place, you know... they are just... After that... that lady called the army and asked them what the problem. Actually they really... who is right and who is wrong I am not sure but they told army and army they let go that Tibetan go. This is the place of Tibetan but why we have to go? Because the army first officer he has investigated, right? He don't listen to anything about Tibetan. He just listened to Chinese and, "Ok, you go. This place is belong to him..."

ET: I think we have to wrap this up but thank you so much.

TT: Ok. You're welcome.

ET: You have anything else you want to add?

TT: No. It's ok.

ET: Ok. Thank you so much.