

མང་རྩོད་ཀྱི་ལོ་རྒྱུས་ལ་གཞི་བཟུང་།

A MANG RDZONG TIBETAN LIFE

བྱ་གཞུང་སྒྲིང་ལྷགས་རྒྱལ། Nangchukja

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Front Cover: Bon skor Community Yul lha Temple, about three kilometers from Nangchukja's birthplace (photo by Nangchukja, 2009)

Back Cover: Prayer flags from Bon skor Community Lab rtse (photo by Nangchukja, 2009).

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LOCAL HISTORY

My father's mother (Lha sgron, b. 1946) and father's father (Seng grogs, b. 1945) told me this story:

About 700 years ago, a woman from the Rgyom Tribe in Khri ka¹ married a man in Tsha nag Village² and later had seven sons. The youngest was called Bon po rtse bo. His parents sent him to Stong che Village³ to study the Bon religion where he learned Spyin 'dul and Dba' ze'u,⁴ two Bon recitations practitioners chant in people's homes.

In time he fell in love with the wife of a man belonging to the Dpon tshang Tribe⁵ in Smad pa'i gshung pa Community.⁶ Bon po rtse bo and this woman fled to Qinghai (Mtsho sngon) Lake where the area was controlled by Bang A ma, a Mongol king. This area had the Sog po mda' tshan bdun or Seven Groups of Mongolians and Seven Kings. Bon skor Community was part of this area.

Two of King Bang A ma's sons died when they reached the age of three. Another of his sons was ill. When the king asked a fortuneteller for advice, the fortuneteller said, "There are probably two people from the west near us.

¹ Khri ka (Guide) County is located in Mtsho lho (Hainan) Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, Mtsho sngon (Qinghai) Province, PR China.

² Tsha nag (Chanahai) Community is located in Mgo mang (Guomaying) Township, Mang ra (Guinan) County, Mtsho lho Prefecture. Tsha nag is about fifty kilometers northeast of Bon skor Community.

³ This village in Khri ka County had many Bon believers in 2010.

⁴ The equivalent Buddhist texts are *rta mgrin* and *sangs gdung*.

⁵ This tribe is known for its number of local leaders. The tribe's name translates as 'Leader Family'.

⁶ In Khri ka County.

One is probably an exorcist. You should try to meet these two people as soon as possible; otherwise, no one can solve this problem."

The King ordered all his ministers to look for two such people. A day later, Bon po rtse bo and his wife were in the area of Bon skor Community. The ministers saw him and realized he was an exorcist for he had a red sash wrapped around his head.⁷ Afterward, the ministers reported to the king what they had seen.

The King told the ministers to find out where Bon po rtse bo was from. Bon po rtse bo and his wife, when questioned, said they were from the west. The ministers pressed them for further details and asked Bon po rtse bo what religious knowledge he had.

He replied that he knew nothing.

The ministers thought that he knew something and encouraged him to tell more, said that the King's son was ill, and asked him if he could solve this problem.

Bon po rtse bo told them that he only knew two recitations—Spyin 'dul and Dba' ze'u.

The ministers did not know what these were and later asked the King who explained Spyin 'dul and Dba' ze'u were religious recitations and told the ministers to bring the couple to his home.

The ministers went to Bon po rtse bo and his wife and told them they must go to the King's place.

Bon po rtse bo answered that he knew nothing and could not solve the problem. The king had ordered the ministers to bring Bon po rtse bo to his home so they encouraged him to go. However, he didn't go. Instead, he gave three beads from his string of sandalwood prayer beads to the ministers and told them to put them in water, boil the water, and have the son drink it. If the fever abated a little at midnight, then they should return the next day, and then he would go, otherwise, he would not.

The son's fever broke at midnight and early the next morning, the king himself went to see Bon po rtse bo and the wife to invite them to his home. They then went to

⁷ Exorcists tie a red sash around their head.

the king's home, where Bon po rtse bo chanted the two mantras for seven days and the son recovered.

The King asked Bon po rtse bo what he needed and offered him half of his land and power in thanks for saving his son's life. Bon po rtse bo answered that he only needed a place to plant barley. The King told him he would be given the best land available.

Bon po rtse bo went looking for good land and first went to Stong skor⁸ where he foretold many Han Chinese would come and integrate with locals. He stayed in Ba yan thang⁹ and was unhappy thinking about what he had predicted. Finally, he selected the place where the current Bon skor Community is located. Firstly, he lived in Rgod ma thang,¹⁰ which is now submerged in the present Tshal rnga Reservoir.¹¹

To confirm Bon po rtse bo as the owner of the land, the King cut a piece of wood into two pieces, colored them at the cut edges, and then gave one of the pieces to Bon po rtse bo's as proof of his ownership.

Bon po rtse bo planted barley there and stayed for several years with the woman he had eloped with and then told the King that he wanted to move to another place. The King agreed and Bon po rtse bo then chose the place Bon po zhing kha,¹² Bon skor's former location, which is now submerged under the dammed water of the Yellow River.

Later, Bon po rtse bo had three sons and two neighbors. The neighbors were of two different tribes—the Thar shul and A rig tribes, given by the Mongol king. Bon po rtse bo's family was called the Bon po Tribe.

⁸ Stong skor refers to Huangyuan County, which in 2010, was a subdivision of Zi ling (Xining) City. Huangyuan County Town is about forty kilometers from the center of Zi ling City, the capital of Mtsho sngon Province.

⁹ Ba yan thang is in Hod kha Township, Brag dkar (Xinghai) County, Mtsho lho Prefecture.

¹⁰ = 'mare's place', near Tshal rnga Reservoir.

¹¹ The first dam built on the Yellow River in Mtsho sngon.

¹² Literally 'Bon Followers' Field', which was local people's home until 1986.

One day, Bon po rtse bo went to locate a site to build a *lab rtse* 'mountain deity altar'.¹³ He put a coin underground on a hilltop that had two small surrounding hills. He told his two sons to choose a place to build a *lab rtse* without telling them the one he had chosen. The two sons chose the two small hills that surrounded the taller hill, and then the three went together to choose again. Bon po rtse bo told the sons, "If we choose the small hill behind the taller one, our place will be controlled by others in the future. If we choose the small hill in front of the taller one, our future generations won't be wealthy."

The tallest one—the one he had already chosen—was the best place to build a *lab rtse* because it would ensure a wealthy and secure future for locals. They then built the *lab rtse* overlooking the local village and facing Glang chen Mountain in the distance. The mountain, Khyung gzur sgang, in front of the *lab rtse* was located across a valley. Bon po rtse bo foretold that the local community would not have incarnation lamas, since Mount Te'u mgo gser gzhas, which was near the *lab rtse*, resembled a lama taking a hat off his head. It is true that no incarnation lamas ever appeared locally.

¹³ Local villages consider *lab rtse* to be mountain deities and sacred places of worship. *Lab rtse* are located on mountain peaks, at the mid-part of mountains, and at the feet of mountains. *Rmu thag* (rope made from white sheep wool that locals believe joins humans and Heaven and is thought to protect local villagers' livestock) and *kha btags* (auspicious strips of silk thought to embody purity and good fortune given to guests, religious personages, and others to show respect) are placed on the site. Very large, handmade wood arrows with fletching are placed in the center of the *lab rtse*. In addition, gold and silver-colored spears, knives, *ho dung* (see next footnote), gems, grain (barley, rice, beans), and sutra streamers are placed on the site. *Lab rtse* are believed to maintain a community's and tribe's security and prosperity and are visited on the eleventh day of the fourth lunar month and on the nineteenth day of the seventh lunar month for relatively large scale rituals.

There might have been seven families there at that time since seven white clay pots were found inside the *lab rtse*, where local people hold rituals twice annually. Bon skor residents believe that they are the descendants of Bon po rtse bo.

Before 1958, the local villagers invited Bon exorcists and monks every year from Stong che in Khri ka to chant. At that time a village leader called Bon po rgya ldang was also from Stong che Village. Therefore, they invited them every year. There was also a Bon exorcist group in the local village. After 1958, the yearly chanting ended and the number of exorcists in the local village dramatically decreased. Recently, locals have mostly followed Buddhism.

The Thar shul, A rig, and Bon po tribes were the largest and most important Bon skor tribes. Snying dkar of the Bon po Tribe was appointed as the local leader by Bon po rtse bo. Later, his name became a tribe's name and all the leaders were appointed from his descendants. It is called Dpon tshang (Leader Family). Over time, outsiders also came and the population increased. Now the community has twenty-one tribes.¹⁴ There are three main tribes; the others are small and developed later.

The Mongol King brought many Mongols to stay at Bon skor and some married local people. The Mongol king and many other Mongols stayed for several years and then left.

King Bang A ma was from one of the seven Mongol groups at Qinghai Lake. All these groups left after staying for about seven years. Why they left is unknown. Evidence of a Mongol presence is obvious from such local place names as Khu khu cim,¹⁵ Ha ra, Hang shar, Har ha nag thes, Thu zhug ge, Ba han da ba, Chu hor, Hor ho,

¹⁴ Bon po, A rig, Thar shul, Dmar ra, Snying dkar, Zha ra, Dpon tshang, Nyag ka, A zla, Gur gzhis, Gur che, Gur, Shing skor, A khu, Mgo skor, Bod bsdu, Zhong ba, Rgya phyug, Ra kho, Skya shing, and Sdong ra.

¹⁵ See the Appendix for a discussion by Juha Janhunen of Mongol place names.

Khun de, Er rgod, Mo hor, and Rgya nur. All these hills, valleys, and landscape features have Mongol names.

In 1994, there were twenty to thirty camels living in the village pastures. However, they are now almost all gone. There are only five camels now in Bon skor Community. Locals sold them and many died.

Locals believe that eighteen generations of people have inhabited Bon skor Community from Bon po rtse bo up to the present day. Since there have been many Bon adherents, and locals mostly descend from Bon po rtse bo, the local community was called Bon skor 'Bon encampment'.

Before 1986, the community was situated in Bon po zhing kha along the Yellow River. In 1986, the government dammed the Yellow River. The water then rose and the government warned villagers to move. Soon, local people moved to the present location—Be len—about twenty kilometers from the former location, Bon po zhing kha.

BLUE MARKS UNDER MY EYELIDS

In 1993 I was six years old. Late winter on the grassland. The dry yellow grasslands were changing in response to the call of spring. Green was coming, but I could not open my eyes one morning. They were glued shut. I was very afraid and began crying.

"What's wrong?" Grandmother asked anxiously.

"I can't open my eyes. I'm scared," I whimpered.

Grandmother rubbed my eyes with her soft, wet tongue. An excruciating pain attacked my eyelids, and I cried even more loudly.

"It's OK. Crying so loudly over such a small problem! That's not what a man should do," she said softly, stroking my head. She picked me up and put me on a sheepskin cushion next to the adobe stove and went to make tea for our breakfast. I sat in my sheepskin robe without wearing underwear. My back was cold, my forehead was painful, and the pain was intensifying. I didn't feel at all ordinary.

"The tea is boiling," Grandmother said from the doorway and stooped to hurriedly wash her hands in the basin next to the door.

"Grandmother, where did you go a moment ago?" I whined.

"I went to the sheep shed to put wet dung in the sun to dry," she said, rushing to take the bubbling, splattering kettle from the stove. She brought a plate of fried bread and put *rtsam pa*¹⁶ in three bowls.

"Sonny, sit still on your cushion. Your grandfather is returning from herding," Grandmother said. I sat motionlessly until Grandfather arrived. His sheepskin cushion was thicker than mine and very comfortable.

¹⁶ Hot tea is poured into a bowl. Butter is added. After the butter melts, roasted barley flour, dried cheese, and (depending on personal preference) sugar is added. This mixture is mixed so that it has the texture of stiff cookie dough and is then eaten.

"Get back on your seat. I'm tired," Grandfather bellowed. I hated it when he yelled and scolded me. I jumped back onto my seat and didn't say anything.

"He's still a child, Seng grogs. He's afraid when you yell," Grandmother said.

Grandfather said nothing, only took the bowl of *rtsam pa* from Grandmother who then put me beside her on her cushion near the adobe stove. We started eating. My head continued to throb.

"I still have a terrible headache, Grandmother," I whispered.

"Where does it hurt?" Grandmother asked warmly.

"I have a headache," I answered.

"Your eyes were glued shut and hurting this morning. Is that the problem?" Grandmother said.

Grandfather stared at my eyes for a moment. "What happened to your eyes? They're swollen. Didn't you notice, Lha sgron?" Grandfather said sharply.

"We need to take him to see a doctor; otherwise, it's going to be worse," Grandmother said worriedly.

"I'll take him to the clinic today on our horse. You herd the sheep today. We'll be back late this afternoon," Grandfather said.

Uncle Bsod nams was in school so herding our flock and doing housework were troublesome chores for my grandparents. They encouraged Uncle to drop out and help them at home, but my father refused to agree to this.

Grandfather put me behind him and we rode off for Dgon thang Village at the foot of the mountains on which we lived. There was only one clinic there where everyone went when they needed to see a doctor. It was about ten kilometers from our home to the clinic, which we reached at around lunchtime. Grandfather told the doctor to give me injections and other medicines. That was my first time to get an injection, and it was the most terrifying thing I had experienced in my young life. We stayed some hours at the clinic and then returned home in the late afternoon.

My eyes continued to be painfully ill. The medicine wasn't helping. Days passed and my condition worsened. My anxious grandparents finally sent word for Father to come.

My eyes became as swollen as two eggs. Father and Grandfather took me to the clinic several times, but the pain continued.

It was winter. Nearly a year had passed, and my eyes were occasionally swollen and painful. My grandparents and parents were very worried for they noticed my eyelids were becoming blue as though they were bruised.

"I'll go to town and invite Lama Kho tshe to come. He can help," Father said and left. All the locals believed that Lama Kho tshe was very helpful and knew everything. He visited a few days later. Before his arrival, Grandmother thoroughly cleaned and tidied the house. When the lama arrived in the afternoon, we all prostrated three times in front of him. After he seated himself, he chanted till late in the evening. When he finished, Father led me to the lama, who closely examined my eyes. Then he took a long, thick Tibetan scripture book out of a yellow bag, put it on my head several times, and chanted loudly and rhythmically.

"Let's see his eyes tomorrow morning," Lama Kho tshe said reassuringly.

"*Ya...lags*,"¹⁷ Father replied, bowing and clinching his hands together over his heart piously.

"Is there anything else that we should do, Lama-lags?" Grandfather asked.

"I don't think so. He'll be better tomorrow," Lama said. "This eye problem is because his mother walked in ashes barefoot when he was still in her womb. You should all take care of this sort of thing in the future. Your son's eyes will not be normal like other people, but they will not ache and swell."

I had a comfortable, heavy sleep that night. The next morning, the swelling had diminished and my eyes no longer ached. Grandmother did not need to rub my eyes open with her tongue, however, blue marks remained under my eyelids.

¹⁷ *Lags* = an honorific added after a name; a variant of *la*.

SHEEP STUCK IN THE MUD

In 1994 I was seven years old. Local herders drove their livestock to the Yellow River once every two days because of the hot weather, rather than the usual once-in-three-days. Uncle Bsod nams was back home from school on summer vacation and my grandparents could relax more at home. They did not need to think much about the sheep, because Uncle herded them so well that Grandfather often praised him as being the best shepherd in the local community.

One very hot sunny morning our goats and sheep were parched. It had rained on the grassland the day before, so we had not watered the sheep because the sheep quenched their thirst by eating wet, dewy grass.

"Nangchukja, go with your uncle to the Yellow River to water our flock. You're now old enough to go," Grandfather said. I had never been to the banks of the Yellow River before. My grandparents thought I was too young and worried that I might fall in the river and drown.

"Sure, Grandfather," I replied excitedly, happily running around the house.

As Grandmother was readying breakfast, Uncle Bsod nams came into the house from the pasture and sat next to Grandfather. He had driven our flock to the pastureland early in the morning. "Bsod nams, take care of him on the way," Grandmother warned gravely, her face lined with worry.

"I'm going to the Yellow River, Uncle! What fun!" I yelled cheerfully and bounced around the house again.

"Don't let him step too close to the river, Bsod nams," Grandfather intoned.

Grandmother took four dragon-decorated bowls from the cupboard and put *rtsam pa* in them. This signaled that she had already boiled a kettle of milk tea, and breakfast was nearly ready. Grandmother took a small red bag from beside the bags made of sheepskin next to the cupboard. "I'll prepare enough for the two of you to eat. Nangchukja will be famished. He's never been to the riverbank before,

Grandmother said kindheartedly. Whenever we went to herd, we could not have lunch at home, so we took food with us.

Grandmother put two loaves of bread and a teapot-sized canteen of milk tea in the bag. I took the bag and my slingshot, and then we started down the trail leading to the pastureland. Grandmother accompanied Uncle and me to the top of the first hill. "Bsod nams, listen! Don't let Nangchukja get too near the Yellow River. You both be careful with the flock when they are having water from the banks. It's summer, and there is deep mud at the riverbank. Don't let the sheep get stuck. Also, the weather can change quickly, and you could be caught in a rainstorm or flood. If that happens, take the flock and move to a safe place," she said seriously.

"Yes, we will Mother," Uncle said in his usual sedate way.

Uncle and I went straight to the pastureland and drove the sheep toward the riverbank. I shot pebbles in my sling after the flock as Uncle did, to push the flock on toward the Yellow River.

"Now, we are nearing the river bank," Uncle said, after we passed through valleys and hills with the flock. He sang Tibetan folksongs on the way casually, without stopping. Uncle sang songs with various melodies whenever he was with the flock. I had heard them so many times that I could remember them all. When we reached the top of some hills and could then see the Yellow River the flock ran fast. They were extremely thirsty.

There were many other flocks watering from the banks. Ka tho's flock was next to ours. He was our neighbor. When our flock finished watering, Uncle and I herded them along the riverbank.

Ka tho approached and Uncle began chatting with him. Ka tho took a package of cigarettes from his shirt pocket and offered Uncle one. They soon were emitting considerable clouds of smoke while chatting nonstop. Uncle Bsod nams told an attention-grabbing story that engrossed us for a long time.

"Why do you look so tired today?" Ka tho asked, inhaling smoke.

"Because I jumped over someone last night," Uncle said, watching as Ka tho puffed smoke out from his mouth and nose simultaneously.

"Oh! No wonder. Whom are you visiting these days?" Ka tho asked eagerly.

"Actually, that's a big secret. Don't tell anyone. Also you, Nangchukja," Uncle warned.

"Yes," I said shyly, bending my head down.

"Of course not, Bsod nams. Have I ever told anyone what you said?" Ka tho said.

"OK. I went to Blo bzang's wife last night. It was my first time," Uncle started.

"Oh! No, Yul lha!"¹⁸ Ka tho exclaimed. I was even more bowled over.

Uncle laughed and then stopped.

"Go on," Ka tho said.

"Actually I went there for her daughter, but I couldn't find her anywhere in any of the rooms. Then I thought she was in the room where her parents sleep, so I decided to check," Uncle paused to smoke.

"I see. Continue," Ka tho said. I laughed loudly and rolled on the ground. I was very interested in such talk.

"When I reached the bed, only one person was there. I was sure it was her and that her mother had gone to a neighbor's home. I took off my shoes and jumped in bed. Just then, I realized that it was her mother! I said 'Oh! Yul lha!' inaudibly.

"She turned to me and said, 'Who are you?' She scolded me, but gently.

"I bravely stayed and put my left arm around her. 'It's me, don't worry,' I replied nervously. I knew her husband had left to dig caterpillar fungi. And she's not that old!" Uncle said.

Ka tho shook his head in disbelief.

Uncle Bsod nams continued,

"When she discovered it was me, she was surprised, elbowed me, and told me to leave. But I could see that she

¹⁸ Yul lha = a mountain deity.

needed a man and I stayed. Before long, I could take her trousers off."

Uncle burst into laughter and so did Ka tho and I.

"Today's wives! Unbelievable!" Ka tho said, thinking of his own wife.

I stood, looked at the flock, and discovered Ka tho's and our flocks had mixed and were scattered all along the riverbank. "Our flocks are mixed and scattered, Uncle," I said anxiously.

"Oh! Yul lha! Some sheep might be stuck in the mud," Ka tho said and stood up worriedly.

We ran to the riverbank. Five sheep from our flock were stuck in mud. "Let's quickly pull them out!" Uncle said.

We took off our clothes and jumped in the mud. About half of the sheep's bodies were stuck in mud. We pulled on the sheep's horns and tails to get them out. We had pulled out four, but one was still stuck. We were exhausted. Uncle and Ka tho tried their utmost to pull out the last sheep. It was almost fully stuck in the mud. After they gripped the lower part of the sheep and horns with their last strength to pull it out of the swamp, Uncle reddened and coughed several times. This sheep died, and we had no way to revive it.

"I will drive our flocks together on the hillsides on the back way. You two come after me when you get the skin from this," Ka tho said and ran toward the other scattered sheep.

Eventually, Uncle took his belt knife from his silver, coral-decorated sheath. He skillfully removed its skin. We then returned home, driving the flock.

We ran along the flocks' tracks while carrying the sheepskin. Ka tho kindly drove our combined flocks. While we were driving the flocks, we tried to separate them, but this was difficult. Uncle and I worried about the dead sheep.

As we neared home, Ka tho's flock naturally separated from our sheep and went their own way. Uncle and I drove our flock on home.

"Don't tell that we didn't see the sheep while talking to Ka tho. Otherwise, my parents will scold us," Uncle said worriedly, not wanting me to reveal the truth.

"Uncle. What should we say?" I asked.

"We should say that the sheep jumped into the mud and then got stuck," Uncle counseled.



Sheep provide mutton and wool for locals.



Sacks made of sheep and yak skins used to store flour and *rtsam pa*.

HERDING

Grandpa took Aunt Tshe b+he and Uncle Bsod nams to enjoy an annual festival at the local Bya mdo Township center. I had never been to that festival before. Grandfather did not take me since I, at the age of seven, was still considered too young.

"Children don't go to the festival because it's unsafe. It's easy to get lost in the huge crowds of people and many thieves are there," Grandfather said as they were leaving.

Grandmother and I were left at home with the housework and herding. Grandmother had been to many festivals, and was no longer interested in them. Our home was hushed that morning. The only sounds I heard were Grandmother chanting *ma Ni*¹⁹ while fingering her prayer beads, and barks from the watchdog at the gate.

"Nangchuk,²⁰ we don't have enough bread for breakfast. I'll cook some *phye*²¹ for our breakfast now," Grandmother said while doing housework, a bit later.

"Sure, Grandmother, that's my favorite!" I said excitedly. Grandmother did not cook *phye* very often, though she cooked it very well. Grandmother put fuel in the adobe stove and placed a kettle full of water on top. Soon steam from the boiling water wafted to the ceiling, dispersing along the whole ceiling, and disappearing as fresh air blew in from outside. I was still in bed. After a while, Grandmother entered the house with the family's hand-operated stone mill²² on her back. Energetically, she put the heavy stone mill on the floor. It was so heavy that I could not budge it.

"Where have you been, Grandmother?" I asked, raising my head from the bed.

¹⁹ *Ma Ni* = the six syllable mantra of Spyan ras gzigs.

²⁰ Nangchuk: An intimate nickname.

²¹ *Phye* = mixture of steamed barley flour plus butter, cheese, and sugar.

²² A hand-operated stone mill is used to grind barley into flour.

"I took our goats and sheep out in the pasture. Our *rtsam pa* is running out. I need to grind some. Tshe b+he didn't do this though I asked her a few days ago," Grandmother said as she ran to open the boiling kettle lid. I got up and dressed.

"Nangchuk, I think you should have *rtsam pa* for breakfast then run to herd the goats and sheep. Otherwise, the goats will run off somewhere, and we won't be able to catch them without your Uncle Bsod nams and aunt. Herd them for a few hours, and I'll cook *phye* for your lunch when you return," Grandmother said warmly.

"OK, Grandmother," I replied gloomily, but I had to obey. I sat on the sheepskin-lined seat at the stove side. Grandmother wiped her hands on the lower part of her Tibetan robe. She was going to give me a bowl of *rtsam pa* in my dragon-decorated bowl. Grandmother originally identified this bowl and said it would accumulate luck and fortune for boys who ate from it. I was uncomfortable in the stillness without Grandfather and Uncle.

"The goats and sheep were grazing in the pastureland. They might be scattered now. Please herd them around the pastureland, and don't sleep," Grandmother warned sternly.

"*Ya...*,"²³ I replied obediently, picking up my slingshot, getting ready to set off.

"Don't sleep like your uncle. Otherwise, the goats will escape and there are many tombs around there," Grandmother said again worriedly, following me to the gate.

"OK, Grandmother I won't sleep," I replied and left.

"Did you take your protective amulet²⁴ with you?" she shouted when I was about a hundred meters from the house.

"Yes, Grandmother," I shouted. Grandfather had made protective amulets for Uncle and me when we began herding the flocks in remote areas.

²³ *Ya...* = respectful affirmative reply.

²⁴ A lama consecrates a slip of paper with Tibetan Buddhist writing, which is then folded in a small piece of cloth and worn on a string around the neck for protection.

The sheep were scattered as Grandmother had predicted when I reached the pasture. After I got them together again, I went up a hill and watched them. The goats were so interested in grazing that I did not need to use my slingshot even once that day.

I lay on the hilltop and enjoyed my usual dreams. At around lunchtime, the flock was scattered. Suddenly, a sharp blare burst out, as if it were beside me. I felt nervous and afraid. No people were in view when I stood and looked around. I wondered if a wolf was coming. I walked to the gate of the pasture. The sound blared again, as if a huge truck was honking near me. I was more afraid and more curious than the first time. I ran home, leaving the flock behind.

Breathlessly, I reached home. Grandmother stood in dismay. "What happened, son?" she asked in astonishment, leaving the hand-operated mill on the floor.

"I heard a horrific sound. Maybe a wolf was roaming around our pastureland?" I replied fearfully.

"That's impossible. Who said there is a wolf? Our flock has never met any wolves. Let's go back. Where are the sheep?" Grandmother said and led me back to the pasture.

"They're still grazing in the pasture," I replied and followed her.

"Where did the sound come from?" Grandmother asked when we got there. The sharp horn sounded out again from somewhere.

"That one, Grandmother," I said, which made her laugh loudly.

"It is from Tshal rnga Reservoir Town. It's a boat honking its horn when the Tshal rnga Reservoir Town leaders go somewhere," Grandmother said and led me back home.

"I have never heard that before," I said.

"Didn't your Uncle tell you?" Grandmother asked. Tshal rnga Reservoir Town was on the other bank of the Yellow River. We could see the town and dam from the herding area.

We had *phye* for lunch.



Lha sgron, Nangchukja's paternal grandmother (2009).

RETRIEVING A GOAT

The air was freezing at the onset of winter. People wore thick, heavy clothes. One cloudy, chilly morning, my grandparents, Aunt Tshe b+he, Bun khrang skyid, Uncle Bsod nams, and I were at home. Uncle was taking the sheep out to the pastureland.

"I need Nangchukja to go with me to get the goat from Lha mo tshe ring's flock today," Aunt Tshe b+he said to Grandmother. Some months ago, we had lost a goat from the flock, and Aunt Tshe b+he had been looking for it from one family to another. She finally found it in Lha mo tshe ring's flock but wasn't able to drive it home by herself.

"He is going to get cold going to that distant place," Grandmother replied. Lha mo tshe ring lived about a half-day's walk from our home.

My grandparents finally agreed I could go with Aunt Tshe b+he. She took me by the hand and we set out. I wore my Tibetan robe that Mother had made of sheepskin. I was warm and didn't feel cold along the way.

When the sun signaled that noon had passed, we reached Lha mo tshe ring's home. She boiled milk tea and made *rtsam pa* with much butter. Only she and her daughter were at home. Lha mo tshe ring was my aunt's best friend, and they talked cheerfully about this and that. Finally, Aunt made up her mind to lodge at Lha mo tshe ring's home for the night, planning to return with the goat the next morning.

"I kept your goat for several weeks, and he didn't go with other flocks," Lha mo tshe ring said.

"We lost it three months ago. We couldn't find it anywhere till I found it here last time," Aunt said in her usual rapid speech.

"I didn't know where it came from. Anyway, the goat was in my flock," Lha mo tshe ring said, laughing.

The sky was darkening. Aunt and Lha mo tshe ring put the goats and sheep inside the pen shed and started cooking supper. Lha mo tshe ring made a fire in the adobe stove and the house filled with smoke. The stove had a

terrible chimney, which was jammed with clots of soot. Nonetheless, she and Aunt cooked.

We ate delicious noodles and cooked mutton. I ate a lot and then fell heavily asleep.

A shriek woke me at around midnight. I wasn't able to see clearly. I heard a man's voice. Aunt was sitting in the sheepskin-lined quilt that I was in.

"Get out of here immediately. My son will be afraid," Aunt said loudly.

"I won't scare the child if we sleep together," a man said in a high murmuring voice.

"Get out right now!" Lha mo tshe ring yelled, taking a broom next to the door and rushing at the man.

"I'm going. What a violent woman!" the mystery man said and left.

"Such a barbarian! Still insulting me! Get out! Do you think I am going to sleep with you?" Lha mo tshe ring said furiously.

"You're right. Such a barbarian!" Aunt supported, but the man was already gone.

"Occasionally, some guys come here when I'm alone," Lha mo tshe ring said giggling.

"Really? How strange, but I always sleep with my parents," Aunt said thoughtfully.

"You don't understand. Some guys are so aggressive that I must sleep with them," Lha mo tshe ring said shyly but bravely.

"Does your husband know?" Aunt asked curiously.

"No. Actually, I have a secret boyfriend," Lha mo tshe ring said. They were talking in such quiet voices, that I could hardly hear and returned to a heavy slumber.

Lha mo tshe ring was cooking breakfast when I woke up. I was alone in bed. It was early, and Aunt appeared at the door with her hair willy-nilly.

The fresh, chilly morning sun rose in grayish clouds in the sky as we ate breakfast. Aunt and I set out with Lha mo tshe ring to get our goat from her sheep shed. Aunt recognized the goat and lassoed it with the rope we had brought from home. We accompanied Lha mo tshe ring to the gate of her pastureland with her flock and the goat. Aunt

and I bid her farewell and returned home with the goat. Aunt pulled the goat ahead with a rope, and I drove it from behind.

"Father will scold me for staying at Lha mo tshe ring's home. Anyway, I don't care! We went there for the goat," Aunt said confidently.

"I don't think Grandfather is going to scold you," I replied.



Goats provide wool that is sold and used to make ropes and tent cloth.

A TOUGH HERDING DAY

It was midwinter. The water was icy, and the air was frigid. The days were short and the nights were long. As usual, my grandparents, aunts, Uncle, and I had milk tea and *rtsam pa* for breakfast. Aunt Tshe b+he helped Uncle and me take the goats and sheep from the shed. Uncle and I were the shepherds that day. My aunts assisted our grandparents with housework. Uncle and I drove the flock to the pasture behind the hills shooting slingshots. It was cloudy, and cold wind blew over the grass. We wore heavy Tibetan robes.

Uncle led me to a concave place where the chilly cold wind was weak. "I stayed up all last night. I'm going to nap. Watch the flock while I sleep," Uncle said, wrapped his head in the upper part of his robe, and lay on the grassland.

"What did you do, Uncle?" I asked curiously.

"You're too young. Watch the sheep. I'm going to nap," he said. Uncle usually dozed on the grassland when he herded. He did not often stay at home at night, instead he was out looking for pretty girls to sleep with.

Gradually, the flock scattered across the pastureland, situated near a valley with the Yellow River at its foot. I sat by Uncle as he snored. I went to another part of the pastureland to play, sing, and amuse myself. I was deeply absorbed with the plant toys I made. I was so engrossed for some hours that I was unaware of anything else.

After lunchtime I felt hungry and remembered our lunch. I went back to Uncle. My mouth fell wide open in surprise when I saw not a single goat or sheep on the pastureland. When I realized there were no livestock, I dashed to Uncle as fast as my legs could take me.

"The goats and sheep are gone, Uncle," I shouted. He said nothing and didn't even move for a while. Finally, he woke and sat up, as if awakening from a horrible nightmare.

"What did you say?" he asked drowsily, rubbing his eyes.

"Our goats and sheep are gone," I replied.

"What? Why weren't you watching them?" Uncle said grimly and stood. I was frightened of his scolding and followed him as he walked away.

"What a disobedient boy!" Uncle complained while running up to the valley top to see where the flock was.

"Wow, this is the local god's view of us," I said merrily after seeing the goats and sheep in the valley. Uncle was still irritated and scowled at me.

"Let's go drive the goats and sheep back to the pasture," Uncle said and led me down to the middle of the valley. We took our slingshots and ascended the valley side.

"Yul lha! Do you see that?" Uncle said, stopping.

"What?" I retorted only noticing some goats going to the bottom of valley by the banks of the Yellow River.

"We are lucky men!" Uncle said, nodding his head regretfully. "If you had herded the goats watchfully, we wouldn't have this hard work!"

I felt guilty and didn't respond.

"Anyway, now we must go down and drive them back," Uncle said.

Uncle and I hurried to the riverbank and shot at the goats with our slingshots to make them climb back up the valley. Uncle scolded me all the way to the pasture.

We were tired when we reached the pasture. The goats and sheep were scattered and grazing here and there. Uncle and I began hungrily eating the food we had brought. We were sweating from running up and down hills though it was a cold day.

Uncle stretched out on the grassland after we had eaten. The sun moved fast, as though eager to set behind the mountains in the distance. It slowly became colder. My toes were nearly numb.

"It's six o'clock now. We'll drive the flock back home in half an hour," Uncle said, looking at his wristwatch, and then a moment later, "Let's go home now."

"It's still too early, Uncle. Are you eager to go out tonight?" I teased.

"Yes," he replied without moving, staring at the ground.

"Where do you go every night, Uncle?" I asked.

"I told you, you're not at a proper age to know," he said.



A zo 'milk bucket' made of juniper wood.

FIRST TRIP TO TSHAL RNGA RESERVOIR TOWN

It was the twelfth lunar month and very cold. Layers of frosty snow lay everywhere. It was a hectic month for everyone because it was the time to prepare for Lo gsar.²⁵ Local children were particularly excited about the coming of the New Year.

One morning, Grandfather and Uncle were preparing to go to Tshal rnga Reservoir Town to make purchases for Lo gsar. I had never been there. I cried and held Grandfather, begging him to take me. I imagined a town to be a paradise.

"You are still a child. It's dangerous for you to go with me," Grandfather shouted. My loud crying continued.

"He isn't a child anymore. You should take him with you," Grandmother said.

Grandfather wiped away my tears, and said, "OK, I will take you today. But you must do whatever I say."

"Yes," I sobbed. I was excited about going to town. Grandmother dressed me in a Tibetan robe that she had mended. We set out, and descended the mountains where our herding area was to the Yellow River. The banks were icy. We had to cross by boat.

Grandfather and Uncle waved to a boat, which then drew close to us. We got in. It was my first time in a boat, and it was scary. As the boat propelled forward, I could see the mountains surrounding the Yellow River. Many cliffs and mountains resembling bird beaks and camel humps lined the river. I sat with Uncle in the front of the boat, looking down from the top. The boat split the currents into a broad arrowhead. I enjoyed the scenes so much that I did not notice when we reached the other side.

All the roads were paved with concrete. It was my first time walking on a concrete road. Tall multi-storied

²⁵ Lo gsar = Tibetan New Year. Family members reunite during Lo gsar, offer sacrifices of auspicious food, wear colorful Tibetan robes, and greet each other with, "*Bkra shis bde legs*."

buildings lined the streets, and people walked on the sidewalks. I saw many trucks and cars—more than I had ever seen before. I was intrigued all day long and gawked at the cars, moving up and down the streets.

"Grandfather I can't cross the street by myself with all these running cars," I said loudly when we were crossing a street to a market. I grabbed Grandfather, terrified.

"Idiot! You are really like a disoriented donkey on a town street. Don't be afraid of the cars. They won't hit you," Grandfather said.

Uncle laughed at me, mockingly. I calmed down and followed Grandfather. For the whole morning, we walked in a big market as Grandfather and Uncle bought a small truckload of articles for Lo gsar.

"Nangchukja, choose a suit of clothes for yourself for Lo gsar," Grandfather said. I was extremely excited by this. Finally, we bought all that we needed and Grandfather took us to a restaurant. The noodles we had were the best I had ever tasted. I will never forget the flavor of that restaurant food.

"We should go to another place to buy clothes for Tshe b+he, and then we will have done everything," Grandfather said, and we set out to another store. Uncle and I followed Grandfather, and bought clothes for Aunt.

The weather turned colder in the afternoon. Grandfather rented a small truck on the street. We loaded our purchases in the truck and drove to the dock. Everyone waiting there helped us put our purchases on the boat and soon the boat started across the river. Tshal rnga Reservoir Town gradually receded as the earth began to wrap itself in shadow. My thoughts were still full of the people and cars in town.

"We've reached the riverbank, sons," Grandfather said and stood. The boat took us to the dock and then left. Grandfather, Uncle Bsod nams, and I backpacked the stuff to the foot of the mountains and then stored them in a rocky cave. Then we climbed up into the mountains to our home, along a path that nobody ever took except my family members.

All along the way, I was still excited about having seen the town and purchased clothes that I had chosen for myself. The family watchdog barked loudly as we approached home. Grandmother ran out and calmed the dog.

(Next page). Along the north shore of Tshal rnga Reservoir (created by damming the Yellow River) facing Bon skor pastureland in the background. Local Bon skor residents cross the reservoir in boats to shop in Tshal rnga Reservoir Town. Bon skor residents herded in areas now covered with water and were resettled in 1986. The reservoir was commissioned in 1989.



PACKING CAMELS

The next morning, Aunt Tshe b+he and Bun khrang skyid went to the pastureland to herd. Grandfather told Uncle Bsod nams and me to take the family camels to pack the stuff home from the cave. Uncle went out to the pastureland to drive the camels home after breakfast.

"You two should be careful when packing. Some of it is fragile," Grandfather said.

"Yes," I replied, putting on my robe.

After a while, Uncle drove the camels in from the pastureland. "Mother, we are leaving now," Uncle Bsod nams shouted loudly into the house.

"Take good care of each other on the way," Grandmother said, running outside worriedly, "Lo gsar is coming. Everyone should be careful."

According to local custom, everyone tries to avoid anything unlucky when Lo gsar is approaching. If something unlucky happens before Lo gsar, it means bad luck throughout the next year.

"Yes," Uncle replied respectfully.

We started down to the riverbank. Because I had gone to town the previous day, I felt exhausted and weak. "I can't keep going, Uncle," I said.

"Be a man. Aren't you ashamed to say that?" Uncle said confidently, but I was truly tired and could not continue. I said it several more times without shame. He stopped and came to me.

"What should I do then?" Uncle asked.

"I want to ride a camel," I said.

"Who rides a camel to descend a mountain in this world? It's unsafe. You would fall off," Uncle said.

"I beg you Uncle. I can't go anymore," I insisted and almost cried.

"OK, I'll let you ride a camel. But don't complain if you fall off," Uncle said and put me on a camel. Riding a camel is more comfortable than riding a horse. Its humps make it similar to sitting on a bulky sofa. I held the front

hump. The camel carried me down with its huge steps along the zigzag paths of the mountain.

When Uncle and I reached midway, he also looked exhausted. Suddenly, the camel stopped, and I fell, though I grabbed at the camel's neck. A pain pierced my foot, and I became unconscious.

"Nangchukja..." Uncle called loudly in my ear. When I opened my eyes, he laughed so hard he was unable to speak. My terrified heart bounced inside my chest. A terrible pain in my foot made me almost weep.

"Are you OK?" Uncle asked.

"My foot is hurt," I said, unable to stand.

"Don't move! Your ankle is bleeding," he said, looking worried. I was surprised and noticed that my hip was numb. He wrapped my ankle in a cloth. The camels were gone. We had stayed a long time there because of my injured ankle. The pain gradually receded, but I could not stand normally.

"The camels are gone. I think you should stay here and keep warm. I'll catch the camels, pack our stuff, and come back soon. Don't go anywhere," Uncle said warmly.

"Yes," I promised.

Uncle left, and I lay down. The surroundings were tranquil. Nobody was around. A cold breeze rustled dried plants.

Occasionally, my ankle throbbed. Uncle did not return after a long while and I felt lonely.

Sometime later I heard the camels panting.

"Is it still painful?" Uncle asked worriedly.

"Yes, Uncle," I replied.

"Yul lha! It is probably sprained," Uncle said after examining my ankle. "Anyway, I'll put you on a camel though they are carrying packs. It will be safe on the way back," Uncle said.

I nodded in approval. He let me ride atop a pack on a camel. The camel climbed up the mountain, swinging from side to side. I clutched the pack ropes and forward hump firmly.

"What should we say when we get home?" Uncle asked.

"I fell from the camel," I replied frankly.

"Don't be silly! They will surely scold us if we say that," Uncle said.

"How can my ankle be cured?" I asked.

"We will splash a bottle of liquor on it. Don't worry," Uncle said.

(Next page). Camels were used for a variety of purposes historically. In 2009, this was one of the five camels in Bon skor Community.



MOTHER'S TEARS

Ten days passed. I was unable to go with Uncle and herd. I stayed inside. My grandparents did not let me go anywhere. The sun was shining after I had breakfast. Grandmother was piously repeating her usual Buddhist recitations outside the house in the sunshine. I hobbled out and sat next to her under the porch where the sunshine was splendid. Warming up is not easy in the herding area in winter with frequent cold, cloudy weather. It was a rare sunny day, and I sat by Grandmother wrapped in my robe. We were sitting on a sheepskin cushion. Grandmother rubbed my ankle with liquor.

"Nangchukja, how's your ankle today? Is it painful?" Grandfather said as he entered the yard and latched the gate behind him.

"No pain today, Grandfather," I said. He sat next to me on the cushion. Grandfather looked at the hillside in front of our home.

"Are Son and Daughter coming today?" Grandfather asked, taking divining stones out from his pouch and doing a divination for my parents.

Grandmother stopped chanting, looked at Grandfather and me, waiting for Grandfather's forecast.

"They are coming, but we will receive some messages before they come," Grandfather said after his divination.

"What would such messages be?" Grandmother wondered and resumed chanting.

Grandfather did not say anything. He lay on the cushion and lazily slumbered as the sunshine warmed him. Grandmother's recitation lulled me to sleep, too. A couple of hours passed before Grandfather and I woke up.

"Lha sgron, bring some cotton and that liquor here. I'll put some on Nangchukja's ankle. It's still swollen," Grandfather said. He rubbed my ankle smoothly and meticulously after Grandmother brought the liquor. "It's

getting better. Don't worry. Your parents are coming to spend Lo gsar with us," Grandmother said warmly.

"Last time they were here, they said they would come today but they haven't arrived," Grandfather added worriedly.

"I'm making lunch," Grandmother said and returned inside.

My ankle felt better. The noon sun was hot. I was sweating and removed my robe. The dirt on grandfather's sheepskin robe shone and became oily. The odor of butter and cooking meat wafted about.

"I feel bored not going with Uncle to herd the sheep, Grandfather," I said quietly.

"OK, I'll tell you a story," Grandfather said and began. I soon dozed off and did not wake up till Grandmother called me.

"Lunch is ready. Let's go in," Grandmother said and helped me inside the house. I sat next to Grandfather near the adobe stove.

"Your parents haven't arrived yet. I wonder if they will come today?" Grandfather said, taking a bowl of milk tea from Grandmother. Grandmother handed me my bowl with buttered milk tea in it. An hour later my grandparents were talking about our plans for Lo gsar.

"Hello!" a familiar voice boomed.

"My daughter!" Grandmother said suddenly and ran outside. It was my parents. Mother ran over and kissed my forehead.

"Did you miss me, Son?" Mother asked warmly, wanting to hug me.

"No! My ankle is hurt!" I said frightened that my ankle would get hurt again.

"What happened?" Mother asked in surprise.

"It is not that serious, Daughter," Grandmother said, "He fell from a camel some days go, and sprained his ankle. Now it is much better."

Mother stared at me while listening to Grandmother, but tears fell from her eyes. Father gazed at me from the other side of the stove.

"Don't worry, Daughter. He will recover soon," Grandfather encouraged. Mother wiped her tears with her new Tibetan robe sleeve. Father came over and carefully hugged me.

"You are a real boy now. Aren't you ashamed of being hugged by your father?" Grandfather said derisively, which I and Father ignored as Father patted my head gently.

"How is it? Let me see," he said and rolled up my pants leg. Mother was also watching.

"Yul lha! It's terribly swollen," Mother said tears falling anew.

"Is it painful? Itchy?" Father asked thoughtfully.

"No, Father. But it's painful sometimes after washing with alcohol," I whispered.

Grandmother offered milk tea, *rtsam pa*, and bread to my parents. Grandfather told the story of how my ankle got sprained and gradually they talked about this and that. Mother sat near the bed and talked with me all afternoon.

A NEW YEAR VISIT

The twenty-ninth day of the twelfth lunar month was the second night before Lo gsar Eve. I would soon be eight years old. All the house decorations were done and the food was ready—mutton, beef, pork, meat dumplings, fried bread, and many kinds of fruits put on wooden plates decorated with the Eight Auspicious Symbols.²⁶ All my family members were at home talking in warm, gentle voices, as everyone should do during Lo gsar days, in the hope of being warmhearted in the New Year.

People compete with each other in decoration, food, and clothing during Lo gsar. My grandparents offered my parents five plates of meat, dumplings, and bread. Everything in the house was awesome that night. Excitement surged through my body.

"I don't want to sleep tonight. How about you?" Uncle Bsod nams asked me after our family had cheerfully enjoyed a huge supper. Most locals did not sleep on the twenty-ninth. Lo gsar began at twelve sharp, when everyone starts visiting.

"I don't want to sleep either, Uncle," I said elatedly. My grandparents and parents were starting to doze while lying on the bed, before getting up around twelve.

"Aren't you two going to sleep?" Grandmother asked.

"No, Grandmother," I replied, wanting to put my new clothes on early.

"You will feel sleepy tomorrow if you don't take a short nap," Mother said, trying to take a nap herself.

"They are excited because Lo gsar is coming. They definitely don't feel they need naps," Grandfather said as I put my new clothes on.

Uncle and I dressed in our new clothes, and I ate some candy. We discussed which family we should visit first,

²⁶ Eight Auspicious Symbols = a conch, a lotus, a wheel, a parasol, an endless knot, a pair of gold fish, a victory banner, and a treasure vase.

how many families were in the local area, and so on. We did not know it was close to twelve until our grandparents called. We got up and Father started to make incense offerings. My family burned incense every night, but the incense offering that night was different for it was much bigger than usual. Uncle led me outside with Father, and we set off firecrackers.

Grandmother chanted "*oM ma Ni pad+me hUM*," rhythmically and loudly. Grandfather prostrated in the family shrine. All the *thang ga* had their covers drawn back, which was only done during Lo gsar and other religious rituals.

"Nangchukja, let's go worship in the shrine with Grandfather," Mother called gently from the house door. I ran to her with Uncle behind me. Uncle and I started off to visit after we worshipped.

"You two don't drink beer and smoke though other families insist," Father warned as we were leaving.

"Yes," Uncle and I replied obediently.

Uncle and I visited Ka tho's family first, and then we went to other homes with Ka tho's son and daughters. We had many people to visit and all wore impressive brand-new clothing. I took a small bag to collect candies people gave me as gifts.

We came to Tshe brtan's home after visiting many families. He was warmhearted and garrulous and wanted each visitor to sing and drink beer. Uncle had to drink a lot with that family. After some hours of singing and joking cheerfully with Tshe brtan's family, Uncle's face was red with drinking and he sang when people asked him. Finally, we left Tshe brtan's family and visited several other nearby families.

"Don't tell any of our family members that I drank beer tonight," Uncle warned.

"Don't drink too much, Uncle," I replied.

Dawn was lighting the sky when we finished visiting. I accompanied Uncle back home. Many relatives had come to our home and were singing happily. Grandmother realized that Uncle was a bit drunk, but she pretended not to notice. Uncle was drunk so I took him to another room to sleep.

"Which families did you visit?" Mother asked.

"All of them," I replied and handed her my bag, full of candy.

"Don't you feel sleepy?" Mother asked while steaming dumplings on the stove.

"No, Mother. I want to make more Lo gsar visits," I replied.

"You can't go back again, son. That would be embarrassing! People don't visit families twice during Lo gsar," she explained. I didn't feel sleepy so I found Father with some visitors and listened to their songs and conversation.



Gor dmar 'red bread' is made for such celebrations as New Year and weddings.

A HEAD INJURY

In late winter, cuckoos welcomed spring's approach, herders blew flutes, and rhododendrons blossomed. I was eight. One day, my grandparents left to Tshal rnga Reservoir Town to treat Grandmother's terrible abdominal disease. Uncle went to herd. Aunt Gnam me was with her son, Rgyal rigs thar, and Tshe b+he at home. "Nangchukja, don't go to the pasture today. Instead, you and Rgyal rigs thar stay at home and dig out dung from the sheep shed for me," Aunt Tshe b+he said. She had been digging the dung from the sheep shed. It was obvious that she and Aunt Gnam me were planning to go somewhere.

"Yes," I replied excitedly "But I have to use the cart to take the dung out."

"You can," Aunt said. "We are going to your Aunt Gnam me's home to help her. If Bsod nams returns home for lunch, tell him there's tea in the teapot."

They started to leave. Aunt Gnam me's home was about two kilometers away. She had moved to Mchog b+he's home as a bride before I was born.

"Rgyal rigs thar and you take dung out of the sheep shed. We're leaving. We'll be back late this afternoon, Aunt Gnam me will stay at our home tonight," Aunt Tshe b+he said.

"OK," I replied and played with Rgyal rigs thar next to the house. Rgyal rigs thar was my cousin. We were the same age. After playing for a while, we ran to the sheep shed. I ran to the cart and grabbed the cart handles. But he grabbed them too, and argued with me. Finally, I overpowered him with my loquacious mouth. I pulled the cart that Rgyal rigs thar loaded with dung. After some hours of work, we rested. My shirt and pants were sweaty, and my palms were bruised.

As I rested by the cart, Rgyal rigs thar shoveled the dung energetically.

"I'll shovel, and you rest," I said. I rolled up my sleeves, dug at the dung, and shoveled it into the cart, which I soon filled. Eagerly and excitedly I threw the spade behind

my head when I reached the cart. Rgyal rigs thar screeched. He was pointing at his head and lying on the ground. His hair was drenched with blood. The spade was next to him. The spade had struck his head. My upper chest was full of fright. I didn't know what to do.

"Rgyal rigs thar! Rgyal rigs thar! Are you OK? Speak to me," I said. He was unconscious. I grabbed his hands to pull him up. After he regained consciousness, he cried and did not stop. His head was wet with blood and bleeding through his hair onto his forehead. I ran back to the house and grabbed the towel used to clean bowls. I cleaned blood from his forehead gently and then put the towel on his head to stop the bleeding.

"It hurts terribly," he said and wailed more loudly. I did not know what to do except press the towel against his head.

Time slowly passed and Rgyal rigs thar finally stopped crying. I helped him to the house, poured warm water in the basin, and helped him swab his forehead, but we dared not wash his hair.

"How do you feel?" I asked.

"Dizzy!" he replied and sat in the house dejectedly. The towel was still on his head, and he pressed it with his hands. We went outside after some time and sat under the porch. I was thinking what I would say when my aunts returned. As the sun was taking itself to its twilight home, my heart beat faster and faster forlornly.

It was getting dark, but no one came, not even Uncle from herding. I miserably thought about Rgyal rigs thar's injury and was frightened to hear voices at the door.

"The goats and sheep are not back?" Aunt Tshe b+he said. My heart pounded terrifically, but I plucked up my courage and stayed with Rgyal rigs thar.

"Didn't your Uncle Bsod nams come yet?" Aunt Tshe b+he asked and put something on the cases next to the door. She had not seen Rgyal rigs thar's head.

"What happened?" Aunt Gnam me exclaimed and ran to Rgyal rigs thar and gazed at his head in shock. He said nothing.

"What?" Aunt Tshe b+he said.

"My head was injured by the spade while shoveling the dung," Rgyal rigs thar replied, as his mother asked repeatedly and worriedly.

"How? How did it get injured?" Aunt Gnam me asked, tears falling as she looked at his head. My heart swelled in horror. After being quiet for a while, he told the whole story.

"You!" Aunt Gnam me said and rushed at me. I raced away. I was terrified. She could not catch me. Without fear of the darkness, I ran through the pasture to Uncle. Later I returned home with Uncle Bsod nams. Aunt scolded me but did not beat me.



Local women put yak and sheep dung in a pile. It is used as fuel when it dries.

COLLECTING FUEL

One summer afternoon in 1995, the sun shone in the lofty sky. Grandmother, Aunt Bal b+he, and I were at home, enjoying the sunshine and lying under the porch after a full lunch.

"Nangchukja, let's go down the mountainside and collect wood," Aunt Bal b+he said. She was my youngest aunt. I was never afraid of her, though she scolded me at times. She attended a school in Khri ka County and was on summer holiday.

Our stove was fuelled with wood and dung from the grassland and mountainsides, plus dung from our sheep shed. Many thorny plants grew on the mountainside near my home, and much dried wood was readily available along the mountains.

Aunt Bal b+he brought two long coiled hemp ropes so we could carry the wood back. I did not really want to go. The sun was hot and laziness urged me to stay at home. Aunt pulled me to go with her and even dragged me for a while. Finally I followed her. She gave me a looped rope when we reached the middle of a mountain.

I hated collecting and hauling fuel, even with Grandmother. We began picking up wood. Two huge valleys were on each side of the mountain and we went into each. It was humid, and my whole body began sweating as I bent to collect wood. After some hours I had still not accumulated much wood. It was summer and dried wood was scarce because my family collected it daily. I felt tired and lay down to nap.

Suddenly, I woke up feeling afraid. When I realized that my accumulated wood was only half enough, I decided to escape and return home. Aunt was not in sight. I picked up my small bundle of wood and started home.

I climbed quickly, looking around to avoid Aunt. When I reached the mountaintop, I looked back into the valley. She was still walking around the valley, bending and picking up wood.

I walked home with my small bundle of wood. Since Grandmother was always kind to me, I was not afraid of her. I put the wood by the fuel room and then went inside because I wanted to drink cold water.

"You're so fast. Did you bring something home?" Grandmother asked in surprise.

"I brought a bundle that I could carry. I'm thirsty. I want some cold water," I said and sat next to the stove.

"Sure, my dear. You collected wood on such a sweltering day," she said warmheartedly, "Where is Bal b+he?" she asked while handing me a cup and ladle for water.

"She's still looking for wood," I replied. I drank a cup of cold water and relaxed.

An hour later, while I was lying inside our cool house, Aunt returned and said furiously, "Son, what happened to you? You brought such a small amount of wood. Aren't you ashamed?"

"I couldn't carry more," I replied without a hint of respect. She ran at me with a stick and I adroitly ran outside. She chased me ferociously and dropped the stick.

"You are always disobedient. I'll teach you a lesson today," she said and grabbed my shirt collar. She tried to throw me to the ground, but she was too short. Grandmother was watching with a big smile.

"It's enough, Aunt. I don't want to argue with you," I insisted.

Aunt said nothing but still held me and tried to push me down. Unexpectedly, I grabbed her by the shoulders and hooked her feet with mine and threw her to the ground. Grandmother was laughing very loudly after seeing how acrobatically I had made Aunt fall.

"OK, now please go to the pastureland and help your Uncle Bsod nams herd," Aunt Bal b+he said, standing up. Grandmother laughed as loudly as she could. It was the first time I heard her really cackle.

Afterwards, the story of me overpowering Aunt, who then fell to the ground, instead of her throwing me to the ground, was endlessly repeated.

A MISDIRECTED SLINGSHOT

Our local herders moved to the summer place with their herds and tents in 1995 to Zog ga de' kha. It had sufficient grass for the goats and sheep to graze and had gorgeous scenery. My family also moved to Zog ga de' kha, driving our goats and sheep. Uncle and I drove the livestock, while my grandparents and Aunt Tshe b+he drove the packed horses and camels.

We got there in the afternoon and unpacked the horses and camels. After eating at our summer campsite, my grandparents pitched the tent, while Uncle took me with him to the sheep. We excitedly talked about this and that while roaming over the fresh summer places. Uncle and I had herded here before, but it was the first time to see the summer place that year. The greenish, bushy grass refreshed the land.

Uncle and I left the flock scattered on the grass and climbed to a hilltop to enjoy the afternoon view.

"The winter and summer places are totally different. There is much grass here so the goats and sheep don't walk far. They wander far away at the winter pasture where there is less grass," Uncle said.

"Now, you have a great opportunity to sleep all day long," I said.

"There are no girls here that I can visit at night, so I won't sleep so much," Uncle said merrily.

Uncle and I stayed on the hilltop as the world darkened. I could not see well at dusk, so I followed Uncle back to where the sheep were.

"We stayed there too late, and we won't be able to find some goats tonight. The flock is scattered," Uncle said regretfully, while shouting at the sheep and goats to return home. Uncle and I collected some stones, took out our slingshots, and shot at the lagging goats and sheep. The entire flock of sheep had come together and was now moving toward the newly-pitched summer tent, but many goats still grazed on a hillside about 200 meters away. Uncle took his

slingshot and spun it over his head and shot at the goats. Unfortunately, his shot was misdirected and hit me square in the testicles. I fell to the ground as unbearable pain shot through me. I almost fainted. I held my scrotum and winced.

"Was that my shot?" Uncle said in surprise. "Where were you hit?" He realized the answer when he saw me holding my scrotum.

"Let me see if it is serious," Uncle said and tried to take off my trousers. I resisted because I was shy. I could not stretch out my legs nor stand. Uncle did not know what to do. I panted silently in pain.

"You tried to kill me," I said angrily, tears welling in my eyes relentlessly. After a time, the pain melted away and I could move my legs. Finally, Uncle helped me up and we went home. Along the way, my testicles throbbed as I swayed from side to side.

"What happened? Oh! Yul lha!" Grandmother said and anxiously ran over. Grandfather and Aunt worriedly ran after Grandmother.

"I misdirected the slingshot and shot him," Uncle whispered. I said nothing, but they understood because I was wincing in pain, holding my crotch.

"You always do such misdeeds!" Grandfather stormed and kicked Uncle Bsod nams, who ran away.

"Is it painful? How did he hit you there?" Grandmother asked seriously. I described how Uncle had shot. My grandparents did not say anything, but Aunt Tshe b+he laughed loudly, squatting on the ground.

"Such a serious accident and you can laugh?" Grandmother scolded. Grandfather took me inside the tent and wanted to splash some medicinal liquor on the affected area but I refused, terribly embarrassed at the thought of removing my trousers in front of Grandmother and Aunt.

"You are not old enough to be shy with me!" Grandmother said but went out. Grandfather took off my trousers and wetted my testicles with alcohol.

"It's serious. You should be careful, Son! These are your life," Grandfather said.

A SNAKE DIES

One hot summer morning the sun was struggling to emerge above the peaks. My grandparents, Uncle, and I were all in our yak-hair tent. Grandmother was churning milk in the butter churn, counting the number of churns rhythmically.

After breakfast, Uncle Bsod nams took me with him to herd the goats and sheep on Gdong ring Hill, a huge, sprawling grassy hill, where goats and sheep grazed without wandering away. All the local herders drove their flocks there.

Other flocks had already covered most of the hillside when we arrived. Our sheep grazed around the edges of the other flocks. Uncle and I sat and then lay down for a while. Many other local women herders were around. Some were singing folksongs.

"Those girls are singing to me. I'll let them imagine what they might do tonight," Uncle said thoughtfully.

"How do you know that they are singing them to you?" I asked.

"I understand the lyrics that you don't know about yet," he said boastfully.

I only knew a few folksongs I had learned from him. I felt a surge of shame and wanted to learn more. After lying on the grassland for some hours, Uncle led me to the other side of the hill where the sun was hotter and there were patches of desert. Uncle warmed up, enjoying himself. It had rained a few days before, so the desert patches were wet. I played in the sand.

"Nangchukja, let's look for some mountain chives," Uncle said. Mountain chives grew when it rained on the hills and was a favorite herb. Sometimes we collected many bunches and made dumplings at home, mixing it with chopped meat.

I stood and shook myself, the sand flying away. We looked for wild chives along the hillside where the sun shone all day. Little by little, I plucked a handful of chives then sat

next to a huge thorn bush. I chewed the chives while Uncle continued collecting it. It was spicy, and tears fell from my eyes because of the pungent smell and taste.

Unexpectedly, a multicolored snake slithered toward me from a nearby bush. I yelped frantically and lunged away, flinging the chives behind.

"What's up?" Uncle Bsod nams asked.

"A snake!" I said, my legs shaking in fear.

He laughed dismissively, chewed some chives and finally said, "Where? Let's go see," he said. Uncle put chives in his pocket and picked up some fist-sized stones from the ground. We went back and found the snake.

"Wow! Such a big snake!" Uncle said in amazement. "Grandmother said snakes can jump on people, lick them, and cause incurable illness."

"Uncle, don't get near the snake. Its tongue is poisonous, it may jump on you, and then lick you," I said fearfully.

Uncle ignored me and hurled stones at the snake, which twisted and coiled tightly, its head in the center. "Look at that! This snake is raging at me," Uncle Bsod nams said and threw stones, one after another, at the serpent.

"How do you know?" I asked.

"Don't you know that when it coils, it means it is furious?" Uncle said, peering at the snake. I thought for a moment and timidly watched the snake move toward Uncle and then suddenly lunge. It didn't reach him, fell to the ground, and quickly retracted into a tight coil.

"We can't stay near it now. It's enraged. Step away," Uncle commanded, but he was still hurling stones, hoping to kill it.

"I'm going to tell if you kill it," I said and moved away.

"Ridiculous! I'll kill you if you do!" he said irately, looking for more stones. He deliberately tossed a few big rocks onto the snake, which soon resembled a stick on the ground.

"*oM ma Ni pad+me hUM...*" I chanted, staying close to Uncle. I thought he was violent, but he was also chanting *ma Ni* piously.

"Don't tell," he said earnestly.

"Why did you kill it, Uncle? You are merciless! I'm going to tell," I said, as we walked back to the hilltop.

"Snakes are poisonous and an enemy to all creatures. It grew from the soul of a demon. We had to kill it," Uncle said.

"What snake comes from the soul of Buddha then?" I asked.

"White snakes. We cannot kill white ones," Uncle said gravely. Our sheep were scattered around the perimeters of other flocks. Our goats had merged with other flocks while grazing. Uncle and I lay on the hilltop. He sang folksongs to the girls at the foot of hill. I enjoyed listening to his songs.



Yak hair fabric for making tents and bags.

A JOURNEY TO A *LAB RTSE*

On the eleventh day of the fourth lunar month, local people celebrate at the *lab rtse* located southwest of my home. A half-day's journey on horseback is needed to go there. Villagers have held a ritual there to improve the local community's fortune and the security of local area since the local community was first settled.

On the afternoon of that day, Grandfather and Uncle were binding fifty *ho dung*²⁷ poles to be put on the *lab rtse* summit. There were also two long poles resembling swords to put on the summit. Usually they left before dawn, or they would miss the celebration time.

That evening, I asked Grandfather to take me with him on the morning of the *lab rtse* celebration. After crying and pleading, Grandfather consented. I was so excited that I could not fall asleep. It was my first time to attend a *lab rtse* celebration.

We got up before dawn and packed the horses. Grandfather let me ride on his horse in front of him.

"We should hurry, or we won't catch up with the others. It's really embarrassing to be late," Grandfather said to Uncle on the way. We galloped along en route to the *lab rtse*. Grandfather was one of the local elders managing celebrations and other religious rituals. The sun was still not up from behind the mountains but many people were riding toward the *lab rtse* hill with swords, *ho dung*, and sheep wool for the *rmu thag*. The swords varied in color and shape and featured symbolic carvings. The *lab rtse* was located atop a hill surrounded by two other hills, dwarfing the *lab rtse*.

²⁷ *ho dung* = cypress or juniper branches. Locals cut fifty poles of newly growing cypress branches that are about as long as an arm and tied with white wool in the tops. Locals collect these branches from farming villages and nearby forests.

Local elders waiting by the *lab rtse* when we arrived, greeted Grandfather warmly. The young people greeted him with great respect. Grandfather was renowned for his eloquent use of proverbs and ability to solve problems in the local area when there was conflict.

A group of local elders invited Grandfather to join them while Uncle and I stayed some distance away. Uncle met a friend and talked with him cheerfully, waiting for the celebration to start.

I unexpectedly met my cousin, Pad ma rgyal, Aunt Rta pu mtsho's son. We didn't meet often, since Aunt's home was far away. Pad ma rgyal was one year younger than me, and my favorite playmate during Lo gsar when Aunt brought him to visit her natal home. We hung around the crowd and played.

Villagers began burning a huge offering in front of the *lab rtse* and then set off firecrackers, signaling the start of the celebration.

"It's started!" an elder announced to the huge crowd that had gathered. People circumambulated the *lab rtse* while putting the artificial swords and *ho dung* in the *lab rtse*, and tying *kha btags* to the top of the *lab rtse*. Finally, they hung wool around the *lab rtse* frame.

"May the deities be victorious!" everyone yelled piously, and circumambulated the *lab rtse* and the burning incense. Pad ma rgyal and I ran to Uncle Bsod nams and followed him.

We began descending the mountain hours later, after villagers had burned incense, sprinkled incense water, and praised and propitiated the local deities.

"The horse race is beginning," Pad ma rgyal said, as we walked down.

"What? There will be horse racing?" I asked.

"Yes. There are still many activities," he said excitedly. He had been to the celebration several times. The horse racing began as we reached the foot of the mountain. Many riders flew by on galloping horses. Unexpectedly, Uncle Bsod nams was also racing his horse. I watched for a while, but I lacked interest in horse racing. Pad ma rgyal and I went behind the crowd to play.

Finally, the horse racers dismounted and gathered. At the end, many boxes of beer, fruit, and candy were brought for a huge party. Local people covered the side of the slope.

"What will they do, Pad ma rgyal?" I asked.

"They will start the party. Let's go. There are many things to eat," he said with a big smile. He led me over. Men were setting out beer, fruit, and candy. Noisy chatting filled the usually silent grassland for a moment. Many young people sang traditional Tibetan songs, entertaining the elders, including Grandfather.

"I have many candies, Grandfather," I said, squatting between his legs.

"Great! Take them home," he said, his attention focused on chatting with others.

Twilight came. Villagers mounted their horses and started home. Grandfather put me on his horse. All along the way, I was eager to return home and retell the whole exciting story and show everyone my candy collection.

(Next page). Bon skor Community's *lab rtse*.



NIGHT VISITATION

After my family had supper one night in the winter of 1995, Uncle whispered to me to go out with him. Our grandparents were unaware of our plotting. They usually rebuked Uncle when they noticed he was going out for the night. Once outside, Uncle said, "Let's go to a party where many local youths will sing folksongs." I followed him. Occasionally, local herders held parties where many people gathered, and sang folksongs.

"Our grandparents will surely scold us tomorrow if we go," I said fearfully.

"I'll deal with it," Uncle said.

We reached Mchog ris's home a bit later. Uncle told me to wait at the gate, went in for someone, and came out with Mchog ris, a neighboring shepherd we met daily.

"I will take the elder one, and you take the other," Uncle said.

"OK, but we don't know if they'll come," Mchog ris replied. Uncle held my hand because I could not see well. They chain-smoked while talking. I could only see their faces from the lit matches.

It was a singing party. Many youths sang lustily while others cheerfully listened and smoked. Uncle took me to the boys' side. Girls sat on the other side. A gorgeous girl wearing a scarf mesmerized all the boys when she sang beautifully. Some were even open-mouthed. I understood none of the lyrics.

The singing was competitive. The girls and boys sang against each other to see who had the most songs and whose voice was the most beautiful.

Hours passed that evening. I wanted to return home, but Uncle was intently listening to the folksongs and watching the girls. I eventually fell asleep.

"The party is over," an older man announced from among the boys. Everyone stood and started back home. Uncle and Mchog ris took me by my hands, and we ran out. I did not know what they were doing, and I could see nothing

outside in the inky darkness. Some girls were laughing near us. Uncle murmured with the girls. I could not understand what he was saying.

We reached the gate of Ka tho's home and I realized it was the girls' home. Uncle and Mchog ris were talking to his daughters. Uncle embraced the older one. I felt embarrassed. Finally, they went into the house, leaving me alone. I was terrified in the dark and felt abandoned and cold.

"Could you stay here for a bit, Nangchukja?" Uncle reappeared some minutes later and asked.

"No! I'm afraid of the dark. I want to cry," I said.

"Just for a few minutes. I'll be back soon. Then we'll go home. OK?" he said. I did not reply, and he rushed back into the house. Fearfully, I waited for what seemed hours. I could hear Uncle and a girl talking inside, then the girl was squealing. I was stuck against the door fearfully waiting for Uncle. Meanwhile, a room next to the girls' room was suddenly bright from a candle and the door burst open.

"Who is with my daughters?" Ka tho shouted and ran at me. My hair stood in fear as I fled into the darkness as fast as my legs could take me. Nobody was chasing me when I turned. Ka tho was still shouting in the yard. Hitting and cracking sounded and then Uncle and Mchog ris rushed out. They rushed toward me, though they also could not see in the darkness. Ka tho was not pursuing so I called to Uncle. We then walked home together.

"What a man!" Mchog ris said angrily.

"He's stupid. He can't guard his daughters all their lives," Uncle said.

"I almost had her pants off," Mchog ris added.

Uncle laughed and then I understood their plan.

"Don't repeat any of this at home," Uncle warned as we were walking. Uncle took Mchog ris with us to our home. It was around midnight when we quietly entered the house and slept.

LIFE IN THE FARMING AREA

Summer of 1996. Grass greened and thorn bushes blossomed all over the grassland. The scent was overpowering in the herding area. Twenty days earlier, Grandfather had taken me to the village where my parents farmed and then he returned to the herding area. The environment and local people were new to me. Many new things surprised me. I was full of questions. I couldn't adapt to life with my parents at first. I missed the pastures and my grandparents.

I watched television at home every day and helped Mother with the housework. Television became my best friend and I was soon addicted to various programs. My parents scolded me for not wanting to leave the couch.

I slowly became acquainted with the local villagers and had an increasing number of playmates. As summer began to shift into yellowish autumn, my parents were fully occupied with fieldwork.

Mother called me early one morning and told me to go with her and Father to the fields. After breakfast, she brought a thermos of black tea, bread, and glass cups in a large bag with handles. The atmosphere and the color of the autumn fields were brilliant. All the local villagers were occupied with harvesting, and seemed to cover the fields.

I followed my parents to our family fields. They began harvesting grain and other villagers came to assist. Farmers help one family to harvest for a day, then help another family the next day. They chatted merrily while working.

The azure sky held a blistering hot sun. The farmers wore extended, fringed hats. Unable to bear the heat, I decided to go home and find some playmates. Then Father said, "Go to the other side of that field and take this cut grass home. Do it until you finish."

I picked up a rope to bind the grass. I had to obey for I feared Father's abrasive behavior. I bound up some grass with the rope and headed home. I was sweating and tired. It

was miserable to go back and get more grass in the burning weather. Instead, I roamed the village lanes and met a playmate, Tshe log. I was excited to find him. We ran to the local tap and played in the running water. We played there, in the village lanes, and by the foot of mountains behind the village. We were unaware of the time passing. When it got dark I felt afraid of Father, but I had to return.

"Where have you been? Father is looking for you and scolding you," Mother said worriedly.

"I had a headache and could not return to the field to continue," I lied. She said nothing and took firewood from a corner of our courtyard.

I went inside the house where the TV was. To my surprise, Father was watching TV. "Where did you go?" Father demanded. "I expected you to finish carrying the grass today. Why didn't you finish?"

"I had a headache," I mumbled.

"Headache? All the farmers get headaches but still work, even cutting their fingers with their sickles. What should we do then?" Father scolded. "You must carry that grass tomorrow. We have more work, too," he ordered grimly.

I gradually forgot my fright as I watched TV.

STARTING SCHOOL

It was August 1997 and I was ten years old. Father took me to the local primary school to register early one morning. I was eager to attend school. All the schools were beginning their new terms, and local students yearned to attend. I was overjoyed and honored to go to the local primary school. Father took my hand and we set out. I thought that I would learn something to proudly show my grandparents, since they saw me as inferior to children who attended school.

I carried a schoolbag decorated with an Endless Knot made by Mother. Mother is a skilled seamstress and has made many Tibetan robes. "Come straight home after school this afternoon," Mother said as I was leaving.

"Yes," I replied respectfully. Classes began early in the morning. Uncle Bsod nams had already gone. I was a beginner, so Father and I set out when the sun was just rising above the mountains. I was exhilarated. "Are you sending your son to school?" everyone along the village lanes asked Father.

I hoped to make many new playmates and learn new games in the schoolyard. As I expected, many students were playing shuttlecock and other games when we entered the school gate. Father led me directly to a room. "Headmaster, I need to register my son," Father said when we got inside.

"Welcome and Congratulations! How old is he? Come here," the headmaster said keenly, with an enormous smile. Father chuckled for a second while looking at me. I was nervous and shy.

"He is ten," Father answered.

"Wow! A young boy! What has he been doing all these years?" the headmaster said jokingly with Father.

"Herding goats and sheep," Father replied.

"Yeah, most local children herd and enter school when they are older. Other villagers send their children to the school when they are around six," the headmaster said thoughtfully.

"Yes, our local custom is different," Father said, and they chatted for a while.

I registered and then they both took me to a classroom and my desk. I was in first grade and had many classmates my age. Father took me outside again with the headmaster. We stood at the headmaster's office door. "Headmaster, I have registered my son. From today, watch him and beat him when he misbehaves, especially if he associates with bad students," Father said somberly.

"Of course, that is my responsibility as a headmaster," he said smiling. Father then walked me back to the classroom door.

"Now you are at school. You are a pupil. Study hard. Don't be friends with bad students. I'm going home now," Father said and left. I stepped inside the classroom. All the children were strangers, and watched until I sat down. I opened my schoolbag and took out a new book that had been given to me during registration. I looked at the book, pretending, for I was totally illiterate. After about three minutes, the students walked around the classroom, hitting each other, and laughing. The classroom fell into complete bedlam.

I did not move from the desk while they were playing. Then a runny-nosed boy came to me and asked me to play with him. He was Sangs rgyas from the local village and knew who I was, though I did not know him. He was very kind and we quickly became friends.

"We won't have classes today. The school doesn't have classes on the first day. Instead, we clean the school yard," Sangs rgyas said contentedly, and led me outside.

The schoolyard was soon full of dust. Students with brooms and dustbins were actively cleaning the yard and classrooms.

"Your uncle is looking for you, Nangchukja" Sangs rgyas said as we hung around the yard.

"Where?" I asked.

Uncle Bsod nams came up and asked, "Have you registered?"

"Yes, Uncle," I said. He led Sangs rgyas and me to his classroom. Uncle was a student in grade five. His classmates were chatting and doing no cleaning.

I stayed with Uncle in his classroom all day. He taught me the thirty letters of the Tibetan alphabet. I was exhausted with repeating the letters. Late in the afternoon, he took me around the schoolyard and introduced me to everything. "Let's go for supper," Uncle said after a sharp bell rang next to his classroom and led me to the school kitchen.

"Uncle, what's that bell for?" I asked.

"Supper," he said. To my huge surprise a cook stirred a gigantic pot full of noodles, and ladled some into Uncle's bowl. All the students were lined up, waiting for the same. I was terribly shy and could not face them. Uncle took the noodles, and we went back to his classroom to eat. They were unexpectedly tasty.

"Uncle, is supper always this tasty?" I asked.

"Today is the first day of school so they always offer good food today. But not afterwards," he explained.

INJURED FOREHEAD

One mid-winter morning, Mother was scraping the frost-covered windows from outside with a towel she dipped periodically in a washbasin. Trailers of vapor moved skyward. I had just awakened and sleepily rubbed my eyes. After a moment, she noticed and called, "Son! Get up or you'll be late for class!" I was still in bed, but I was getting up. Just then she entered the house and smiled. She poured milk tea in my dragon-decorated bowl. *Rtsam pa* and bread were ready. She packed my lunch in my schoolbag. There was no time to come back for lunch since school was two kilometers from home. I put on my Tibetan robe as usual after breakfast, took my bag, and was ready to go.

"Keep warm! Today the weather is freezing, and the snow is heavy," Mother said.

"Yes," I replied and left.

I got to school twenty minutes before classes started. Students were tossing snowballs at each other while frolicking on the snowy playground. Some students were making snowmen. Others made snow horses in front of the classrooms. I went straight to my classroom, put my bag in the desk, and took out my Tibetan book to review. I liked my Tibetan class best. Afterwards, I decided to play with the students in the snow, but the first class bell suddenly rang. Hastily, all my classmates poured into the classroom. The teacher did not come even though a half hour passed. Soon all the students were talking and some walked around the classroom. There was a huge amount of noise. I wanted them to be quiet but they did not listen to me. Finally, I joined the other students in talking. I suddenly noticed Rgya mo skyid was wearing a fashionable hat.

"Wow! You've got a new hat!" I complimented. She did not say anything. Afterwards, everyone imitated me, praising her fashionable hat. Rgya mo skyid's cheeks reddened until they resembled apples. She was irritated with others and me. At the moment, I decided to snatch her hat and put it on to show off in front of the other students.

When she was looking away, I grabbed her hat and danced around the classroom. She ran after me. I ran several times around the classroom as she chased me. Everyone was watching her, and yelling her name. I had the hat on my head. I ran through the aisles, not paying attention. Suddenly, my foot struck a desk foot. I fell, and my head hit the teacher's platform. A piercing pain flashed through my forehead. I jumped up. My forehead was bleeding as a dreadful pain intensified in my head. Blood splattered on the floor. My classmates crowded around as my sight gradually dimmed. I lurched, fell, and watched the pool of blood on the floor grow larger.

Through a dim mist, I regained consciousness. I opened my eyes and realized I was in the school clinic. Doctor Rgya ris sat next to me by the bed. He seemed to have observed me for a long time.

"You are awake. How do you feel now?" he asked quietly with a note of sadness. My forehead was wrapped in a white bandage.

"I don't feel anything," I replied.

He laughed and gazed at me.

"You were very naughty!" he said.

Some minutes later, a group of students entered the clinic noisily but calmed down. They were Uncle Bsod nams and my classmates. They smiled when they saw I was awake and related what I had done some hours earlier in the classroom.

"Your mother is coming. We called her," Uncle said and then sat next to Doctor Rgya ris and talked with him.

I did not say anything but my classmates told the story again, exaggerating everything that had happened. After a while, Mother appeared and ran to me anxiously. She embraced me, tears streaming from her eyes.

"What happened to you, dear? How did this happen to you so suddenly?" she said wiping her eyes.

All my classmates kept silent. The doctor checked my pulse. "He can take some medicine, then take him home," he said.

"Isn't it serious?" Mother asked.

"No problem. It's only a wound on the forehead," the doctor replied.

"Thanks, Rgya ris! Prescribe some medicine, and I'll take him home. He'll catch cold here," Mother said.

Doctor Rgya ris prescribed some medicines and gave them to Mother, who helped me get up. Some classmates and Uncle helped me home. I felt nauseous and irritated on the way. Mother wanted me to relax on the warm bed when we finally reached home. I quickly fell asleep and did not wake until the following morning.

DRIVING THE FIRST TIME

We received a short holiday one autumn afternoon. Instead of closing on weekends, the local school gave students eight days off once a month. The local villagers were harvesting, and I thought I would be told to help Mother with the farm work. I played with my schoolmates all the way home. As soon as I reached the gate of my home, I heard a car. I immediately ran to the lane from where I could see the main track from the village to my house. Father was driving a car. I was delighted. I ran to the front of the car, just as it stopped at the family gate. I was very proud of Father. No one owned a car in the village. Curious, I ran to Father and watched him. He usually brought candies for me after returning from a distant place. He took some packages from the car and brought them into our house.

"Who's at home?" Father asked.

"I don't know. I'm just back from school," I replied.

"Is that the car that you were planning to buy? Where did you buy it?" I asked excitedly.

"You don't know! I bought it in Zi ling City," Father replied. My grandparents had mentioned that city several times, but I had never been there.

"I have heard about Zi ling, Father," I said, and together we lugged the packages into the house.

"Oh, you've returned?" Mother said happily. She carried some packages inside and set them down. "Did you buy the car?" Mother asked as she opened the packages to check the contents.

"Father bought a car in Zi ling City," I said rapidly before Father could say anything.

"Is there candy or something for me, Mother?" I asked.

"Quiet, son! You always eat candy, and one day you will be eaten by microbes that develop from eating too much candy," Mother said grimly. I silently and unhappily went near Father and sat with him.

"How much did it cost?" Mother asked.

"About 5,000RMB," Father said, wrinkling his forehead.

"That's expensive! It's all our family can afford in this lifetime," Mother said.

"Let's go out," Father said, leading me to the car. I excitedly examined every inch of the car.

"Father, what is your car's name?" I asked.

"It's a jeep," he said. I thought for a while. I had never heard of a jeep before.

"I have to check something about the car now. Son, can you clean my car?" Father asked, handing me a towel. He then started the car engine. Mother approached the car, looking puzzled.

When I finished cleaning the car, Father drove it around our threshing ground looking at something. Father looked tired after driving the car all the way home from Zi ling.

"Nangchukja, would you like to try to drive?" Father said, smiling.

"He can't. He's still a child," Mother said worriedly.

"I want to!" I said and ran to Father. He stopped the car and let me sit in the driver's seat.

"You should learn how to drive so you can drive for me when I get old," Father said.

"Father, how can I make it go forward? I don't know how to accelerate or change gears," I said excitedly. He taught one thing at a time. I felt nervous and clutched the steering wheel, shaking in fear. I quickly recovered and did my best. I drove the car around the threshing ground, turning this way and that way. Father sat silently beside me. Meanwhile, Mother was scolding Father for letting me drive.

I used to play with minicab toys Father bought for me. My dream had finally come true. Finally, Father told me to stop. I was full of the excitement of driving.

"He is a child. You're foolish to let him drive. It's dangerous! What would you do if he crashed it against the wall?" Mother reproached.

"I have the skill not to wreck it," I said loudly and unhappily.

"He can learn how to drive soon, so I won't need to drive when I'm old," Father said proudly.

A REALIZATION AFTER A LONG TRIP

The year faded to an end and propelled people into hectic Lo gsar preparations. On the third day of Lo gsar, my parents and I were with my grandparents in the herding area. These first few days wore me out from spending time with my old friends and making Lo gsar visits. My plastic handbag was full of candy. I handed them all to Grandmother as Lo gsar gifts. She laughed and said warmly, "My dear, I don't need them. I'll keep them for you until next year. Now you must leave with your parents to return to the farm. I'll miss you. Study hard and obey your parents."

"Grandmother, are you going to visit soon?" I asked.

"I will surely come when your aunt and grandfather can herd the goats and sheep without me," Grandmother said, patting me on the head.

My parents were packing, getting ready to set out. I ran to the bed and put on my Tibetan robe.

"Let Bsod noms come to school after Lo gsar," Father said to Grandfather. I felt great sadness when leaving my grandparents.

"Mother, now we are ready to leave. Is there anything else you want to tell me?" Father asked while cleaning his hands with a cloth after packing everything on a horse.

"I don't think so. I told you everything last night. Please be nice to Lha sgron mtsho," Grandmother warned. She looked worried. Father occasionally had problems with Mother, which led my grandparents to reproach him.

"Yes," Father said guiltily.

"OK, Mother and Father, now we've got to go," Mother said respectfully.

Father led the packed horse as we walked away from the house. We walked to the hilltop and looked back where my grandparents had their hands to their foreheads, watching us leave. My soul lagged behind with them. I waved to them, but they seemed not to see us through the mist.

It was a frozen, windy day. I was short and light and felt the wind would blow me into the sky. I wrapped my

body in my Tibetan robe, but the wind still chilled me and made me sway from side to side with its sudden, cruel gusts.

Many layers of snow lay atop the mountains where we walked. Mother led the horse. Father led me. The road was an unsafe series of zigzags. My hands were soon numb. Father took his huge warm Chinese military coat and put it on me. I soon tired from the weight of so many heavy clothes.

"Father, I can't continue," I sighed.

"We only have a short way to go now, then we can ride in the car," Father encouraged.

"I'm so tired. I really need to rest, Father," I insisted.

"OK, son, I'll put you on the horse," Father said.

"There's a big pack on the horse. Where can I sit?" I asked.

"You can sit on the pack," Father said, halting the horse.

I leaned against the pack and held the reins tightly in my numb hands. My parents were completely covered by their Tibetan robes except for their eyes. They did not seem cold.

We soon reached the mountaintop and only needed to descend the mountain to Dgon thang Village, near the Yellow River.

Tibetans say that a man should dismount when coming down a mountain so I dismounted and ran downhill. Most of the mountainside was desert, so it was easy to run. I joyfully reached the valley below while my parents were still descending the mountain with the packed horse. The valley was warmer than the top, but the wind still blew. Gradually my hands, ears, cheeks, and fingers ached unbearably as the air warmed them.

"Let's go to Gnam rtse's home to get the car and head home as fast as a plane flies," Father said smiling.

Gnam rtse was Father's good friend. When we reached his home, Mother took some Lo gsar gifts from the pack on the horse for Gnam rtse's family. We tied the horse's reins to the pole at the gate as Gnam rtse's family came out, greeted us, and invited us inside.

Father urged us to set out after only a few minutes. He went outside and started his car engine. Mother entrusted the horse to Gnam rtse's family. Uncle Bsod nams would come for it later.

We bid farewell to Gnam rtse's family and Father drove us home. I enjoyed these trips and was alert for every moment of the drive. I watched Father along the way, but finally dozed off, my head on Mother's lap.

"Nangchuk! Wake up! We're home!" Father said, waking me from a dream. The farmland lay idle and the weather seemed as warm as in summer. I felt this farming village was an exceptional place to live as I considered the differences between herding and farming areas.



The number of horses has decreased sharply as motorcycles are purchased.

SMOKING

Approximately two months had passed after the first school term started in 1998.

One afternoon after the first period of a Tibetan language class, Jo pa said, "Nangchukja, the next period is that boring Chinese class. I have a good idea. "Our Chinese teacher is a Tibetan woman, and we don't need to be afraid of her. Let's go out and play during her class."

Tshe log, another boy, seemed to approve as if they had already discussed the plan. Chinese class was the one class I refused to study for.

"Yes, that's a great idea. Let's go," I said.

Jo pa was the best-behaved student in my class. We ran with Tshe log from the schoolyard behind the school and jumped over the short schoolyard wall. Behind the school were a mountain valley and a long concrete ditch that the villagers had built for flood prevention.

I thought we were going to play behind the school, but Jo pa and Tshe log led me to a place further from the school. As we walked along the concrete ditch, Jo pa took a pack of cigarettes from his pocket. He and Tshe log both took one and smoked along the way.

"Would you like one, Nangchukja?" Jo pa asked.

"No, I'm not used to it," I replied.

They smoked as normally as Father. I thought they were very fashionable and then felt like trying one.

"I'll try one," I said bravely.

"Are you sure, man?" Jo pa said, handing me one. I reached out to take it. Smoking was an enemy in my mind. Since I could speak and stand, my parents had told me thousands of times to never smoke. Still, I had never tasted one and was curious. Jo pa took a lighter from the same pocket where he kept his cigarettes. I soon inhaled a big mouthful of smoke and then a cough moved up my lungs under my ribs. I squatted on the ground and coughed several times as saliva sprayed from my mouth. I tightly held the

cigarette between my index and middle fingers. Jo pa and Tshe log laughed.

"Everyone is like that the first time. Just try a second time, and you'll be able to smoke without a problem," Tshe log said, sucking on his cigarette.

"Smoking is a terrible thing, just as my parents told me. You guys are tricking me!" I yelled.

"If you don't believe us, that's OK, but if you like you can try again and see what happens." Jo pa said.

After hearing this, I tried it again and got the same reaction. The smoke felt like a knife stabbing my lungs. I could not keep my balance and sat on the ground, ready to vomit. I threw the cigarette into the ditch. My friends laughed again and moved away from me.

It seemed they were going to stay longer and smoke more. I returned to school. The class was still continuing so I waited for the bell. Just as the school bell was about to ring, Tshe log and Jo pa approached from the ditch, grayish wisps of smoke wafting around their heads. Suddenly, the bell rang so loudly that I'm sure dead people in the other world must have heard it. I ran to the classroom, thinking that the teacher had already left.

Unfortunately, I crashed into her right outside the door. Fear gripped my heart. I was not sure whether to stand still or run away. "Where have you been?" our Chinese teacher inquired severely. I was frightened and trembled. I silently stood in front of her.

"Where have you been? Did you hear me? Are you going to tell the truth?" she demanded repeatedly and angrily. I said nothing. She turned and walked inside the classroom to get something.

At the same time, Tshe log and Jo pa ran up not knowing the teacher was still there. When she came back to the door holding a bamboo stick, Jo pa and Tshe log froze. Their faces reddened, reflecting terrible remorse.

"Where have you been?" she asked again, about to beat us with the bamboo stick.

"We were playing behind the school," I said honestly.

"Why did you skip my class? Tell me the truth!" she asked forcefully, shaking the stick. Since I was the class

monitor, she hit me on the buttocks with the stick as hard as she could. We said nothing, which only made her angrier. She hit us repeatedly. She hit Tshe log and Jo pa very hard.

"I will tell your parents if you don't explain," she threatened.

"I will tell you, Teacher..." Tshe log replied fearfully while she was beating him with the stick. She stopped and listened.

"We... went... to smoke... cigarettes..." Tshe log slowly enunciated. She was even more furious and beat us harder than before.

"How daring you guys are!" she said with an enraged look that I had never seen before. "You smoke?" She hit each of us again energetically. Not yet satisfied, she led us to the front of the teachers' office and made us stand before the whole student body. We stood there for almost half an hour when she called, "Come!" and led us to the classroom, where she made us stand at the front. She took something in a plastic bag from her handbag. Inside were three packs of cigarettes. We wondered what she was going to do. "Here we go. Each of you take one pack of cigarettes and eat them quickly, since you are smokers," she said, shocking us all.

When we resisted, she hit us with the stick. She forced each of us to put cigarettes in our mouths. She grabbed each of our faces and forced cigarettes in our mouths. Though the cigarettes were bitter, we had to do as she said. One by one, we put them all in our mouths. I swallowed one or two cigarettes. The awful taste almost made me faint. We all vomited. Tears welled up in my eyes.

"How does tobacco taste? Is it as delicious as you imagined?" she asked.

"No... no... no..." we whimpered.

"Go home!" she said wrathfully, "If you have a brave heart, try again later!" then she left. We were hardly able to stand upright while still vomiting.

Most students had gone home. I went to the classroom and grabbed my schoolbag to return home, but I first went to the school water tap to clean my hands and mouth to avoid my parents suspecting something unusual had happened.

A TEACHER'S CRITICISM

Winter receded. The days grew longer. The school still started class early in the morning.

One morning before dawn, I awoke and sleepily looked out the windows. Father turned over in bed and continued snoring. The morning sun slowly lit up the sky. I had to get up.

Mother was already awake. I washed my face and forced myself to start off for school. I complained for a moment but, without reaction from Father, I set out. Even though it was a bad habit, I took one or two RMB from Father before going to school every morning. Many of my classmates were from families that had money, and competed over how much money they had and how many snacks they could buy from the school's small shop. Some showed off the expensive things they had, feeling superior.

The first period class was mathematics. The teacher was very lax. As usual, some classmates chewed gum and ate snacks, making other students jealous. Students from better off families never studied or listened to teachers' criticism. The Chinese teacher had given us difficult homework the day before, and everyone was anxious about it. But, of course, some of the students copied others' homework. Others were too lazy to even attempt response.

As the math teacher taught, I fearfully completed my Chinese homework. I finished it just as the math class ended. Some students from the rich families worried about the Chinese teacher, because she was strict about homework.

The second period began. Some students sat in the classroom with empty notebooks. As usual, the students stood up to greet the Chinese teacher with, "How are you, Teacher?" Surprisingly, she said nothing. Instead she put a long stick and her books on the table.

"Hand me your homework first, and then sit. If anyone didn't do the homework, they cannot sit," she said grimly. Some students were so scared their tongues came out

of their mouths. The students who had finished the assignment sat down. About five students still stood.

"Please come to the platform and stand in line," the teacher said to the standing students. They fearfully went to the platform. They were from the rich families in the local village.

"Why didn't you write your homework?" she asked sternly. They didn't reply.

"My homework book is lost," Bkra shis finally said.

"Why didn't you buy a new one? You can buy gum and snacks every day?" she shouted and kicked his knee. Bkra shis trembled and almost fell. He did not reply. He was overcome with guilt. The teacher asked the students one by one. All their reasons were the same. She furiously hit them with the stick. When she hit one student's palm, the stick broke. She was still very angry.

"You five never do my homework," she said and kicked them again.

"We will next time, Teacher," they pleaded.

"How many times have you said that and then done nothing? The five of you will see today. Go to my office!" she thundered and led them to her office without a further thought about the rest of us.

I thought that if I had gotten some money from Father I would surely have competed with them and not done the homework. I determined to not cry for money in the morning when Father was at home and instead to listen to the teachers. Meanwhile, all my classmates clamored that I should see what the Chinese teacher was doing to five classmates. We ran to the windows of her office. She was hitting their palms with a long, rubber ruler. Their faces were red as they grimaced fearfully and regretfully.

FLEEING

It was the first day of the second term in 1998. All the students were playing excitedly, since the school never had class the first day. Many new students were registering. Some from the local wealthier families were around the little school shop buying snacks and toys, eating snacks, and loudly slurping soda. Uncle and I were standing mindlessly at the classroom door.

After a while, the students were ordered to clean the schoolyard. Uncle led me outside the school to avoid the cleaning duty. We went to the village fields where we played all day long. The cleaning ended in late afternoon.

"Nangchukja, I am really tired of attending school. I miss the herding area, the goats, the sheep," Uncle Bsod nam told me dejectedly at the school gate.

"I miss them too, Uncle," I replied thinking about the herding area and my grandparents.

"We have the same idea. There is a way to solve this, Nangchukja. Let's escape to the herding area and not attend school," Uncle said.

"Are you sure?" I asked doubtfully.

"Yes. Don't worry about anything. If your father wants to beat you, I'll stop him and tell him," Uncle added convincingly.

I brooded for a moment and then Uncle suddenly took my left hand and pulled me out of the school. He persuaded me and finally I agreed to leave school with him and head to the grassland. "Let's escape tomorrow morning after we get up. Pretend to be leaving for school," Uncle said. My heart was full of fear as I thought about my parents.

Uncle and I walked home when it got dark. My parents did not imagine we would escape. Mother had supper ready when we arrived. Uncle and I went to bed early after supper in a room separate from my parents. At around midnight, Uncle got up and started packing food and other stuff in our schoolbags for the trip we would begin in a few hours.

I slept deeply ignorant of his preparations. In the morning, Uncle and I got up and went to the other room where Mother had readied breakfast. After we ate, we went back to the bedroom and got our schoolbags as we normally did. Mother had no clue what we were up to.

"I packed everything in the schoolbags," Uncle said when we were on the way.

"Yeah, it's heavy," I said.

We went behind the school to the base of the mountain, and started climbing.

On the way, Uncle told me stories and many interesting things that made time pass quickly. The herding area was far from the village. Travelling on foot through the mountains took much energy.

Without resting, Uncle led and sang as we walked. The sun had just risen as we passed the mountain behind our village.

Hours passed. My stomach groaned from hunger. Uncle and I ate the food in the schoolbag and then set out again.

The sun was about to set when we approached the mountain where my grandparents live. "It's still early. Let's rest," Uncle said at the foot of the mountain. After a short while, he dozed off. I felt increasingly frightened in that isolated area. I called to him several times, but he did not wake up. Finally, I kicked his butt, he woke up, and then we started to climb up the final mountain pass. I felt weak from hunger when we got to the middle of the mountain. With Uncle's encouragement and more effort, we reached the mountaintop.

"That's your grandfather. He's driving the sheep home," Uncle said, gazing at the foot of the mountain where an elderly man was driving a flock of sheep. The sun was falling behind the mountains in the distance.

"We must never reveal that we escaped from school to your grandparents," Uncle said.

I promised not to divulge any of our secrets. However, later my grandparents realized that we had escaped. Grandfather lacked interest in sending Uncle Bsod namts to

school, so he agreed to let him dropout. On the contrary, I was forced to return.

A COMPLIMENT

I'm back!" I yelled at the house door, back from my annual visit to my maternal grandmother on the third or fourth day of Lo gсар. She had divorced before I was born, and lived with her sons, Ra log and Lha mchog, and daughter, Dpa' mo yag. She has six children (two sons and four daughters).

"Oh! My son, you're back!" Mother said in surprise. She stopped making dumplings for Lo gсар guests and came to talk with me.

"So how is Lo gсар in our grandmother's home?" she asked eagerly.

"Lo gсар there is different from here," I replied, untying my sash.

"How? Do you think our Lo gсар is inferior?" she asked.

"No, our family Lo gсар is superior. The way they arrange the food and other decorations are different," I said and opened the bag that I had brought with me. Mother was silent, waiting for what I would take from the bag.

"What did Grandmother say about the gifts?" she asked as I fumbled in the gift bag. I took out two bottles of orange juice, a bottle of liquor, and some apples.

"These are Lo gсар gifts that Grandmother told me to give to you and Father," I said and took out the gift Grandmother had given me—a piece of mutton.

"Wow! Grandmother gave you a special gift again!" Mother exclaimed with a smile.

"Mother, is it customary for Tibetans to give mutton as Lo gсар gifts?" I asked.

"If someone is the most important person in someone's heart, they give them mutton. It is only given to boys and men, not to girls."

"Oh! It's like that! I was curious about this mutton and felt shy on the way home so I wrapped it in the bag to hide it," I said, making Mother laugh again. Then I took my Tibetan robe outside and hung it on the clothesline.

"Son... Son!" Mother called from inside the kitchen.

"Yeah, Mother?" I replied, trotting back.

"Dear, you must stay at home and herd the cows tomorrow," she said. "I'll be busy making dumplings."

"Why? Isn't Aunt Bun khrang skyid herding the cows every day?" I asked.

"Grandfather is sending her to Stong che Village for Uncle's wedding tomorrow," she said.

"Wow, how sudden! When did they decide that?" I asked.

"The uncles from the groom's family came here yesterday and decided with your father to hold the wedding tomorrow. Your father drove his car to pick up Grandfather this morning from the herding area," Mother said tiredly as she continued making dumplings.

I was excited for Aunt Bun khrang skyid who would go as a bride to Stong che Village. There would be a party at home the day after Aunt left. On the other hand, I felt sad that I had to herd the cows. Much of my childhood was spent enjoying candy, tasty drinks, and eating. I did not much care to herd cows alone.

"OK, Mother! I'll herd the cows," I said.

"That's a good son!" Mother praised. My nose lifted proudly, and my heart swelled with confidence.

ANOTHER ESCAPE

The hot summer sun encouraged people to wear thin clothes. All the local primary school students were delighted by the weather, but anxious about the results of the midterm exams. I was in the classroom with my classmates, happy with the high score I had earned on my Tibetan exam.

"She's coming. She's coming!" someone shouted. Everyone ran to their seats. The door opened. The Chinese teacher stood with a piece of paper in one hand and a long stick in the other. She looked moody. Many students had failed their exams, and she was going to beat them. She entered the classroom and stood on the platform.

"Here are the scores that you earned this time. Disgraceful!" she said. Everyone was as quiet as death. "Many of you failed. When I call your name, come stand here," she said pointing to the teacher's platform, where there was a large empty space. She read the names of those who had failed, including mine. Then she turned to us, a quivering line awaiting the inevitable. She ordered us to hold our palms turned up. Her stick came forcefully down on the first set of palms. After six stinging strokes, she moved on to the next. My heart trembled in the fear that increased with every wince that followed every stroke and the red welts that quickly formed.

"Stretch your hands out further!" she barked, and my heart almost stopped. Bravely concealing the fear that electrified my body, I stretched out my palms. I looked straight ahead, keeping my mind off what was happening. After three strokes, my hands were numb except for the needles that stabbed my palms. Satisfied with her work, she left without a word.

Not knowing what else to do with the unbearable pain, we went outside to warm ourselves in the sunshine. As our hands became warmer and the pain become more intense, some of us no longer held back the tears stinging our eyes. In

that little group of pain the only words that could flow were in vilification of that woman.

"None of the Tibetan teachers hit us or even pinch us when we flunk the exams. Why does this Chinese teacher always beat us so violently?" some students asked.

Others headed for the kitchen and lunch. I had no appetite. My hands swelled with pain and my heart swelled with rage. Fighting back tears of hatred and frustration, I went to the dorm. I threw my schoolbag on my bed and crawled in after it. A plan to leave for a while slowly began to form.

Having decided to escape from school, I packed my essential belongings into a bag and ran out to the ditch behind the school. That was as far as my planning took me. I sat leaning against the bank to catch my breath and consider my next step. I had escaped last time to the herding area. This time I would go to the pastoral area where my maternal grandmother lived. I had never sought refuge there before. After making up my mind, I ran towards Grandmother's home. The area was only about an hour away if I traveled fast.

I met nobody. Soaked to the skin with perspiration, I threw myself down for a brief rest just below the crest of a hill. As I got my bearings I realized that this was the last summit before reaching my destination. My heart urged me on again. I reached the summit and raced down the steep mountain as if chased by a thousand demons.

Running as fast as my legs would allow, I finally saw the house. Grandmother and Uncle Lha mchog were standing inside in the family yard. Grandmother was already at the yard gate when I reached it.

"Is that my son?" Grandmother said doubtfully and then reached out to me contentedly. "Why did you run so fast? Don't you have classes these days?" she asked, smiling. She knew little about my school and did not even approve of me going to school. Because of my schooling, Uncle Lha mchog was stuck at home herding the goats and sheep.

"I have classes, but the Chinese teacher beat me today. I couldn't bear to stay so I fled here," I told her

without doubt or fear, because I knew that she would not scold me.

"Is that true? Let me see your hands," Grandmother said, holding my palms in her hands. "That witch! No mercy! My son! Let's go inside and rub some liquor on your palms," she said, leading me into the house.

Uncle was fixing a cart in the courtyard. He looked up as Grandmother and I walked to the house and asked in surprise, "Why did you come here today? Is everything all right?"

"The Chinese teacher beat him. His hands are really red and swollen. That Chinese witch is terrible!" Grandmother said.

"Ah! I will take you to the school tomorrow. I'll tell the teacher she cannot hit anybody like that," Uncle Lhamchog said furiously and continued fixing the cart.



Bon skor Community Primary School (built in 1989). The school had classes from kindergarten through grade six with a total enrollment of 302 students, fourteen teachers, and four cooks in 2010.

ENCOURAGEMENT

Five days passed at Grandmother's home. On the fifth day, I was in the house playing with a toy tractor made from mud. To drive a tractor or a jeep was a splendid dream. Uncle Lha mchog was outside the house, and Grandmother was herding, far from home.

"Is Nangchukja here?" said Mother unexpectedly from outside.

"He has been here four or five days. Have you come here to get him, Sister?" Uncle replied. My heart throbbed fearfully at the sound of Mother's voice. I ran behind the door to hide. I could hear her steps and high voice talking to Uncle as she entered the house.

"Where is he?" Mother asked, not seeing me.

"He was just here. Where are you, Nangchukja?" Uncle Lha mchog called out hesitantly. Mother was clever. I heard her footsteps as she drew close to the door behind which I was hiding. She swung the door open and saw me.

"My idiotic son is here!" Mother said disappointedly. She kicked me hard on the legs while scolding me.

"Sister, please don't beat him. The teacher already beat him badly," Uncle pleaded. I was not afraid of Mother's frail kicks. Whenever she tried to reproach me and beat me, I was not at all frightened. She ceased beating me and switched to yelling at me.

"Now we must go back to school or your Father will kill you for dropping out," she said, trying to frighten me into going back. However, I was in no mood to return to school.

"I don't want to go to school. The teachers have no mercy and beat me all the time," I replied.

"It's your problem they beat you. You don't listen to the teachers and miss class. The teachers also said you failed the exams," she said.

"That's what the teachers said?" I replied, surprised that she had heard so quickly.

"Your Father and I went to school today, and the teachers told your father their reasons for beating you," she

said coldly. I realized there was no way for me to lie to hide my guilt.

"It sounds serious, Nangchukja. You should return with your mother. It will be better if she goes with you," Uncle Lha mchog encouraged. "Studying is the most important thing for people. You will be useless without education."

I silently calmed down. Mother was thinking, disappointment written on her face.

"He skips school, bringing on himself his teachers and parents' condemnation. If he would only stay in school and work, his father would do everything he needs," Mother said to Uncle.

"Yeah, it's true," Uncle agreed.

"His father was furious. He would have come here himself but I was afraid of his violent temper," Mother said in distress. She and Uncle talked to me for about half an hour, until my tears poured out unceasingly. They finally convinced me to return to school, but first we had to go home. Mother encouraged me, and we soon set off.

"I did what I could to calm you father, but I do think he's going to beat you," Mother said, terrifying me on the way home.

It was already late afternoon when we reached the school gate. Instead of stopping, Mother took me directly home. My fear of seeing Father grew as I neared home.

"Are you frightened?" Mother asked as we entered the family gate. Mother wanted me to stay on the enclosed house porch without Father seeing me. Father was inside. I heard him cough. Mother went in, and they began arguing. After a long time, Mother brought a half loaf of bread on a plate and a cup of tea. She left me on the porch and went outside.

In a few moments, Father rushed in. "You're eating my food? Get over here! Did you understand what I told you before? What's this about not wanting to study?" Father shouted brutally and kicked me from the seat where I was sitting, trying to eat the bread. I burst into tears and in fear, ran toward the family gate. With determined strides he grabbed me and dragged me back to the yard.

"What did I tell you the first time you entered that school? You must study hard! That is what I ordered you to do! Your teachers say you are not studying well, missing classes, and failing exams. And now you run away, shirking your work! You don't want to study anymore? Take off all your clothes. Those are the clothes I bought for you. I bought you everything. You leave them here," Father goaded. I felt extreme trepidation and abhorrence. I believed he wanted to kick me out of the home. After I took off the clothes, I again tried to run out of the yard.

Father blocked my exit, coming at me with a long strap. He began beating me with it, like a prison guard beating a rebellious prisoner into submission. He hit my naked back, my buttocks, and legs very hard. It was more awful than having boiling oil poured on me. I ran around the family yard but could not escape the lashes. Father filled the yard with his rage.

"He is the only boy that I have. Are you going to kill him? Don't be stupid, Dpa' rtse 'bum," Mother cried and tried to grab him and pull him off me. I was about to faint and unable to cry any longer. My tears were exhausted.

"Shut up! He always disobeys and doesn't go to school, that's what comes of your pampering him," Father said, his chest heaving. Scowling, he headed back to the house but not before saying, "I no longer need you. Go wherever you want to go. Don't come back to my house to sleep."

My heart was full of dismay. I shyly covered my privates with my hands. I felt my back was torn to shreds. Night had fallen. I tried to see my back in the moonlight. It was red and tender to the touch. Tears welled up from my aching heart and joined those of Mother, who was crying beside me, hugging me. In bitter hatred, I knew that I had no father anymore. From the fire of this mental and physical suffering came a new strength and confidence. In time I would come to see that what Father had given me was encouragement.

STUDENTS FIGHT

The pale air of frozen winter arrived, blanching the landscape. Violent cold coated every object, seeming even to ice my throbbing vital heart. It was the end of the second term and students were in a frenzy preparing for final exams.

As class monitor, it was my job to keep the other students from being too noisy, fighting in the classroom, and engaging in other disruptive behavior. One afternoon after the last class, the students were playing boisterously in the classroom. I was watching Jo pa, Tshe log, and some girls playing.

"Now, let's get supper from the kitchen," Sangs pa said, pausing from running around the classroom with others.

"OK, everyone, let's go together!" I yelled, above the clamor of their play. I turned from the classroom and looked to see if the kitchen door was open. The school kitchen was opposite the classroom. A dirty table stood outside the door where cooks placed the food, and students then took their servings of food back to the classroom.

"It was you... you!" somebody shouted as I was going out with my bowl for food. I turned to see who it was. Jo pa and Pad ma were grabbing at each other's necks furiously. They were not exactly fighting. I silently watched this comical performance.

"Why you did step on my foot?" Pad ma said. His face was red. The huge Tibetan robe he wore made his movements clumsy. Jo pa, too, wore a really big coat his mother had made for him, which inhibited his reach. It was clear, from the haughty expression on Jo pa's face that he had deliberately stepped on Pad ma's foot. He seemed to enjoy bullying the mild-natured Pad ma, the most pure-hearted boy in my class. By this time most students had finished their meal and were gathered around the door, some jeering and egging them on. The two combatants were cursing and smacking each other, as if they were defending their mother's honor.

"Stand there!" a man yelled. The students from the other classes dispersed, and ran back to their classrooms. It was the school principal, Tshe brtan rgyal, a handsome Tibetan teacher. He was grimly looking at me and not at the students who were fighting. I looked at him puzzled and began trembling. "Are you the monitor?" he said sternly.

"Yes, Teacher," I replied in the most respectful voice my constricted throat could muster.

"Did the teachers instruct you to be monitor in order to watch other students fight?" he said closing in on me with his glare.

"No," I replied meekly.

"So why were you just standing there?" he asked and kicked me once in the foot. I stood still, until he turned to face Jo pa and Pad ma.

"Why were you fighting?" he demanded.

"He stepped on my foot and was bullying me," Pad ma said.

"No, I didn't Teacher. He yelled at me," Jo pa replied, looking at the teacher fearfully.

"You don't need to explain. You are always involved in such things," the principal reproached. "Jo pa and Pad ma come to my office after supper."

He turned his stern glance back to me before saying and then striding away, "Nangchukja, you were appointed monitor to prevent such incidents. I'll be watching you. This better not happen again."

DANCE COMPETITION

Around June twentieth in 1999, most students had left for summer holiday. The annual town festival was coming soon and the school had selected fourteen students to train for the dance competition, including seven boys from my class. The festival would start in fifteen days and we had already been in training for six weeks. We were pastoralists and this was all new to me. Learning a dance for the first time was tricky and humbling. Luckily, our dance-training group had a kindhearted and impressive dance teacher, assigned to us by the local County Tibetan Art Group. It was the first time in my life to learn Tibetan dance, and I enthusiastically took to it.

"Watch and repeat my every action. It's easy!" we often heard during our classes. With our teacher's instruction and the support of other students, my clumsy moves were soon transformed into a proper dancing style. There were many obstacles, frustrations, and disappointments throughout the weeks of training, but in the end we became a viable competitive team. We earned our teacher's approval, and we were ready for the festival.

There was precious little of the summer holiday left by the time the training ended. I was very homesick by then and took the one free day given before the festival to go home. As I approached the house, I became aware of sharp pain piercing the soles of my feet. I limped into the house and took off my shoes.

"What happened to your feet, Son?" Mother asked sympathetically.

"I hadn't noticed. My feet are swollen and bruised from dancing," I replied, bending my head to get a close look at my soles.

"I can't believe how well you dance," Mother said. I considered telling her of the difficulties, but I said nothing; not with my history of mischief-making and disobedience.

Mother let me wear the new Tibetan long-sleeve dance robe around the house. To make up for the rest I

missed during the strenuous weeks of dance preparation, I fell into a heavy slumber on our porch, lying on a cushion of artificial wool.

Early the next morning, Mother sent me to school wearing my new dance robe. All the dance group members had arrived. The village leaders, school headmaster, and the dance-training teacher were waiting for us with two tractor-trailers.

"Today we will compete against six other village schools. You will show them the results of your two and a half months of training. Remember, you are representing our school and our community. Do your best today!" said our vice village leader, Thun 'dzi. We looked at each other confidently, silently accepting the challenge. The tractors started, we piled in the trailers they pulled, and set out. Wearing new Tibetan robes and eager smiles we were on our way to join the local festival and make an impression with our dancing. We passed through crowds of local villagers going to the festival, all wearing new clothes.

A riot of colors met us as we drew near the festival field. Women dressed in their new multicolored blouses and robes and men in brightly colored silk brocade robes milled around the many shops and restaurants set up for the occasion. The local village leaders met us as we arrived and led us to a big tent near the central stage. Before long, loudspeakers blared out across the field ordering the dancers to line up before the stage. The crowds began to assemble, pressing in closer and closer. I stood in awe, not knowing what to think or feel. I had never been in such a huge crowd before.

The loudspeaker, mounted high above the heads of the crowd, blasted out the anthem of the People's Republic of China as an official hoisted the red flag up the flagpole. The lines of officials stood with their right hands raised in the way we were taught in school. After an aged official gave a long, tedious speech, the dance competition began. As one group after another went on stage for their dance, our nerves drew increasingly taut.

"Don't be nervous, just go have fun everyone!" the dance teacher encouraged, as we queued to go up the stage steps. Our turn to compete had arrived.

"OK, OK, OK ..." we mumbled nervously, filing past him, hardly hearing him. We formed our circle on stage, brave and confident. I reflected back on the two months of training that had prepared me for this, the pain and hardship. My confidence swelled as I gazed out at the assembled crowd.

Our performance went smoothly and the crowd applauded as our dance ended. Behind our giant smiles we felt wrung out, trembling with nervous energy. The village leaders and other locals met us happily as we left the stage, offering us snacks and drinks.

"You guys did well! How glorious!" praised some villagers. "Let's go for a meal now," some said, wanting us to stay together until we heard the judges' decision. The village leaders led us to a tent restaurant down the street. It was exciting for me to hear that we were having lunch at a restaurant, something I did not often get to do.

After lunch the leaders led us back to the tent where we were staying. On the way, the loudspeaker caught our attention. We stood still and heard: "Attention. Here are the results from the dance competition. Bon skor Community's dance group got the highest score. This is the first year that village has sent a dance team for this competition. This is a great achievement. They are the champions. Congratulations!"

Many of our villagers applauded and shouted in excitement. The rest of the announcements were drowned out, as the members of our dance group jumped for joy. We were exhilarated by what we had accomplished.

"Let's eat, drink, and sing. Whatever you guys like, let's do it," the village leader said happily, and he sent someone to buy three crates of drinks and much food to eat in the tent.

Later that afternoon, the village leaders collected our entire dance group members together for a meeting. "I am so proud of you all for achieving top honors for our village. To show our appreciation, the town has put together a reward

for each of you," the leader said. I was bursting with excitement and eager to see what he was going to give us.

"Each member will receive 150RMB," he said and clapped. With one mind our group felt honored and uplifted.

TIBETAN CALLIGRAPHY PRIZE

I advanced to grade five in August 1999. I competed in a sports program at school that summer, and earned an award. All this contributed to the growing pride and respect my parents and relatives had for me. They remarked on my progress in study and behavior. They no longer thought of me as a naughty, disobedient boy.

One day, our school gave the students a chance to compete in a Tibetan handwriting contest. Dpa' ldan rgyal was the top student in my class and in the whole school. I was a contender in athletics and even on the academic side, urged on by Father's constant reproach, I was improving. I was never great with the textbooks, but my handwriting did garner the praise of the teachers.

A notice went up that the handwriting competition would begin at four p.m., setting everyone abuzz. I returned to the classroom immediately and set about practicing letters and choosing pen points. Here was my chance to gain a good reputation, a little fame even, for excellent calligraphy. My heart was full of jealousy when I thought of those excellent scholars, who loved to mock and deride me as naughty. I would challenge them on their own ground, and win.

My classmate, Rgya mo skyid, appeared at the door and said, "Nangchukja, are you joining the handwriting competition?" I shifted in my seat so she couldn't see me selecting my pen points, or she would have known immediately that I was preparing for the competition. "No. And you?" I said.

"Why don't you join? Isn't your handwriting great?" she replied earnestly.

"I'm just kidding. I am joining," I said turning towards her directly, with an open smile.

"Hope you do well!" she said and sat down at her desk.

I then left and headed down the hallway, as ready as I could be, and trudged to the classroom along with many

other students. I took my seat. The school was small, so we did not need to register.

Tshe ring rdo rje, a Tibetan teacher wrote out a long paragraph on the blackboard.

"Now the competition has begun. Take your time and copy this paragraph in your best hand. Use this paper," Bde skyid, another Tibetan teacher said, handing out papers.

I took great care to write each letter as beautifully as I could, taking my time. All my focus was on my piece of paper. After about a half hour I was finished. Everyone else had already handed in their paper. The room was almost empty.

"You must have done very well," Teacher Bde skyid said as I left. That was nice to hear, but I was still worried about Dpa' ldan rgyal and his ability.

"I didn't do well this time," Dpa' ldan rgyal said as I entered my classroom.

"Why? What's wrong?" I asked.

"I forgot to take a good pen. My letters looked terrible," he said.

"Why didn't you get a good pen?" I asked, secretly feeling happy. I wondered if he was lying.

"I just forgot to get one," he replied.

The results had not been announced by supertime. All the contestants were eager, myself included.

"The results are in!" someone yelled. We all ran out into the hallway and crowded around the bulletin board. I wondered why the results had been posted so quickly, as it had only been about an hour since the competition ended.

"You are first, Nangchukja," a student from grade one said, before I could even reach the board. I was surprised. When I looked at the board for myself, sure enough my name was on top. I was number one. Dpa' ldan rgyal was second. I thought there was a mistake, but people were congratulating me. It had to be real. I felt honored. Happiness flooded over me.

Honored and self-confident, I went home elatedly to share this great accomplishment with my parents.

SCHOOL FOOD

Brisk autumn air settled on the farming village. I was working hard at my fifth grade classes. Our school had some boarding students. The rest of us lived at home with our parents. School supper was served when the sun was setting. However, the custom among the farmers was to serve supper after the sun set, and their livestock were put in the sheds.

The boarding students were resentful with this arrangement, because they knew that we locals were enjoying two suppers—the one at school and another a couple of hours later at home. One day, some of us planned to eat as many bowls of noodles as we could for supper at school. In spite of the poor sanitary conditions of the school food, I ate three bowls of tasteless noodles that night, grit and all. The farming area was sandy and sand found its way into everything including the noodles.

My stomach was bulging after evening class. I went home and straight to bed, without having another supper at home.

"You local students are having supper twice every day. Doesn't the school give you enough to eat?" Father often asked when I was eating the evening meal at home.

"He is young, and boys need to eat more; you were just like him," Grandmother said to Father every time she stayed with us in the village.

I was awakened by great pain before dawn. I went outside to relieve myself even though it was still dark. I was not accustomed to being in the darkness by myself. Darkness was the most frightening thing for me. Nevertheless, my intestines urged me outside.

Terrible diarrhea took hold of me from that early morning. I could not go to school; I could hardly walk. "I can't go to school, Mother," I said that morning, and slept.

"What happened? We don't have medicine for that," Mother said worriedly. "Are you seriously ill?"

"Yes," I replied.

The morning sun was shining in the family front room. I came out of the bedroom to warm myself.

"What did you eat yesterday?" Father asked after he got up.

"Three bowls of school noodles. They had sand and it didn't taste all that good," I replied.

"You're always hungry even though the food is not good. Your diarrhea seems serious. I'll get you medicine this afternoon," Father said and left after breakfast.

A piercing pain sporadically tore through my gut, which I bore with clenched teeth. I did not want Mother to know, because she worried when I was ill.

Father drove his car to the local clinic for medicine that afternoon and returned in a half hour with Tibetan medicines folded in paper. The piercing pain in the center of my gut stopped after taking some medicine with hot water, but I was not back to normal.

The medicines sent me smoothly through the night in a deep sleep. By the next morning I was able to get up and the pain in my stomach and the diarrhea were gone. Father took me to school when the sun rose. "I need to say something about the school food to the school principal today. Let's go son," Father said as we were leaving home.

"Don't argue with him. He's good to all the villagers and children," Mother said apprehensively.

"If he is such a good man, the food should be better. He should be told about the food situation. This is a suggestion villagers should bring to him," Father said.

I followed him along the lane to school. Father repeated his usual religious recitation as we walked. Class was in session when we entered the schoolyard. The rhythmic sound of the students repeating the texts in unison after the teacher filled the courtyard. The school principal was the only teacher not teaching. As we entered the school office, he was sitting inside and drinking milk tea.

"Please come in," he said and stood up with a big smile. "What happened to your son yesterday? He didn't come."

"What happened? What do you think? Did you think he escaped again?" Father said awkwardly. I felt uncomfortable and just bent my head toward the floor.

"I don't know. What happened actually?" the headmaster asked.

"Your management of school food is seriously lacking. Most students say the food contains sand and sometimes has no taste at all. My son had terrible diarrhea yesterday and couldn't even walk. What will you do about this?" Father inquired agitatedly.

"OK, you are right. Thanks for your suggestion. I'll take care of this right now. Is that OK? You should also be aware that the local government is not sending good cooks to our school. That's the biggest problem," the teacher replied with reddened cheeks.

"As school principal, you should solve whatever problems arise. Telling us the problems is useless. This is the point. If you can't, of what use are you?" Father said furiously. "Go to class after the break. I'm going back home," Father said and left without another word to the principal.



Bon skor Community, summer 2009 (taken from Er rgod).

A HERDING DAY

It was the third day of Lo gsar in 2000 and I was at my maternal grandmother's home, giving her Lo gsar gifts. Early morning on that third day of Lo gsar, Uncle Lha mchog asked me to go to the grassland to herd the sheep with him approximately five kilometers away.

Grandmother packed food for uncle and me. "The grassland is far, and you won't return home till dark. It will be hard for you, Nangchukja, since you are attending school," Grandmother said when Uncle and I were ready to take the sheep after breakfast. She helped us take the goats and sheep from the shed and began cleaning out the dung in the shed as Uncle and I drove the flock away.

"Lha mchog, take care of him on the way. You two don't sleep on the grassland," she said warmly. She had a very kind heart.

"Yes," Uncle said, driving the sheep. Uncle and I reached the other side of the hill, beyond sight of the family home. Nobody was there but Uncle and me.

"Come here, Nangchukja, I'll show you something," Uncle said from the other side of the flock. He took a bottle of beer from his Tibetan robe.

"What is this, Uncle?" I asked.

"Let's drink it on the grassland," he said, smiling.

"I have never had a drink, not even a mouthful of beer. How does it taste?" I asked.

"You'll learn once we are on the grassland," Uncle said and ran to the other side to round up some stray goats.

Some hours passed and I asked where we would stop with the flock. On the way, we saw many other flocks scattered across the great grassland and heard shepherds singing.

"We are almost there," Uncle said, pointing to a place on the horizon. "That's where we are going to herd our goats and sheep."

The grassland was dotted with undulating small hills. Goats and sheep were scattered across the grassland as if all

the stars in the sky had fallen. "Many flocks and herders are around, even behind these hills. We can't see them all without going to the tops of the hills," Uncle said. "Yesterday I chased a girl here. She is not here today," he said smiling.

"What did you do?" I asked.

"Nothing happened. Let's not talk about it. Now that we've arrived, let's drink this," he said and took the bottle of beer out of the bag and sat cross-legged on the grassland. Wordlessly, I followed suit.

"Try," Uncle persuaded.

"I've never tried this before, Uncle. I'm afraid of my parents, and what may happen if I drink it," I replied.

"I have experience. Don't be afraid. It's still Lo gsar. We should drink. This opportunity won't last much longer," he said persuasively. We drank the beer with much banter and laughter. I could just barely make Uncle go out to the far side of the flock to drive them back, and then return to me. Either because of my weak eyes since childhood, or the effects of the drink, I could not see well. Everything Uncle was saying was going past my ears, not inside. I tried to concentrate on what I was doing and on what Uncle was saying. It was not much different from climbing up a cliff without hands. Finally, all my memories and eyes moved into a darkish world, like shutting down a computer.

When it was time to return home, Uncle woke me, and my brain was clear. I could hardly believe that I had been sleeping in the same position on the grassland for a long while. The empty beer bottle lay on the grass in front of me.

"You were so ridiculous after you drank some beer. You slept for hours," Uncle said. My head was killing me and I was not interested in talking.

"I told you I'm not interested in drinking beer and have no drinking experience. Now, you see? I have a terrible hangover," I replied morosely.

"Boys shouldn't react that way! They should be strong! Aren't you ashamed?" Uncle said. "Now we've got to take the flock back. Are you ready?"

It would be dark soon. I tried to stand and walk, but I was staggering.

"Yul lha! I'm still drunk. I can't go home, Uncle," I said, bending down, holding my forehead in my hands.

"I'll help you. Steady! Don't worry! Don't tell anybody, especially not our family that we drank beer today," Uncle warned.

My maternal grandmother and Uncle Lha mchog lived year round in the pastoral area. Uncle Ra log and his wife, who was grandmother's youngest daughter, lived in the farming village, but came each year to spend Lo gsar with Grandmother. Uncle Lha mchog was afraid his brother-in-law, Uncle Ra log, would find out about the beer.

"Are all the goats and sheep here, Uncle?" I asked.

"Of course, I have herded these goats and sheep all my life. This is the one thing I can do well," Uncle said proudly.

We drove the sheep home and gradually my nausea and staggering diminished. My head cleared as we approached home.

SCHOOL IN MGO MANG TOWN

Warm summer came as winter receded. The school year was ending. It was July of 2000. Students were moving to higher grades. I had finished the last grade of primary school, grade six. My study had improved from the time I was a naughty schoolboy. The local middle school had some awful Chinese teachers and Father contacted a school at the local township, hoping to send me to a better school.

Father drove home in his jeep one late afternoon. He entered with a bag that I could see through the windows. "Why are you so late?" Mother complained as she usually did when he was late coming home.

"I talked with the principal of the Mgo mang Town Tibetan Junior Middle School today about Nangchukja," he replied.

"How did it go?" Mother asked.

"He should go tomorrow. I bought new clothes for him. This regional school is very different from the local school. The students dress nicely," Father said and tossed the clothes to me. I was excited that Father had bought new clothes. He usually bought new clothes only for Lo gsar.

"I worry about him staying far off at the school in town," Mother said.

"That's crazy. No one is going to eat your son there. Many Tibetan and Chinese students are there. I will visit him when I go to town," Father said.

"I'll miss him a lot if I can't see him every day. He's my only son," Mother said tearfully.

"Everyone's children go to school," Father said.

Mother did not reply. I was excited about my new clothes.

"Now you should wear modern clothes²⁸ most of the time, because the students don't wear Tibetan robes at the

²⁸ Locally referred to as 'Chinese clothes'.

town school," Father said when I put the Chinese sport clothes on.

"Can't I take my robes with me?" I asked.

"I'll bring them to you later. Not now," Father said. Most of the time I wore Tibetan robes at the local primary school. I was terribly cold in winters and on rainy days when I wore only Chinese clothes.

Mother roused me early the next morning. Father was still deep asleep, as usual. Mother was packing things that I needed.

"Take care of yourself and don't go around with bad students," she advised.

"Yes," I replied. I was in my new outfit and very excited.

"You should chant *ma Ni* sometimes," Mother added.

"Your mother really has a narrow mind, Nangchukja," Father said from his bed.

Mother soon had breakfast ready. Father got up, and we all ate together. All through the short meal my parents advised me about my new school life. "There are so many different students in the middle school. You should make friends carefully," Father said, sipping his tea.

"Yes," I replied.

"You should listen to the teachers and study hard. Otherwise, I won't let you return home," Father said repeatedly.

"Yes," I replied with a heavy heart.

They believed in my transformation into an earnest student, able to understand things correctly. After breakfast Father went out to start the jeep. The car was soon packed, and I sat in the front seat. I waved goodbye. As the jeep drove away I could see tears welling in Mother's eyes.

My excitement grew on the long ride to town. I had been to town just once before with Father two years ago. No sooner did Father point to the school building than we were there, at the gate.

He took me directly to the principal's office. Many students were in the school playground. Classes had not begun yet. Father soon got me registered and some teachers showed us my classroom and the dormitory. Father entrusted

me to the teachers and some other students. The school environment and everything was absolutely different from the local village school. The students were dressed and groomed well. I found the two-tiered bunk beds to be very odd. I guessed it was difficult to reach the top bunk.

"Don't be disappointed with unfamiliar things. Take your time. You'll get used to it. Soon you'll be happy to be here," Father encouraged. He seemed ready to return home. "Here is fifteen RMB for your allowance. Don't spend it quickly, I don't have that much money. I'm leaving now. Study hard. That is the only thing you should do. You are the only student our family has," Father said.

"OK," I replied, feeling strong pressure from the feeling of soon being far from home.

"I'll visit you in a few days. Don't go out with any students," Father admonished. I didn't say anything, but tears dribbled from my eyes as he drove away. I was lonely and homesick. This was the first time I was separated from my home and in strange surroundings.

REMORSE

A month passed. Father visited me several times. I was soon accustomed to the school and acquainted with many new students. My classmates were very kind and helped me. I still believed in the importance of the Tibetan language.

I began to take English classes that term. Since I had never heard English before, I thought it was the most interesting subject. I attended all the English classes taught by a Han teacher. Full of laughter and energy, I joined his class even though the pronunciation of the English words was odd.

Gradually, my life became a routine. The school offered small amounts of food at each meal and if you did not arrive on time for meals, you went hungry.

After the last class one day, I remained in the classroom repeating the English alphabet. Everyone else had gone to the dorms. I was so absorbed that I failed to notice the time. When suppertime had almost passed, I looked up at the huge clock in the classroom and dashed to the dining room. The cooks were closing the doors as I rounded the corner to the dining hall.

"Please wait," I begged.

"The food's already finished," one cook said in Mtsho sngon Chinese dialect and turned away in total indifference. Disappointed, I returned to the dorm.

"Where have you been?" Gnam 'bum, my favorite classmate, asked.

"I stayed in the classroom," I replied, not mentioning that I had missed supper. I was not close to others in the dorm room. Confiding I had missed supper would have been embarrassing. Gnam 'bum continued digging for something in his messy unfolded clothes.

I went out and stood by the dorm door, my empty stomach grumbling. Though the primary school's food sometimes gave a mean stomachache, I missed the kitchen

and the old classmates' sharing supper with laughter and jokes.

The sky was turning shadowy as a forlorn moon appeared in the sky. Standing in the doorway, I looked at the moon and the stars, then turned and went behind the dormitory where there was a toilet. I was alone and saw no one. Hearing the noise the students were making in each of the classrooms, I reflected on my life at the primary school and the families from the pastoral and farming areas. Tears streamed down my cheeks unchecked, as I recalled my disobedience. The clarity of a new perspective dawned in my mind and I realized for the first time the poverty of my family and relatives.

Father often said, "Limit your spending. We aren't rich like some others." As I contemplated the many things Father had told me, I realized some of the difficulties my parents faced. Father was the only financed caretaker of my family. Mother had frequent health problems. For a moment, I experienced profound remorse for the pressure I had put on my parents by my heedless, uncaring attitude.

I emerged from this reverie to realize I was still standing behind the dorm. I set out to the classroom to join the other students, wiping away the tears, grateful that there were no witnesses.

The classroom was hushed. There was no teacher. Each student worked at their own desk, doing homework. I also sat quietly at my desk and tried to figure out my math exercises. Deeply absorbed, I didn't notice when other students left. Rdo rje called to me when I had almost finished the homework. Most of the students had gone.

"Let's go back to the dorm," Rdo rje said at my side.

"OK, I'm almost finished. Just a few minutes," I replied. Rdo rje was the only person I felt close to. He had relatives in my village, so we knew some of the same people. He was from Stong skor Village, near my own village.

"There, I finished. Let's go now," I said, after writing a few more sentences. We turned off the classroom lights and left. The air was becoming cooler with autumn's approach. In fact, I felt a bit chilled as we walked to the dorm together.

"Go ahead," he said, "I'll catch up with you. I want to talk with someone in the classroom," he said. He knew many girls at the school, which he often mentioned when we talked.

I continued to the dorm. The thought of missing supper returned when I saw the school dining room.

A FLOOD

I was with my family at the farming village in the summer of 2000 during the vacation. "Bsod nams and Nangchukja, I need you two to help me today," said Father. "I'm working on my jeep. We must fix something under the jeep. We'll take the front tires off first, and then see what needs to be done."

First, we jacked up the jeep. Father started to hammer on something after the jeep was up on the jack. We were trying to loosen the lug nuts and remove the tires, but neither Uncle nor I knew how to do this. Father occasionally became furious and scolded Uncle and me ferociously when we did not understand his instructions. Finally, the front tires were off. The jeep seemed dangerously elevated, but evidently it was stable on the jack.

That was as much help as I could give, so I hung back and watched, careful to stay out of the way. Father and Uncle worked away. At one point, Father asked our neighbor, Tshe ring rgyal, to help us.

In the early afternoon Father, Uncle, and Tshe ring rgyal were still hammering and fixing the jeep. Mother had just come in from the field carrying bundles of grass she would put on the roof to dry and feed the cows in autumn. Wisps of black clouds lazily rolled across the sky towards the village. As they drew close, the local deity, Yul lha, seemed to push them away from the village field.

Father and Uncle finished the repairs, came inside, and we had lunch. "Those clouds are returning. They may bring a rain storm," Mother said.

"Let it come. Why are you afraid of? There's no history of a flood in our village," Father said, continuing his lunch. I ran out and looked at the clouds. Mother was right behind me. The clouds were blacker than last time and looked frightening. I thought that the local deity would send these away, too. Instead, black clouds welled up and rolled quickly to fill the village sky. A dragon bellowed sharply and terribly. A moment later, lightning shattered the sky, as if a

collection of ghosts were on the verge of appearing. Mother screamed, and we ran back to the house.

"It's a big storm. It looks like Yul lha can't stop it this time," Mother said.

"Have you covered the grass and the sheep dung?" Father asked. They finished eating, and Tshe ring rgyal went home. Hailstones suddenly tapped the roof and windows. The windows rattled as wind blew strongly. Gradually the hail increased, becoming wall after wall of thudding sound. My grandparents were in the new room that my family had built earlier in the year. As the hailstorm intensified, we all moved into the room where they lived. The deafening storm continued for half an hour. We watched from the windows, as the hail gradually became steady rain.

Suddenly, the back wall of the new room exploded with a roar. Water rushed at us, mixed with stones and a thick layer of hail, flooding our house. Everyone was shrieking in fear and horror. Father pushed and dragged us out.

I moved as fast as my legs could take me. When I looked back in terror, an enormous wall of water was rushing at me. I leapt up onto the compound wall. Other family members had made it safely to higher ground. I jumped down and raced to the compound gate. Hail still fell. The water was rising, covering the earth with water, I guessed, spelling an end to the world.

The flood pushed open the two doors enclosing the compound. I wondered if my sister, Rdo rje dpal 'byor, and the others had drowned. The pain in my heart welled up and spilt out of my eyes, mingling with the raindrops. Increasing my despair, I saw our furniture and belongings floating in the yard. And then, worst of all, I spied our television floating atop the waters.

Suddenly, there was Father! He was standing on the taller wall that surrounded the family compound. I waved, wailing loudly. His mud-smearred face broke into a joyful smile, relieved to see me alive. He came over and got me up to the higher wall.

"Don't cry. Hold me tightly, and I'll carry you to Tshe ring rgyal's home. Your mother and everyone are there," he

said and put me on his back. Valiantly, he carried me to our neighbor's home where my grandparents and Mother were.

"My son!" Mother cried. We all were crying. The rainstorm had almost ceased, but churning floodwater still flowed through our courtyard.

"It's safe here. Don't cry," Father assured. I was shuddering in fear but kept my mouth shut. We entered Tshe ring rgyal's home and warmed up by the adobe stove. Gradually, a look of mingled happiness and sadness settled on all our faces. Even in such circumstances, my parents were confident and undaunted.

"Now, everything is OK. Don't worry about anything!" Father said.

"Where are the Tibetan robes and coral? Floating away with the floods," Mother complained.

"Those are nothing! The important thing is people. Nobody was injured. We are lucky today. Don't complain about losing possessions. People can find treasures if they have lives. Treasures don't look for people," Father said.

Mother calmed down. My grandparents sat thoughtfully by the stove.



Women wear *skag bcings*, coral, and *g.yu* around their waists

FATHER'S DRUNKEN ESCAPE

Summer ripened into autumn. The harvest was over. People were busy selling grain in town, satisfied with their earnings. It was late autumn 2000. Father had just returned from taking our grain to market. It was early in the afternoon. Grandfather was in the house starting lunch, while Grandmother, Mother and I were returning from the fields. Father's jeep was parked at the yard gate. I rushed over and got in, pretending to be driving. Father had not left the keys in the jeep.

"Don't touch anything in the jeep, or it will move," Mother yelled, while she and Grandmother took the grass to the storeroom. I twisted the steering wheel, avoiding an imaginary obstacle, making growling engine noises. After a bit, I hopped out of the jeep and helped Grandmother carry grass into the storeroom.

Just then, Father appeared at the gate. He looked unusual. Grandmother, Mother, and I stood looking at him. He did not say anything, ran to the jeep, and opened the gas tank forcefully, without using a key. "This scoundrel family should be eliminated!" Father said strangely, while getting out a hose and gas container from the jeep to siphon gas out of the tank. We were stunned. We didn't know what to think.

"What? What did you say, Son?" Grandmother asked.

Father didn't reply. He began siphoning the gas.

Mother strode to him and reached for the gas container. "He is drunk," Mother said.

Father kicked her and she fell down.

"Are you serious?" Grandmother said and ran to Father. I realized he was drunk. A ghost had seized him. I cried loudly and did not know what to do but beg him. Grandmother and Mother grabbed the gas container from him.

"I beg you Dpa' rtse 'bum, stop. What do you want to do?" Grandmother asked, terrified.

He ran into the house. We followed. To our horror, he grabbed a cleaver from the kitchen, brandished it at us,

and raced away. The next thing I knew, we were all face down on the floor. Father had gone.

"What is he going to do? Yul lha!" Mother cried. We got up and chased after him. He had already leapt over the high wall and run away. A motorbike pulled up. It was O rgyan, a local villager, and one of Father's best friends.

"O rgyan, he just left. Can you stop him? He is surely going to kill someone," Grandmother said in desperation.

O rgyan said, "He was drinking beer at Btsun pa's house. Someone was teasing him. He jumped up and ran away." O rgyan left his motorbike in our yard and ran after Father.

Faint with fear, we ran through the village lanes to Btsun pa's home. Many local villagers were outside. "He seems intent on destroying that family at the root," Grandmother said to Mother.

Mother only muttered, "Yul lha," repeatedly, tears slipping down her cheeks as she rushed inside. Once inside the gate I stopped, hands on my knees trying to catch my breath. Grandmother also stopped and did the same.

"Ku b+he, what happened?" Grandmother said. Ku b+he was another of Father's best friends and sometimes helped him drive our jeep.

"We were drinking beer at Btsun pa's home. I don't know exactly, but someone said something to him in jest, which he took seriously. He ran off in a rage," Ku b+he said.

"Who else was there? What happened next?" Grandmother asked.

"Blo bzang and Gnam 'bum were with us. Before we could stop him, Dpa' rtse 'bum hit Btsun pa's wife. G.yang 'bu skyabs took her to the town hospital,"

"Oh, Yul lha!" Grandmother exclaimed and ran into the yard.

Ku b+he and I ran after her. Mother was crying loudly and begging Father. He was still on a rampage, brandishing the cleaver in all directions. He had dragged all the house furniture outside. Some were trying to encircle him, but they were wary of the cleaver and could not get close enough to grab him. The inside of the house was in shambles.

"Dpa' rtse 'bum, please, please don't do this!" Grandfather begged tearfully.

Father dashed into the house and grabbed the refrigerator. With great strength he threw it out of the house where he kicked at it until it was dented and broken. He went back inside. We heard creaking, rattling, and explosions like bombs. Those in the yard just stood and wailed. Nobody seemed able to stop Father's crazy rampage.

"Shut up!" Father yelled and rushed at us. Everyone ran out of the yard. I was last, running on wobbly legs, weak with fear. I glanced back and saw him brandishing the cleaver. I thought he was really crazy, and I did not stop running until I collapsed, gasping for breath, after about a kilometer.

When I stopped, nobody was near me. A flock of inquisitive sheep approached me with a shepherd, Rdo rje rgyal, a relative. "What are you doing here Nangchukja?" he asked. My chest heaved as I tried to catch enough breath to answer. After a while, I told him everything.

He stared at me skeptically. "He's not around here. You're lying," he said.

I led him to Btsun pa's family gate. My grandparents and Mother were at the gate. They seemed less fearful than before.

"What happened, Sister?" Rdo rje rgyal asked.

"He ruined this family, beyond imagination," Grandmother groaned.

"Where is he?" he pressed.

"Ku b+he finally caught him. He is talking to him inside," Grandmother managed between sobs, wiping her tears. Mother wept at her side.

Ku b+he appeared from the door and approached us. "He has a cut on his head, but don't worry. It's not serious. Gnam 'bum and I will take him to the local clinic. You all return home," Ku b+he said.

"Yul lha!" Grandmother exclaimed. "Please do your best for my son."

Mother and I cried with the bad news. "He is not such a dim-witted son. What really happened?" Grandfather said in outrage.

"Don't worry, it will be just fine," Ku b+he said and returned to the room where Father and Gnam 'bum were.

The rest of us headed home, weeping.

"How is he going to compensate for all that destruction?" Grandfather asked thoughtfully.

"That's all just because of you. You should pay for it. How did you treat all my children and me in the past? You left us all and stayed with Btsun pa's witch wife. This is the result of you actions!" Grandmother scolded energetically.

Mother focused on making supper. Everyone was starving, having gone without lunch. Uncle Bsod nams appeared and was surprised to see our downcast faces.

"Where have you been all day? You would have caught your brother if you had been here!" Grandmother yelled. Uncle often wandered around the village, ignoring all family matters except when Grandfather and Father forced him. This had gone on ever since he quit school. Grandmother chanted her usual *ma Ni* while flicking her prayer beads. Mother kneaded the dough for supper, softly crying.

Even though we had missed lunch, I had no appetite.

NIGHT POOL

I had already completed one term at the township school, where I boarded. I had many friends and was close to many students. We roamed about town on weekends. Pool was a popular game, and my friends and I got into the habit of playing each other over the whole weekend. For a number of weekends, Rdo rje, Gnam 'bum, and I had played pool in the tables by the street. We were addicted to pool and were quickly going through the small spending allowances given us by our families. Even after mine was depleted they still asked me to go with them, treating me to play.

One Monday evening after class I went to the dorm room and found it empty. After a while Rdo rje came in and said, "School is really boring!"

"What happened?" I asked as the door opened and Gnam 'bum came in.

"I have an idea for tonight. Want to join me?" Gnam 'bum said happily.

"For what?" Rdo rje inquired.

"Let's jump over the wall tonight and go play pool!" Gnam 'bum said.

"Are you serious? Won't we get caught by the teachers?" I asked.

"We can't jump over the schoolyard walls," Rdo rje said doubtfully.

"Don't worry. I've got it all figured out. Well, yes or no?" Gnam 'bum challenged.

"Will you come, Nangchukja?" Rdo rje asked. His voice told me he wanted to.

I hesitated then summoned enough courage to agree. We went behind the dorm. It was easier to jump over the walls than we expected. We ran through the streets until we got to a pool table. We laughed at our good fortune to find the table free and grabbed the cue sticks. We played game after game, heedless of time. Midnight arrived, and Rdo rje and Gnam 'bum were slowing down, getting tired. I, however, was on a roll, winning most games and had no desire to leave.

I urged them to play on through the night. We played on, and I could not be beaten. Onlookers suggested that I play with the town champion. I was feeling cocky and told them to bring him on. My winning streak continued as the night wore on. I beat the champion again and yet again. Time flew by unheeded until dawn's gray light caught my attention. I called to Rdo rje and Gnam 'bum, "Let's get back to school now."

They did not hear me. They were slumped in chairs, sleeping. I nudged them awake and we jogged back to school, fearing we would be caught. We climbed back over the walls and got to our rooms. I stretched out on my bunk in the quiet room, willing myself not to sleep because morning exercise would soon begin. I managed to stay awake. We joined the morning exercise and finally it was time for class. The first period was Chinese. Heavy sleep pulled at me, though I tried my utmost to concentrate on the lesson.

"Nangchukja!" someone yelled in my ear. It was the Chinese teacher, Mrs. Wang, looking at me nastily. "Stand up!" she said furiously. I struggled to my feet. The class proceeded. I wanted the class to finish. I was still struggling against the pull of sleep. I tried my best to look at the teacher through drooping lids. Slowly but surely, my soul fell into a heavy, fast sleep.

"What happened to you? Get out of here!" someone yelled in my ears sharply. It was Mrs. Wang again. She was kicking me awake. My classmates were laughing. I could not wake up, I was embarrassed.

"Get out!" Mrs. Wang said.

"I won't sleep anymore," I said.

"Do what I said. No more talking," she said violently. A surge of anger welled up. I ran out of the classroom. I half expected her to follow. I went back to the dorm and stayed till her class was over.

That was my first experience at staying out all night playing pool. It was also a first to have a teacher kick me out of class. In reflecting on this, I realized my faults and decided I should go to the next class. Somehow I got through the rest of the morning classes and slept through lunch.

SGROL MA

Preparations for final exams were in full swing at the end of the second term. The week before the exams was self-study week; there were no formal classes. It was time for students to review, and a last chance to get the help they needed. I devoted all my energy to review and study. One late morning while I was studying in the empty classroom, someone called my name.

"Nangchukja!" a girl in the hallway called. I turned the Tibetan book over to keep my place and went out. To my surprise, a stranger was waiting for me.

"Were you calling me?" I said shyly.

"Someone wants me to give you this message. Here you are," she said and handed me a folded note.

"Who sent this? What's this about...?" I asked as she was turning to leave.

"You'll understand after opening it," she said, smiled, and left. I excitedly dashed back into the classroom and opened it. The letter was written in Chinese by someone proficient in that language.

Hi! How are you, Nangchukja?

It's my pleasure to see you around the schoolyard every day. I have been watching you, though you haven't noticed. It is understandable that you haven't paid attention to me, though I have been near you at school. I am writing you now so that we may become friends. For many reasons, I would like to meet you before the term is over and tell you how I feel about you. I will wait for your reply. Hope you give me an answer! Good luck on the final exams!

Yours,

Sgrol ma

Nervous and confused, I did not know what to think. Concentrating on the Tibetan textbook was hopeless. I went back to the dorm. Sgrol ma was from my village. We had both studied at the local primary school. She was one grade ahead of me.

My good friend, Gnam 'bum, was in the dorm. I told him about the letter and asked him for suggestions.

"Don't be nervous, Nangchukja. I'll help you figure it out," he said warmly and thought for a moment.

"I have never gotten such a letter from anybody. I have no idea what to do," I said, looking at the letter again.

"If you have never had a girlfriend, you should use this excellent opportunity to gain experience," he persuaded.

"What should I say to her when we meet?" I asked.

"From the sound of the letter, she's crazy about you. I think you should meet, be especially attentive, and make a good impression. That's important," he advised.

Gnam 'bum and Rdo rje were my best friends at school. They both had many girlfriends and spent much time pursuing them while I studied. For the next few hours, I listened as Gnam 'bum described his experiences and gave me suggestions.

Supper was approaching. He suggested that I meet Sgrol ma before evening class in a corner of the schoolyard that was usually empty at that hour. I was a nervous wreck all through supper. Rdo rje and Gnam 'bum gave long pep talks as we ate. My eyes darted around the dining hall, fearing she might appear at any moment. Gnam 'bum understood what I was thinking. He said many encouraging words, and I gradually felt better. After we returned to the dormitory, both Rdo rje and Gnam 'bum told me to relax. I realized dating a girl was no reason for cowardice. I decided to meet her, and Gnam 'bum went to inform her.

"She'll be waiting there when the evening class bell is just ringing. Be there on time," Gnam 'bum said after he returned.

My courage suddenly faltered as the evening class bell rang. I went to the designated spot, and there she was. Sgrol ma from my village was waiting for me. I did not know what to say.

"How are you?" I finally managed shyly.

"Great. How's your review going?" she asked in a warm, gentle voice.

"Not too bad. But..." I replied nervously.

"Why are you so shy?" she asked.

"I'm not shy," I pretended. Our eyes met briefly before we looked away in embarrassment.

I had no idea what to talk about. The easiest path was to chatter about our hometown, which stirred up memories of my mischievous behavior and what I had learned from it. She listened and then changed the topic to other things that were easier to talk about. It was dark. No one else was around. A cool breeze blew comfortably over us. Study for the finals came to mind as I watched students heading for the classroom in the distance.

"Now, shall we go?" I said, without asking about the letter and why she asked to meet me. Though she was calm, she seemed to have something on her mind.

"I have one thing I want you to do. Can you?" she asked.

"What's that? I will if I can," I replied.

"Can you hug me, please?" she said. I didn't know what to say. I was nervous. I had never done such a thing. We stood awkwardly, silently, for a long time. Excitement finally overruled shyness and cowardice and I hugged her and then raced to the classroom without a word.

Rdo rje and Gnam 'bum ran up and asked for every detail. They laughed uproariously when I told them how it had gone.

My parents and relatives were in high spirits during the winter holiday after I graduated from junior middle school in 2001. They were no longer suspicious of me. Father, ever status-conscious, wanted me to change schools again. He had been making plans during the winter holiday with Zon thar rgyal, who was a student from my village and studying in Mgo log Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture.

"The school in Mgo log is a famous private school. They teach in Tibetan, and the education and discipline are the best among A mdo schools," Father said. He repeated this often to visitors and neighbors during the holiday. Father has a pure love and admiration for anything Tibetan, and admires famous Tibetans and famous schools. He has an intense pride in and loyalty to his own culture. He wanted to instill these values in me, too, and so chose this traditional school.

I was silent when he told me about the change. I trusted him to know more about these things than I. Besides, my interest was growing in my own cultural heritage, and I appreciated the opportunity to be exposed to an environment rich in Tibetan language and education. I felt lucky to have an opportunity to study Tibetan in a real Tibetan school. The farthest I had ever been from home was to the town middle school, which was about thirty kilometers away. I understood that Mgo log was much further.

Lo gsar passed swiftly. It was soon time to leave for Mgo log and the new school. "The school term begins the day after tomorrow," Zon thar rgyal said to Mother. "Lha sgron mtsho, you should pack for Nangchukja."

²⁹ Shes rig nor gling is a private Tibetan school in Mgo log Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture founded by a Tibetan monk, 'Jigs med rgyal mtshan, in 1994 and known as the 'Jigs med rgyal mtshan Welfare School (<http://www.fulixx.cn>).

The school had no kitchen. Students brought food from home. This new fact stunned me.

Father had been in town all day, while I stayed at home with Mother. As she prepared the evening meal, Father returned. We ate supper as darkness wrapped its cloak around the village. Father said earnestly, "You must study hard at this new school. You are the only son we have, and the one who is getting an education. We all count on you. Everyone knows we are a poor family. Fortunately students at this Tibetan school pay no tuition. Even so, I was in town today, trying to borrow money for you. There will be fees, and you will need money for your expenses. We expect you to eventually bring this family into better circumstances. You must study well. That is the only thing we expect of you. If you do not maintain good grades, the school will expel you. Don't doubt that for a minute. If that happens, your education will be over."

We sat at the dining room table as Mother continued cooking meat in preparation for my departure the next day. Father paused, went behind the door, and picked a twig from a dried plant from which we make brooms, and used it as a toothpick.

"Yes, do as your father says. Don't forget to chant *ma Ni* and don't associate with bad friends. Stay on campus and focus on your studies," Mother added. She looked worried. I knew she was very concerned about my going to school in far-away Mgo log.

"I borrowed money for you to go to school. I'm in charge of this large family. I'm confronted with many difficulties. I run everywhere caring for the family's needs, even to the mountain deity. You should understand the true condition of our family. Don't think it's easy," Father said, not as complaint, but as sad reality. Father was the greatest and most infallible man in my village. He was intelligent and kind to everyone who asked him for help. I then better understood the difficulties facing Father and the family.

Father continued, "You must be very careful with your money at school. Don't spend it on anything that is not absolutely necessary. I will visit you in a few months with more food. The one tough thing for you and Zon thar rgyal is

that there's no kitchen at the school. Students cook for themselves. That's why we are sending flour and meat with you. A good thing is that the school is tuition-free. Given our family circumstances, I wouldn't be sending you there otherwise."

It was a difficult journey to Mgo log and Father could not visit often.

"When will he return?" Mother asked.

"There are no school holidays at midterm. You won't be able to come home until the term ends. I'll telephone you often, though," Father said.

"How difficult," Mother said disappointedly.

"Many children attend schools further away than Mgo log and they don't mind the great distances. A young person must be willing to go anywhere and do whatever it takes for a good education, to learn useful things. Then he can return and make useful contributions to his village and family," Father reasoned.

Mother could not object to what he said. Still, her tears flowed as she thought of her son leaving. "Most other village children stop school after primary school," Mother said, making a last feeble attempt to keep her son close.

"This is the old way of thinking. That's the way the ancients did it. Catch up with the times. You don't understand the real world out there. A person can no longer get by in this world without education. With better education, a person can rise in this world and make real contributions. If the next generations are unlettered like us, they will have a thorny future. Don't you want your son to be a township official? They are the ones with comfortable lives!" Father said.

This talk reshaped my thinking. This also had an effect on Mother. She calmed down, persuaded to have confidence in the choices being made for me.

LEAVING FOR SCHOOL

The days blew by and it was time for Zon thar rgyal and me to go to school in 2002. Early in the morning on the day we were to leave for Mgo log, Father called, "Nangchukja! Get up quickly, and let's go. Otherwise, we'll miss the bus for Mgo log. Zon thar rgyal is waiting to drive us into town."

"OK," I replied reluctantly, then remembered that this was the day I was going to Mgo log. I imagined it to be like a paradise from the way Father described it. I jumped up and put on my clothes. Just then, Zon thar rgyal came into the room where my parents and I slept.

"You'll have to get up really early in the morning from now on," Zon thar rgyal said and sat down.

"What time do the students usually get up?" Father asked.

"Before dawn when the entire sky is still filled with stars," he replied. He was watching my reaction and chuckling.

Father said nothing. He just coughed his early morning cough and rolled over in bed.

"Are you going to wear that hat to school?" Zon thar rgyal asked, smiling.

"Yes," I said.

"You'll learn something right away when you show up with that hat on," Zon thar rgyal said.

I had no idea what he was talking about. As I went out to the toilet, I passed Mother coming in with sheep dung and wood to make a fire and cook breakfast.

Father was getting up and talking with Mother and Zon thar rgyal when I returned.

"Wash your hands and face, we're leaving soon," Father said while dressing.

"Aren't you going to have breakfast?" Mother asked.

"We won't have time if they're going to catch the bus," Father replied.

"How sad that my son can't enjoy a last breakfast at home. He must go to Mgo log on an empty stomach," Mother murmured.

"We'll get breakfast in town if we get there quickly," Father said.

Zon thar rgyal helped me carry my bags to the jeep at the gate. Father started the jeep as we loaded it. I was ready to go, but Father went back inside to wash up. Mother ran to me and planted a departing kiss on my forehead.

"Keep this in your pocket," she said, pushing five RMB into my pocket. "Take care of yourself. Remember, your father will call you if there is a phone at the school. I don't know anything about these things, but he does."

"Yes," I replied and got in the car. Mother's eyes brimmed with tears as the car started. My heart seemed to stay behind with her. Tears welled in my eyes, as the car moved away. When I turned to look through the rear window, she was still standing at the gate, watching.

"How many hours do we need to get to town?" Zon thar rgyal asked Father.

"Half an hour if I drive fast," Father said and sped up.

The village passed by. It felt like I was leaving home forever. Father would not accompany me to Mgo log, because Zon thar rgyal had been there many times and knew the way well. Father confidently entrusted me to Zon thar rgyal.

The sun rose over the mountains that we passed along the way. Sure enough, we arrived in half an hour, just as Father had predicted. "The bus just came. There!" Zon thar rgyal said urgently, and Father parked the jeep next to a big red bus. We got off and hauled all our stuff to the side of the bus. Father talked with the Chinese driver who helped us put our stuff on the bus.

"I have given 300 *yuan* to Zon thar rgyal for you. This is for your food on weekends. Don't spend it on anything else, do you hear? It must last. I talked it over with Zon thar rgyal. You will stay with him in his room. Do whatever he says," Father commanded.

"Isn't this too much for me?" I asked in surprise, since I had never held even a hundred *yuan* before.

"You don't understand. You will need this and more soon. When you two run out of cash and food, phone me," Father said.

The bus honked. Father motioned us to board. We found our seats and looked out the window at him waving goodbye. As he turned towards his car, tears leaked out of my eyes just as they had once before at the town school, a few years earlier.

"Be brave. Be a real man!" Zon thar rgyal encouraged, when he saw my tears. This was my first time to ride on a big bus and to go such a long distance. My sadness dissipated quickly, when I saw many great mountains I had never seen before. My eyes were glued to the window, taking in all the wonderful sights. Sometimes Zon thar rgyal told me the names of places and mountains. Deeply impressed, I remembered everything because it was all new and easily stayed in my mind.

"The school will surely give you an entrance exam. It will be helpful if we reviewed some of what they will ask. You'd better be prepared and do well," Zon thar rgyal said.

Zon thar rgyal proved a good teacher. The questions he asked were mostly things I did not know. He taught me a lot. I lacked answers for many of the Tibetan grammar questions. "Just because you have never heard it, doesn't mean it doesn't exist," he chided, as I told him that I had never heard some of the questions before. I tried my utmost to remember what he taught.

After five hours on the bus, we reached the school that afternoon. Zon thar rgyal and I carried our belongings into the school. As we entered through the front gate, we saw a magnificent building in the middle of the grounds, which dwarfed everything around it. It reminded me of the Po ta la Palace, which I had often seen in pictures. The school was located in a valley near a tall rock mountain, which was a local landmark.

"What is that rock mountain, Zon thar rgyal?" I asked him.

"Khyung mgon Mountain. It was a great garuda before, and then it was transformed into a mountain. It has become a great mountain deity for the local people," he said.

"A garuda is that big?" I asked.

"Yes, but there are no garudas nowadays," Zon thar rgyal said. We walked along carrying our bags. I saw a river running about a kilometer from the school. Zon thar rgyal said the school was near the Yellow River, which flowed from A myes rma chen Snow Mountain.

"The Yellow River is right over there?" I said.

"Yes. This is the northern tributary of the Yellow River in Tibet," he said, weary from the weighty bags on his back.

"How are you Zon thar rgyal?" a smiling monk asked as they shook hands.

"Great," Zon thar rgyal replied.

As we walked along with what we had brought, many monks and students greeted him warmly. I could hardly believe it. One monk grabbed some of our bags and walked with us to a room, talking warmly. I was surprised that so many monks lived in the school. It was also a surprise to see what looked like hermit cottages. When I asked Zon thar rgyal about the academic environment, he said, "You'll understand everything after you've been here a while."

Our room was big enough for only the two of us. It was small and it took me several days to get used to it.

AN ENTRANCE EXAM

The view of the school and the high mountains surrounding it the next morning was magnificent, true to Father's description. The mountains were covered with conifer trees, and their fragrance wafted throughout the schoolyard. As the sun rose in the clear morning air, I took in the panorama of the valley and the mountains surrounding us. Ra rgya Monastery was next to the school at the foot of Khyung mgon Mountain. "Is that Ra rgya Monastery?" I asked Zon thar rgyal.

"Yes. It was founded by A rig dge bshes.³⁰ Now, let's get ready to visit the teachers," he said putting together some *kha btags* and tea bricks as Lo gsar gifts. He was also boiling tea for us.

"We will offer these *kha btags* and Lo gsar gifts and then I will introduce you to the other teachers. Don't be afraid. Reply to the teachers respectfully when they ask you something," he said. We ate a breakfast of *rtsam pa* and milk tea before setting off across campus. I observed that the ground was reddish, not like the sandy, grayish color of my village. We saw many monk students. I had never seen monks attend an official school.

Zon thar rgyal and I reached the headmaster's office, located in a long flat Tibetan building that featured the style of architecture characteristic of Tibetan monasteries.

"The school principal is a great *dge bshes*. Treat him with respect. Don't be afraid, just answer honestly if he asks you something. Now take off your cap. Nobody wears hats here. It's impolite," Zon thar rgyal said. I was startled to hear that the school principal was a *dge bshes*, while taking off my cap and thrusting it into my pocket.

³⁰ *Dge bshes* = a spiritual master, a learned monk, an expert on important Buddhist scriptures. A rig dge bshes = Bya dral nga dbang bsod rnam (1726-1803), founder of Ra rgya Monastery situated on the north banks of the Yellow River.

We knocked softly and opened the door a crack. "Come in. How are you Zon thar rgyal?" a voice replied.

The school principal was handsome and kindhearted. To my surprise, Zon thar rgyal was bent double, with his head down—almost crawling forward, with the Lo gsar gifts held in his outstretched hands. I offered my *kha btags*.

"Teacher-*lags*, these are our Lo gsar gifts for you," Zon thar rgyal said quietly and respectfully.

"I can't accept all this. It's too much. There's no need to give me this," the headmaster refused kindly.

"We brought them from home just for you. Please accept them as tokens from our hearts," Zon thar rgyal said and then the lama had to accept them.

"Who is he?" the lama asked, looking at me.

"He's from my village and has come to study here," Zon thar rgyal replied.

The teacher kept his steady gaze on me, making me uncomfortable. I wanted to lower my head as Zon thar rgyal had done.

"Welcome to this school and *bkra shis bde legs*³¹ in your study and everything here!" the headmaster wished. I was so nervous I could not reply.

Zon thar rgyal asked, "When is the new student exam being held, Teacher-*lags*?"

"Haven't you taken that yet? Soon. Today. In an hour. Did he attend school before?" the headmaster asked. The school was recruiting youths to study, even if they had never studied before. Even shepherds from grasslands were welcomed.

"Yes, he graduated from junior middle school last year," Zon thar rgyal replied.

"Then the exam will not be a problem. I'm sure he'll do well," the headmaster said warmly.

Zon thar rgyal and I left and walked back to our room. "Should the students show respect to the teachers the way you just did? Almost crawling?" I asked.

"Absolutely! This school is not like the government schools you attended. This is a Tibetan school, and Tibetans

³¹ *Bkra shis bde legs* = good luck.

should respect their leaders in this way," Zon thar rgyal explained. "Do you know why I laughed that time in the village when you were wearing that hat?"

"I don't know. Why? Tell me now if it matters," I said.

"Students here never wear hats like that one. It's a hat soldiers wore. Everyone calls it 'laggard hat', and they don't like it," Zon thar rgyal said.

Back in our room, Zon thar rgyal reviewed what he had taught me the day before yesterday on the bus. We concentrated on this for about an hour and then I felt confident. Zon thar rgyal then took me back to the teachers' building where many students were lined up and said, "These are new students who will also be taking the exam. Wait with them. The exam will start soon."

A monk came a few minutes later and gave a short talk on how to take the exam and more about how the school was run: "You'll take three different exams—Tibetan, mathematics, and Chinese. The school has six grades, and some grades have more than one class. This exam will measure your basic knowledge. Based on that, we will divide you into grades. Once assigned to a grade, you can move up or down after the term begins if your progress is substantial."

He then led us to a large classroom and said, "The exams will begin now. Answer the questions on the paper. Do your best!" he said.

The test only took an hour. The new students waited for the results. As I stood with the other students, it struck me that there were no girls. It slowly dawned on me that this was a boys' school.

At last the test scores were ready. The teacher read the list of student names. Some students were in the preparatory class, and some were in the second class. I was in the third class, which was the highest level for new students. Happiness accumulated in my mind as I heard my name called with those of four other students. Many new students had no prior education. After the teacher finished reading the list and grouping the students, a monk teacher, Dge 'dun, took our small group to the third grade classroom and introduced the school, its rules, and lifestyle. I then

better understood everything. As time passed, Zon thar rgyal helped me a lot in learning what I needed in order to be successful. He watched over me and encouraged me to study hard daily, just as Father would have done. I was settling in well and got along well with my classmates, who proved compassionate. Everyone was kindhearted and helpful. I really loved that school.

A WEEKEND

I was still finding it very difficult to understand the teachers two weeks into the term. All the lessons were in Tibetan and the teachers often used the literary language, which was new to me. I encountered many new books. The teaching style was incredible because they actually talked with the students and made the lessons interesting. They were totally different from my middle school and primary school teachers. The *dge bshes* teachers taught life skills along with basic subjects. My personal views of life were changing. The homework load was intense, requiring complete dedication and hard work. We studied Tibetan grammar, history, and literature the first term. I had to write many papers that I could not finish if I did not work through the weekend. There was much memorization required and many books to read.

At first, I found it helpful to get up early in the morning while the campus was quiet and memorize Tibetan passages. After doing this for some weeks, I found I had memorized quite a few, which made my work easier.

Zon thar rgyal encouraged me to be really committed in my study. The weekend rolled around, and most students went into town, but not me. Time would pass before I visited Rgyud 'go Town, across the river. Getting there was easy, for there was a regular taxi shuttle service between the school and the town.

Zon thar rgyal and I sat on our bed eating the lunch we had prepared in our tiny cooking space one day. I found it difficult to cook during the week, when I was also very busy with classes and study. This experience made me miss Mother's cooking. At home, I took food for granted and never worried about when or how the food came. It was just always there and always delicious.

"I really miss Mother's cooking," I said to Zon thar rgyal while cleaning the bowls.

"You shouldn't say that Nangchukja. Aren't you ashamed to tell me that? Be a man!" Zon thar rgyal chided.

We cooked noodles on the weekends. During the week we ate *rtsam pa*, bread, and meat we had brought from home.

"Let's go somewhere you have never been before," Zon thar rgyal said one day.

"Where?" I asked.

"Let's go on pilgrimage to Ra rgya Monastery first and then to Rgyud 'go Town," he said.

"What does the town look like?" I asked.

"All the buildings are in Tibetan style and most businessmen are Tibetan," he said. The only towns I had been to were Tshal rnga Reservoir Town and our local Mgo mang. It would be a special treat to explore a new town.

"Sure, Zon thar rgyal. I'll go with you," I said excitedly and got ready.

Zon thar rgyal changed into fashionable trousers and shirt. I kept on the same outfit Father had bought me for Lo gsar, which had been washed once at home, but was still new. We set out after dressing up. He took me to the monastery and guided me to the Monk's Assembly Hall and then to the Guardian Deity Hall. We circumambulated the monastery along lanes lined with *ma Ni* wheels. The first time around was long, but the second and third times felt shorter. Many herders and monks were also circumambulating, praying, and chanting the whole way. Mgo log people are extremely devoted, more so than people in my home area. Many people made pilgrimages here daily, even old people barely able to walk.

We completed the usual three circumambulations and Zon thar rgyal then led me down from the monastery to the taxis that shuttled to and from Rgyud 'go Town. The drivers were all Tibetan. I saw few Han and Muslims. We crossed a long bridge. It was my first time to see such a long bridge and I watched in surprise through the taxi windows.

"This is the Rgyud 'go Yellow River Bridge," Zon thar rgyal commented, and then he began introducing all the things around the small town. Rgyud 'go was a real Tibetan town full of monks and herders. Zon thar rgyal took me here and there among the market stalls.

"I'm exhausted, Zon thar rgyal," I finally confessed.

"Let's go back to the bridge and rest," Zon thar rgyal suggested. I felt homesick when I was not studying, but all my homesickness vanished when I saw many new things around town that day.

COLLECTING CATERPILLAR FUNGI

A brief spring break conveniently coincided with caterpillar fungi season. There was enough time for me to go home, but a classmate invited me to his home. I had to choose. "Come on, we'll have fun. Come to my home to dig caterpillar fungi, instead of going to your home," my friend, Bstan kho, said.

"I'm not sure. I haven't called my parents yet. I need to talk with them," I replied.

I gave it more thought and decided to tell my family I would not be coming home for the holiday. My parents were reluctant. I had to explain that this was a great opportunity for me to earn money to help defray my school expenses. In the end, they gave permission for me to visit Bstan kho's home and collect caterpillar fungi.

Two days before the break, as was customary, students gathered in each other's classrooms and chanted with the teachers. The monk teachers said this helped ensure safe travel for teachers and students.

Bstan kho and I clambered onto a motorcycle the next day after class and rode for a couple of hours towards the Mgo log Autonomous Prefecture capital into a great valley about eighty kilometers from school. The area was covered in bushy grass. Amid this idyllic Tibetan landscape, a small river streamed past Bstan kho's home. The grassland swept up to the mountains. Herds of yaks and sheep were scattered all about. I could make out the forms of people here and there on the slopes with their trowels bent to the ground, searching for the elusive caterpillar fungi.

An older woman emerged from the house as Bstan kho and I passed through the gate into his home yard. She was dressed in a grimy sheepskin coat, lines of age etched on her upturned face. "Mother, I've arrived," Bstan kho said loudly. Her hearing was weak. We crossed the yard and stepped out of the sun into the dark house. I clutched boxes of candies and tea bricks that had cost me half of my remaining cash.

"Come in, my son. Oh, you brought someone with you. I can't see him with these old eyes of mine!" Bstan kho's mother said. She gave me a big, kind smile as her eyes focused.

"This is my best friend at school. I brought him here to dig caterpillar fungi, Mother. Sit here, Nangchukja," Bstan kho said hospitably. The house was much like my home in the pastoral area. I looked around and saw that walls and ceilings were coated with black soot from the same type of stove my family used.

"Your best friend? What's his name?" Bstan kho's mother asked.

"He is from Mang rdzong. His name is Nangchukja," Bstan kho said taking the candies and tea bricks from a traditional, embroidered Tibetan bag.

"Nangchukja...Nang.." she repeated my name with great concentration.

"Mother, these are gifts Nangchukja brought for you and Father," he said and handed them to her.

"You shouldn't spend your money on us. You are a student and you have little to spare," she said, graciously accepting the gifts.

"Do you think you'll be OK staying here?" Bstan kho asked.

"Sure. This is a really good place," I replied. Bstan kho's mother brought two bowls with butter and *rtsam pa* to our side of the stove. She smiled as she poured milk-and-butter tea over the *rtsam pa* in our bowls.

"You two must be hungry. Have *rtsam pa*," she said ever so kindly, before sitting on the other side of the stove in a chair that looked as though it might collapse instantly.

Bstan kho and I both dug into the *rtsam pa*.

"Make yourself at home. Don't be shy!" she said kindheartedly.

I replied with a heartfelt "Oh...yes," which did not begin to express the depth of my gratitude.

"I heard bad news from local people in the past couple of days about the fungi in our area," Bstan kho's mother said. "Many diggers were kicked out by the government officers in the areas around here. They are

checking everyone these days. That's what people are saying."

This stunned me.

"I don't think they will bother students from our school, Shes rig nor gling. 'Jigs med rgyal mtshan, the school principal, is from our local area. Surely they will let his students dig freely, Mother," Bstan kho declared.

This reassured me.

"It's true. Anyway, Nangchukja, don't worry about anything. Even if officials come looking, we will hide you here," she said, further reassuring me.

"Yes," I replied and finished my *rtsam pa*. We had been indoors talking with Bstan kho's mother for some time. The weather outside was warm and wonderful. Bstan kho asked me if I felt like going out to search for caterpillar fungi on the nearby mountain.

"Is this an auspicious day?" Bstan kho's mother asked.

It was very important to begin to collect fungi on an auspicious day according to the Tibetan calendar. This was my first time to dig. I did not know how to find the caterpillar fungi or how to hold the spade. Bstan kho studied the calendar on the wall and saw that it was a good day. Consequently, we took our spades and started climbing the opposite mountain. Bstan kho described his local village and family as we searched for the fungi.

After a half hour, we had not found a single caterpillar fungus. We decided to split up, each taking a separate section of the mountain, where we each searched our piece of land. I had never before seen a fresh caterpillar fungi—I had only seen the dried ones. I began to identify and dig out these strange herbs. I proudly held out three when we met on the mountaintop. Bstan kho had found eleven.

The sun was tracking its way toward the netherworld behind distant mountains. Excitedly, we tumbled down the mountain to Bstan kho's home. On the way, we met some of Bstan kho's friends and stopped to chat. The people of that area were extremely kind, saying they would help me with anything I needed. When we parted, I felt I was their friend, too.

Bstan kho and I talked about where to go the next day to search for the fungi. Bstan kho wondered if we should go where he had found many last year. Finally, we decided that we would go there tomorrow.

A COSTLY ACCIDENT

The time had come for us to return to school. Our holiday was drawing to a close. We had dug caterpillar fungi for twelve days. At the end of the day, I was amazed to find that I had earned the staggering sum of 1,100 *yuan*. It was a great experience for me. Searching for, finding, and digging up the fungi was fun, and I found the local people to be very helpful and kindhearted. As we planned to return to school, I was feeling so grateful that I gave fifty *yuan* to each of Bstan kho's parents in appreciation of their hospitality.

Bstan kho and I started for school on his motorbike on the morning of the thirteenth day. His kind parents saw us off, walking with us the first 200 meters. They invited me to return on weekends with Bstan kho. I felt very welcomed. On the road back to Rgyud 'go, we met many young men from his community also riding motorbikes, speeding and driving crazily, totally ignoring anything related to safety.

We reached school around lunchtime. Classes would resume the next day. I phoned my parents, who were overjoyed to hear of my earnings from digging caterpillar fungi. All the students were ready to start classes and appeared delighted to be back.

Bstan kho and I rode his motorbike to Ra rgya Monastery that same afternoon. Many monks also had motorbikes, including my friend, Rgya mtsho, who was from a rich family, as his friends often reminded me. He was young and mischievous and we soon became friends.

Late that afternoon, Rgya mtsho asked me to go with him to his home, Mtsho byang, which was about thirty kilometers away. After mulling it over, I asked Bstan kho to lend me his bike. Because we were best friends and would do anything for each other, he readily agreed. I had a growing interest in anything with a motor, and loved riding his motorcycle.

"We can stay at my home tonight and then return tomorrow early, before the first period," Rgya mtsho said.

We were each on our bikes by then. He revved his motor and took off like a devil was chasing him. My bike did not kick over at the first try. By the time I got it started, Rgya mtsho was way ahead of me. I tried to catch up, but he grew further away as I cautiously maneuvered the twisting, bumpy road. Before long, he was nowhere to be seen.

It was in midsummer when the weather is very changeable. When I looked at the sky, I realized clouds were building up behind me. A storm was heading my way. I ignored this and focused on the road ahead, hoping to catch a glimpse of Rgya mtsho over the next mountain pass.

The road snaked through the mountains and began to climb. At the higher altitudes I ran into light drizzle. I sped up, hoping to outrun the storm. But soon the storm was upon me, painfully pelting me with large hailstones. It went on for a while, and when I saw a rock overhang at the roadside, I stopped and took shelter for about an hour.

I was soaked and freezing and it was still fifteen kilometers to Mtsho byang. I had enough sense to realize that riding on a wet, hail-strewn road through the mountains was dangerous. I decided to give up and go back to school.

The road was slick and muddy. Keeping fear in check, I rode down the mountain towards the school. It was hard to keep the speed down as I approached the foot of the mountain. I was trying to wrap a cloth around my head when I approached a crossroad. There were guardrails across the right edge of the road to protect against the steep drop-off to a flood-eroded valley. I geared down as low as I could, but still the bike was at an unsafe speed. The engine screamed as the corner approached. Fear lunged in my heart. I was afraid to brake too hard in fear of skidding. I seemed to be a wild horse galloping toward the guardrails and the rocky riverbed beyond. Panic seized me. I pressed the brake as hard as I could. The guardrails filled my field of vision. That was the last thing I remembered as the motorbike slid toward the guardrails, slammed into them, and flung me skyward.

Raindrops on my face woke me up. I was sprawled in the middle of the road. My clothes were drenched. When I tried to roll over and stand, I was knocked back by sharp pain in the left side of my body. The pain was most acute

around my thigh. I tried again, and finally managed to get upright. The pain in my right elbow and thigh almost made me fart. I was distracted when I did not see the bike. I limped over to the guardrail, looked down, and saw it. To my horror, it hung on the rocks just below the road, the front portion smashed and twisted. I did not know what to do. I was full of dread and sadness. A truck honked behind me. I turned to see it coming towards me slowly, with a monk at the wheel. I waved my arms. It stopped, and three people climbed out.

"What happened?" the monk asked.

"The bike smashed into the rails and threw me. The bike is down there. Please help me get it back up to the road," I said, pointing with my injured left hand.

"Are you OK?" the monk asked sympathetically.

"Yes," I replied.

"You should be careful riding on such a rainy day," he said. They helped me lift the bike up to the road. Deeply embarrassed, I thanked them. They warned me again to be careful, got back into their truck, and drove off.

The plastic parts at the front of the bike, including the headlamp, were totally smashed. Gamely, I tried to start the engine. At first it refused but I kept at it. Finally, thanks to my mountain deities, the engine finally caught and I rode it back to the monastery with a heavy heart, seeing the damaged part in front of me. The rain had stopped, but the pain in my legs, thighs, and elbows was increasing. I was trembling from the shock as my mind kept replaying the accident. I rode the motorbike to my friend Dge 'phel's home in Ra rgya Monastery. He was shocked and unable to speak for some time.

"What happened?" he said.

"An accident," I replied.

"Is everything OK? Are you injured?" he asked.

"I'm fine. Fortunately, I'm not injured," I said.

"That's great. Yul lha! Look at your motorbike," he said.

I put the motorbike on his room porch and went inside to dry my clothes by the stove. It was early in the afternoon. Dge 'phel and I went to Rgyud 'go Town and bought new motorcycle parts. It was dark when we returned

to his home. I started fixing the motorbike and at midnight it was done.

SCHOOL DISCIPLINARIANS

When I was deep in my studies in the second semester a monk classmate, Bstan pa, said, "Nangchukja, would you like to come to my room to have supper?"

"Sure," I replied. This was a fortuitous invitation because our own food supply was running low.

"I'll cook noodles and meat," Bstan pa said, as we walked to his room at Ra rgya Monastery. He was friendly and generous.

"Great!" I replied sincerely. Bstan pa and I cooked the meat and noodles as quickly as we could. But by the time we had finished supper, it was dark, and mandatory evening classes had begun, which meant we had broken a rule. Bstan pa and I ran to school as quickly as we could. The evening class was in session, and all the school disciplinarians from the student council were walking around the classrooms observing each class. Unluckily, the school disciplinarians were at the door of our classroom, caught us, and wrote down our names for being late. School discipline was so tight that nobody got away with anything. They even checked the students' feet for cleanliness, which I thought rather strange. Punishment was dished out on weekends for infractions committed during the week.

Bstan pa and I were on the list that weekend. The school had a meeting of all students and teachers every Saturday morning. The latter reviewed the students' work, praising those who had excelled and penalizing those who had erred. This was my first punishment. I felt great embarrassment. The other students looked down their noses and in general snubbed the guilty ones, who were assigned such penalty chores as collecting rubbish around the school grounds.

"Let's finish the work quickly so we can go home and do our homework," Bstan pa said on the way to the classroom for shovels and brooms.

"How long do you think we must work?" I asked.

"I don't know. I guess we'll work until all the trash is picked up," he said lazily. We left the classroom building and passed some school buildings on the way to the yard.

"You two come here," our Tibetan literature teacher, Yon tan, called as we passed his room. We ran to him, our heads bent in respect.

"What did you two do to get this punishment?" he gently inquired.

"We didn't get to the Thursday evening class on time, *lags*," I replied, before Bstan pa could say anything.

He smiled at our embarrassment and invited us into his room. "I have some work that needs doing here. I think it will be enough if you do this work, instead of cleaning up the schoolyard," he said.

"Yes," we replied respectfully.

"Nangchukja, why do you look so scared?" he gently teased, and then he chuckled. "OK, you two clean my room. Sweep the floor and mop it. Then the work is finished."

"Yes," we replied and took up the brooms and mop. When he turned away, Bstan pa gave me a happy smile. He seemed on top of the world with this easy work assignment. He took the mop outside to the water tap in the schoolyard to make it wet, while I started sweeping the room. This was the first time for me to be inside Teacher Yon tan's room. I saw that every available space was filled with books. I was flustered, not knowing how to sweep around the piles of books and where to set my feet. Teacher Yon tan was outside on his balcony. I stood still, waiting for Bstan pa to come back.

I let him sweep the floor and mop it, without letting the teacher know. It was embarrassing, but I just did not know how to sweep that small floor space among and between the piles of Tibetan scriptures and books. Bstan pa was a monk with much experience in such things. He knew Dge bshes's room and dealt with it easily. Finally, I took the trash to the rubbish bin. Our school punishment was completed, quickly and simply, thanks to our literature teacher.

"Now, you two can go. But it might not go so easily for you next time, so be careful and don't break school rules," he advised.

"Yes," we replied respectfully and left.

"How lucky we are today!" Bstan pa said once we were outside.

"Yes. I think I'll skip another invitation to your home for a late dinner, thanks anyway," I said in jest.

He laughed, and we went to our separate rooms.

Zon thar rgyal was reading a book when I arrived. "Why didn't you tell me that you were late for evening class? It's shameful that you were assigned punishment in front of the whole school. If you are not ashamed, I am sadly disappointed," he said gravely.

I had no reply. Guilt burned inside me. I vowed I would never break school rules again.

A VACATION DATE

When I went home for summer vacation in 2003, I found my grandparents had sold all their livestock and had moved in with my parents. The pastoral lifestyle had become too difficult for them as they began suffering from the inevitable sicknesses and limitations of old age. This meant that Father was now the only provider for the entire family. Every day, Uncle Bsod nams herded the cows and yaks our family still owned in the stretch of grassland opposite the village. During past summer vacations I had been sent to the pastoral area to herd. This holiday I stayed at home and tended the yaks and cows.

One day as I was herding the yaks and cows on the narrow strip of grassland surrounding the village, I decided to drive them to the other side of the village. On the way, I saw village elders coming home after a ritual at the village *ma Ni* hall. "When did you come home, Nangchukja?" Dpa' mo yag asked as our paths crossed on the road.

"About seven days ago," I replied.

"You go to school in Mgo log. I hear that monks and lay students study together there. All the classes relate to our Buddhism. Is that true?" she asked in her loud, old-woman voice.

"Yes," I said.

"You are lucky. You must be studying well there. You have really changed from the naughty boy you used to be," she complimented with a big smile. She seemed to admire my school, *Shes rig nor gling*. I did not know where she got such information. She asked many questions, and I answered each one proudly. Finally we parted as her praise rang in my ears as I continued along with my livestock. My study and behavior had improved markedly since I began attending *Shes rig nor gling*. Compared with last year, both my Tibetan and Chinese had improved progressively with skilled teaching methods. I also noticed the differences between me and my former primary school classmates when I encountered them around the village. They looked up to me

now. And best of all, my family felt proud of their son's good grades and improved behavior.

I had supper with my family that night. Uncle Bsod namts sat next to me. He ate with us but slept in another room. Uncle Bsod namts went out until all hours of the morning, and I found that interesting. I decided to go with him one night. I had never been out in the village late at night. My parents never permitted it. I followed Uncle into the other room where he was washing his face and preening in front of a mirror. "I want to go with you tonight, Uncle. Will you take me?" I whispered, hoping my parents would not hear. It was customary that I slept in the same room as my parents. Trying to slip out unnoticed was impossible. It occurred to me then that I was no longer a little kid; it was time for me to sleep separately.

"OK, I'll take you, but aren't you afraid of coming back alone in the dark? I won't come back till dawn," Uncle warned.

"Not at all," I said proudly.

Uncle took me to the village movie house, where many locals gathered. I hung back, feeling shy, but Uncle shoved me into the room ahead of him. I then understood why Uncle came out every evening. The place was full of village girls. Boys and girls met here and, at the end of the evening, they competed in singing love songs, and some even became lovers through singing. Finally, the boy went to the girl's home for the night. The room was filling with young lovers.

"Would you like to go to a girl's bed tonight? If you do, many village girls prefer boys who are students," Uncle said loudly so the other guys could hear.

"No," I said shyly, beginning to squirm. The other guys snickered, thinking I was a coward with girls. The video room filled as the night sky darkened. I was flabbergasted to see Sgrol ma among the girls in the video room. I stared at her. She was so engrossed in the movie that she did not notice me. Everyone watched the movie, and it would have been obvious if I had waved or stood to let her see me. Then her eyes left the screen and she was looking at me with a surprised expression on her face.

I thought that after the movie finished and when the crowd thinned out, I would meet her on the way home. It was around midnight when the movie finished. I slipped out before anyone else and waited. As people flowed into the darkness, I could not find her. Thinking quickly, I ran to the gate of her home, which was a hundred meters from my own home. I did not feel a drop of fear in the darkness, in sharp contrast to my childhood phobia. After a while she came, walking straight towards the gate. As she drew close, she saw me standing there.

"When did you get back? I didn't see you until tonight," she said.

"I got back a few days ago. I didn't know if you had returned," I replied.

Hours passed as we chatted. She had missed me and was still in love with me.

Finally, she kissed me on the cheek and said we needed to go home. We decided that we would meet on the grassland the next day, where I herded the family yaks. Afterwards, we met almost every day of the vacation. Our feelings for one another deepened from spending so much time together and gradually, rumor wafted through the village of our dating and reached Mother, who approached me with a strong warning. "Is it true you have a bride from a family of *gseb dri*?"³² she asked.

"Who said that? No," I replied.

"Who would believe you? You must never do anything that would defile this family's next generation! Furthermore, it will destroy your educational future!" Mother said.

³² *gseb dri* = body odor, the absence or presence of which is investigated before a marriage is agreed to by both sides.

DROPOUT

It was the summer that I was to begin my last year at the Mgo log school in 2004. Zon thar rgyal and I had just arrived at school in time for the start of the semester. The school environment was delightfully peaceful, as if the campus was empty, even though it was the beginning of the term. Maybe it was because the school was isolated from any noisy city. I should have been excited to be there, but my heart and soul were still stuck in my village and my thoughts were focused on Sgrol ma.

"Zon thar rgyal, I miss her all the time. I just can't concentrate on study," I said to him several times at the beginning of term.

"You are in my custody here. Your father entrusted me to watch over you. You can't think like that. Get a hold of yourself. Be a man!" Zon thar rgyal said.

Four days into the new semester, my concentration was gone. The only thing that remained was my strong feeling for her. I was in a daze, not hearing anything Zon thar rgyal said.

One day I skipped class and nothing happened. The weekend was approaching, however, and I was afraid there would be repercussions at the usual assembly. I began missing more classes. Zon thar rgyal had no clue what to do. My soul was back in the village, wrapped around Sgrol ma. Nothing remained for my study. She was studying at the Tibetan Junior Middle School in the Mang ra County seat. I would skip class, run to Rgyud 'go, and phone her. I could not bring myself to tell her that my heart had gone out of my studies, and that I wanted only to be with her.

The first Friday morning of the new term, I decided not just to skip class but to leave school. Zon thar rgyal had gone to class. I grabbed a bag, packed all my belongings, then took a taxi to Rgyud 'go, and then on to the county center. I still had cash from the allowance Father had given me but fortunately, in Rgyud 'go I caught a truck going directly there. I had never been there before. Along the way,

I rethought my whole life. I thought that after seeing her, I would return to my home and talk with my parents. I would tell them that spending their hard-earned money to put me through school was wrong and that it would be better if I stayed home and herded with Uncle.

I reached the county seat in the afternoon. I was disoriented and did not know where to go. I looked for a hotel, booked a room near the bus station, and then searched for a phone to call Sgrol ma. "Is Sgrol ma there, please?" I said, when I connected to her dorm phone.

"She is very ill with a bad cold and went home yesterday. I don't know when she'll be back," one of her roommates told me.

I did not know what to do. I berated myself for failing to call her the day before. Dejected, I returned to the hotel, terribly confused and took the earliest bus to my hometown early the next morning. I worried all the way about how my parents would react. The bus arrived before I knew it. Uncle Ra log drives a taxi. I looked for him and found him around the taxi stand. Because he is usually very kind to me, I did not expect him to scold me for having left school. "Oh! Yul lha! What are you doing here? All the villagers are talking about you. They say that you escaped from school with a girl," Uncle Ra log said in genuine concern, as he helped carry my bags.

"What? What are you talking about?" I asked in surprise.

"Why did you leave school? The semester only just began. Have you escaped with a girl? That girl from our village?" he asked grimly.

"No. Never, ever," I lied. "How did he know?" I wondered.

"Why did you flee from school and come home?" he persisted.

"I don't like studying there anymore. That's all. There's no other reason. Please don't ask me, Uncle," I said.

"Anyway, your parents and grandparents were frantic yesterday, even until late last night. Your father looked all around for you here and in Khri ka County Town, when he heard the bad news," he said.

"I don't understand. I didn't escape with a girl. I just left school and came directly home," I said in surprise.

"Your father called Zon thar rgyal yesterday. You ran away, just as he said. But some local villagers are spreading a rumor that you escaped to India with a village girl," Uncle said.

He knew that during the summer vacation I had spent much time with Sgrol ma. He did not mention her by name.

"What a rumor!" I said angrily.

"Sgrol ma was home sick, but she left for school yesterday. Your father put two and two together and guessed that you two planned to meet up and run off," he said.

The most outrageous rumors were being spread. It was true that I had run off from school. I could not deny that nor escape the coming trouble.

It was in the late afternoon. There were no other passengers going to the village from town. It was just Uncle and me in his taxi. "You were doing so well at that school. You had made a real turnaround in your behavior. You were such a troublemaker when you were young. We all thought you had grown out of that sort of mischief. But look, now you have gone and done it again, just when you really had us believing you had changed your ways. I wish I could do something to help you, but your father is surely devising a special treatment for you this time. Your folks are hopping mad."

"I don't know what to do, Uncle. I really can't stand to be so far away. I don't mean to imply that there is something wrong with the school! It's that I've been so homesick and even starving some time," I said, practicing for the big confrontation.

"If you walk in that door alone, your father is likely to give you the beating of your life. I think I should go with you and try to explain it to him just as you told me now. You are telling the truth, aren't you?" Uncle said.

We were almost home. I felt relief that he was going to stay with me and try to deflect Father's wrath. When we pulled up to the home gate, he tooted the horn once. Mother appeared and burst into tears when she saw me. She ran to me, scooped me up in her arms, weeping the whole time.

"Where have you been, son? We were nearly mad with worry," she cried. The red puffy rims around her eyes made it obvious she had been crying.

"There's no need to cry, Sister. It's all just rumors. He didn't run off with any girl. He just didn't like being at school, and so he came home," Uncle said.

"Why didn't you stay at school? Don't lie! Everyone is talking about you and this witch's daughter," she said, disparaging Sgrol ma's mother without mentioning names.

"He didn't like staying in Mgo log; it was too difficult for him. You two sent your only son so far away. It's understandable such a young boy would be homesick. Everyone at that school has to be self-reliant. He had to fend for himself. He just wasn't prepared for all that. Surely that's not such a crime?" Uncle said, making a good case for me.

"It wasn't my idea to send him there. It was all Dpa' rtse 'bum's plan. Anyway, he is crazy with this bad news and planning to kick him out of the family. He said he doesn't want such a son," Mother said disappointedly, tears dribbling down her chin. She now believed that I had not escaped with the girl.

"What should I say if they asked me where I went yesterday, when I left school," I wondered.

"I will explain it to him," Uncle said.

"Yes, you should explain. I don't think I can help. The boy should stay in Grandfather's house. Wait until you have had time to talk with Dpa' rtse 'bum. Otherwise, he will surely kick and beat him."

We three went to the house next door. We could hear Father talking loudly in bursts of anger.

"He is arguing with Grandfather. We have all been arguing with him about his intention of throwing you out of the family," Mother said. They left me there, and went in to speak with Father. After a long while, Grandfather returned.

"My son, what happened to you? Where have you been?" he asked.

"I didn't go anywhere, Grandfather. Everyone is telling rumors about me. I just left class and came home," I replied.

"So you don't plan to return to school? You made us all very angry, and you've set us at odds with your father, arguing against disowning you. He's in a rage," Grandfather said.

"I don't like living at that school. It's too far away. I feel homesick all the time," I said.

"Tell me the truth – didn't you really run away with that girl?" he asked softly.

"No. I really didn't," I replied.

Mother ran to me, wiping her tears with her long sleeves. "You cannot stay here. Stay in Uncle's Ra log's home tonight. Your father is really crazy. He doesn't believe what we said," Mother said.

I was confused. I thought Father really was crazy. Sinfully, hatred grew in me again. I was terribly frightened of him.

"Father says that if you didn't leave school for that girl, why did you leave?" Mother said, with a questioning look. "Anyway, let's go to Ra log's home. Otherwise, he'll beat you. Grandmother is holding him back now. He is mad with worry at the thought of you not attending school."

Mother and Uncle took me back to his car, and we rode to Uncle's home. Uncle urged me repeatedly to return to my studies and to listen to my parents. My heart was full of sadness and disappointment through that night.

ANOTHER SCHOOL

It was the second day of my stay at Uncle Ra log's home. Mother came several times and reported what Father was saying about me. "You'll never know how much your father thinks about you all the time," Mother said sternly. "He didn't sleep last night. He paced up and down, chain smoking, pondering what to do. I told him to sleep and then he scolded me. He is really mad."

I had nothing to say. My heart was heavy as I thought over all that Mother had told me as she sobbed. I reflected and knew it was all my fault, but I still could not bear the thought of returning to Mgo log.

I had to go somewhere. The only place I could think of was the school in Stong che Tibetan Village, where Aunt Bun khrang skyid lived. The school was teaching English, which was very interesting to me. While I was considering this, I realized that without learning something important, I was rubbish. My new desire to go to that school to learn English dominated all other thoughts.

That day, I told Mother that I planned to attend school in Stong che. She was puzzled and unfamiliar with this school. Anyway, I decided to go there the next morning.

"I will ask your uncle to call Bun khrang skyid and ask about the school there," Mother said. Uncle had already left for town. I would have to wait until the next day to hitch a ride to town with Uncle and then go on to Stong che.

That evening, Uncle, Mother, and I discussed my going to Stong che the following morning. Mother exhorted me all evening as we sat together. She would lapse into silence and then softly begin again, trying to set me on a straight path. "If you really have a heart to learn that language, then you should go there and stay. Work hard at it. The way you have broken up your education by changing from one school to another or if you don't finish this school, there won't be anything left for you to do. No one will want to take a chance on you again," Mother said. She had calmed

down from when I had first seen her tear-swollen face at the gate.

Early the next morning, Uncle and I walked to his car. Many villagers asked what had happened to me and why I did not stay in Mgo log. I did not reply. I felt pressure and embarrassment when they asked. I thought I was the worst boy in that village. I was numb.

When we reached town, Uncle and I phoned Aunt Bun khrang skyid. "Your aunt will wait for you at the county bus station. She'll find you," Uncle said after the phone call and led me to the Khri ka County bus. He said the ride was about an hour. I bid goodbye to Uncle Ra log. The bus took me quickly to Khri ka County. My mind was empty, except for the occasional thought floating through that I would be learning English. I wondered what it would be like.

When the bus pulled into the bus station, I spotted Aunt Bun khrang skyid. "Aunt!" I yelled, and ran toward her.

"Oh! There you are! It's so nice to see you," she said happily, a grin splitting her face. "Now tell me, boy, why did you suddenly decide to come here to study?" she asked, taking the bag from my back.

"I didn't like the school in Mgo log. I want to study English at your village school," I replied. She believed me.

"I came here as a bride and I am the resident from our home village. I get so lonesome for local people. If you stay here with me, it will make me very happy. I hope you'll like it here and stay a long while. Now what you should do is apply yourself earnestly to your studies," she said. Stong che was located in a very long valley that seemed to have neither head nor end. The road went through an expansive wooded area. We went to her home by taxi. She told me that Stong che was twelve kilometers from the county town. As we crested the hill, I beheld a green land that alternated between forest and cultivated fields in the valley below. It felt radically different from any place I had been before. I hoped my life would begin anew.

"I'm going to work hard at English. When can I register for the school and start classes, Aunt?" I asked.

"You can register for school tomorrow. It's too late today," she said.

"Do they teach English at the school?" I persisted.

"Yes. If you like studying English, it will be great. Foreigners visit the school occasionally and speak English with the students. The school has two foreign teachers. You can learn well," she said. My excitement increased as she described the school.

"I will be starting at the beginning. Will that be OK?" I asked doubtfully.

"They start with ABC," she said. Aunt knew a lot about the school, since her daughter, Bsod nams dbang mo, studied there.

"There will be an English Training Class at the school," she said. I felt more comfortable. I said no more, only followed her home. That next morning I took my first significant steps toward learning English.

BUYING BOOKS

Winter of 2004. The weather was not very cold. Stong che is in a valley that is warmer than the higher altitude places I had known, such as my home area and Mgo log. I was doing well at the new school, according to my grades and feedback from my teachers and kinfolk. I studied English all day at school. On the weekends I stayed in my room at Aunt's and studied more. I practiced English every chance I got, but I did not stop using Tibetan. I had a small, quiet room at Aunt's that had a desk piled high with English and Tibetan books.

"Nangchukja, you cannot stay in the room like this every day. You should exercise or do something outside," Aunt said. But I did not go out on the weekends. Instead, I sat in that room to learn English and read Tibetan books. Father's crazy reaction to my leaving Shes rig nor gling School was another strong source of my wanting to study hard and independently.

A person who devotes their heart and soul to study will be successful no matter how impoverished they are. Since I started school in Stong che, Aunt paid all my tuition and other fees. Father paid nothing. This was added pressure for me to learn as much as possible.

Mother visited me unexpectedly with some food one wintry day. I was very excited to see her. I had not seen any of my family for months. "We heard that you are diligently studying at school here. Many people say your Tibetan is better than other students here," she said.

"Who said that? I don't do anything well. I have never done well, Mother," I replied modestly.

"He is doing well at school. I have met many of his classmates, and they told me that his Tibetan is better than theirs, and he is the class monitor. Besides, he doesn't come out of that room throughout the weekend. His head is always down in the books. He won't even eat sometimes," Aunt told Mother.

My Tibetan was much better than the students in the local school because of my classes in Mgo log. I had a swelled head about it.

"Anyway, your father heard this and is a bit happier. He said he will pick you up and bring you home before Lo gsar in a few days. Study. Don't let up. Who knows? If you change, something else bad may happen," Mother said. She still did not trust my positive changes at the school, just as I feared. My credibility was damaged. Learning English and Tibetan were to become my soul from then on, though many people continued to spread rumors.

"He is really doing better than all his classmates. Everyone admires him. I believe he won't change!" Aunt said proudly.

That afternoon, Mother said she had to return home. There were good bus connections from Khri ka to my hometown. "Take care of yourself; study hard and Father will surely come get you after school is finished. I only have this hundred *yuan* note to give you. Buy something you want. Don't waste it," Mother said kindheartedly before she left.

Aunt and I walked Mother to the bus station in Khri ka County Town. After the bus left, I ran to Khri ka County Bookstore to buy some books I had heard of that were in both English and Tibetan. I had a strong desire to own them. That was how I spent the hundred *yuan*.

A KARMIC CHANCE

I spent Lo gsar of 2004 at home after Father picked me up as promised. He was less upset than I expected. He seemed satisfied with my study in Stong che, though he wanted me to attend an official high school and get a degree.

"Students need a degree," he said and was planning to send me to a senior middle school but had no idea where and how. On the other side, Father often scolded me, since I had destroyed his trust. "You change all the time even though I provide you with tuition and everything else you need at school," he would say when he scolded me.

Ten days after Lo gsar, local students were returning to school. I was also waiting for my school's start date so that I, too, could return to classes. "Nangchukja, finally you have a chance to go somewhere," Father said upon returning after an absence of a day.

"Is he going to yet another school?" Grandfather asked incredulously.

"Yes. My friend can get him into the senior middle school at Mtsho lho Teacher's Normal School. It is urgent that we go there tomorrow because that is the last day for registration," Father happily said.

"What about the tuition?" Mother asked.

"It's about 3,000 *yuan*. I borrowed it from a friend in town today. Don't worry," he said.

Mother washed my clothes that night and put them near the stove to dry. All my family members encouraged and lectured me for hours that night. I was embarrassed about the rumors that were still alive in their minds about Sgrol ma. I could understand what they were thinking, and why they worried about me. By this time I had mostly forgotten Sgrol ma, and I had not seen her again.

"You only need to attend this school two years, and then you graduate. Do your best at school. If you run off or do something else again, I will not forgive you," Father said.

I happily realized that I now had a chance to go to the prefecture school. I appreciated Father's efforts and felt

confident that I would satisfy my family's hopes. I did notice and appreciate that Father was devoting everything to me and my study.

Father drove me to Mtsho lho in his new truck early the next morning. The road to Chab cha was safer than the roads to Mgo log. We reached Chab cha in the afternoon. Father drove to his friend's home. Afterwards, his friend, Tshe ring skyabs, took us to the school to register. Mtsho lho Teacher's Normal School was in the center of town and was much prettier than I had expected. A lovely park was in the campus center. Many students were walking about carrying books.

"Your son needs to study for only two years, and then he will graduate. Remember, don't go outside casually. It's dangerous here," Tshe ring skyabs said, wagging his head from side to side

"Thank you for creating this unexpected opportunity for my son. I'm sure he will study well," Father said.

The people in Chab cha were Tibetan and Han and mostly spoke the Mtsho sngon Chinese Dialect.

STUDY IN ZI LING

It was the twentieth day of the lunar New Year in 2005. I was eighteen years old. I was in the last semester of study at Mtsho lho Normal School. We did not have regularly scheduled classes on campus, but rather had to go into communities and teach. It was hard to believe that two years had passed at the school. I would go with Uncle Bun khrang rgyal to Zi ling and learn English in a school instead of going for the internship teaching. Uncle was a college graduate and I admired him for doing what nobody else locally had done.

The days crawled by until finally, Uncle and I started out to Zi ling. It was my first time visit to Zi ling. Uncle spoke to me in English and asked many questions, most of which I could understand, but not all. He challenged me to speak English that day. He encouraged me and talked about both of our futures.

Zi ling City was huge with many tall buildings. People bustled along the streets, just as I had seen on television. Uncle and I got off the bus at the city center. Everything was new and unfamiliar. "First I will take you to a place where we can rent a room for you to stay," Uncle said and hailed a taxi. Many things puzzled me and I had many questions to ask Uncle all along the way. I recalled my parents saying there were many thieves in Zi ling City.

"I heard there are many robbers in Zi ling. Is it true, Uncle?" I asked.

"Yes, but not around here. It's mostly around the bus station," he said, staring at something outside the taxi window. I did not ask more, but wondered where the bus station was. Uncle told the taxi driver to stop in a quiet place that he said was Yangjiazhai Village. It was close to Mtsho sngon Normal University. Uncle spoke Standard Chinese and communicated with Han people we met. Finally, he led me to a rented room where I would stay. Uncle would stay with me for a few days, but he was soon leaving for graduate study in the Philippines.

"Now we will go to the school for registration," Uncle said the next morning.

"OK," I replied.

He led me into the heart of the city and stopped by a bus stop. Many large buses were running.

"Where are we going? Where is the school, Uncle?" I asked.

"You'll see where it is when we reach it. Now, let's take the public bus here," he said. Suddenly, a big blue bus stopped in front of us. We got on, and I was surprised that it was unexpectedly clean and much bigger than the public buses that I had seen in Khri ka County.

"We are close to the school. This is Zi ling's big crossroad," he said at a stop after we got off.

A huge circular bridge was above a crossroad. "It is a great bridge," I thought.

"The school is a missionary school. There are many foreigners teaching here," Uncle said while we were walking.

"What is a missionary, Uncle?" I asked.

"It means the people who spread their religion to other areas," Uncle said.

"Are the teachers spreading their religion in this school?" I asked hesitantly.

"Yes, Tibetan students believe it easily. Be careful when you are at the school later," Uncle warned with a smile.

"Impossible!" I replied as we entered the school office. A Tibetan lady who resembled a Chinese lady was registering new students. After we talked I learned that she was from Yul shul but only spoke Chinese and the Yul shul dialect, not the A mdo dialect.

Many Tibetan students were walking around the classrooms, and many foreigners were speaking English. I felt more aspiration and pressure to learn English. I also worried if I could catch up.

Uncle gave my name and other personal information and we decided that I would attend the school starting the next day.

ENGLISH TRAINING PROGRAM

My English was making progress. "Study hard at school and don't hang out with troublemakers. We are the hope for other students in our community. All the local students watch us. We should get good study results for our families and villages." Uncle said.

I promised I would study well. It was clear that Uncle was the greatest student from our village, I was very proud that he had such a good command of English and such a mature mind.

I continued my studies and my English improved to the point I could understand most ordinary oral English. The school's foreign teachers were friendly, but I was uncomfortable with their occasional proselytizing lessons. Furthermore, the school often changed teachers and some were unqualified.

I attended English corners held by the school teachers on weekends, which helped my speaking and listening improve.

I soon concluded there was little more for me to learn at the school and then studied alone. Meanwhile, I cultivated friendships with students of the English Training Program (ETP) at Mtsho sngon Normal University and studied new methods of learning English from them. I admired their good English. I also learned how to write and fundraise for community development project proposals. A small library book project in Mang rdzong was funded (4,500RMB/\$671USD) for a local village primary school in June 2005 by the Lillian Kirby Tuttle Fund. This surprised my family and my community. I was seventeen that year and those who knew about the project could hardly believe that I was responsible until the completion of the project convinced them. This encouraged me to fundraise for more projects.

I took the entrance examination for Mtsho sngon Normal University in October 2005. In mid-December, I received an admission letter from the Mtsho sngon Normal

University branch campus in Chab cha, a three-hour bus trip from Zi ling City.

Before class began in March 2006, I stayed in Zi ling studying independently and wrote more project proposals. My family members called me daily, asking me to return home to do housework. They were sure I was wasting my time in the city and were very concerned about finding money to pay my college tuition. My family earned cash from selling sheep, goats, cattle, wool, and grain. I received very little financial support other than tuition from my family when I attended middle school and my family went 8,000RMB per year in debt to pay my college tuition. Mother wanted me to stop schooling, stay at home, marry, herd, and do farm work as do most locals. Heavy pressure overwhelmed me because schooling was my priority. Eventually, I received financial support from a donor, alleviating my parents' worries.

Attending Mtsho sngon Normal University was a life-changing experience. I took courses taught in English about Linguistics, Cultural Anthropology, World Literature, Teaching Methodology, and English Composition. Meanwhile, I applied to embassies, foundations, and individuals for funding related to rural health care, running water, rural school libraries, training programs, solar energy, and other projects.

In the cause of cultural preservation and improving my English writing, I was encouraged to write this book by Dr. CK Stuart. He and Mr. Gerald Roche also encouraged me to research and write about local weddings.

I received my Associate Degree from Mtsho sngon Normal University in January 2008. Meanwhile, I passed an entrance examination to a BA program at the same university and graduated in 2010.

From August 2008, I worked for the English Training Program Office, Plateau Cultures Initiatives at Mtsho sngon Normal University, but left the latter after six months so I could spend more time on Friendship Charity Association.

CONCLUSION

Experiences from implementing projects, my social connections with locals, locals' poverty and isolation from the outside world, and limited flow of funds into communities with great needs persuaded me to register a NGO at the local county level. Shortly after the Beijing Olympic Games, Friendship Charity Association was registered on 7 October 2008 with the county Civil Affairs Bureau, as a non-governmental, non-profit organization serving as a bridge between donors and local communities.

Through FCA I will be able to contact international organizations and individuals to further assist local communities. Meanwhile, I continue working for the English Training Program Office.

In March 2009, I volunteered to be the representative for HuaQiao Foundation in Zi ling.

With other partner organizations' sponsorship, I attended many eye-opening meetings in Mainland China and Hong Kong.

FCA's vision is to help build a better future for the impoverished people of east-central Mtsho sngon by assisting disadvantaged communities by improving locally identified needs in basic education, rural development, health, environmental protection, and cultural preservation.

We believe that our goals are best achieved by a participatory approach in researching local conditions, strengthening communication between organizations, donors, and volunteers to conduct project planning, building local capacity, and sharing results and experiences with other local organizations.

Finally, I am pleased to share the accounts of my life and culture, and Friendship Charity Association to provide a record of a particular Tibetan childhood. My past had moments with little meaning but the sum total of my mistakes, victories, and realizations motivates me to strive onwards. I am fortunate to have mentors, friends, and teachers who have connected me to a much larger world.

With their help, I have been empowered to dare to try and help others have a better life.

PROJECTS

27 December 2005–10 October 2010

Total Value: 2,713,969RMB

Donor: 1,473,394RMB

Local: 1,240,575RMB

Beneficiaries: 27,918 Local residents

1

Project Number	FCAPN01	Report Date	27/12/2005
Donor RMB	3,800	Local Value RMB	813.20
Total Amt (inc. in-kind) = 4,613.20RMB		Beneficiaries	300 students 9 teachers
Project Title	Bon skor Tibetan Primary School Library		
Donor	Lillian Kirby Tuttle Fund		
Author	Friendship Charity Association		
Project Location	Bon skor Tibetan Village, Bya mdo Township, Mang ra County, Mtsho lho Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, Mtsho sngon Province		
Final Report	http://old.thdl.org/community/pdfs/guinanlibrary.pdf		
<p>Summary: A grant of 3,800RMB from the Lillian Kirby Tuttle Fund, plus a local contribution of 813.20RMB, financed the purchase of 487 books and the establishment of a school library that immediately benefited 300 Tibetan primary school students and 9 Tibetan teachers. Prior to the project, the school had no library and few books. Consequently, students access to information was limited. Moreover, teachers lacked essential references for class preparation and resources to expand their range of knowledge. Mr. 'Brug lha, the 31 year old headmaster, confided, "The teachers and students in our school are all herders and of course this is a remote, pastoral area. Our school is 200 km from the county town and because of this, there is no regular communication between the school and the outside. Herders do not appreciate the benefits of</p>			

education as much as outside people do. However, their ideas are changing now. Two years ago, when I became the headmaster of this school, all the students believed study was useless. There were around 50 students in the school. They knew little about the outside world. Now the library has given teachers and students the opportunity to read about the outside world. We are grateful and want to say thanks for your support."

Tshe dpa' rgyal, a 26 year old Tibetan teacher at the school, said, "I have taught Tibetan for more than 5 years in this primary school. During this time, we were unable to get a library like the present one for students and teachers. Now, we have access to much knowledge, and it is easier for our teachers to teach the students, especially the young students because we have books with pictures. The library books have really improved our poor conditions, and I truly appreciate support for this project."

Project Number	FCAPN02	Report Date	12/1/2006
Donor RMB	1,500	Local Value RMB	1,500
Total Amt (inc. in-kind) = 3,000RMB		Beneficiaries	108 students; 3 teachers
Project Title	Winter Teaching Program		
Donor	Bon skor Community Committee		
Author	Friendship Charity Association		
Project Location	Bon skor Tibetan Community, Bya mdo Township, Mang ra County, Mtsho lho Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, Mtsho sngon Province		
Summary: This teaching program was initiated in 2004 by the local primary school. FCA has managed it since 2006. With a contribution of 1,500RMB from the school and 1,500RMB from the Bon skor Community Committee, the teaching program continued. Three teachers used student-centered teaching methodology to teach English as a third language to 108 students for a month. Consequently, students enthusiastically learned basic English.			

3

Project Number	FCAPN03	Report Date	2/4/2006
Donor RMB	53 items	Local Value RMB	100
Total	53 items + 100RMB	Beneficiaries	23 Tibetans
Project Title	Secondhand Clothes for a Rural Tibetan Community		
Donor	Various		
Author	Friendship Charity Association		
Project Location	Bon skor Tibetan Community, Bya mdo Township, Mang ra County, Mtsho lho Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, Mtsho sngon Province		
Summary: Beneficiaries included 18 girls and women and 5 boys and men who received 53 items (toys, shoes, socks, pants). Recipients were chosen when villagers and leaders met to choose the poorest families in the village. Recipients saved money they would have spent buying clothes.			

Project Number	FCAPN04	Report Date	3/5/2006
Donor RMB	10,400	Local Value RMB	719.42
Total Amount (inc. in-kind)	11,119.42 RMB	Beneficiaries	300 students 9 teachers
Project Title	Tibetan Primary School Library Books		
Donor	German Embassy in Beijing		
Author	Friendship Charity Association		
Project Location	Bon skor Tibetan Community, Bya mdo Township, Mang ra County, Mtsho lho Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, Mtsho sngon Province		
Final Report			
http://www.friendshipcharity.org/wp-content/uploads/2009/01/tibetan-primary-school-library-books2.pdf			
<p>Summary: 862 books and teaching materials are benefiting 300 Tibetan students and 9 teachers with the German Embassy's contribution of 10,400RMB and a local contribution of 719.42RMB. Teachers and students have essential references for class preparation and are able to expand their range of knowledge. The school was built in 1989 and has 6 grades, 237 students, and 7 teachers. All students are local Tibetans. Except for the Chinese and English languages, all subjects are taught in Tibetan. Most students' homes are in a herding area 20 kilometers from the school. Consequently, students board at the school. 'Khar mo 'tsho, a 14 year old in grade 5, said, "Now I can read in the library and learn new words by using books with pictures. I am really interested in looking at pictures to learn new words because my hobby is drawing and it is very easy to learn the words while looking at the pictures. I am eager to visit the library. I go there to read and look at pictures whenever I have finished my homework."</p>			

5

Project Number	FCAPN05	Report Date	5/5/2006
Donor RMB	7,300	Local Value RMB	2,500
Total Amount (inc. in-kind) 9,800RMB		Beneficiaries	350 Tibetans
Project Title	Solar Cookers for Bon skor Tibetan Community		
Donor	German Embassy		
Author	Friendship Charity Association		
Project Location	Bon skor Tibetan Community, Bya mdo Township, Mang ra County, Mtsho lho Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, Mtsho sngon Province		
Final Report http://old.thdl.org/community/pdfs/germansolarcooker4.pdf			
<p>Summary: The German Embassy contributed 7,300RMB and recipients contributed 2,500RMB that purchased 50 solar cookers benefitting 350 local Tibetans. Recipients each contributed 50RMB toward the cost of a solar cooker, which cost 150RMB each. The solar cookers save local people's money by reducing the purchase of coal and significantly reduce the difficulties associated with and the time-consuming task of collecting fuel; before the project, wood from a forest 2-3 km from the village was collected as well as dung. This is traditionally women and girls' work; local women have more time to spend on housework and rest. The number of students (especially girls) attending school and literacy rates will increase over time, health risks associated with cooking in smoky kitchens are reduced, and villagers will drink less unboiled water.</p>			

6

Project Number	FCAPN06	Report Date	3/5/2006
Donor Value RMB	30,160	Local Value RMB	4,040
Total Amount (inc. in-kind) 34,200RMB		Beneficiaries	300 Tibetans
Project Title	Solar Electricity Generating Panels for Bon skor Tibetan Community		
Donor	German Embassy		
Author	Friendship Charity Association		
Project Location	Bon skor Tibetan Community, Bya mdo Township, Mang ra County, Mtsho lho Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, Mtsho sngon Province		
Summary: The German Embassy contributed 30,160RMB. Each recipient contributed 101RMB toward the cost of each solar panel, which cost 850RMB per unit. A total of 40 solar electricity-generating panels were purchased that benefited 300 villagers in Bon skor Tibetan Community. The German Embassy's contribution is significant because it helps local people save money by reducing expenses for candles and oil, reduces eye diseases from smoke, helps local women when they cook at night, and provides lighting for students doing homework at night.			

Project Number	FCAPN07	Report Date	9/7/2006
Donor RMB	1,500	Local Value RMB	2,500
Total Amount (inc. in-kind)	4,000RMB	Beneficiaries	130 students 3 teachers
Project Title	Summer Teaching Program		
Donor	Bon skor Community Committee		
Author	Friendship Charity Association		
Project Location	Bon skor Tibetan Community, Bya mdo Township, Mang ra County, Mtsho lho Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, Mtsho sngon Province		
Summary: A cash contribution of 1,500RMB from the school and 2,500RMB from the Bon skor Community Committee financed the project. Three teachers from Mtsho sngon Normal University taught 130 students English for 25 days.			

8

Project Number	FCAPN08	Report Date	15/1/2007
Donor RMB	1,500	Local Value RMB	2,500
Total Amount (inc. in-kind) 4,000RMB		Beneficiaries	121 students 3 teachers
Project Title	Winter Teaching Program		
Donor	Bon skor Community Committee		
Author	Friendship Charity Association		
Project Location	Bon skor Tibetan Community, Bya mdo Township, Mang ra County, Mtsho lho Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, Mtsho sngon Province		
Summary: FCA met young villagers to discuss the importance of the local annual teaching program and encouraged locals to continue the program. The Bon skor Community Committee contributed 1,500RMB and the local school contributed 2,500RMB (from the teachers) to finance the program. FCA invited English majors from Mtsho sngon Normal University to teach 121 students.			

Project Number	FCAPN09	Report Date	10/7/2007
Donor RMB	1,500	Local Value RMB	3,000
Total Amount (inc. in-kind) 4,500RMB		Beneficiaries	132 students 3 teachers
Project Title	Summer Teaching Program		
Donor	Bon skor Community Committee		
Author	Friendship Charity Association		
Project Location	Bon skor Tibetan Community, Bya mdo Township, Mang ra County, Mtsho lho Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, Mtsho sngon Province		
Summary: This program benefitted 132 local Tibetans in primary and junior middle schools. Bon skor Community Committee contributed 1,500RMB and the local village school contributed 3,000RMB for the teaching program. The program emphasized student-centered teaching activities, enhancing students' interest in education.			

10

Project Number	FCAPN10	Report Date	23/7/2007
Donor RMB	16,000	Local Value RMB	2,500
Total Amount (inc. in-kind) 18,500RMB		Beneficiaries	5 students; 20 family members
Project Title	Scholarships for Five Students		
Donor	Mr. Richard Harlan		
Author	Friendship Charity Association		
Project Location	Bon skor Tibetan Community, Bya mdo Township, Mang ra County, Mtsho lho Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, Mtsho sngon Province		
Summary: This project allowed 5 students to continue their education. Mr. Harlan provided 16,000RMB a year and the students' families provided 500RMB per student. Poverty and parents' skepticism toward State-sponsored education would have resulted in students being kept at home after primary school graduation to do housework, herd, farm, and marry. These scholarships allowed the students to continue their education.			

11

Project Number	FCAPN11	Report Date	15/8/2007
Donor RMB	79,000	Local Value RMB	22,000
Total Amount (inc. in-kind) 101,000RMB		Beneficiaries	1,800 Tibetans
Project Title	Tibetan Health Clinic for Bon skor Tibetan Community		
Donor	German Embassy		
Author	Friendship Charity Association		
Project Location	Bon skor Tibetan Community, Bya mdo Township, Mang ra County, Mtsho lho Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, Mtsho sngon Province		

Final Report

www.friendshipcharity.org/wp-content/uploads/2009/01/tibetan-health-clinic-for-bon-skor-tibetan-village2.pdf

Summary: The German Embassy provided 79,000RMB, local residents gave 20,000RMB, and local government contributed 22,000RMB to build a local clinic benefitting 1,800 Tibetans (360 households). Local government provides salaries for a doctor of Traditional Tibetan Medicine and a nurse to work in the clinic. Both are local people, speak the local Tibetan dialect, are versed in local culture, and sympathetic to local people. Ms. Bsod nams skyid, 49, said, "I've been sick for about 3 years. For 2 years I was getting much worse when I took Chinese medicines in the local county town. Later, I took Tibetan medicine and now I'm much better, although I still take Tibetan medicines as I am not completely recovered. When I went to the county town for treatment, I spent another amount equal to the cost of the medicine for travel and food in the town. The Tibetan clinic is here and it's very helpful for women to take Tibetan medicine, which is also much cheaper."

The doctor instructs local people how to prevent and treat hepatitis, diabetes, and STDs; the importance of sanitation; the dangers of unprotected sex; encourages the use of condoms, etc.; and treats local people in the clinic, which is located in the community.

Zon thar rgyal, the local Tibetan doctor, said,

"Women suffer from disease associated with unprotected sex, poor sanitation, and childbirth without seeing a doctor, and so on. Tibetan medicines are significantly helpful for women's diseases and can usually solve these problems in a year or so. It's been about 1 month since the new local Tibetan clinic opened. Many local villagers are coming. Tibetan medicines are helpful and cheap. I also talk with teenagers about the dangers of unprotected sex."

12

Project Number	FCAPN12	Report Date	24/11/2007
Donor RMB	5,600	Local Value RMB	700
Total Amount (inc. in-kind) = 6,300RMB		Beneficiaries	43 Tibetans
Project Title	Solar Electricity Generating Panels for Ho spyor Tibetan Village		
Donor	The Canada Fund		
Author	Friendship Charity Association		
Project Location	Ho spyor Village, Nyin phyug Township, Rtse khog County, Rma lho Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, Mtsho sngon Province		
Final Report			
www.friendshipcharity.org/wp-content/uploads/2009/01/solar-electricity-generating-panels-for-hojor-tibetan-village2.pdf			
Summary: The Canada Fund provided 5,600RMB, and local recipients contributed 100RMB to purchase 7 solar panels, which cost 800RMB each. Local women now spend more time on other housework and enjoy more leisure time, villagers live and work in a less smoky environment and no longer suffer the accompanying health risks, and the local environment benefits from less destruction to local forests.			

13

Project Number	FCAPN13	Report Date	10/7/2008
Donor RMB	1,500	Local Value RMB	3,000
Total Amount (inc. in-kind) 4,500RMB		Beneficiaries	161 students 3 teachers
Project Title	Summer Teaching Program		
Donor	Bon skor Community Committee		
Author	Friendship Charity Association		
Project Location	Bon skor Tibetan Community, Bya mdo Township, Mang ra County, Mtsho lho Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, Mtsho sngon Province		
Summary: Bon skor Community Committee contributed 1,500RMB and the local primary school and its headmaster contributed 3,000RMB to continue the teaching program benefitting 161 local Tibetan students and 3 local teachers who audited the classes to learn teaching methods. Results of this program are apparent from local junior middle school students' official exam scores. More than 10 Bon skor students gained top scores in English at the local county junior middle school.			

14

Project Number	FCAPN14	Report Date	10/9/2008
Donor RMB	80,000	Local Value RMB	121,738.50
Total Amount (inc. in-kind) 201,738.50RMB		Beneficiaries	457 Tibetans
Project Title	Running Water for a Rural Tibetan Community		
Donor	German Embassy		
Author	Friendship Charity Association		
Project Location	Bon skor Tibetan Community, Bya mdo Township, Mang ra County, Mtsho lho Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, Mtsho sngon Province		
Final Report			
http://www.archive.org/details/RunningWaterProjectForBon-skor-TibetanVillageGuinanCountyQinghai			
Summary: The project benefited 457 villagers in Bon skor Tibetan Community with a contribution of 80,000RMB from the German Embassy plus 121,738.50RMB from the local community. The project brought clean water much closer to local homes, the time spent on collecting water has been reduced, women and girls have more time to do other things, children have more time to study because the time spent on fetching water has been greatly reduced, bickering over fetching water has been eliminated, disagreements caused by livestock traveling over pasturelands to water sources has been reduced, and environmental degradation has been lessened by fewer livestock making paths through the grassland on the long trek to the former water source.			

15

Project Number	FCAPN15	Report Date	10/9/2008
Donor RMB	48,000	Local Value RMB	3,800
Total Amount (inc. in-kind) 51,800RMB		Beneficiaries	455 students and teachers
Project Title	Tibetan Library Book for Smar skams and Ban shul Village Primary Schools		
Donor	German Embassy		
Author	Friendship Charity Association		
Project Location	Ban shul Village Primary School, Sum mdo Township & Smar skams Village Primary School, Mgo mang Township, Mang ra County, Mtsho lho Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, Mtsho sngon Province		
Final Report http://www.friendshipcharity.org/report-library.pdf			
<p>Summary: 4,880 books and teaching materials benefit 455 Tibetan students and teachers with the German Embassy's contribution of 48,000RMB and a local contribution of 3,800RMB. The students now can read various materials, improve comprehension by looking at illustrative pictures and finding difficult words in dictionaries, and teachers have more teaching references, thus improving their teaching. Students may read what they like in their spare time. Teachers' teaching and students' limited view of the outside are changing.</p>			

Project Number	FCAPN16	Report Date	10/11/2008
Donor RMB	8,450	Local Value RMB	3,250
Total Amount (inc. in-kind) 11,700RMB		Beneficiaries	248 Tibetans
Project Title	Solar Cookers for Two Communities		
Donor	Sebastian and Stefan		
Author	Friendship Charity Association		
Project Location	Tshal rnga Monastery and Bon skor Tibetan Community, Bya mdo Township, Mang ra County, Mtsho lho Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, Mtsho sngon Province		
<p>Summary: This project benefits 248 local people. It was made possible by Sebastian and Stefan's generous assistance and 50RMB from each recipient household. Project recipients historically collected large amounts of dung and wood for fuel. The solar cookers reduced the time spent collecting fuel and the amount of fuel collected.</p> <p>Blo gros (b.1968), a monk from Tshal rnga Monastery, said, "Our monks and our relatives now have less work in providing us with fuel. Monks don't go out and collect fuel, instead, each monk's relatives transport wood, dung, and straw to the monastery. Now we have received solar cookers and our relatives spend less time in collecting fuel for us and transporting it by cart and tractor."</p> <p>Nangchukja: "How much fuel did you usually burn every day before you got this solar cooker?"</p> <p>Blo gros: "In summer, a half-sack of cow dung that weighs about 6 kilos and about 5 kilos of wood. In winter, we used twice that much since it is cold and we must have a fire to warm the room, especially at night when we chant and read."</p> <p>N: How much fuel do you use daily now that you have the solar cooker?</p> <p>B: "About 3.5 kilos of cow dung, and 3 kilos of wood. Now, we never burn fuel during the day, especially when it is very sunny. This cooker is really useful, for example, we use it to boil several thermos bottles of water and use that at night and early in the morning, so we burn less fuel."</p>			

Project Number	FCAPN17	Report Date	25/12/2008
Donor RMB	3,000	Local Value RMB	4,214.50
Total Amount (inc. in-kind) 7,214.50RMB		Beneficiaries	210 students 4 teachers
Project Title	Winter Teaching Program		
Donor	HuaQiao Foundation		
Author	Friendship Charity Association		
Project Location	Bon skor Tibetan Community, Bya mdo Township, Mang ra County, Mtsho lho Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, Mtsho sngon Province		
Final Report			
www.friendshipcharity.org/wp-content/uploads/2009/01/english-and-tibetan-training-program-for-primary-school-students2.pdf			
Summary: This program benefited 210 students and 4 teachers. The HuaQiao Foundation provided 3,000RMB and the local primary school contributed 4,214.50RMB. The project included a Tibetan language teaching component, a first for the program. The program attracted 76% of local elementary-age children who studied Tibetan and English, putting free time to good use and further developing an interest in reading and writing.			

18

Project Number	FCAPN18	Report Date	5/2/2009
Donor RMB	12,000	Local Value RMB	17,960
Total Amount (inc. in-kind) 29,960RMB		Beneficiaries	4 students; 18 family members
Project Title	Scholarship for Four College Students		
Donor	100Friends Project		
Author	Friendship Charity Association		
Project Location	Mang ra County, Mtsho lho Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, Mtsho sngon Province		
Summary: This project benefits 4 poor students in colleges. 100Friends Project provided 12,000RMB a year, plus these students' families contributed 17,960RMB a year to allow the students to finish their college education. Prior to the students' attending college, they planned to stay at home, farming, herding, and doing housework for the rest of their lives. The 100Friends Project allows these students to attend college. They will more easily find a good job and change their lives for the better.			

19

Project Number	FCAPN19	Report Date	6/2/2009
Donor RMB	26,590	Local Value RMB	5,000
Total Amount (inc. in-kind) 31,590RMB		Beneficiaries	1 NGO
Project Title	Facility Project for Friendship Charity Association		
Donor	HuaQiao Foundation		
Author	Friendship Charity Association		
Project Location	Bya mdo Township, Mang ra County, Mtsho lho Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, Mtsho sngon Province		
Summary: A contribution of 26,590RMB from the HuaQiao Foundation and 5,000RMB from Nangchukja provided a shared field office room and equipment for FCA and HQF in Xining, the capital of Mtsho sngon Province. This allows FCA to work jointly with HuaQiao Foundation, helps FCA become a more formal organization with the creation of a base, provides work space for 2 full-time staff members to fulfill the organization's mission by being in charge of administration work, strengthens the solidarity of FCA staff with HQF, improves organizational work skills, builds capacity with meetings and discussions in the same place, and creates a recognized FCA and HQF workplace.			

Project Number	FCAPN20	Report Date	25/09/2009
Donor Amount/Value	11,360	Local Value RMB	200
Total Amount (inc. in-kind) 11,560RMB		Beneficiaries	28 Tibetans
Project Title	Impoverished Household Assistance		
Donor	100Friends Project		
Author	Friendship Charity Association		
Project Location	Mang ra County, Mtsho lho Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, Mtsho sngon Province		
Summary: 100Friends Project visited Skar ma thang, Ho spyor, Bon skor communities in East-Central Mtsho sngon and contributed 11,360RMB for the poorest households' medical care, student tuition, food subsidies, and school sports equipment. This directly benefited about 25 people and 3 primary schools in these rural communities.			

21

Project Number	FCAPN21	Report Date	7/10/2009
Donor	71 clothes items	Local Value RMB	200
Total 71 items + 200RMB		Beneficiaries	69 Tibetans
Project Title	Clothing for Three Tibetan Communities		
Donor	Mr. Zhang Hangui		
Author	Friendship Charity Association		
Project Location	Ban shul, Tsha nag, Bon skor Communities, Mang ra County, Mtsho lho Prefecture, Mtsho sngon Province		
Summary: This project directly benefited 69 Tibetans in Ban shul, Tsha nag, Bon skor Communities. Mr. Zhang Hangui collected new and second-hand clothes from Korea and transported them to the FCA office. FCA then distributed the clothes to the poorest local people, who will be warmer in winter.			

Project Number	FCAPN22	Report Date	30/10/2009
Donor Value RMB	79,931.74	Local Value RMB	148,800
Total Amount (inc. in-kind) 228,731.74RMB		Beneficiaries	1,746 Tibetans
Project Title	Water Project for Tsha nag Tibetan Community		
Donor	ERM Foundation		
Author	Friendship Charity Association		
Project Location	Tsha nag Tibetan Community, Mgo mang Township, Mang ra County, Mtsho lho Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, Mtsho sngon Province		
<p>Summary: ERM Foundation provided 79,931.74RMB, and the local community and government provided 148,800RMB, which realized a running water project benefitting 1,746 Tibetans in Tsha nag Village. Funds bought pipes, cement, and bricks, and paid for transportation; 95 locals contributed 30 days of labor to dig ditches, bury pipes, and transport sand, stones, and other materials.</p> <p>Tsha nag is a large herding community. Local residents live across a broad grassland area. Many must travel at least 1.5 kilometers to reach the next home. For generations, locals got water from sources that required travel of 12-18 kilometers round-trip from their households. This sometimes required a full day or night. About 152 households (912 people) with 21,000 head of livestock got water from a salty spring and 2 water sources that locals believed caused abdominal illnesses. The water sources are muddy when it rains, icy in winter, and run dry for 1-2 days, at which time locals, before this project, had to drive their livestock 18 kilometers (round-trip) to another village. This tired the livestock, especially the sheep. There was also significant grassland degradation from livestock walking across the grassland and conflict because livestock graze on others' pastures to and from the watering places. Water was fetched by people carrying plastic containers on their backs and by using motorcycles.</p> <p>This project has solved all the aforementioned problems. Thirteen water taps now greatly reduce the distance and time locals invest in obtaining water, as well as reduced grassland degradation and conflict over grazing.</p>			

23

Project Number	FCAPN23	Report Date	9/9/2009
Donor Value RMB	8,000	Local Value RMB	2,500
Total Amount (inc. in-kind)	10,500RMB	Beneficiaries	410 students 10 teachers
Project Title	Summer Go West Program for Five Primary Schools		
Donor	HuaQiao Foundation		
Author	Friendship Charity Association		
Project Location	Rab rgan, Thu ro, Stong skor, Lo ba gong ma, and Lo ba zhol ma Village Primary Schools, Mang ra County, Mtsho lho Prefecture, Mtsho sngon Province		
Summary: HuaQiao Foundation and FCA have established Children of Hope, pioneered in East-Central Mtsho sngon Province under the Go West Program supported by HQF. HQF contributed 8,000RMB and local schools provided 2,500RMB. The program began 12 July 2009 and has brought change to the targeted areas by teaching and identifying local problems. 410 students in 5 village primary schools benefitted. The program brought new teaching methods, games, activities, and ideas to local schools. Local teaching approaches have remained traditional due to unqualified teachers. Modern, second language acquisition teaching methods elicited much enthusiasm.			

Project Number	FCAPN24	Report Date	12/9/2009
Donor Amt RMB	9,980	Local Amt/Value RMB	4,754
Total Amt (inc. in-kind) = 14,734RMB		Beneficiaries	423 students 6 teachers
Project Title	Summer Teaching Program		
Donor	HuaQiao Foundation		
Author	Friendship Charity Association		
Project Location	Ban shul and Bon skor Communities, Mang ra County, Mtsho lho Prefecture, Mtsho sngon Province		
<p>Summary: A contribution of 9,980RMB from HQF and 4,754RMB provided by local schools funded a project that benefited 423 students and 8 teachers in Bon skor and Ban shul Tibetan village primary schools.</p> <p>Mr. 'Brug lha, Bon skor Primary School headmaster, said, "We have held this program for 6 years with the assistance of the local village and external assistance from FCA (twice by HQF). Program results exceeded our expectations. Students were encouraged to attend school and to continue their education after primary school. Recently (after exam results were known), we learned that most local graduates are top students in Tibetan and English in middle schools in local towns in the county. We added a Chinese language class to the other 2. I believe that in a few years, these students will be the top students at all of these languages in middle school."</p> <p>Mr. Bsod nams rgyal, headmaster of Ban shul Primary School, said: "We heard of this program. A Tibetan teacher-of-English was recruiting students to teach English in the local town last year. However, that was 1 class and the tuition was high. From this year, after discussion with FCA, we received HQF assistance and started this program. It is cost-effective since it is held in the community. Students can easily attend, are excited to learn in this program, and are especially interested in English because it's a new language for them and they are full of curiosity. I hope we can continue this program."</p>			

Project Number	FCAPN25	Report Date	27/11/2009
Donor Amt RMB	203,800	Local Amount	253,800
Total Amt (inc. in-kind) 457,600RMB		Beneficiaries	1 NGO
Project Title	FCA Facility Project		
Donor	Misereor		
Author	Friendship Charity Association		
Project Location	Bya mdo Township, Mang ra County, Mtsho lho Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, Mtsho sngon Province		
Summary:	Misereor's 203,800RMB, plus in-kind contribution of 253,800RMB from FCA, provided FCA's operational cost for 2 years. This project strengthens FCA's capacity building by recruiting 2 staff members, helping FCA become a more formal organization, identifying local community needs, raising funds to find answers for local needs, implementing projects to build a better future for local communities, and doing further training and projects.		

Project Number	FCAPN26	Report Date	14/12/2009
Donor Amt/Value RMB	20,583.03	Local Amt/Value RMB	5,848
Total Amt (inc. in-kind) 26,431.03RMB		Beneficiaries	279 students 13 teachers
Project Title	Library Book Project for Dmar khog Primary School		
Donor	The Bangkok Patana Primary School and Mr. Mark LF Nicholson		
Author	Friendship Charity Association		
Project Location	Dmar khog Primary Boarding School and Rtse mda' Orphanage School, Pad ma County, Mgo log Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, Mtsho sngon Province		
Final Report	http://tibetanplateau.wikischolars.columbia.edu/The+Bangkok+Patana+Primary+School+and+Ms.+Dana+R.+Nicholson+Supported+Libraries+for+Two+Tibetan+Primary+Schools		
Summary: This project benefits 279 students and 13 teachers with a contribution of 16,962.29RMB from 100Friends Project, and 3,620.74RMB from Mr. Mark LF Nicholson, and a local 5,848RMB contribution. Prior to the project, a severe problem for schools was students' lack of learning resources. They only had textbooks to read, which are dry and tiring, and lead to a lack of interest in schooling. Local students are enthusiastic to learn new things and find the new books interesting. A library is essential in order to improve students' reading, interest in acquiring knowledge, and in improving teachers' teaching methodologies. Now, students and teachers maintain a supportive and nurturing environment in the school libraries with the new books; windows to the outside world open rapidly as students and teachers turn the pages of new library materials. Students easily access new knowledge based on self-interest at school. A broad range of materials is now available, e.g. illustrated storybooks, picture vocabulary cards, basic national law books, and teachers' reference materials. Students develop transferable skills for sustaining knowledge beyond the classroom and become independent learners as they read in the			

library alone, which encourages them to be lifelong readers. Students' knowledge and interest in different subjects dramatically improves over time.

Project Number	FCAPN27	Report Date	15/12/2009
Donor Value RMB	241,458	Local Value RMB	284,120
Total Amount (inc. in-kind) 525,578RMB		Beneficiaries	10,602 villagers
Project Title	Comprehensive Environment and Health Initiative for Five Tibetan Communities		
Donor	The Canada Fund		
Author	Friendship Charity Association		
Project Location	Smar skams, Tha ba, Ban shul, Stong skor, Bon skor, Tshal rnga Village, Bya mdo and Mgo mang Townships, Mang ra County, Mtsho lho Prefecture, Mtsho sngon Province		
<p>Summary: The Canada Fund's 241,458RMB and a local contribution of 284,120RMB funded this project benefiting 10,602 local villagers: A reliable, fully functioning water system for 2,875 villagers' homes throughout the year; basic health training, including hygiene and women's reproductive health, provided to villagers to complement access to water and building of toilets; each household in Bon skor and Tshal rnga villages plants 50 fast growing trees to supplement fuel supply and reduce erosion; 120 solar cookers are installed and used (30 per village in 4 villages), reducing environmental degradation from tree cutting; and 60 toilets built across 5 Tibetan villages (5 per village), improving village sanitation.</p> <p>The project will have wide-ranging and profoundly positive impact upon the local community. Household income is expected to rise as a result of the time saved collecting water that will be reinvested in agriculture, animal care, and potentially paid labour activities. Health will improve as people drink and bathe using safe water throughout the year. Similarly, households will wash clothes and dishes, and provide water to livestock, vegetable gardens, and trees. Currently, clothes are only washed every few months in winter and bathing in winter occurs sporadically. The work burden on children, notably girls, will be reduced, and school attendance rates will increase, as children are no longer obliged to stay at home to collect water for their families. The elderly benefit from easy access to fresh water for tea and cooking.</p>			

Project Number	FCAPN28	Report Date	10 May 2010
Donor Amt RMB	5,114.55	Local Amt/ Value RMB	6,714.55
Total Amt (inc. in-kind) =1,600RMB		Number of Beneficiaries	163 students; 3 teachers
Project Title	Ko'u sde Community Winter Teaching Program		
Donor	Ms. Ramona Johnson		
Author	Friendship Charity Association		
Project Location	Ko'u sde Community, Chu khog Township; Rong bo Community, Nyin phyug Township, Rtse khog County, Rma lho (Huangnan) Prefecture, Mtsho sngon Province		
Final Report	http://www.scribd.com/doc/31298374/Holiday-Teaching-Program-in-Guday-Tibetan-Community-2010		
<p>Summary: With a contribution of 5,114.55RMB (750USD) from Ms. Johnson, plus a local contribution of (1,600RMB that covered teachers' payment, food, transportation, and books), this teaching program was realized. The 30-day program (January-February 2010) consisted of 3 classes in English, Tibetan, and Chinese taught by 3 instructors. 163 students attended classes.</p> <p>On the first day of the program, 163 students attended the classes. Teachers firstly divided the students according to their grade. Class One was for primary school students, Class 2 was for junior middle school students, and Class 3 was for senior middle school students. On the second day, another adjustment was made. Some students from primary school had better English than some junior middle school students and thus were moved to another class. Each class had 50–54 students and their ages ranged from 9–18. Teachers used a student-centered teaching approach as much as possible.</p> <p>Each teacher received 600RMB as a stipend, 300RMB for food, and 100RMB for transportation. Locals also provided a food subsidy for 30 days.</p>			

Project Number	FCAPN29	Report Date	15 February 2010
Donor Amt/Value RMB	10,000	Local Amt/Value RMB	4,300
Total Amt (inc. in-kind) =14,300RMB		Number of Beneficiaries	354 students; 9 teachers
Project Title	Teaching Programs in Bon skor and Sde mang Tibetan Communities		
Donor	Mr. Philip Jones		
Author	Friendship Charity Association		
Project Location	Bon skor and Sde mang Tibetan Communities, Byamdo Township, Mang ra County, Mtsho lho Prefecture, Mtsho sngon Province		
Final Report	http://www.calameo.com/accounts/346741		
<p>Summary: Mr. Jones' contribution of 10,000RMB, plus 4,300RMB provided by local schools, allowed 354 students to have a positive learning experience January-February 2010. A total of 354 students learned English, Tibetan, and Chinese from nine instructors.</p> <p>Each school had teachers from Shanghai International Studies University and Mtsho sngon Normal University who used a student-centered teaching approach. In addition to the courses mentioned above, teachers also taught math and science after regular class hours.</p> <p>Each teacher received 700RMB as a stipend and an honorary certificate recognizing their teaching. The program also covered teachers' accommodation, food, and transportation. The teaching program was successfully held in these 2 communities.</p> <p>The program concluded with a day of final exams, which students were given half a day to prepare for. The teachers then graded the exams. The three highest-scoring students in each of the 3 classes received an award certificate and prizes such as notebooks, stuffed animals, and dictionaries. Two boxes of second-hand clothing and 2 boxes of school supplies donated from an organization were also distributed.</p>			

Project Number	FCAPN30	Report Date	25 August 2010
Donor Amt/Value RMB	20,010	Local Amt/Value RMB	5,500
Total Amt (inc. in-kind) =25,510RMB		Number of Beneficiaries	305 students; 27 teachers.
Project Title	English Teaching Program in Five Tibetan Communities		
Donor	HuaQiao Foundation		
Author	Friendship Charity Association		
Project Location	Bon skor, Bsde mang, Rab rgan Ban shul, and Ske ba Tibetan Village Primary Schools, Mang ra County, Mtsho lho Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, Mtsho sngon Province, PR China		
Final Report	http://www.calameo.com/books/0003467410700838d6a42		
<p>Summary: This teaching had 27 teachers, all of whom expressed enthusiasm in teaching in local primary schools.</p> <p>305 students attended the programs. They were selected based on their level established by entrance examinations. Historically, all students were allowed to attend the program, however, in order to improve the quality of the experiences, we implemented selection criteria. On average, the classes ranged from 30–40 students and were placed in classes at beginner, intermediate, and advanced levels. Two teachers were with each class. One teacher taught, while the other observed and assisted.</p> <p>Textbooks for the teaching program were selected and organized by FCA based on students' level and in discussion with local teachers. Lessons were created from different textbooks, which were collated and printed cheaply in Xining (0.075RMB per page). Lessons were selected from <i>American Cutting Edge</i>, <i>New Concept English</i>, <i>Folktale Reader</i>, and <i>ABC English</i>. The first two were for advanced classes, and the latter two were prepared for intermediate and beginner students.</p>			

Project Number	FCAPN31	Report Date	10 October 2010
Donor Amt/Value RMB	70,132	Local Amt/Value RMB	95,000
Total Amt (inc. in-kind) =165,132RMB		Number of Beneficiaries	1,021 Tibetans
Project Title	Water Project in Stong skor Tibetan Community		
Donor	The German Embassy		
Author	Friendship Charity Association		
Project Location	Stong skor Village, Mgo mang Township, Mang ra County, Mtsho lho Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, Mtsho sngon Province, PR China		
Final Report	www.Tibetanplateau.wikischolars.columbia.edu/Final+Report+for+Dongkor+Water+Project		
<p>Summary: This running water project provides ample clean water to 1,021 Tibetan residents (271 households: 621 males and 400 females) and 53,200 head of livestock (50,000 sheep and 3,200 yaks) in Stong skor Tibetan Community.</p> <p>With 74,640RMB contributed by the German Embassy on 27 May 2010 and 95,000RMB provided by the local community, FCA has successfully completed this running water project. The local Water Bureau and government offered technical support and advice throughout project implementation.</p> <p>Stong skor is a Tibetan herding community thirty kilometers south of Mgo mang Township. For generations, locals living on the grassland traveled seven to eight kilometers per round-trip from their households to the nearest water sources.</p> <p>Fetching water was the biggest problem in Stong skor Community. Before the project, locals carried plastic water containers and used donkeys to pull carts to fetch water using old tractor inner tubes as water containers or old oil barrels. During the rainy season, locals rarely utilized the carts. Instead, women had to carry water (10–25 kg), while men herded livestock. When there were storms, locals collected rainwater to drink. This project brought running water to Stong skor Community solving the aforementioned problems.</p>			

Project Number	FCAPN32	Report Date	10 October 2010
Donor Amt/Value RMB	79,000	Local Amt/Value RMB	77,400
Total Amt (inc. in-kind) = 156,400RMB		Number of Beneficiaries	1,047 Tibetans
Project Title	Irrigation Ditch and Reservoir Repair Project for Sde mang Tibetan Community		
Donor	The German Embassy		
Author	Friendship Charity Association		
Project Location	Sde mang Village, Bya mdo Township, Mang ra County, Mtsho lho Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, Mtsho shgon Province, PR China		
Final Report	http://tibetanplateau.wikischolars.columbia.edu/Final+Report+for+ Demang+Reservoir+Project		
<p>Summary: We are pleased to report on the satisfactory completion of the Irrigation Ditch and Reservoir Repair Project for Sde mang Tibetan Village. On 13 August 2010, 79,000RMB granted by the German Embassy, plus 77,400RMB provided by Sde mang Village, ensured the successful completion of this project.</p> <p>Local Tibetans cultivate wheat, barley, and rapeseed on 1,300 <i>mu</i> (86.71 hectares) of cropland, which is the main source of local income. A local earthen-reservoir and irrigation ditch were built twenty-six years ago and are of poor quality. The reservoir is small and cannot store the volume of water needed. A government-supported concrete irrigation ditch was severely damaged in 2008 due to flooding. Consequently, locals were unable to irrigate their crops and could only depend on summer rains. The result was poor harvests, which seriously impacted local income and food supply.</p> <p>With funds from the German Embassy, FCA bought 500 meters of metal tubes and 500 meters of concrete canal that allowed the transport of irrigation water from the river to the three-meter deep reservoir. Adding one meter of stone and concrete increased reservoir capacity. The reservoir walls were strengthened with stones and concrete. Consequently, the irrigation canal is safe and the reservoir holds adequate water. Local farmers no longer worry about having enough irrigation water for croplands and local income will increase.</p>			

PHOTOGRAPHS³³

Nangchukja's relatives in the photographs.

Name	Birth Year	Relationship
Bsod nams	1985	paternal uncle
Dpa' chen rgyal	1976	paternal uncle
Dpa' rtse 'bum	1967	father
G.yang mtsho skyid	1984	paternal uncle's wife
'Jam dbyangs skyabs	1982	cousin
Khams thar rgyal	1994	cousin
Klu rtse rgyal	2002	cousin
Lha sgron	1946	paternal grandmother
Lha sgron mtsho	1969	mother
Pad ma	1969	paternal uncle
Ra log	1979	maternal uncle
Rdo rje 'bum	1979	paternal uncle
Rdo rje dpal 'byor	1996	sister
Seng grogs	1945	paternal grandfather
Snying b+he	1982	paternal aunt
Sring go skyid	1925	paternal grandmother's sister

³³ All photos by Nangchukja.

BON SKOR COMMUNITY TEMPLE AND MA NI HALL

Figure One. Yul lha, the local deity, in 2008. It is located in the northern part of the Bon skor Community. Locals go to the temple to burn *bsang* and prostrate.

Figure Two. Yul lha Temple gate in 2008.

Figure Three. Local *ma Ni* hall gate in 2007, located in the center of Bon skor Community. Locals, especially elders, come here to turn the *ma Ni* wheels.

Figure Four. The local *ma Ni* hall door in 2007.









ORNAMENTS

Figure One. *Bzho bzung* worn by local women.

Figure Two. Local women often wear silver *blo bzur* and *bzho bzung* together.

Figure Three. Local women wear necklaces of coral, turquoise, and silver.

Figure Four. G.yang mtsho skyid at her wedding.









HOMELAND

- Figure One. View from 'Gram ring Hill, south of Bon skor Community.
- Figure Two. A *bsang khri* is a place of higher elevation where incense is burned (taken from atop Mount Mdo rtse).
- Figure Three. Bon skor Community, 2008 (taken from Hang shar, looking east).
- Figure Four. A *rgya ma* 'scale' used to weigh grain.
- Figure Five. Nangchukja's paternal grandparents' shrine.
- Figure Six. Most local households have an adobe stove for cooking and some have such stoves in their courtyards.
- Figure Seven. Prayer flags at Nangchukja's home.
- Figure Eight. A '*bum khang* filled with *tsha tsha* in Nangchukja's home courtyard.
- Figure Nine. Prayer wheel attached to a stovepipe in Nangchukja's home.
- Figure Ten. Goat-hair rope.
- Figure Eleven. Incense bags.









九平六具

五















LAB RTSE

Figure One. Burning incense at the *lab rtse*.

Figure Two. Local men burn *sang*.

Figure Three. Local men toss wind horses.

Figure Four. Oversized bow and arrow put on the *lab rtse*.

Figure Five. Locals prepare *rmu thag* to put on the *lab rtse*.











PEOPLE

Figure One. (From left) Rdo rje dpal 'byor, Seng grogs, Lha sgron, Dpa' rtse 'bum, Bsod nams, G.yang mtsho skyid, Snying b+he, Klu rtse rgyal, and Khams thar rgyal.

Figure Two. Sring go skyid.

Figure Three. (From left) Dpa' chen rgyal and Nangchukja.

Figure Four. Rdo rje dpal 'byor (third from left) and her classmates.

Figure Five. (From left) Rdo rje 'bum, Snying b+he, G.yang mtsho skyid, and Bsod nams.

Figure Six. (From left) Nangchukja, Lha sgron mtsho, Rdo rje dpal 'byor, and Dpa' rtse 'bum.

Figure Seven. A local bride and her brother on the way to the groom's home.

Figure Eight. 'Jam dbyangs skyabs sings a traditional song in 2007 in Bon skor Community.

Figure Nine. Dpa' rtse 'bum and Pad ma.

Figure Ten. Nangchukja, 2002.

Figure Eleven. Ra log.























NON-ENGLISH TERMS

A

A khu, ཨ་ཁུ།
A mdo, ཨ་མདོ། Anduo 安多
A myes rma chen, ཨ་མཉེས་རྣ་ཚེན།
A rig dge bshes, ཨ་རིག་དགེ་བཤེས།
A rig, ཨ་རིག།
A zla, ཨ་ལྷ།

B

Ba han da ba, བ་ཧན་ད་བ།
Ba yan thang, བ་ཡན་ཐང་།
Bal b+he, བལ་ལྷོ།
Ban shul, བན་ཤུལ།
Bang A ma, བང་ཨ་མ།
Bde skyid, བདེ་སྦྱིད།
Be len, བེ་ལེན།
Bkra shis, བག་ཤིས།
bkra shis bde legs, བག་ཤིས་བདེ་ལེགས།
Blo bzang, ལྷོ་བཟང་།
blo bzur, ལྷོ་བཟུར།
Bod bsdu, བོད་བསྐྱུ།
Bon, བོན།
Bon po rgya ldang, བོན་པོ་རྒྱ་ལྷང་།
Bon po rtse bo, བོན་པོ་རྩེ་བོ།
Bon po zhing kha, བོན་པོ་ཟིང་མ།
Bon skor, བོན་སྐོར།
Brag dkar, བྲག་དཀར། Xinghai 兴海
'Brug lha, འབྲུག་ལྷ།
bsang khri, བསང་མྲི།

Bsod nams, བསོད་ནམས།
 Bsod nams dbang mo, བསོད་ནམས་དབང་མོ།
 Bsod nams rgyal, བསོད་ནམས་རྒྱལ།
 Bsod nams skyid, བསོད་ནམས་སྐྱིད།
 Bstan kho, བསྟན་མོ།
 Bstan pa, བསྟན་པ།
 Btsun pa, བཙུན་པ།
 'bum khang, འབུམ་ཁང་།
 Bun khrang mtsho, འབུན་ཁང་མཚོ།
 Bun khrang rgyal, འབུན་ཁང་རྒྱལ།
 Bya dral nga dbang bsod rnam, བྱ་དྲལ་ང་དབང་བསོད་ནམས།
 Bya mdo, བྱ་མདོ།
 bzho bzung, བཞོ་བཟུང་།

C

Chab cha, ཆབ་ཆ།
 Chu hor, ཟུ་ཧོར།
 Chu khog, ཟུ་ཁོག།

D

Dba' ze'u, དབའ་ཟེའུ།
 dge bshes, དགེ་བཤེས།
 dge 'dun, དགེ་འདུན།
 Dge 'phel, དགེ་འཕེལ།
 Dgon thang, དགོན་ཐང་།
 Dmar khog, དམར་ཁོག།
 Dmar ra, དམར་ར།
 Dpa' chen rgyal, དཔའ་ཆེན་རྒྱལ།
 Dpa' ldan rgyal, དཔའ་ལྡན་རྒྱལ།
 Dpa' mo yag, དཔའ་མོ་ཡག།
 Dpa' rtse 'bum, དཔའ་རྩེ་འབུམ།
 Dpon tshang, དཔོན་ཐང་།

E

Er rgod, ཨེར་རྗོད།

G

Gdong ring, གདོང་རིང་།

G.yang 'bu skyabs, གཡང་འབྲུ་སྐྱབས།

G.yang mtsho skyid, གཡང་མཚོ་སྐྱིད།

g.yu, གཡུ།

Glang chen Mountain, གླང་ཚེན་རི།

Gnam 'bum, གནམ་འབྲུམ།

Gnam me, གནམ་མེ།

Gnam rtse, གནམ་རྩེ།

gor dmar, གོར་དམར།

'Gram ring, འགམ་རིང་།

gseb dri, གསེབ་དྲི།

Gur, གུར།

Gur che, གུར་ཚེ།

Gur gzhis, གུར་གཞིས།

H

Ha ra, ཧ་ར།

Han 汉, Rgya, རྒྱ།

Hang shar, ཧང་ཤར།

Har ha nag thes, ཧར་ཧ་ནག་ཐེས།

ho dung, ཧོ་དུང་།

Ho spyor, ཧོ་སྐྱོར།

Hod kha, ཧོད་ཀ།

Hor ho, ཧོར་ཧོ།

HuaQiao, Huaqiao 华桥

J

'Jam dbyangs skyabs, འཇམ་དབྱངས་སྐྱབས།

'Jigs med rgyal mtshan, འཇིགས་མེད་རྒྱལ་མཚན།

Jo pa, ཇོ་པ།

K

Ka tho, ཀ་ཐོ།

kha btags, ཁ་བདགས།

Khams thar rgyal, ཁམས་ཐར་རྒྱལ།

'Khar mo 'tsho, འཁར་མོ་མཚོ།

Khri ka, ཁྲི་ཀ། Guide 贵德

Khu khu cim, ཁུ་ཁུ་ཅིམ།

Khun de, ཁུན་དེ།

Khyung gzur sgang, འཁུང་གཟུར་སྒང་།

Khyung mgon, ཁུང་མགོན།

Klu rtse rgyal, ལུ་རེ་རྒྱལ།

Ko'u sde, ཀོ་འུ་སྡེ།

Ku b+he, ཀུ་བེ།

L

lab rtse, ལའབ་རེ།

lags, ལགས།

Lama Kho tshe, ལ་ལགས་ཁོ་ཚེ།

Lha mchog, ལྷ་མཚོག།

Lha mo tshe ring, ལྷ་མོ་ཚེ་རིང་།

Lha sgron, ལྷ་སྒོན།

Lha sgron mtsho, ལྷ་སྒོན་མཚོ།

Lo ba gong ma, ལོ་བ་གོང་མ།

Lo ba zhol ma, ལོ་བ་ཞོལ་མ།

Lo gsar, ལོ་གསར།

M

ma Ni, མ་ཉི།

Mang ra, མང་ར།

Mang rdzong, མང་རྫོང་། Guinan xian 贵南县

Mchog b+he, མཚོག་བེ།

Mchog ris, མཚོག་རིས།

Mdo rtse, མདོ་རྩེ།
Mgo log, མགོ་ལོག།
Mgo mang, མགོ་མང་། Guomaying 过马营
Mgo skor, མགོ་སྐོར།
Mo hor, མོ་ཧོར།
Mtsho byang, མཚོ་བྱང་། Hebei 河北
Mtsho lho, མཚོ་ལྷོ། Hainan 海南
Mtsho sngon, མཚོ་སྔོན། Qinghai 青海

N

Nangchuk, ལྷིང་ལྷགས། snying lcags
Nangchukja, ལྷིང་ལྷགས་རྒྱལ། snying lcags rgyal
Nyag ga, ཉག་ག།
Nyin phyug, ཉིན་ཕུག། Ningxiu 宁秀

O

O rgyan, ཨོ་རྒྱལ།
oM ma Ni pad+me hUM, ཨོ་མ་ཉི་བརྗེ་ཧྲཱི་

P

Pad ma, པད་མ།
Pad ma rgyal, པད་མ་རྒྱལ།
phye, ཕྱེ།
Po ta la, པོ་ཏ་ལ།

R

Ra kho, ར་ཁོ།
Ra log, ར་ལོག།
Ra rgya, ར་རྒྱ།
Rab rgan, རབ་རྒན།
Rdo rje, རོ་རྗེ།
Rdo rje 'bum, རོ་རྗེ་འབུམ།
Rdo rje dpal 'byor, རོ་རྗེ་དཔལ་འབྱོར།
Rdo rje rgyal, རོ་རྗེ་རྒྱལ།
Rgod ma thang, རོ་ད་མ་ཐང་།

rgya ma, རྒྱ་མ།
 Rgya mo skyid, རྒྱ་མོ་སྐྱེད།
 Rgya mtsho, རྒྱ་མཚོ།
 Rgya nur, རྒྱ་ལུར།
 Rgya phyug, རྒྱ་ཕུག།
 Rgya ris, རྒྱ་རིལ།
 Rgyal rigs thar, རྒྱལ་རིགས་ཐར།
 Rgyom, རྒྱལ།
 Rgyud 'go, རྒྱུད་འགོ།
 Rma lho, མ་ལྷོ། Huangnan 黄南
 RMB, renminbi 人民币
 rmu thag, རྒྱ་ཐག།
 Rong bo, རོང་བོ།
 Rta mgrin, རྟ་མགོན།
 Rta pu mtsho, རྟ་ཕུ་མཚོ།
 rtsam pa, རུས་པ།
 Rtse khog, རྩེ་ཁོག།
 Rtse mda', རྩེ་མདའ།

S

sangs gdung, སངས་གདུང་།
 Sangs pa, སངས་པ།
 Sangs rgyas, སངས་རྒྱལ།
 Sde mang, སྡེ་མང་།
 Sdong ra, སྡོང་ར།
 Seng grogs, སེང་གྲོགས།
 Sgrol ma, སྐྱོལ་མ།
 Shanghai 上海
 Shes rig nor gling, ཤེས་རིག་ནོར་གླིང་།
 Shing skor, ཤིང་སྐོར།
 skag bcings, སྐག་བཅིངས།
 Skar ma thang, སྐར་མ་ཐང་།

Ske ba སྐེ་བ།
 Skya shing, ལྷོ་ཤིང་།
 Smad pa'i gshung pa, མཛད་པའི་གཤུང་པ།
 Smar skams, མཛར་སྐམས།
 Snying b+he, སྟིང་རྗེ།
 Snying dkar, སྟིང་དཀར།
 Sog po mda' tshan bdun, སོག་པོ་མདའ་མཚན་བདུན།
 Spyan ras gzigs, ལྷན་རས་གཟིགས།
 Spyin 'dul, ལྷན་འདུལ།
 Sring go skyid, སྤོང་གོ་སྦྱིང།
 Stong che, སྟོང་ཚེ།
 Stong skor, སྟོང་སྐོར།; Huangyuan 湟源
 Sum mdo, ལུ་མ་མདོ།

T

Te'u mgo gser gzhas Mountain, ཏེ་འུ་མགོ་གསེར་གཞམ།
 Tha ba, ཐ་བ།
 thang ga, ཐང་ག།
 Thar shul, ཐར་ཤུལ།
 Thu ro, ཐུ་རོ།
 Thu zhug ge, ཐུ་ཞུག་གེ།
 Thun 'dzi, ཐུན་འདྲི།
 Tsha nag, ཐཤ་ནག Chanahai 查纳亥
 Tshal rnga, ཐཤ་རྩ། Chanai 查乃
 Tshal rnga 'gag, ཐཤ་རྩ་འགག། Longyangxia 龙羊峡
 tsha tsha, ཐཤ་ཐཤ།
 Tshe b+he, ཐཤེ་རྗེ།
 Tshe brtan rgyal, ཐཤེ་བརྟན་རྒྱལ།
 Tshe brtan, ཐཤེ་བརྟན།
 Tshe dpa' rgyal, ཐཤེ་དཔའ་རྒྱལ།
 Tshe log, ཐཤེ་ལོག།
 Tshe ring rdo rje, ཐཤེ་རིང་རྩ་རྗེ།

Tshe ring rgyal, ཚེ་རིང་རྒྱལ།
Tshe ring skyabs, ཚེ་རིང་སྐྱབས།

X

Xining, Zi ling, ཟླ་ལིང་། 西宁

W

Wang 王

Y

Ya..., ཡ། ya

Ya...lags, ཡ་ལགས།

Yangjia zhai 杨家寨

Yon tan, ཡོན་ཏན།

yuan, རྫོང་། yuan 元

Yul lha, ཡུལ་ལྷ།

Yul shul 玉树, ཡུལ་ཤུལ།

Z

Zha ra, ཇ་ར།

Zhang Hangui, 张汉圭

Zhong ba, རྫོང་བ།

Zi ling, ཟླ་ལིང་། Xining 西宁

zo, ཟོ།

Zog ga de'i kha, ཟོག་ག་དེའི་ཁ།

Zon thar rgyal, ཟོན་ཐར་རྒྱལ།

APPENDIX
MONGOLIAN TOPONYMS

Juha Janhunen

- Ba han da ba: Mo. Ba han = likely бага 'small' (Lessing: bagh-e) + dabaa 'mountain pass' (Lessing: dabagh-a(n)); in Tib. one would normally expect *daban from Oirat dabaan, while бага should yield baha and not bahan; possibly, therefore, there was an irregular metathesis in the Tib. place name: *baha-daban > bahan daba
- Er rgod = likely Mongolian *ergi* > *erge* > *ereg* 'steep bank, steep precipice of slope' (Lessing). The dative form is *erge-d* 'on the slope', which may be the direct origin of Tibetan /er rgod/, supposing that the final d was pronounced.
- Ha ra = Mo. xara 'black' (Lessing: xar-a); less likely = xaraa 'sight, vision', based on xara- 'to watch'; in the latter case, one would expect Tib. haran, from Oirat xaraan, but see below sub bahan daba
- Hang shar = Mo. xangshaar 'bridge of the nose' (Lessing: xangsijar), perhaps used as a descriptive topographic term
- Har ha nag thes = Mo. xaragana[g]tu 'place where Caragana grows' [also a place name] (Lessing: xaraghanatu), based on xaragana '*Caragana arborescens*' [a plant], with -tu > Tib. thes = possessive adjective derivative suffix
- Hor ho = perhaps Mo. gorxo / gorxi ~ xor(o)xon 'small river' (Lessing: ghorcki, xoruxun); or xoroxoi 'worms, insects' (Lessing: xoruxai); or also, hor = Tib. hor = reference to the Mongols
- Khu khu cim: khu khu = Mo. kuku ~ kökö 'blue' (Lessing: köke) + possibly Mo. jim 'trace, trail' or 'turf' (perhaps two homonymic words, both rare) (Lessing: zim)
- Khun de = Mo. köndei ~ köndüi > modern xöndii 'valley, gorge, cavity'

Mo hor = possibly Mo. muxur 'blunt, hornless' (Lessing: muxur)

Rgya nur = the latter part nur = Mo. nuur 'lake' (Lessing: naghur), while the first part might be Tib. rgya (many meanings), or also shortened from Mo. jaaxan 'small, little'; there are also other possible Mongolian identifications for rgya.