

A Tewo Tibetan Childhood

Rdo rje tshe brtan རྡོ་རྗེ་འཇམ་བུ་ནུབ་པ།

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SUMMARY: Rdo rje tshe brtan (b. 1986) describes his childhood in Dredze Village, Yiwa Township, Tewo County, Gannan Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, Gansu Province, China, as well as being a student in Xining City, Qinghai Province. Topics covered include his family, childhood injuries and illnesses, education, Terang (malicious household deities), mountain deities and associated rituals and sacrifices, death, conflict with other locals, collecting local plants, a birth in the village, stealing fruit, a wedding, plowing, a visit to a hot spring, a lost yak, slaughtering pigs, and government confiscation of fields. Photos provide additional detail.

FRONT COVER: Villagers en route to a *ladze* celebration in Tewo County on 1 May 2012 (Gonbo Jay).

BACK COVER: Rdo rje tshe brtan, 9 September 2012 (Lhamo Tsering).

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Tewo County, Gannan Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, Gansu Province, PR China.¹

¹ An altered version of:
[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Location_of_T%C3%A4wo_within_Gansu_\(China\).png#file](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Location_of_T%C3%A4wo_within_Gansu_(China).png#file), accessed 14 February 2012.

CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS <3>

MAP<4>

CONTENTS <5>

INTRODUCTION <6>

1: MY FAMILY <9>

2: A SCAR <12>

3: GREEN PEPPERS MAKE ME CRY <15>

4: THE VILLAGE SCHOOL <22>

5: A THREE-WHEELED CAR <30>

6: CONSTIPATED <33>

7: TERANG <36>

8: SACRIFICES TO MOUNTAIN DEITIES <40>

9: PRIMARY BOARDING SCHOOL <48>

10: DEATH <54>

11: CIRCUMAMBULATING A DIVINE MOUNTAIN <65>

12: ANTLERS <70>

13: A BAD COLD <73>

14: FIGHTING <76>

15: GRADUATION <79>

16: STEALING APPLES <83>

17: BIRTHDAY <87>

18: TEWO TIBETAN MIDDLE SCHOOL <90>

19: A WEDDING PARTY <93>

20: PLOWING <97>

21: CHURNING MILK <100>

22: TRAGEDY <103>

23: A HOT SPRING <106>

24: THE GANLHO NORMAL SCHOOL <109>

25: A LOST YAK <112>

26: GREEN ENVIRONMENT <115>

27: SLAUGHTERING PIGS <117>

28: CONCLUSION <120>

PHOTOGRAPHS <121>

NON-ENGLISH TERMS <150>

INTRODUCTION

I am from Dredze Village, Yiwa Township, Tewa County, Gannan Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, Gansu Province, China. Mother cannot remember the exact date when I entered this world and gave my first feeble cry, other than that the year was 1986. I came out from under her Tibetan robe one evening after a day of harvesting. Cousin later told me that during his first night in Lhasa after a long trek on foot, he dreamed of three white stupas appearing auspiciously in front of our family shrine, convincing him that Mother had given birth to a son. The next morning he rose very early, went to the Jokang,² and prayed that I would have a successful life.

...

Summer vacation began and all the students went home, except for the Grade Two senior middle school classes because we were required to take a provincial-level Chinese language exam. I happened to meet my English teacher in the schoolyard at noon who said, "Your class is lucky. A teacher will come to select students from your class to study English in Ziling next term. It's a special opportunity."

Later that day, the monitor called me from outside the dormitory to come to our classroom for a short meeting. I realized that we were going to choose students for the English Training Program (ETP) at Qinghai Normal University. I hurried to the classroom, hoping to be chosen. The Tibetan Department leader and our head teacher stood near the windows as a stranger stood on the

² Tibetans believe this is the most important and sacred temple in Tibet. The temple was built for King Songtsan Gampo's (569–649?/ 605–649?) Chinese and Nepalese brides, who are said to have brought important deity images from China and Nepal and placed them here.

teacher's platform introducing the ETP. Afterwards, my classmates chose eight students by writing their names on pieces of paper and giving them to the stranger. Fortunately, I was selected. Next, the stranger gave the eight finalists a Chinese text entitled 'The Monkey and the Elephant'³ to translate from Chinese to Tibetan in ten minutes. He said he would select the three students who did the best translations. After the translation exercise, we each had an oral exam. Finally, the department leader called me and two other students and gave us each a red paper that said we had been chosen to study English in Ziling.

I then began a new, happy, and challenging life, studying English and other subjects at Qinghai Normal University. My classmates were from Sichuan, Gansu, Yunnan, and Qinghai provinces and the Tibet Autonomous Region. Two years later, in March 2007, I enrolled in a two-year college program at the same university. Throughout, I pushed myself to try new things and to be different from my village elders who seem so powerless in today's world. I also knew that if I really cared about those who loved and encouraged me, I had to study very hard.

Learning English opened my mind and broadened my worldview. I see things differently now than I did before. I hope my future will be as glorious as those shimmering white stupas my cousin dreamed of years ago. I believe that if I struggle against obstacles, I will never be defeated.

...

Elders told me the Jone Bonbo ruled Tewa and Jone counties until the Red Army arrived. At that time, more than 500 farming

³ A story with a well-known Tibetan motif derived from the Jataka tales of the Buddha's former lives. It involves an elephant, monkey, rabbit, and bird and teaches the value of peaceful, harmonious co-existence.

households had to pay heavy taxes - five or six large leather bags of grain, regardless of good harvest or bad. The tax official, after collecting the grain tax, then selected ten to fifteen men from each village to transport the grain tax to the Jone Bonbo with mules, horses, and yaks. It took them three days through dense forests and high mountains to travel from Tewo to the Jone County Town. They encountered dangerous wild animals and thieves on the way. The Jone Bonbo greeted them warmly when they arrived, offered them a feast, and gave them receipts for the taxes. Then they returned home.

My village was not required to pay taxes in the same way because The Jone Bonbo had killed thousands of Muslims in Kache. In time, the Chinese Government noticed and ordered the Jone Bonbo to be imprisoned. However, a hero from my village who looked like the Jone Bonbo was sent to jail in his place. My village was proud of him, but sad that he never returned. Thus my village paid taxes to this hero's family and, even today, villagers continue to show respect to his descendants.

When I was a little child, Young Uncle told me our village was called Grain Village. Formerly, all the local people worked together on farmland where they plowed thousands of *mu*;⁴ planted beans, wheat, barley, rapeseed, and garden peas; harvested the crops together; and then stored the harvested grain in my village in granaries surrounded by thick walls of stones and earth. My village protected the grain, thus the name Grain Village.

⁴ Fifteen *mu* equals one hectare.

1

MY FAMILY

Mother (Jeeshi Tso) was born in 1942. Her parents passed away, Mother said, because of poor medical care, impoverished living conditions, bad roads, and because the county hospital was so far away. Her mother was sick for a long time and then died when Mother was a young child in a mountain village called Shaza, which is where my aunt's family lives today. A neighbor shot and killed mother's father while he was working on the roof of a wood house, the result of conflict over water rights. Mother didn't give more detailed information and I didn't ask.

Cousin (Padba Jay) is Mother's elder sister's son, and was born in 1960. His mother died when he was nine. I don't know anything about his father because Mother and Young Uncle never told me. Mother said that after villagers dug potatoes, she went back and searched and dug in the potato fields for a long time, found one or two potatoes, returned home, boiled them, and fed Cousin. Mother raised him and, for this reason, I call him 'Brother'. After Cousin grew up, my family divided property and farmland. He then married and established his own household. Though Cousin and I live in different homes in Dredze Village, Cousin helps my family when we need it.

Elder Uncle (Wande Tar) is Mother's older brother, and was born in 1934. He passed away from an incurable intestinal illness when I was studying in primary school. He herded livestock and pigs on the summer pasture during the summer and fall. He carried me on

his back around the village, circling the village *mani stone* pile⁵ when he had time. He herded village livestock in the mountains and when he returned, he went to each household to tell the villagers where their livestock were. Everyone loved him, and gave him food when he was sick. Many came and offered money and chanted *mani* at his funeral.

Young Uncle (Taba) is Mother's younger brother. He was born in 1938 and was my first Tibetan teacher before I attended our village's primary school. He was a knowledgeable monk and a leader in the local monastery. During the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976), he was forced to become a layman to support my family, among other reasons. He lives at home and helps Mother and our family. He never married. I spent my childhood with him and learned a lot from his many life experiences.

Elder Sister (Dorjee Man) is Mother's elder daughter, and was born in 1977. She married a man in another township when I was a little child. Her father is from a mountain village in my community. I have little memory about her wedding other than villagers and relatives kissing her cheeks when she left for her husband's home. I was overjoyed and rushed to her whenever she returned home, because she brought candies and drinks for me.

Young Sister (Lama Tso) is Mother's younger daughter, and was born in 1980. She is an unmarried adult in my village. I don't know who her father is, and I don't know who my father is. Because of my family's poor condition, my family decided I should attend school. Lama Tso stopped her education when she was in grade three, and stayed at home to work in the fields. She also leaves the village to do construction work to support my education and family. I love her

⁵ *oM ma Ni pad+me hUM* is a common six syllable mantra associated with Avalokiteshvara, the Bodhisattva of Compassion. This mantra is carved into rocks and then placed in piles that people walk around as part of their religious practice.

most in my family, though I do not forget that she heartlessly beat me several times when I was little boy.

2

A SCAR

You can't hit a target when you hate it. *local proverb*

I was four years old, playing aimlessly in the courtyard one beautiful summer day. Hardworking bees flew busily in our garden, collecting whatever bees collect from five-colored flowers blooming and waving their heads, as if welcoming all sentient beings to their world. A warm breeze that was both energizing and relaxing blew gently across the garden. Village herders drove livestock past the garden, punctuating the calm with the melodious tinkling of bells.

Mother called, "Dordor, bring me the stool hanging by the pigsty. I need it for milking," while pulling a calf from its mother to keep it from drinking all the milk. After tying the calf, she sat on a stool by the *zomo*,⁶ held a milk-pail between her legs, rubbed the teats with fresh butter, and proceeded to milk it. Elder Sister milked when she lived at home, but after marrying and moving into her husband's home in another township, Mother was left to milk the *zomo* and cows.

"OK," I replied rushing to get the stool. I handed it to her, and watched as she milked skillfully into the pail while the hungry calf jerked at its restraining rope with all its might, trying to reach its mother's udder.

Elder Uncle tended pigs on the village pasture and, when he had time, went to the local mountain pasture and herded yaks, mules, and horses. Mother said that ever since my family had moved to this

⁶ A yak-cow hybrid prized for its milk production.

farming village, Elder Uncle's only duty had been tending livestock at home and on the mountains.

"Move! Otherwise she'll kick you! She's angry and doesn't want to give much milk today!" Mother shouted because I was standing too close to the *zomo*.

"OK, but she's gentle with me. I'm sure she won't kick. Sometimes I ride on her back when I herd with Elder Uncle," I said confidently.

"My boy, be obedient and get behind me," she said sternly. I obeyed and slowly moved behind her. Patiently she continued to milk the old colored cow. Mother said with a warm smile, "This cow is like a Xinjiang cow,⁷ and gives more milk than the others."

Elder Uncle banged on the gate, shouting "Open the door! The pigs won't follow my beans. It's difficult for me to drive them to the pigsty this afternoon because of the rain. Open the door wide!" and then he ran back for the straggling pigs.

"Dordor, go open the door and don't make any noise as the pigs enter," Mother ordered.

"OK," I said, rushing there, unlocking the door, swinging it open, then standing behind it and holding it open. A neighbor's tractor had run into the gate, damaging it some days earlier.

Elder Uncle was giving beans to the lead pig. All the others followed it into the courtyard like students following their teacher to a picnic on the grassland. I ran to the pigsty, opening the door as Elder Uncle had instructed, but I frightened the pigs when I tried to drive them into the pigsty with a long bamboo pole.

Elder Uncle was furious with the pigs. He beat the head of one pig and then threw a hoe at the pigs, but missed. As a proverb goes, "You can't hit a target when you hate it." Indeed, the hoe sprang up

⁷ It has a large udder and is known for its milk production.

off the ground and hit my left eye, knocking me to the ground. I saw rainbow colors, then nothing more.

I woke up several times that night, surrounded by my concerned family, especially sorrowful Elder Uncle. Mother stayed up all night by my bed, comforting me every time I awakened.

Elder Uncle came to my bed early next morning and asked, "How badly is your eye hurt? I don't know what to say. I feel useless. I couldn't sleep last night thinking about your injury." He thought that the hoe had permanently damaged my eye, but my vision was fine. One side of my face hurt, but I pretended that I felt nothing because I knew Mother would scold him if I complained.

"My eye is fine. The hoe hurt my cheek a little," I said softly, kissing his forehead. "I'm really OK. Don't be sad, or I'll be uncomfortable." Then I stood and jumped several times on the bed energetically to prove how good I felt, though I was still weak and dizzy.

"If it just hit your face, you'll recover soon," Mother said, and then went to the kitchen to cook breakfast. Her eyes were red from a sleepless night, spent caring for me. A small scar still remains on my face. I remember Elder Uncle's head bent in front of my bed every time I see that scar.

3

GREEN PEPPERS MAKE ME CRY

I was asleep one day in late autumn as the golden sun gradually crested the top of the mountains in the east. Magnificent green mountains stretched high above each side of the village, like dragons crouched on the horizons. A gentle stream meandered past the village, flowing into White Dragon River. Locals said this is a medicinal stream flowing from distant Dawa Mountain. The legend of Dawa Mountain is told differently in each village but, in my village, Dawa is a great deity, protecting all people and livestock from harm and illness, just as though the village were tucked in the sleeve of his robe. He is a very great deity and very kind to locals.

I was awakened suddenly from a deep sleep on the *dzeto*⁸ by two yowling cats violently fighting on the second story of my home. I was frightened and snuggled deeper into my wool quilt, listening. Thinking there was no one around and hearing no one, I cried louder and louder.

"Don't cry, my son. I'm here," Young Uncle said. He favored me because I was the youngest child and only boy in my family. I watched Young Uncle from under my quilt as he took a stick among the firewood from behind the door, rushed to the second story, drove the cats away, and shouted, "Devils! How dare you come here with your ominous yowls! I'll kill you all!" He came back flushed with anger, washed his hands, and quickly made a butter lamp. Putting it

⁸ A raised, earthen platform. The front is an adobe stove used for cooking. Hot air and smoke are drawn through the platform and out the back of the house. Family members sleep here because it is very warm. Important relatives and guests are also entertained and sleep here when they visit.

in front of the shrine and clasping his palms together, he touched his forehead, mouth, and chest three times while chanting the Six Sacred Syllables.⁹

I casually rubbed my face with my hands, turning my back to the brilliant sun shining through the windows. "Get dressed. I'll help if you need it," Young Uncle called.

"Where's Mother? I want to get up. Can you bring my clothes?" I asked, frustrated that I didn't see my clothes anywhere near me.

"Your clothes are under your pillow. Put them on before your mother comes or she'll be angry," he said. He wanted me to do things by myself. He chopped firewood in the courtyard, returned, and kindled a fire in the stove with the wood he had chopped.

"Maybe he's going to cook breakfast," I thought. "Please help me, Young Uncle," I pleaded. I had tried several times to put my clothes on, but it was difficult, especially my woolen shoes. He told me to sit on the edge of the *dzeto*, helped me dress, fetched a basin of warm water and my towel, washed my face, and rubbed a little fresh butter on my face.

"I want some milk tea," I said after I finished washing. I hurried into the dining room where Young Uncle had prepared a delicious breakfast.

"Eat. Make sure your little tummy is full," he said kindly.

"Did Mother eat breakfast this morning?" I asked curiously.

"No. She went to the county town very early this morning. She promised to buy a box of biscuits and new summer shoes for you," he said.

I was excited to hear that and quickly finished my breakfast. Next, Young Uncle and I went into the courtyard to enjoy the sunshine. Young Uncle sat by me on a small square of sheepskin and

⁹ *oM ma Ni pad+me hUM.*

said, "Come sit on my lap. I saw you scratching your head. Maybe I can find some lice." His hands gently smoothed my hair from back to front, picking one louse after another. Sometimes he killed the lice between his teeth, which made a popping sound. Sometimes he killed the lice between his thumbnails, which sounded even louder than between his teeth.

"Go sit in the sunshine now. It's good for your health. Old people say children should get sunshine on their bodies for fifteen or twenty minutes every day," he said, when he finished lice-hunting.

"Young Uncle, what time will Mother return?" I asked impatiently, as I walked around the courtyard, pulling a small car made by my gentle neighbor, Gonboo Jay, because he liked me. Of course, I loved him, because he was handsome, honest, and especially kind to poor children.

"Be patient, my boy," he said, as he opened his sheepskin sewing bag and began mending some tattered clothes. He often looked after me when Mother was absent, chanting scriptures, and teaching me the Tibetan alphabet.

"Ha! Mother will buy me some candy and new shoes," I said happily. I filled my car with dry dirt and circled the courtyard. I don't know how much time passed as I played with my little car. It was a sunny day with not a single cloud in the sky, making everyone relaxed and happy.

"Come here, my boy, and put these on your feet. Your mother will return early this afternoon. Sit by me. I have a question for you: Who do you love more, your mother or me?" he said, pointing his forefinger at his forehead. He had finished mending my socks and stood stretching his hands in the air and yawning.

"I love Mother with all my heart, because she buys things for me, but you don't," I said.

"I'll buy you a new car when I go to the Mani Ritual¹⁰ at Lhamo Monastery,"¹¹ he said.

"Young Uncle, I love you, too," I said, as soon as he promised that.

"I hope you will be a great man when you grow up, love me all the time, take care of the family as I wish, because, when our family first came here..." he started, and then swallowed the rest of his words. I felt sure he had important things to tell me when I was older. Mother said my family lived in a mountain village where my elder aunt married and had five children. My family had many difficulties when they moved to Dredze Village where I was born. The local village helped us move our furniture from the mountain village to Dredze Village at night, because policies were harsh after the Red Army came. Other than that, I didn't know what had happened to my family. I didn't ask Mother, and she and Young Uncle didn't tell me.

Young Uncle stood and said, "Put these on now. You wore boots without socks this morning. Don't run outside. I'll be back shortly." He put the socks beside me and went to the kitchen to fetch a basin of cool water.

"Did you put the socks on?" he asked when he returned.

"No, I can't. Please help me," I said, nearly bursting into tears because, as usual, it was difficult for me to deal with my socks and wool boots, and I couldn't untie my bootlaces. He helped me untie the laces and put the socks on.

"That should keep your feet warm until bedtime," he said.

I could do only two things for my family by myself - open the gate for the livestock to enter and drive away the neighbors' pigs

¹⁰ A seven-day religious ritual. Participants are forbidden to drink alcohol, eat meat and garlic, and have sex.

¹¹ A large Buddhist monastery located in Zorgay County, Ngawa Prefecture, Sichuan Province, near Machu, Tewo, and Luchu counties in Ganlho Prefecture, Gansu Province.

when they entered our pig sty to eat leftover food or sleep lazily. Sometimes I entertained myself by riding on their backs and watching them fight each other.

I wore a small jacket that my sister had bought for me the previous New Year holiday. I wore it every day in summer, because my friends said it was beautiful and fashionable. I wore it the entire summer without washing it. I also wore a sacred amulet a local lama gave me when I was ill.

"Come hold my hand! We'll go wait for your mother at the village bridge," Young Uncle said warmly.

"OK," I replied, hurrying to catch up with him. He closed the courtyard gate and made sure it was locked.

Surrounding the village are dense forests where we secretly cut trees when we need wood for buildings. Local homes are made of wood, and their beautifully decorated gates are magnificent, displaying the family's wealth. Some are carved with the Eight Auspicious Symbols¹² and painted brilliant colors.

I pulled my wood car with one hand and held Young Uncle's robe sleeve with the other. I saw other children jumping rope and chasing each other. My favorite game was 'Wolf-and-Sheep'. It was very hard for girls to catch boys, and sometimes they never caught boys during the game. My family didn't let me join, because Mother said that I was wilder than other children, and she worried that I would injure other children by being too rough.

Many old people were circumambulating the *mani*-stone pile by the bridge, chanting the scripture of the Three Jewels.¹³ Some fingered prayer beads as they chanted, others spun prayer wheels.

¹² The Eight Auspicious Symbols consist of a protection parasol, a pair of gold fish, a treasure vase, a lotus, a white conch shell, a victory banner, an endless knot, and the gold wheel of the dharma.

¹³ The Three Jewels are the Buddha, the Dharma (the Buddha's teachings), and the Sangha (the monastic community). This particular scripture is chanted in the early morning and late afternoon by locals.

Young Uncle and I circled the *mani*-stone pile, waiting impatiently for Mother. Trucks zoomed by on the road, but none stopped by the village bridge. As I was wondering what had kept Mother busy in town for such a long time, a large truck stopped at the bridge. Mother got off and began taking what she had purchased in the county town from the truck. I shouted, "Mother is getting off the truck!" jumping up and down, pointing to where she was.

"Your mother needs help. Let's go," Young Uncle said, as he headed for the truck, with me running after him as fast as I could.

"What did you buy for me, Mother?" I demanded. Mother handed me a pair of new shoes. Back at home a few minutes later, Mother showed Young Uncle, Elder Uncle, Young Sister, and Elder Sister what she had bought. Young Uncle helped me put on my new shoes. Mother had also bought flour and peppers. Young Uncle put the peppers on a plate on the table.

I played with my toys on the *dzeto* while Mother made supper, and Young Uncle went outside to feed the livestock. Elder Sister, Young Sister, and Elder Uncle were busy with various chores as I happily pushed a toy car back and forth on the table until it bumped the plate of peppers. I picked one up and put it in my mouth, which burned as soon as I bit into it. My face turned hot. I rubbed my face trying to make it cooler, but this only made things worse. My face turned red as an apple, and I could not open my eyes. When I rubbed them, the pain was like needles stabbing into my eyes. I yelled to Mother and Young Uncle to help, while covering my eyes with my hands, crying, and kicking my feet in the air.

"What happened to you, baby?" Mother said, rushing over and embracing me, rubbing my face with a wet towel.

I squalled that I didn't know what had happened, but Mother quickly understood when she saw the half-eaten pepper.

"He bit a pepper and now his face is red," Mother explained.

"What shall we do?" Elder Sister asked as Mother, Young Sister, Elder Uncle, and Young Uncle sat by the *dzeto* looking at me with worried, sad faces.

"I have some nectar and a sacred cloth given by a great lama at Lhamo Monastery last year," Young Uncle said, moving quickly to the shrine. He brought it back, carefully rubbed it on my face, and then placed the sacred cloth underneath me, which seemed to ease the pain.

"Take him out into the courtyard and let the wind blow on his face," Mother said, putting me on Young Uncle's back and tying me tight with his sash. It was now night, and the moon was shining high in the sky as if it were trying to comfort me. The stars shone brilliantly as I squinted at the tranquil sky, and eventually fell asleep on Young Uncle's back.

The next morning, I awoke to the smell of *sung*¹⁴ burning on the altar. Mother was chanting the scripture of the Three Jewels. She opened her leather wallet, counted her money, and said, "I will take you to the county town to see the doctor about your swollen face."

I was exhausted and tasted pepper when I licked my lips.

¹⁴ Barley flour, wheat, beans, rice, milk, juniper leaves, and pieces of conifer wood burned as an offering.

4

THE VILLAGE SCHOOL

It was customary for boys to stay at home and support the family. It was shameful if no sons stayed at home and cared for their parents. I was the only son in my home, and I believed that it was my karma to live with my family. When I was two, Mother, Young Uncle, and Elder Uncle agreed that Elder Sister should marry and live with her husband in his village. "It's fine because we have a son who will support us in the future," Mother said.

...

"Dordor, it's time to get up and eat breakfast," called Young Uncle from the kitchen.

"OK," I replied, pulling on my worn clothes.

"Dordor, look at your boots. You have them on the wrong feet. Change them right now," Mother said, laughing as she filled our bowls with black tea. I sat on the ground, switched my boots, and tied my bootlaces again.

"Sit here by me, my boy, and show me your handsome face," Young Uncle said, putting a small square of sheepskin on the ground for me to sit on.

"Do you want to learn more Tibetan this morning? You're learning quickly these days. I'm happy you're going with your mother to enroll in the village school today," Young Uncle said with a proud smile. When I was four, he had begun teaching me the Tibetan alphabet and to write and read common Tibetan words.

I was happy at the thought of joining other students from our village at school, where I could play and make new friends. I jumped

joyously, thinking, "I'll be as free as a mouse that has escaped a cat. No longer will I have to stay at home with Young Uncle." I really didn't know what students did at school. I then stopped jumping, squinted at Young Uncle, and said, "This morning I don't want to learn Tibetan. Instead, tell me what it means to go to school."

"School is where you learn to read and write with children your age, and where you obtain knowledge from teachers and books. This will open your mind, and you will become intelligent," Young Uncle explained.

"What is knowledge?" I asked.

"Knowledge is something you learn in school that stays in your mind like a jewel that money cannot buy and a thief cannot steal," Young Uncle explained, sipping tea from his cup.

"Is it difficult to get?" I asked.

"Yes, knowledge is like a mountain. You walk to the mountaintop step by step, eventually reaching the top. But you need patience, energy, and determination to achieve it," Young Uncle said. I suddenly pictured Tiger Mountain, a huge mountain near my home, in my mind. In summer, visitors spend half a day climbing it to relax and take pictures.

"What is the purpose of education?" I persisted, leaning against Mother.

"Education will help you get a job and have a splendid life in the future. You can use your knowledge to bring prestige to our family reputation and ..." he paused, sadly looking at the ground.

"And what?" I demanded.

"You are too young to understand. You will experience these things when you are older," Young Uncle said thoughtfully, hiding something from me.

"OK, I understand," I replied and nodded. I wanted to attend school with other village children and learn Tibetan and arithmetic.

Young Uncle never told me his life story, and why he became a layman. Mother only told me he had been a great monk in the local monastery before the Cultural Revolution. He was knowledgeable and chanted scriptures for poor families without payment. He was the local monastery abbot and was extremely busy. He sat on a high seat at the front of the chanting hall and led all the monks in chanting scriptures as local people worshipped. He had painted religious images. Many of his works hung from the ceiling of the chanting hall. He also made beautiful *dorma*¹⁵ with other monks. Since no lamas maintained the monastery, he depended on local people and his own effort. The other monks greatly respected him. The local people also respected him for his knowledge of scriptures and his blessings at monastery religious activities. He taught many students from local communities in the monastery.

During the Cultural Revolution he had tried to stop men from smashing the Buddha images, beating monks, and burning the monastery, but it was all in vain. As the years passed, he met many more difficulties, and finally he became a layman. Grandmother had ten children living in poverty, without adequate food and clothes. Consequently, Young Uncle returned home and organized the family to work in mountain fields so that they could survive during that terrible time.

"Now, we need to go to the village school and register. I told the head teacher that you would attend kindergarten," Mother said.

"OK, but what is kindergarten?" I said, pulling my wood car behind me as we walked out past the shadow of the courtyard wall.

"This class teaches the Tibetan alphabet and arithmetic to new students," Mother said.

"Mother, I already learned Tibetan at home from Young Uncle.

¹⁵ Made by mixing barley flour and water and creating images of different sizes and shapes. They are painted different colors and offered to ghosts and devils.

I don't need to attend kindergarten to learn Tibetan," I said.

"You don't know enough Tibetan to attend grade one," she said.

"All right," I said.

"Dordor, remember to wear your hat. When you are outside, the weather is hot and the sun will burn your skin," she said.

"OK," I replied, rushing back to my bedroom to get my hat from under my pillow.

"Hold my sleeve and don't run away," Mother said, closing the gate behind us.

"I'll follow you and be a good boy if you'll cancel my Tibetan classes at home with Young Uncle," I pleaded.

"Why?" she said.

"Because I'll learn Tibetan at school soon, so ..." I said and stopped. I didn't want to make Mother angry. She spanked me when she was in a bad mood.

There were many new students with their parents from both the mountain villages and the local village gathered at the school when we arrived. Some were called to the head teacher's office, where new students were registering. They were all wearing new clothes and new shoes, and carrying new schoolbags. I was embarrassed that my clothes were not new. As I glanced at the other new students, frustration built inside me until I nearly burst into tears. I knew none of the children from the mountain villages. Mother introduced me to one: "His name is Buntso. His mother's name is Dorjee Tso. They are from our old village."

I knew only Lhamo Jay and Tsekho, who were my neighbors and friends.

"Is this cute boy your son? He looks very smart," an old woman said. "Children grow up so quickly."

"I don't feel he is growing up very quickly. Are you

registering?" Mother asked kindly, putting her right hand to her forehead as a shield against the sun.

"No, I came to throw garbage away. I'm on my way home and saw you here," the old woman said, turning prayer beads in her wrinkled hand, quietly chanting the Six Sacred Syllables under her breath.

"I see. How is your health?" Mother asked.

"Good, but it could be better," the old woman said. Then she turned to me and said, "Study hard at school. Don't fight with others, Dordor, or the teachers will be angry with you. Oh! I must go home now," she concluded, stroked my head, turned, headed through the gate, and vanished from view.

"Who is that old woman, Mother?" I asked.

"Aunt Agung - one of Cousin-in-law's relatives," Mother said.

"Oh, I see," I replied, rubbing my head because something was moving there.

Many new students passed through the school gate, where a board hung on either side with the school name in Tibetan and Chinese. I could slowly read the Tibetan words. Mother and I entered the school office, which was empty except for two teachers. We were the last to register.

"Come sit down," one teacher said with a smile.

"Thanks," Mother said.

"This is Teacher Agon, who is from our village. Call him Brother Agon," Mother said. According to local custom, adding 'Brother' before names of males who are older than you indicates respect.

I waited shyly.

"What grade are you in? Grade one has two classes, and grade two has one class. Do you want to attend kindergarten or grade one? What is your name and age?" Teacher Agon asked.

Mother looked at him strangely and told me later that since Teacher Agon was from our village, he should have known my name and age. However, my family usually kept me at home. Many local children and adults didn't know who I was, and I also did not know who they were.

"His name is Dorjee Tsedan, he is six years old, and he is from our village. He will attend kindergarten this year," Mother said.

Teacher Agon added my name to one of the lists.

"Punish him when he doesn't listen to class or finish his homework on time," Mother said.

"I will," Teacher Agon said. "Come to school tomorrow morning at ten o'clock. I will arrange the classrooms, desks, and chairs. You will help clean your classroom and the schoolyard. I will give you your new school books afterwards."

"OK," I said. I was very excited to attend school and get new books just as Young Sister had said.

"This term, Teacher Yumtso and I will have many new students from the mountain villages," Teacher Agon said happily.

Teacher Yumtso was sitting behind an old desk and writing something in a notebook. She nodded her head with a gentle smile as Teacher Agon introduced me.

Teacher Yumtso taught arithmetic. She was from a poor family in Bugang Village. She had failed higher education exams when she graduated from the Tewa Tibetan Middle School. She then returned home, and studied by herself while helping her family. The leader of the Tewa County Education Bureau gave her a job at my village school. She was a responsible, strict teacher. She looked much younger than Mother.

"Thanks Agon," Mother said warmly.

"I'm happy your son will attend school. May he have a much better life than we have and be the best student in school," Teacher

Agon said. He also had no college diploma and, like Teacher Yumtso, his salary was quite low. Mother said Teacher Agon was a student of Akhu Nyima, who had studied only Tibetan for many years in Zorgay County. Teacher Agon's written Tibetan was much better than any of the other local people's.

"I hope so," Mother replied, and then said good-bye to Teacher Agon as we turned and left.

"His written Tibetan is very good and he is kind to students. He didn't continue beyond middle school after he graduated from primary school, however, teachers who graduated from college can't compare with him, because he studied Tibetan for five years in a monastery after primary school," Mother said on the way home. Then she added, "Teachers Agon and Yumtso have taught Tibetan and arithmetic at the village school for many years."

That night Mother mended the school bag that Young Sister had used before she dropped out when she was in grade three, because I had been chosen to go to school. Very few girls from our village attended school.

I happily took my bag the next morning and started walking to school. There were eight students in kindergarten. I learned the Tibetan alphabet again and also began learning numbers from one to one hundred. Gradually, I learned the names of the students and their parents. I made friends with Tsekho and Buntso the first week. We shared our cornbread and helped each other when we fought with others.

Teacher Yumtso didn't come to class one wintry afternoon. Some of us were chatting with each other while others were sitting by the stove to get warm. I aimlessly drew nonsensical pictures in my notebook by the stove. Unfortunately, Teacher Agon noticed this, pinched my right ear, and said "When the cat's away, the mice do play."

I looked around at my classmates, who pretended to be doing homework.

The mountain students went home on Friday afternoon. Sometimes students from my village fought with them. We threw small stones at each other, but didn't hit each other because of the distance between us. We shouted bad names at them as they walked further up the mountain. No one ever won. We did this just for fun. By the next Monday, we had all forgotten what had happened and jumped rope and played basketball in the schoolyard with each other in our free time. Sometimes Teacher Agon taught us Tibetan songs and told us tales about ghosts and King Gesar. We sang Tibetan songs we had learned while groups of us were going or coming to school. Villagers applauded proudly when they heard us.

I got high scores in my class and earned the top prize every year until I graduated. I didn't see my arithmetic teacher, Yumtso, again after I entered grade two. She married a Tibetan bus driver in the county town and went to live there.

My family didn't let me attend primary school when I finished grade two, because it was a boarding school far from my home. I attended the village school until the age of ten and then stayed at home and herded pigs for two years with village herdsman. I loved the village school because I made many friends, played with them, and had class with them.

5

A THREE-WHEELED CAR

order, do you want to join us? You can ride this car when it is your turn," Lhamo Jay said, pushing Dantsering along the village path. Dantsering sat in a wood car, steering it arrogantly as I watched, leaning against a village wall.

"I want to join," I said, running after them joyously.

"Good. You're stronger than me. Let's push him once around the village, then you drive the car and I'll push you," Lhamo Jay said fairly, collapsing to the ground and panting. Dantsering was the only village child who had a wood car big enough to ride in. His brother drove a logging truck, had brought some old wheels home, and had made a wood car with help from a carpenter. The car's front wheel was a little bigger than the two rear wheels, and the three wheels squealed when it went fast.

"OK," I said and pushed Dantsering around in a big circle with all my might. He deliberately steered the car into a much bigger circle than he had shown me on the ground with a stick.

"Now it is your turn to ride my car. Because you're new, we'll go around this big circle one time," Dantsering said authoritatively. I then steered the car one time around in the circle as Lhamo Jay pushed me.

"You two listen carefully: there's a rule for riding in this car," Dantsering said. "Each of you must push me around three times and then you can drive around one time. You can't ride in this car unless you obey the rule, because the car is mine."

"OK, I'll go after you Dantsering," Lhamo Jay said.

"Do you agree, Dordor?" Dantsering asked.

"It's not fair. We should push you around two times when it's your turn," I said.

"Why?" he asked, standing up in the car and looking at me stupidly. He was four or five years older than me and much taller.

"Because we push you together around this circle two times as fast as you wish, with you driving at high speed like a truck driver," I persuaded. We argued for about a half hour. Finally, we reached a fair agreement about driving the wood car.

"OK, but you must push me around twice without stopping with all your strength," Dantsering said. He stood with his hands in his pockets while Lhamo Jay and I took turns pushing each other around the circle.

A child from a rich village family slowly peddled his small bike around us. He pulled up the front wheel and accelerated the bike after a short run. Children ran after him, admiring the bike as he scooted here and there. The boy was very insulting to the children whenever someone touched his bike. He wouldn't let other children ride the bike and sometimes shouted at them without justification.

I begged Young Uncle to make me a wood car like the one Dantsering had. One afternoon, when I returned home from the village school, I was overjoyed to see that Young Uncle had brought three old wheels from the county town and was sawing a wood block with great care.

"Are you happy now? I'm making a new three-wheel car for you," Young Uncle said warmly, handing me some candy.

"Oh yes! Can I help you with anything, Young Uncle?" I asked happily, removing the candy wrapper.

"No, the car is nearly finished," he said.

I rushed next door, calling to my friend, Lhamo Jay. I told him Young Uncle had made me a new wood car. He was very excited

to hear that. We later drove the car and pushed each other. Sometimes we competed with Dantsering. We won all of the competitions with him because he was heavy and those pushing him weren't strong enough to push him fast.

I was proud of my three-wheel car, which I always drove with Lhamo Jay. I enjoyed it when children ran after us. Occasionally, I let others drive my car when they begged me, and I never insulted or hit them if they touched the car.

6

CONSTIPATED

The chirping of morning birds broke the tranquil village dawn. I woke from a nightmare on the *dzeto*, suffering from a terrible stomachache. I tried to lift my head from the pillow that leaned against the wooden chest behind it. I clutched my belly, writhed in pain, and thought, "I would rather work hard in the fields than be ill."

Young Uncle often said, "Illnesses are the most dangerous enemy unless you defeat them. The most important thing is caring for your health, because losing it means losing your life."

Earlier that morning, Mother and Young Sister had gone to the mountains to cut grass for our livestock to eat in winter. If a village woman didn't get up very early, other women would cut all the best grass. It was a challenge for village women to cut grass, because my village was large but only had a small summer pasture. Women and girls bore the heavy burden of working at home and in the fields. Small families had about ten *mu* of farmland and large families had about twenty *mu* to plow, weed, and harvest.

The sun shone brightly through the windows when Mother and Young Sister returned, carrying huge bundles of grass on their backs. I held my belly with tears in my swollen eyes as I lay on the *dzeto*. Mother kindled a fire while Young Sister wearily washed and combed her long black hair.

"How is your stomachache? Getting better?" said Mother worriedly, putting tealeaves into the soot-covered kettle.

"I can't endure this. Do we have medicine?" I asked.

"No, but I know how my mother treated this when my siblings and I were young," Mother said. She hurried into the kitchen and returned with a handful of barley, which she rubbed on my belly while chanting with an angry expression, "This weak boy has no flesh for you to eat. This skeleton boy has no blood for you to drink. This poor boy has no treasures for you to take. Your family is urgently calling you. They have boiled pork for you to eat, prepared milk for you to drink, and readied treasures for you to take. It's better to go there and never return, Todsong, Todsong, Todsong (Family Stove Deity), return to your home." Then Mother blew three times on the barley she was holding and tossed it out through the gate. Villagers believe that each family has such stove deities as Stomachache-stove deity, Headache-stove deity, Kneeache-stove deity, and so on. If you visit a family who has Headache-stove Deity and touch their stove carelessly, then you will surely get a headache that night. This is especially true for children who are active and inquisitive, and want to touch everything.

Young Uncle said that I had touched my neighbor's Stomachache-stove Deity. He told me not to enter neighbors' homes. Even if Young Uncle and I visited Cousin's home, he made me sit on his lap or by him - he never let me walk around freely.

Young Uncle made *tsasong*¹⁶ using the small shovel that he used every morning, and took it smoking into the courtyard, and put it on the ground while chanting the Sacred Six Syllables. He placed it quite low because the local lama said that the spirits of dead family members were about ten centimeters tall, and could not smell *tsasong* if it was hung too high. Dead family members returned home to smell it to kill their hunger and dared not eat or smell *tsasong* if

¹⁶ Hot ashes, barley flour, butter, and a little clean water are offered to hungry ghosts and family stove deities. It is especially offered to a family member who has died and whose spirit is believed to have returned home with an empty stomach.

fire or embers were inside it.

"Are you better?" asked Mother.

"Not really," I answered. I didn't say more because talking was painful.

"Well, Stomachache-stove deity will release you soon because, when I tossed out the barley, our neighbor's gate was opening. I am sure that stomachache-stove deity will leave soon," said Mother confidently. She then joined Young Sister and Young Uncle for a lunch of *tsamba*¹⁷ and yogurt.

"Dordor, take this medicine with this cup of hot water," Mother said after returning, handing me some medicine that Young Uncle had brought from the county town.

"OK, but it is very bitter," I said. Young Uncle encouraged me to take the medicine three times a day, but the medicine was ineffective. Next, Cousin went to Dorine, Sichuan Province and brought medicine from a Tibetan doctor who said I should drink more hot water and exercise more. I then drank so much hot water that I could barely stand. Young Uncle helped me walk slowly around the courtyard every day until finally, I could defecate. I took the Tibetan medicines Cousin bought daily and my health slowly improved. After half a month, I was totally well. Afterward, I was afraid to eat *tsamba* and leftovers, which are hard to digest.

¹⁷ Roasted barley flour and hot black tea that is mixed with butter, dried cheese, and a little sugar, and then squeezed into a ball to eat.

7

TERANG

Terang¹⁸ are powerful and invisible. They help and protect people and can make you rich by bringing you what you request. However, when you become the richest person in the world, Terang return, set fire to your house, and burn everything they have helped you gain. You are then the poorest person in the world again, a mere beggar. Terang play with you like a toy but, if you are smart, there is a way to be a rich person forever.

"Listen and I'll tell you a story, but I have a condition before I begin," Young Uncle said.

"What is your condition?" I said impatiently.

"You must retell the story when I finish," he said.

"Sure," I said.

Young Uncle then told me this story one night, as I was recovering from my illness:

Many years ago, a very clever boy lived with his old mother. They had only *tsamba* and black tea for their meals and had no livestock. Their lives depended on the few *mu* they had near the village. After working in the fields all day the boy went to a village water mill one evening. His mother was grinding barley. He watched the upper grindstone turn on the lower grindstone, grinding the barley into flour that softly fell on a board below.

"These grindstones are wonderful! They grind whatever you put in. They're valuable for our village, especially a poor

¹⁸ Ghost-like beings that live among humans.

family like us, aren't they?" the boy said as he put barley flour into a bag.

"This water mill is only used by our poor family. Others no longer need to use it," replied his mother, putting the last of the roasted barley into the hole of the upper grindstone.

"I would take these grindstones home if I were strong enough, because we are the only ones who use this mill in our village," the boy said.

His mother laughed and said, "That's a good idea. It would be very convenient for us, but how would you move them to our courtyard?"

"I don't know," the boy replied. They then took the barley flour home, where they ate simple food as usual, wore simple clothes as usual, lived in a simple room as usual, and slept in a simple bed as usual. The next morning when the boy went out to pee, he was astonished to see the grindstones in his courtyard. He wondered who had put them there, why, and how. He hurried back to his mother and reported what he had seen.

"They do not belong to us and the villagers will certainly find them. We must put them back as quickly as possible," his mother said regretfully.

"How can we put them back?" the boy asked.

"We must put them back before the villagers notice," she said.

"Yes, we must, or the village will surely fine us heavily," the boy said, then took a large tattered cloth and covered the grindstones. They locked the outside gates securely and stayed quietly inside their home without even making a fire the whole day.

Meanwhile, the entire village was talking about Terang. Some families wanted to be rich and wanted one in their home because they were extremely poor and were denigrated by the rich.

Terang are terrified of fire and light. Sacred scriptures on prayer flags, mani-stones, and scripture chanting are like big fires and Terang flee when they see them. Afterwards, Terang

call to the family they have helped from a far distance. "What has happened to our family? Who did this?"

When family members hear this, they must answer convincingly, "Our house burned in an accidental fire. We don't know what caused this fire. We don't know how we will live from this day onward. Please flee and never return." The family continues this religious ritual for seven days. Terang are afraid of fire, light, and Buddhist scriptures. They flee, extremely disappointed, without looking back. If the family is unlucky and does not know how to trick Terang, they return after several months and burn down their home and everything they have helped them accumulate. If the family is lucky, Terang leave that place forever.

Certain families do not want to have Terang because they are terrified it will burn down their home after they become rich.

The boy went into the courtyard the next morning and saw that only the large cloth remained. The grindstones were gone. The boy realized that the Terang the elders talked about had been involved and rushed inside to tell his mother.

The boy and his mother soon began benefitting from things Terang brought them. The boy first asked for daily necessities and received all he asked for. Gradually, they obtained furniture like the furniture in rich homes, and the boy eventually married a beautiful woman with whom he had two sons in three years. Several years later, the boy's family was far richer than any other local family; they had everything they desired.

One beautiful morning, the family was having breakfast when the mother said mournfully, "I had a nightmare. A giant with wild hair and a sword came and killed us all. Blood was splattered everywhere in the courtyard. He set fire to our home and fled as the villagers stood, laughing happily in front of our gate."

"We must do something as quickly as possible. What a bad omen! How can we avoid Terang?" the son said.

"We must ask for things that are very difficult to obtain,"

his mother said.

"Perhaps we could ask Terang for things that never existed in the past and present, things that people always wonder about," the son suggested.

"A rabbit horn, a frog tooth, a snake horn, horse wings, and turtle hair are the five treasures. I don't think there are such things. People have said that such things may be found far across the oceans, but are very difficult to get. We can ask for such things," the mother decided.

The son did as his mother instructed. Terang listened as usual to what they requested. When the Terang left, the family invited the local monastery's incarnate lama and other monks to chant Buddhist scriptures. Villagers brought the Kanjur and Tanjur¹⁹ from the local monastery and spread the volumes in their courtyard. Old people chanted the Six Sacred Syllables while young villagers put sacred prayer flags around the home. They held religious ceremonies for seven days. The ocean-like blue sky gradually grew dark as the lama, monks, and villagers chanted in the late afternoon of the seventh day. Terang yelled from far away, on the other side of the west mountain, "What has happened to our home? Who set fire to our house? I cannot come help you. What should I do?"

The son shouted clearly, "Our home and all of our property were burnt. We saved nothing from the fire. We must move. We don't know who made this fire. We will leave and never return. We have no home from this day onwards."

"I have what you requested, found across the ocean. I will put them here. Come take them if you wish. I will leave and never return," the Terang said sorrowfully and left forever. The family then lived happily, and was the richest in the world, with their five unique treasures. People still talk about those five treasures.

¹⁹ The Tibetan Buddhist canon recognized by various schools of Tibetan Buddhism includes the *Kanjur* (*The Translation of the Word*) and the *Tanjur* (*Translation of Treatises*). The former is considered the spoken teachings and precepts of the Buddha and the latter is the collection of Indian commentaries on the Buddha's teachings.

8

SACRIFICES TO MOUNTAIN DEITIES

order, your cousin brought a *lhoda*²⁰ and sacred prayer flags today from the county town. He said he would call you and Young Uncle tomorrow morning. You must offer *sung* with him and Cousin on Zhogartsejee Mountain. Sleep early after supper and I'll wake you in the morning," Mother said, putting noodles into bowls and handing them to Young Uncle, Elder Uncle, and me. Next she served Elder Sister, Young Sister, and herself. Elder Sister had come from her husband's home with many things for me, some of which I ate that night in bed.

"I'd love to go with Young Uncle and Cousin. Will Young Uncle help me on the way? Will I need to carry something tomorrow morning? Will we have lunch on the mountain?" I said.

"No. You don't need to take anything," Young Uncle said warmly, kissing my forehead. He sipped black tea from his cup as I leaned against him and ate noodles.

"You'll have lunch on the mountain. Walk on your own. Don't make Young Uncle carry you," Mother said sternly, and added, "I'll prepare milk, bread, butter, and barley liquor²¹ for your lunch."

"OK," I said, licking my plastic bowl and handing it to Mother. "I'm full. I'm going to bed now. Will you put my Tibetan robe and sash on my bed for me?"

"Of course," she said warmly, then went to the kitchen and brought them to me. As soon as my head touched the pillow, I was

²⁰ Wind-horse.

²¹ Villagers brew it for ceremonies and celebrations.

wandering in a marvelous dream, enjoying the scenery of boundless grassland that I had never seen before. A gentle breeze blew through the air as several friends and I flew a kite that moved higher and higher in the sky as I unrolled the string further and further. Suddenly, the string snapped and the kite flew away in the steady breeze. I ran after it, jumping up many times with all my strength, but I could not grasp the string. As the kite hung from the distant side of a high cliff, I clapped my hands and then ran towards it, mimicking a flying bird, waving my arms. I flew straight toward the kite. When I reached the place where it was hanging, I cautiously untangled it from the roots of a small tree growing on the rocky cliff, slowly beating my wings. I could fly everywhere and saw the broad, green grassland beneath me, and buildings that appeared only a fraction of their normal size.

While enjoying these enchanting views, a vulture suddenly struck my back, knocking me into a spin. I was like an airplane falling, spiraling out of control toward the earth. I closed my eyes tight, hopelessly plunging to my death. I thought about my family, friends, and playmates as I plunged downwards in terror. Warm tears rolled down my cheeks like a broken string of prayer beads. I waved my legs and hands in the air like a bug struggling with its many legs to stand upright. I closed my eyes tighter than before as I neared the ground. Fortunately, I landed in the dense forest as gently as if Mother had put me into a soft bed. The forest terrified me and I cried loudly, but I heard nothing. I struggled wildly. I could not see my feet. I heard a ghost murmuring to me in the distance.

I wakened from this dreadful dream in terror, finding myself lying on the *dzeto*. Mother was calling, "It's time to get up now. Young Uncle is waiting for you outside."

"OK," I replied groggily, rubbing my eyes. I went to the kitchen and washed my face. Young Uncle was waiting for me in the

courtyard, a cloth bag on his back.

"Are you ready for a journey?" he asked.

"Is Cousin coming, Mother?" I asked impatiently. Young Sister and I were afraid of Cousin because he was severe and never smiled. Cousin beat us when we were disobedient or fought, and beat Young Sister harder than he beat me.

"He's coming soon. Don't let Young Uncle carry you on the way," Mother reminded. As soon as she finished shouting, Cousin arrived with a flashlight and a bunch of cypress branches tied to a cloth bag on his back.

"Did you bring nectar and matches?" he asked. People remind each other about the 'nectar' and matches when they prepare offerings for the mountain deities' *ladze*.

"Yes. I have them. Let's go," Young Uncle said. The morning was just dawning and I could see little on the path except Cousin and Young Uncle's vague shapes. I held Young Uncle's Tibetan robe sleeve, jogging to keep up. We reached the foot of the mountain where we could make out a path zigzagging up the mountain. We stopped to rest. I removed my Tibetan robe and wrapped it into my sash while Young Uncle and Cousin put their bags on the ground. I could not ask them to carry my Tibetan robe because they were already carrying heavy loads. Swallowing that thought, I decided to carry it myself.

On this frosty, tranquil morning, small beams of light gradually spread across the distant horizon above the eastern mountaintops and inky clouds. The whole universe was peaceful and quiet as its beloved people were sleeping deeply. The mountains appeared, resembling sets of steps for the deities, a welcome to the human world. Trees in the dense forests stood quietly at attention as though waiting for mountain deities' instruction. I led the way without sweat on my forehead as we began ascending the mountain. After an hour, morning birds chirped and flitted from one tree to

another as we chatted. We enjoyed the waxbills' marvelous, vigorous twittering as they accompanied us.

Young Uncle said, "Go ahead! You be the first, my dear one." Actually, Young Uncle and Cousin had things to discuss they didn't want me to hear.

We rested under a big tree. Villagers always rest here for a few minutes when herding or cutting timber. We could see a few of our village's mountain soybean fields. Cousin put his cloth bag down by the big tree and said, "Always rest going up the mountain, but don't rest for very long." His back was damp where the bag had been and his undershirt was glued to his back. He could go no faster, especially up the mountain, because he was heavy and could not breathe as easily as normal people. Young Uncle wiped his face with the sleeve of his robe. "I'm going to tell Milarepa's²² life history so you won't feel tired."

"Yeah! I'd love a story, Young Uncle," I said, sitting on a log nearby.

Young Uncle then told me this story:

Long ago, a man named Milarepa lived in a village called Nyanyul near Yalongtsangpo in Tibet. His father was outside their village doing business when he was born. When his father heard the news of Milarepa's birth, he was so happy that he gave the child the name Tobagar (Happy News). His family was extremely rich when he was young, but as people say, 'Property is as temporary as morning dew.'

When Milarepa was a little child, his father died from illness and he, his mother, and his sister were then treated cruelly by his uncle and aunt. When he was fifteen, his mother asked him to study the black arts to take revenge. He became so

²² Milarepa (1040-1123) was a famous Tibetan yogi, who achieved enlightenment in one lifetime. He is renowned for being extremely thin because he only ate nettles during long periods of meditation.

powerful that he could destroy villages with hail storms. However, he eventually began studying Buddhism. He faced many difficulties while learning the teachings of many great lamas. He meditated in caves in Nepal, Tibet, and elsewhere. He practiced long periods of meditation, eating only a little nettle. He had many well-known students. Finally, he achieved enlightenment.

"Today, Tibetans use him as an example to encourage students to study hard and make progress. We need to learn from his ideas and spirit," Young Uncle concluded.

The mountain altar appeared nearby, but we still had a steep climb up to the mountaintop. The golden sun rose gradually from the far horizon and lit the clouds like butter-lamps for the heavens. The clouds bounded above the distant mountains like a flock of sheep and lambs on endless grassland. We saw deer, rabbits, and marmots as we neared the mountain altar. We rested by a set of cooking stones where yak-herders cooked in summer and autumn. I picked strawberries among the rich grass, and then popped them into my mouth.

"Dordor, don't eat strawberries in early morning or you'll get a stomachache," Young Uncle said sternly.

"OK," I replied and stopped eating. When he mentioned stomachache I was frightened, remembering the time I thought I was going to die from constipation.

"We will leave our things in the cottage²³ except for the *lhoda*, *sung* bag, and prayer flags. We'll eat a little here so we won't be hungry until we return and cook lunch. We must hike up the rest of the mountain to the top," Cousin explained, wiping perspiration from his forehead with his hands.

"Come and eat, my little one," Young Uncle said warmly as usual.

²³ A small wood house with several rooms, used by village yak-herders.

"OK," I answered, tossing my Tibetan robe on the grass. I was tired, hungry, and I wanted to rest and eat something.

We ate cornbread, drank bowls of barley liquor with a little *tsamba* in it, and then silently started up the mountaintop.

My village has five *ladze*. Each protects villagers from different threats. Different chants are used for offerings and prayers to each mountain deity when beseeching them. Other chants are used to beseech the family deities with *sung* offerings at home.

"Victory to the deities! Victory to the deities! Victory to the deities!" Cousin and Young Uncle yelled as we approached the Zhogartsejee Mountain *ladze*. It was my first time here, and I was startled by the sudden shouting. I watched and listened curiously, and then tried to imitate their yells. Young Uncle pushed leftover ashes to each side on the mountain altar, and then placed fresh wood in the altar center. Cousin put cypress twigs, *tsamba*, and other offerings on the conifer wood. A straight piece of cypress wood was placed upright in the center. Young Uncle kindled a fire and got ready to chant. He and Cousin purified *lhoda*, prayer flags, and the *sung* bag in the smoke. Then they began chanting the offering-burning prayers to the mountain deity. They poured the *sung* bag containing the five grains²⁴ into the fire, auspiciously saving a little of the five grains according to custom. Butter was spread on the straight cypress stick standing in the center of the offering. We put a piece of the cypress in the small kettle that was filled with nectar as *sung* smoke curled auspiciously into the sky. It was now a sunny, cloudless day with a deep blue sky. With their faces full of joy, Young Uncle and Cousin began chanting the offering prayer, beseeching the mountain deity to protect our village residents.

Purify the *sung*, purify the *sung*, purify the *sung*

²⁴ Barley, wheat, beans, rice, and rapeseed.

Offer one hundred, offer one thousand, offer ten thousand
Offer one hundred if it's not full; offer one thousand if it's not full,
offer ten thousand if it's not full
Offer one hundred, offer one thousand, offer ten thousand
Offer on this auspicious day, offer on this auspicious day
Offer on the special day of the family deity, the auspicious day,
the celebratory day of the mountain deity
Offer during leisure time, work time, and other busy times
May the village be full of boys and the enclosures full of livestock
May no harm befall people and no disease befall livestock
Offer *sung* like falling water, offer the five grains like falling snow
Smoke incense reaches Heaven, purifying heavenly deities
Smoke incense rises, purifying the mountain deities of space
Smoke incense rises into the world, purifying the earth's water
deities
May I encounter good things and avoid all bad things
May I meet luck everyday, have sufficient food every year, and
have children for generations
May there be joy wherever I go, and warmth wherever I live
May others help me if I encounter enemies, may teachers teach
me if I make mistakes

We threw the pieces of cypress into the *sung* when we finished chanting the offering-burning prayers, and Young Uncle and Cousin then began chanting the *lhoda* of Tara.²⁵ Meanwhile, we scattered *lhoda* in the sky while circumambulating the *ladze* and the altar of smoldering *sung*. We flung *lhoda* into the ascending *sung* smoke as we circled three times and prostrated to the altar three times. Next, we inserted prayer flags where many other prayer flags had been inserted in the *ladze*, and where the wind blew strongest. Afterwards, we walked down to the cottage for lunch.

²⁵ Tara is a female protector deity, and also a tantric meditation deity used by those seeking to develop inner qualities and better understand compassion and emptiness.

"If people often offer *sung* and celebrate the mountain deity's day, then the mountain deity will be very happy and protect the village from danger and harm," Young Uncle said.

Cousin collected mushrooms by the path and I picked strawberries to ease my hunger. When we reached the cottage, Cousin cooked the mushrooms and then brought out beer and liquor bought in the county town, as well as homemade barley liquor. We enjoyed it all.

We gazed at the yaks and other livestock on the mountain's summer pasture. Young Uncle and Cousin said on the way home that they had enjoyed themselves thoroughly that day. We had sacrificed to the mountain deities and felt that we would surely have future success.

9

PRIMARY BOARDING SCHOOL

There is a saying: "The whole day's work depends on a good start in the morning, the whole year's work depends on a good start in spring, and life's work depends on a good start when children are young." *local teacher*

I herded the pigs with village cow-herders for a year. In the autumn, barley, beans, and wheat were harvested and then villagers restlessly stayed at home. Some village men played chess on a long wood bench while basking in the sun. Others swam in streams and pools. Villagers had nothing much to do except rest, while livestock grazed in the fields. Cousin came to my home one day to talk about sending me to the primary boarding school in the township center. I eavesdropped by a small window, concerned that I'd be kept at home to care for the family pigs. Mother, Young Uncle, and Cousin finally determined that I should go to school in order to learn Chinese, because they thought it was important for my future. However, after graduating from the primary school, they decided I would stay at home to help the family. The futures of local poor children were arranged by their family and were often dictated by poverty and tradition.

"Dordor, do you want to attend the township primary school? Many children your age are going there this year," said Tsekho, whom I greeted while he was riding an old bike near my family gate. He was a close friend and attended grade three in the township primary school.

"I'm not sure. How are your studies, dear friend?" I asked, while riding my three-wheeled wood car inside my family courtyard. I was sure Mother would send me to the school where most local children were studying.

"I failed this year, so Father told me to repeat grade three again. I hope you can attend grade three this year with me," he said, riding away, glancing over his shoulder.

I was ten years old in 1993. When primary school was about to begin, Mother said she would take me to register. Since the school was five kilometers from my home, students walked to school, remained there for the week, and returned home on weekends. I held onto Mother's robe sleeve and walked with both new and older students from my village. On the way, groups of students laughed and chatted happily with each other as if they were going for a picnic. I proudly wore new clothes and new shoes, and carried a new schoolbag.

Most students were from remote nomad areas. Some students rode horses, some rode bikes, and many came on foot. After we reached the primary school, I was afraid of the strange students and teachers and closely followed Mother. A teacher came, opened the office door, instructed students to make two lines, and told new students to register before the older students. The teacher gave me a form that asked for my name, parents' names, village name, age, and which grade I would be in. I filled all of the blanks but I didn't know what to write for my father's name. I knew there were five people in my family at that time - Elder Uncle, Young Uncle, Young Sister, Mother, and me. There was no father. I was embarrassed. The teacher understood and kindly said, "It's fine,"

Mother paid five *yuan* for tuition and then an older student led us around the school. We went to the dormitory across from the teachers' offices. There was a long garden in front of the teachers'

rooms protected by a long wooden fence. All the buildings were old. The school kitchen was an adobe building.

"This is your dorm room. Bring bedding tomorrow. Class starts the day after tomorrow," the student said and opened the door to the room for new students from my village. There were four empty bed frames and a metal stove.

"OK, thank you very much. We will bring bedding tomorrow," Mother said, and then we walked back home.

Mother put a wool quilt, sleeping mat made of black yak-hair, and a pillow on a big cloth, wrapped it, and the tied it tightly with a rope. I asked Tsekho to come to my home the next morning. I suggested that we should put our bedding together in a pushcart to take to school, to which he readily agreed.

I had a big meal for breakfast the next morning with Elder Uncle, Young Uncle, Young Sister, and Mother. Then Tsekho and I put the belongings we would take to school in the pushcart along with a cooking pot and other utensils. We gathered with eight other students from the village and set off with five pushcarts. When we reached the school, many students were already there, following their head teachers' instructions to clean dorm rooms, classrooms, and the playground. We put our bedding on our beds and made our room neat.

The bell rang loudly and all the students cheerfully entered their classrooms. I felt a bit frightened entering the grade three classroom with students I did not know. A teacher came into the classroom as soon as we sat down. We shouted, "Good morning teacher!"

The teacher introduced himself and told us that he was our head teacher. He explained the school rules, and told us to respect the teachers and study hard. We attended classes according to the schedule posted on a wall by the blackboard. Mother left for home at

noon and I began missing Young Uncle.

I started to learn Chinese characters for words like 'moon' and 'sun'. I had a terrible time learning Chinese and was frequently beaten by the Chinese teacher with a long bamboo stick. As soon as he finished beating me, I thrust my aching, blood-covered hands under my armpits. I could not understand what the teacher was saying during Chinese class in the first term. Later, as I focused on Chinese, I began to improve and was no longer tormented by the Chinese teacher.

Arithmetic was also difficult, made more so by the teacher beating me every morning for about five minutes before class started. We were beaten with a bamboo stick. The number of blows was based on how many mistakes our homework had. One evening, while I was correcting arithmetic homework in the classroom with several classmates, the teacher entered the classroom and beat us hatefully with a bamboo stick for no reason. We neither sat on the chairs nor looked at the arithmetic teacher's angry face, only sobbed silently under our breaths, grimacing in pain.

"Bad students of a bad teacher, bad children of bad parents," the teacher fumed under his breath, and left.

We finished doing the arithmetic homework and dejectedly returned to the dormitory.

...

We cooked lunch in our dorm room, selecting numbers from one to seven. Those who got the numbers one, two, and three cooked a lunch of noodles, vegetables, or potatoes for themselves. Others ate *tsamba* and dried bread with cold water. Those who cooked ate. Sometimes those who cooked shared their leftovers with dorm mates who were their close friends. If there was enough time, all the dorm mates cooked a big pot of noodles together so everyone could be

happy with full bellies.

We went up the hill behind the school and collected firewood every Wednesday afternoon. Five students made one group. We chopped five pine trees per student, dragged them to the school with ropes, and chopped them up into stove-sized pieces with axes.

A short, strong classmate competed with me as we chopped the pine trees in front of our dormitory. He watched me closely and challenged me frequently, because I got high scores in my class. I enjoyed this spirit of competition, but this time his envy burst out in a bad way. He said, "Did you chop wood like this at your home? How can the teachers kindle such wood in their stoves? Can't you see how other students chop wood?" He then cursed and abused me.

I had no idea how to respond.

My friend, Tsekho, observing this situation, commented, "The head teacher came here a bit ago, and told him to chop this way. Do you want to contradict the head teacher?"

"Mind your own business!" the short, strong classmate said.

My classmates and the other students came over and gathered around us, watching and waiting.

I pushed him with all my strength and said, "Why are you always tormenting me? I'm your classmate. Why do you treat me like this?"

He kicked me in the groin. I felt dizzy and faint. He hatefully kicked me again.

I reached into my pocket for a pointed pencil sharpener.

He continued kicking me.

I stabbed his left leg twice.

He struggled with me for a few minutes, until suddenly he cried out at the sight of blood seeping out from his tattered left shoe. He rushed off in the direction of the head teacher's office, while Tsekho and I returned to the dormitory, fearing what would ensue. I

didn't know what I would say about my actions to the head teacher. A student soon rushed up and said that the head teacher had summoned me to his office.

The head teacher said, "What happened to you? Do you know you injured him? You broke school rules and will be expelled! I thought you were the best student in our class! I'm really disappointed."

I wanted to tell the head teacher the whole truth, but I didn't know where to start. "Let's go treat the injury first," the teacher said, and then we headed to an old dilapidated clinic in the township center where a doctor said his skin had barely been punctured. I borrowed two *yuan* from a friend and paid for the treatment. Afterwards, Young Uncle came to the school and explained the situation to the head teacher in private. I was not expelled, and the short strong boy never troubled me again.

10

DEATH

There is a beginning and there is an end, there is happiness and there is sadness, there is birth and there is death. *Taba*

A golden sun rose from the eastern mountaintop as I gripped an old, worn-out broom, cleaning snow that had fallen during the night. The peaks of Tiger Mountain were covered with a thick blanket of snow in the far distance. I could see them from where I stood on the pigsty roof. I was thinking about Elder Uncle who had carried me on his back until I could walk and talk. He had been ill only twice in his life that I could remember. Now, he was terribly ill, bedridden, and no longer ate. He vomited immediately after drinking tea or having even a little food. Cousin asked the best doctor from the county hospital to come to our home. After an examination, and giving him injections for two days, he said, "He needs an operation in Lanzhou City.²⁶ Prepare about 20,000 *yuan* for treatment and other expenses. If you can, his illness can be cured. You need to think about this quickly, otherwise..."

"We'll try to borrow money from relatives and others," said Mother.

The doctor wrote down the hospital name and told Cousin what to do next.

My family members were happy to hear the illness was curable but sadly, we could not find 20,000 RMB quickly. Mother and Cousin went to relatives' homes and local rich people, but in vain. Everyone

²⁶ Capital of Gansu Province.

thought my family was poor and would never pay back the debt. Elder Uncle's illness worsened. As Tibetan New Year approached, he became so ill he could hardly breathe and seemed more and more willing to die. During his lifetime, he had chanted the Sacred Six Syllables day and night and had helped countless people in need.

"Stop cleaning the snow and summon the family. He's worse," Cousin called from the courtyard, and then hurried inside. I rushed down the ladder and into the room where Elder Uncle had waited for death for about two weeks. He was breathing painfully as Cousin chanted the Sacred Six Syllables and tightly held Elder Uncle's hand.

"Quickly inform Young Uncle to return home. Elder Uncle will leave us soon," Cousin said. Mother stood nearby, her eyes full of tears, sobbing quietly. Cold fear gripped my heart as I rushed to find Young Uncle, who was collecting firewood in the hills. I heard the sound of an ax piercing dried timber. I shouted. He rested for a moment, listening to me, shocked by what I said. We immediately started home.

"Don't follow me too closely or you'll be frightened, my dear. You are only thirteen and too young to see this. Stay out here," Young Uncle said, putting the ax behind the door and hurrying into the bedroom.

"I want to see Elder Uncle one last time. I love him and have cared for him during his illness. He looked after me when I was a young child. If I don't see him now, I'll never see him again," I said, tears streaming down my cheeks. I neared his bed where he was now peacefully dying. Elder Sister was sobbing under the sleeve of her robe. Tears flowed down our cheeks as Cousin quietly talked to Elder Uncle with a fake smile. Elder Uncle seemed to improve after the whole family had assembled. His face was radiant with a peaceful smile. He suffered from this awful illness for two more days, and then closed his eyes and left us forever on the nineteenth day of the

eleventh lunar month.

A family customarily keeps a death a secret for three days to prepare for the funeral. The family buys liquor for villagers and relatives who come to offer condolences, and buys cloth on which to print the Six Sacred Syllables. It also gives the family time to fry bread and buy what the invited lama and monks need during the seven days that they come to bless the corpse and purify the deceased's sins. Women and girls clean all the rooms and prepare money for funeral expenses.

The morning birds chirped and the golden sun shone brightly. People came and went and looked as strange as I felt. My family members sobbed silently. Uncle's eyes were closed as he peacefully lay on the *dzeto* in the new robe he liked most. With a warm smile, he looked as he usually did when he was happy. I could not restrain my tears as I sat by Mother. Our whole family did nothing but silently weep the entire morning. Hundreds of thorns seemed to prick my heart as my family wept. The sunlight shone brightly on the village, hurting my eyes as Young Uncle took me and my empty heart outside.

"Don't be sad. All humans eventually face this," Young Uncle said. "It's time to wash your hair, wash your clothes, clean the rooms, and change the beds for tomorrow. The day after tomorrow, we need to borrow things from our Anebudze Tribe²⁷ to use during the funeral."

Young Uncle covered Elder Uncle's face with a white cloth and I realized it was the last time I would see my beloved Elder Uncle. It was also the first time I saw a corpse in such tragic circumstances.

"Today, Dordor and I will go to the county town and buy liquor, cloth, and so on for the funeral. Take care of other arrangements as you think best. Young Uncle will organize the sacred

²⁷ One of Dredze Village's three tribes.

paintings to display in our family shrine," Cousin said. He put the yak-hair saddlebags on the back of his old bicycle to serve as a seat for me and off we went. It was the first time I had gone to the county town by bicycle with Cousin. Afterwards, I yearned for a chance to ride a bicycle again and hoped to sell my three-wheeled car to buy a small bicycle.

I followed Cousin wherever he went, from shop to shop. Sometimes I stood by the bicycle to guard the items we had already purchased while he went into other shops to buy more things. I was so exhausted when we finished that I had little appetite for lunch. After we had eaten, Cousin left me with a Chinese shopkeeper while he went to Leglung Monastery to consult a fortuneteller about instructions for Elder Uncle's funeral. The fortuneteller's advice was always cremation of the corpse at the local cremation site, sky burial at Lhamo Monastery, or water burial in White Dragon River, the biggest river in Tewo County. As I waited, I thought about Elder Uncle. His gentle face and voice replayed in my mind. The Chinese shopkeeper's exaggerated smile and pallid expression made me uncomfortable. He spoke to me in a dialect I didn't understand as I stood by the bicycle. I nodded occasionally, eventually lowering my head silently as the shopkeeper continued talking, hoping Cousin would return soon.

Cousin appeared after some time, having hitched a ride on a truck. I rushed to him like a bird freed from a cage.

...

My family sold a yak and a cow for Elder Uncle's funeral and invited monks and an incarnate lama to chant scriptures to create a bright light for Elder Uncle's soul on its way to the afterlife, ensuring the deceased would have good living conditions in the next life and be reborn sooner. The fortuneteller had said that the corpse should be

cremated. Young Uncle, Cousin, and others planned a seven-day long funeral in accordance with local custom.

The Anebudze Tribe and other villagers assisted my family in every possible way. Mother and Young Uncle were highly respected by villagers because they got along well with everyone. Consequently, the villagers took care of my family very well during our time of grief. Many relatives came with gifts and extended condolences. Some wordlessly sobbed, others cried quietly under their breath in front of Elder Uncle, where he lay on a small wood box with his head on flat stone, clad in his beloved clothes. Each time a relative came, my family members wept without greeting and then as the relatives approached Elder Uncle, they began crying and saying that they wanted to speak to him one last time. Tears flowed down their cheeks and they cried loudly, as if Elder Uncle could hear them as he traveled to a bright peaceful world. Lamentations reverberated through the house daily, making me repeatedly burst into tears. I felt great melancholy as their sad cries and tears tore into my heart. We stayed secluded at home with reddened-eyes and messy hair. My world was upset and darkness filled my mind.

We invited two incarnate lamas from local monasteries and twenty monks to chant for seven days. The villagers came and chanted the Sacred Six Syllables during this time, and offered conifer needles, printed *mani* flags, and stones carved with sacred *mani*. These activities removed Elder Uncle's sins and created a bright road for him so that he would soon be reborn as a human. My family fed everyone for seven days.

Villagers and close relatives gathered and prepared for the cremation at dawn on the seventh day. The family courtyard was full of people ready to escort Elder Uncle to the afterlife. My family, close relatives, and Elder Uncle's close friends lamented and sobbed as the last star in the west winked out. I watched two men wrap Elder Uncle

tightly in his robe and then tie him to two long poles. Several young villagers carried the corpse up the path to the cremation site. The crowd slowly followed and then vanished.

Elders say a soul travels for seven days to all the places it has been. If it is not time for them to die, the soul returns to its body and its heart resumes beating, which is why the corpse is kept at home for seven days. After cremation, the deceased travels for forty-eight nights to meet the King of Death. They are guided by a bright light and experience neither fear nor danger, so long as the deceased's family has held the proper religious rituals. On the forty-eighth night the deceased person invisibly returns home one last time. The deceased's family should be happy, prepare an empty seat, and fill the deceased's bowl with tea. The deceased can see the family and feels very glad if the family is happy. Afterward, the King of Death passes judgment on the deceased person according to how they lived their life. Then the deceased person is reborn as one of the six sentient creatures. I always feel uneasy when people talk about death because I recall Elder Uncle's death.

...

I had nightmares every night after Elder Uncle passed away. Young Uncle said, "Elder Uncle's ghost has returned and is requesting *mani* for his next life. Our family must chant the Six Sacred Syllables for him and then he will soon be reborn." My family then chanted the Six Sacred Syllables after supper until midnight.

Young Uncle told me local stories before I slept, which put an end to my nightmares.

Thumb Bird

Long ago, Thumb Bird and Pika lived together in a forest. Pika stole Thumb Bird's eggs and ate them. Thumb Bird had no idea what to do and flew to Garuda, the king of birds, and asked him to solve the problem.

"I am the king of birds. If I cared about such small things, then I would have too many things to worry about. I have no time. Solve this problem by yourself," Garuda said arrogantly.

"Please don't think that I am only a little bird. Do not be regretful if this problem becomes worse," Thumb Bird said angrily and flew away.

Thinking she couldn't live with Pika's bullying, Thumb Bird took two pieces of dried grass with sharp tips and waited for Pika to steal her eggs once again. When Pika surreptitiously came and tried to steal her eggs, Thumb Bird stabbed the grass into Pika's eyes. Pika was then blind, and ran about in great pain, trying to find a hole to hide in. Pika finally ran into a big sleeping elephant's trunk. Thus awakened from his deep sleep, Elephant got up, and ran into the big tree where Garuda had its nest. The nest fell to the ground, killing all of Garuda's babies. Elephant also died.

Seven hunters then happened by and happily said, "We don't need to hunt any more. This elephant is just enough for us!" They skinned the elephant and prepared to divide the meat.

One stupid little hunter was tasked with taking a kettle to fetch water. While he was gone, the other six hunters discussed how they could get more meat and then put poison in the little hunter's bowl.

A bit later, the little hunter decided to take all the meat for himself and put poison in the kettle of water he brought from the stream. The other six hunters drank tea boiled with this water and died immediately. Afterward, the little hunter foolishly drank water from his own bowl and also died.

At that time, Sister Fox came looking for food, neared Elephant, and ate until her stomach exploded.

Garuda noticed his dead babies and felt very sad and regretful. Thumb Bird flew over, faced Garuda, and sang:

If you don't know your position,
Look at Garuda's nest.

If you don't know how to control yourself,
Look at Elephant's carcass.

If you cannot get along with others,
Look at the seven hunters' corpses.

If you don't know how much you can eat,
Look at Sister Fox's carcass.

Thumb Bird then stretched its wings and flew away.

Drodza Paba Defeats the Nine-Headed Ogress

Long ago, Drodza Paba lived with Jasha Marlen, Jamtso Hurtun, and Dzeku Ripug in the Tewa area. Nine-Headed Ogress also lived in a valley and ate people when they collected firewood and hunted deer. There was no happiness and no peace for those who lived in that valley.

Drodza Paba was an intelligent, compassionate man and wanted to kill Ogress immediately. He gathered three of his friends and went to the forested valley to hunt deer while hoping for an opportunity to kill Ogress.

On the first day, Dzeku Ripug stayed by the fire to care for their belongings while the other three were out hunting. When the three hunters later returned, Dzeku Ripug had disappeared. They called, "Dzeku Ripug, please come and eat venison and drink soup!" Meanwhile, Ogress had caught Dzeku Ripug. Then the three hunters ate meat, drank soup, and rested.

On the second day, Jasha Marlen stayed by the fire to

care for their belongings while the other two were out hunting. When the two hunters later returned, Jasha Marlen was gone. They looked for him for about a half hour, but couldn't find him. Then they ate venison, drank soup, and rested.

On the third day, Jamtso Hurtun stayed by the fire to care for their belongings while Drodza Paba was out hunting. Ogress then caught Jamtso Hurtun.

On the fourth day, Drodza Paba stayed by the fire for a while and then he went out hunting, killed a deer, and then returned. A bit later, he noticed that the cooking-stones were quaking as he boiled venison in a pot. He then heard Ogress say, "Please, don't throw stones, I'm living under here."

Drodza Paba ignored this and kept boiling venison. He then took a big stone and beat the place where the voice came from.

Ogress shouted, "Don't throw stones! I'm living under here!" A moment later, Ogress came out while Drodza Paba was unhurriedly using a needle to stab the leather container he used to fetch water.

He handed it to Ogress, and said, "Please take this container and fetch water for us, and then we'll boil venison and drink soup. If the container leaks, pull out some of your hair to patch it."

Ogress agreed and left to fetch water. Water leaked from the container as Ogress returned. She pulled out her hair again and again to stop the leaks until she was nearly bald. Meanwhile, Drodza Paba went into Ogress's home and replaced all her metal weapons with similar weapons he had made of flimsy wood.

Ogress returned, and angrily said, "Let's have a contest and see whose sword is sharper!" Then she went into her home, took out all her weapons, picked out her demon sword, and tried to stab Drodza Paba. However the sword struck Drodzo's shield and broke.

"Aha! This sword behaves as though it were made of wood, not metal," Ogress said.

Drodza Paba then used the metal sword and cut off one

of her nine heads.

"Let's have a contest and saw each other!" Ogress said confidently, took out her demon saw, and sawed Drodza Paba once. The saw broke into pieces. "Aha! It seems this saw is made of wood," Ogress said.

Drodza Paba then used the metal saw and sawed off one of the Ogress's eight remaining heads.

"Let's have a contest using a knife to cut each other!" Ogress said, took her demon knife, and stabbed Drodza Paba. The knife broke. Drodza Paba then used the metal knife and cut off one of Ogress's remaining seven heads.

Ogress felt the situation had become dire and fled. Drodza Paba chased her, following her footprints and saw Ogress run into a distant cave. Drodza Paba transformed himself into a monk, entered the cave, and asked, "What happened to you today?"

"I fought with Drodza Paba and lost. He wounded me terribly," Ogress replied.

"Oh, it'll soon be fine. I'll chant some scriptures to bless you," the monk said. He then took a piece of pine tree bark inscribed with scriptures, chanted for some time, and then asked, "Do you have a big pot and firewood?"

"Yes, I do," Ogress answered.

"Sit in the pot. The hot water will cure your wounds. Meanwhile, I'll continue chanting. It will bless you. Come out of the pot after I finish chanting," the monk said.

Ogress sat in the pot. The monk then put the lid on top, and made a big fire underneath. Ogress soon couldn't bear the heat and tapped the lid. The monk then put a long pole between the lid and a rafter. When Ogress was nearly boiled to death, she bit through the lid with her fangs.

The monk then assumed the form of Drodza Paba, broke Ogress's fangs, and Ogress then died in the boiling pot.

Drodza Paba looked around Ogress's home, and found his three friends who had been beaten and hung over rafters. He took them down, put their heads back on their bodies, chanted

scriptures, and stabbed needles into each of their necks.

The next morning, when he woke up, he saw that his friends were now alive. They left as Ogress's three daughters howled in the distance.

They killed some deer in the forest, returned, and were reunited with their family and neighbors. Tewo Tibetans in this valley have lived a peaceful, happy life since that time.

11

CIRCUMAMBULATING A DIVINE MOUNTAIN

It was the eighth day of Losar, an auspicious day and the best month of the year, but my family didn't celebrate, because of Elder Uncle's death. Instead, we stayed home chanting the Sacred Six Syllables. Young Uncle chanted scriptures every day and Mother and Young Sister fasted for several days.

Some wealthy village families who owned trucks offered to take local villagers to circumambulate Divine Mountain in Sichuan, which is forty minutes away by truck.²⁸ Villagers often take their children with them, carrying the babies on their backs and helping old people circle Divine Mountain once. Younger people circumambulate twice, without taking time to enter a sacred cave.

It was five a.m. and well before dawn when my dreams were ruined by several barking dogs. Something evil seemed to be happening in the village. Maybe our ancestors were coming to harm the village, which is why the dogs were barking.

Mother entered my room and said, "It's time to get up. Wash your face quickly. The villagers are leaving," and then she left to prepare. Young Sister was washing her face under the light of a butter-lamp that hung from the ceiling.

"OK," I replied sleepily and put on my usual clothes. Elder Uncle's death meant that I had no new clothes for Losar. I didn't ask for clothes nor did I complain, because I understood.

I got on a truck, put our bags in the truck as Mother handed

²⁸ Divine Mountain is in the vicinity of Lhatsegu Village, Tsongru Township, Zorgay County.

them up to me, and found a space for us to sit. There was no loud talking, because villagers believed that this disturbed the mountain and family deities. The driver came and started the engine. I sat next to Mother, leaned against her, and kept quiet.

The truck started off. Some minutes later, it slowed down and stopped by a group of people who were standing and shouting by the road. They were from the mountain village we had left years ago. This village had been created in the mountains to herd our villages' livestock at the time the Jone Bonbo ruled Tewa County. Although we live in different villages, this village joins our village during funerals, weddings, and celebrations. The driver drove slowly over the rough, winding road to Divine Mountain. I vomited several times and jerked up every time the truck hit a bump on the way. Living conditions and transportation are rudimentary in these remote Tibetan areas.

We divided into three tribal groups and made fires to boil kettles of tea for breakfast when we reached the foot of Divine Mountain. It was snowing lightly on the upper part of the mountain, making it look more sacred and beautiful. It was a lovely scene as pilgrims in single file began circling Divine Mountain, resembling a serpent writhing up the mountain.

"My dear one, eat *tsamba* before the journey, so you won't get altitude sickness," Mother said, handing me a ball of *tsamba* as Young Sister poured tea into our cups.

"Thanks, Mother," I said.

Our communities believe in the Yellow Hat Sect of Tibetan Buddhism and circumambulate Divine Mountain and monasteries in a clockwise direction. Some Tewa communities follow Bon and circumambulate counterclockwise.

We approached Divine Mountain as the sun rose over the peak. We drank holy water and prostrated to each of the three holy *mani* wheels turned by stream water. People shouted and chanted

loudly each time we reached a sacred spring: "Holy place, place of knowledge, pure place, blessed place: I cannot come alone, and depend on my walking stick. Please grant us holy nectar to cleanse our minds of the murkiness and confusion of our lives."

We sang the Six Sacred Syllables as we journeyed to a sacred cave where we climbed up a wood ladder one by one. We beseeched mountain deities to protect us from dangers and devils before entering the sacred cave. Some pilgrims held candles, others held butter-lamps. Friends said that we needed to pray quickly, because it was a long journey through the sacred cave to the holy nectar inside. Hand in hand we followed one another like a train, holding our lights to see the way, feeling both fear and joy. We loudly sang the Six Sacred Syllables while viewing various naturally arisen deity images that were on the rocks. I felt holy water dripping on my head. We went carefully, circling huge rocks, praying under sacred boulders, and then climbed short ladders until we were deep inside where holy nectar - the sacred spring water - flowed from a tiny *ladze*.

"Tsering, give me a little holy nectar," I said, as he squatted by the holy spring.

He gave holy nectar to all who asked. "Stretch out your right hand and I'll pour holy nectar for you first, because you are my best friend," he said.

After receiving the water, I first put a bit on my head and licked it as it trickled down my face, rubbed more over my upper body, and put some in a bottle I had brought from home. I felt concerned and frightened when we were ready to return, because dense smoke from conifer needles smoldered on the altar, making it hard to breathe. The smoke purified our bodies, but I worried it would extinguish our lights, and then we would be unable to find our way out. I also worried that we might suffocate. I cautiously held a butter-lamp and followed the others. I heard pilgrims coming toward

us and saw small lights bobbing in the distance. I prayed to the deities that I would have a great future life. Many people were coming. We found a space to stand aside and let them pass. I recognized them by their Sichuan Tibetan accent, which is a bit different from ours. They chanted the Six Sacred Syllables loudly as sacred water dribbled down from above our heads. I knew we were nearly out of the sacred cave when I saw sunlight ahead. I put the butter-lamp on a table with many other butter-lamps. The lights seemed to be prepared for newcomers. I devoutly worshipped the deities again at the sacred cave entrance and then climbed down the ladder.

We tried to catch up with villagers who had not entered the sacred cave, passing pilgrims who would have lunch together. The only fellow villagers I met were a few elders. Some worshipers were circumambulating Divine Mountain by prostrating, stretching their hands pressed together, touching their forehead first, then touching their chin, and finally their heart: then, stretching out on the path, they made a mark on the ground where their hands reached. Afterward, they stood, stepped to the mark, and repeated this action. It took three days to prostrate around Divine Mountain. Some Pilgrims prostrated from their homes to Lhasa and Mount Kailash, the holiest mountain in the world. I took out some apples, candies, and oranges from my small bag and gave them to the worshippers, hoping they would continue prostrating.

"Here are fried bread, dumplings, water, and juice," Tsekho said.

"Thanks," I said, sitting cross-legged on the grass by him.

After lunch, we walked and sang the Six Sacred Syllables as we passed through Small Forest and Big Forest with strangers and fellow villagers. When we reached a large *mani*-stone surrounded by prayer flags flapping in the gentle breeze, we prostrated and rested

and then prepared to leave. Conifer trees were growing nearby and I recalled that Young Uncle had told me to collect some conifer needles. "Tsekho, Young Uncle told me to collect some conifer needles here. Can you help me?" I said.

"Of course. Climb this tree and collect some," he said, sitting on the ground and eating.

"OK," I replied and climbed the tree he indicated. I cut some conifer needles and put them in my bag, while he plucked some needles from smaller trees.

Tsekho and I reached the mountaintop where some friends waited for us. We rested and then galloped down the mountain like wild horses. I had tied the bag of conifer needles on my back and was the first of our group to reach the bottom where villagers were waiting for the old people and us at our truck. They scolded us for being gone so long and then I realized that we had spent a long time in the sacred cave. We waited until the elders came at sunset, and then we all clambered into the back of the truck and returned home safely and happily.

12

ANTLERS

It was summer and I was fourteen. I had entered the sixth grade with the highest scores in my class of thirty students. I had nothing to do at home during the May First Holiday. I didn't need to herd pigs on the summer pasture since disease had killed all but three of them. Women and girls had gone to the forests and mountains to collect *shala*²⁹ to sell. Men and boys busily searched for deer-antlers in the forests. Mother instructed Tsekho and me on how to collect *shala* on the mountain near our local village. It was my first time to do this and I was delighted at the prospect of earning a little money. On the other hand, I felt uneasy that others would say something bad about me doing women's work.

Mother lectured, "Don't care what others say, think for yourself and go your own way. People have great respect for those who earn money, my dearest one."

The weather was wonderful - a sunny, lucky day. Mother gave me a small basket to put on my back that morning. Tsekho had a basket that was larger than mine on his back. He had some baked bread in his basket and had come to my home after eating breakfast at his home. I had hoped to go with Mother to collect *shala*, but she said I would bother her.

"Dordor, shall we go? The sun will rise soon and it's long way to our destination. Please hurry," Tsekho said.

"OK, I'm coming," I said. Mother put a bottle of hot tea in my

²⁹ A vegetable that grows in mountain forests. One kilo sells for three *yuan*. On average, locals can collect twenty-five kilos per day.

basket. The air was fresh, clear, and tranquil as I rushed off with Tsekho. As was my habit, I didn't talk much, thinking it would waste time. We each collected some *shala* individually along the path to the mountain. We hid behind trees or on the ground when we heard women and girls laughing and talking. When we no longer heard them, we resumed collecting. We met several groups of women and girls on the way up the mountain, and hid each time to avoid the embarrassment of being seen carrying baskets on our backs.

We picked sweet strawberries and other fruits along the path, and ate them.

The sun gradually rose to the center of the cloudless blue sky as our baskets grew steadily heavier. We were tired and hungry when we reached our final destination. I pretended I was not hungry and followed Tsekho until he stopped under a big pine tree. As he helped me take off my basket, I saw a white, bone-like object lying in the grass about thirty meters away. I said nothing, helped Tsekho remove his basket, and then I rubbed my eyes and looked again. As Tsekho wiped perspiration from his face with his sleeve in the shade of the pine tree, I rushed over and saw a five-point deer antler. The spikes were sharp from rubbing on trees. "Friend, look what I found!" I yelled.

He ignored me and lay in the shade.

When I brought it over and showed Tsekho, he said joyfully, "You're a lucky boy! May you find more than a hundred antlers in your life with Buddha's help."

I was sure Mother would be as happy as though I had found a kilo of pure gold.

"Dordor, I heard Grandfather say that if you find half a set of antlers, you can find the other half if you step about ten meters in the eight directions from where you found the first one. Let's try," Tsekho said hopefully.

We put our food back into our baskets, walked to where I had made my discovery, stepped in the eight directions hand in hand, and concentrated on searching, but we found nothing. Suddenly, I heard a group of girls singing a love song. I gestured to Tsekho to hide. He nodded and came over to me. I suggested that we leave immediately or the girls would see us.

"I'm sorry. I need to collect more," he said.

"OK. It doesn't matter. I know the way home," I replied.

"See you later," he said. I didn't reply, because I was upset that he did not come home with me. I ran home holding the antler in my hands and found Mother doing chores. When I showed her and Young Uncle my treasure, they were delighted. Young Uncle opened the family shrine, lit a butter-lamp and incense, placed the deer-antler in front of the shrine, and prayed. Mother gave my forehead a warm kiss.

13

A BAD COLD

Village residents were busily harvesting barley and wheat while I coughed day and night. I woke up from a horrible nightmare at dawn, realizing that I was dizzy and had a high fever. My hot skin was wet with perspiration and stuck to the quilt. I coughed constantly. I looked around, but saw nothing in the darkness. All was quiet and peaceful in the house, even though the morning birds were not yet chirping. I crawled under my quilt again, hoping my horrible dream would not return: I had been trapped in an ocean of fire and, as I had attempted to flee, the fire had come ever closer. I could not sleep again because of my incessant cough. I slept lightly during the day and had bad dreams at night. My family went to the fields to harvest barley and wheat from dawn to dusk, leaving me alone at home. After they finished harvesting the barley and wheat, the beans ripened. Livestock would eat them at night if they were not harvested immediately.

I tried getting up when the sun shone through the windows onto my bed, even though my illness was worsening. I put on my clothes, but did not wash my face, comb my hair, or brush my teeth. I had a constant headache. I was wracked by such a terrible cough that I couldn't walk steadily. I went to the small pasture near the village and slept in the sun the whole day without waking. The autumn weather was very warm, with occasional, gentle breezes.

"You cannot stay at home and be ill like this. You must see a doctor in the county town. We must take you there," a voice said. I was half asleep. The voice, though familiar, seemed very far away.

Then a spell of coughing woke me.

"Is it you, Cousin?" I said groggily, trying to sit up, while pretending everything was fine. It seemed that his family had finished harvesting their crops.

"Get up and come with me," he said, helping me up. When we reached the road, a truck came by. Cousin stopped it and we got in the back.

"I can't believe your mother and young uncle! You are the only boy in your family. They should take better care of you so you can support the family in the future. All our hopes are on you to be the major support of this family," he said. Then he felt my body as though he were a doctor and said, "Look at you! You're so thin. You don't take care of yourself. You are fourteen now. This is a time to grow. Don't you know you must struggle for life? You must take care of your family in the future."

I said nothing and just sat stupidly. It was my first time to see a doctor and my first time to hear Cousin talk so much. We thanked the truck driver upon reaching the county town. Cousin led me to a clinic and talked to an old doctor who was his friend. The doctor had two nurses. He examined me carefully and then said, "You need to take injections for several days, drink lots of hot water, and eat well."

I then lay on a bed and the doctor gave me an IV from a bottle hung on the wall by my bed. It was painful and my hand numbed as the bottle slowly emptied. Cousin and the doctor chatted in Chinese for a long time. I understood nothing the doctor said because he spoke quickly, but I understood a bit of what Cousin said. I guessed they were talking about the recent harvest. I was disappointed that I had graduated from primary school but couldn't communicate with others in Chinese.

It was early sunset when the second bottle emptied. A few people were walking on the streets under dim lamplight. Cousin got

us a room in a cheap hotel after supper in a restaurant. I went to bed early and Cousin didn't talk much. I slept quietly and felt comfortable that night. I coughed less than before. It was my first time sleeping in the county town.

"Dordor, do you feel better this morning?" Cousin asked, as he got dressed.

"I feel better than yesterday, but I'm still faint and dizzy," I said.

"That's because you've been eating very little. You need to eat more," he said.

I nodded and washed my face. Afterward, we had noodles for breakfast in a small restaurant and then went to the clinic where the doctor had already prepared my drips. He said something in Chinese that I didn't understand. He hung the first bottle of fluid by my bed, which slowly ran into my vein, drop by drop.

Mother arrived with two bottles of yak milk and some new clothes for me at about the time the first bottle finished. She said, "The harvest is still not finished. Young Uncle and Young Sister are harvesting beans. Young Uncle offered *sung* on the altar, lit butter-lamps before the family shrine, and prayed to the family deities at dawn."

"That's good," Cousin said.

The doctor calculated payment for treatment, because people must pay before treatment. My family spent about 300 RMB on my treatment. After eight days I felt much better and asked Cousin to stop the injections. My illness lingered, but I pretended to be better. Cousin thought it was OK to return and treat the illness at home. I continued to have headaches, but I rarely coughed. I ate more and drank lots of hot water as the doctor suggested. I recovered after about ten days at home and could then play with village children again.

14

FIGHTING

The students who lived near the primary school were arrogant and self-centered. Even though they didn't read and write very well, they bullied students from villages further away. These students pointed at our foreheads and kicked us when we passed each other on the way to and from school. Our village had fourteen boys and five girls in primary school. We were a close knit group and got along well with each other. Other students didn't argue or fight with our village's students because we fought back as a group if one of us was bullied.

I was doing homework alone in the classroom one wintry afternoon when a group of students came in and circled me. I knew they were from an upper class and were from Gontsa Village near the school. "Hey! Cowardly bastard! Do you want to buy some candy for us or fight with us one by one? I hear you're the boss of your village gang and a good fighter," a tall boy said arrogantly, removing his jacket and putting it on a desk. I said nothing. I decided to fight, though I had money to buy candy. I hated this gang for often tormenting other students. Obviously, the tall boy would be the first to fight. I stood up and tried to persuade them not to fight, but they ignored me. One came over, slapped my face, and insulted me.

"I don't want to fight you. I have no dispute with you, but I'll never buy candy for you guys. Can I choose one of you to fight?" I said.

"No, you have to fight me. Come on, piglet!" the tall boy shouted angrily and then kicked me with all his strength, which

knocked me to the ground. He and the others burst into laughter.

"Look how easily I defeated you! Now I want you to taste salt in your ugly mouth," he said, gesturing for me to stand up.

"OK. I'm not afraid of you. Come fight me," I replied, taking off my jacket and putting it on my desk.

The tall boy rushed at me and kicked me in the belly. I nearly collapsed but then rushed at him, and grabbed his ears and pulled. He was not as strong as I imagined. I let go of his ears and punched him in the belly several times with all my strength. He fell to the ground as tears filled his eyes. My fists ached.

"I can't get up. You fight him, quickly!" the boy said, pointing at a fat boy who ran over and punched me in the face, knocking me to the ground. I looked around, but no students from my village were there. This boy was stronger and wilder than the first one, and I believed I could not defeat him. I ran to my desk, took out a small knife I used for sharpening pencils, stabbed him, pulled his hair, and pressed him under my body. Afterwards, the classroom was filled with noise as students crowded around us. Many students gathered outside the windows looking in, shouting, and clapping their hands. Suddenly, several students from my village appeared, but they did not attack my tormentors. It seemed they were afraid. I didn't know what to do at first, but then I saw firewood piled in the back. I grabbed a piece. The students from my village followed my example. The fat boy was crying, saying that he had been stabbed. Meanwhile, the others retreated, realizing that they could not win. Some pointed at me and said, "We'll get you next time."

"You lost, we won! Look at you guys!" I said. When they saw the blood on the fat boy they were shocked. Some were afraid to look at him and covered their eyes with their hands.

Two or three of my foe's friends shouted, "We'll get you next time, you bastard," then they held the fat boy's arms and left the

classroom.

"No one is afraid of you guys, except the lower grades. You have nothing to be proud of," said one of my friends, and then I hushed him. We returned to our dormitory. I was surprised that no teachers learned what had happened. They were in a special meeting that afternoon. From that day on, my village students took better care of each other and nobody bullied or bothered us at school.

15

GRADUATION

Lower grade students were in the schoolyard one Friday afternoon, talking about the sixth grade graduation, while the sixth grade students waited for their head teachers. The teachers were in a meeting. Our head teacher told us to stay in the classroom until he returned. My classmates talked about studying beyond primary school. I had no idea what I would do because Mother decided everything. My friend, Tsekho, had stopped studying when we were in the second term of grade five after his father died. He then stayed at home to help his family. Without Tsekho I had no intimate friends with whom to share my hopes and thoughts, although I didn't think about my future very often.

The school leaders came to the classroom with a notebook and sat in the back of the classroom. "The County Education Bureau has decided you must go to Tewo County Town to take the middle school entrance exam," our head teacher stood on the stage and explained. "We need to collect some money for expenses during the examination time. I need to talk to you for thirty minutes about this exam."

The school was silent after this prolonged class meeting. Most students left for home except the grade six students. I went to my dormitory room, got the schoolbag I had packed earlier, and hurried to catch up with the other students. Fortunately, some Bugang Village³⁰ students were waiting outside the school gate. I decided to walk with them, knowing I would be protected from any attacks by boys from the fat boy's village. I thus got home safely, thanking the

³⁰ A mountain village.

mountain students from my heart for protecting me, because I had seen some groups of students from the boy's village glaring at me on the way.

During suppertime that evening at home, I told Mother what the head teacher had said. She was happy to hear this, because she wanted me to stay at home and care for the family after I graduated from primary school. However, I knew Young Uncle expected me to continue to study beyond middle school.

"It's very nice to hear news of your graduation. I'll prepare what you need before you go to take the exam in Tewa County Town," Mother said.

"Thank you, Mother. I'll do well on the exam, I promise," I replied confidently, sitting cross-legged by her. I didn't dare voice my opinion; I just sat mutely on the sheepskin, thinking, "Mother is the greatest, dearest woman in the world. She has been in charge of the family for years, has gotten along with her siblings her whole life, and has never scolded her two brothers and younger sister. It's amazing how she overcame the difficulties she encountered without the father of any of her children living with her."

"It's very important that the son stay at home to care for the family, following local custom. My purpose is that your younger sister will marry soon after you stop school," Mother said.

"I understand and I agree," I nodded, sipping tea from my bowl.

I watched her reaction, noticing that she was pleased. She rewarded me with a warm smile.

As my family members murmured the Six Sacred Syllables as usual after supper, I went to my bedroom before Young Uncle came. I had not completely understood everything Mother had said and I continued thinking about it before falling asleep.

I awoke to the sound of Young Uncle loudly chanting from the

second story of our home early the next morning. I dressed quickly, enjoying the morning landscape, especially the small, forested mountain across from the village and a distant snowy mountain powdered with a little snow. Smoke from chimneys and smoldering conifer needle offerings blew through the serene village.

I thought it was the proper time to ask Mother to give me one hundred *yuan* for the examination as the head teacher had instructed, to finance our housing and food while we were taking the middle school entrance examination in Tewo County Town. It was the first time I had asked Mother for money and she willingly gave it to me, expressing the hope that I would graduate soon. A truck provided by the township government took ten students to Tewo County Town for the examination. The tall buildings and town residents were strange to many of the students, who nervously and fearfully followed the head teacher.

It was not my first time to visit Tewo County Town. Cousin sold logs and once took me to Linxia City when I was in grade four of primary school. There, I had seen many cars, trucks, and tall buildings for the first time.

I earned the highest average score of all Tewo County Tibetan students who took the middle school entrance examination that year, bringing fame and honor to our primary school; earlier graduates of my primary school had received low scores compared to other schools. The head teacher and school leaders were happy about the scores. The primary school leader praised me and rewarded me with one hundred *yuan*. Young Uncle smiled and told all our relatives to congratulate me. However, I remained anxious, hoping Mother would allow me to study beyond middle school.

Cousin came to my home when I returned from taking the exams and was delighted to hear my news. "I'm happy and will buy new clothes for you when you begin to study at middle school," he

said.

I was overjoyed when my family members gathered and had a grand meal together at my home. I was especially glad that Elder Sister returned, joined our party, and sang a Tibetan song.

16

STEALING APPLES

Someone lends barley liquor with trust, and you thank them by returning water! *Jeeshi Tso*

During the long summer vacation in 1996, I went with other children to mountains and forests to pick fruit and collect mushrooms. We gathered what we liked until the golden sun hid behind the west mountains in the late afternoon. My stomach was full of fruits and mushrooms. We played a marriage game where I was 'Father' and a beautiful girl was 'Mother'. My face was full of joy when I returned home, because I didn't need to herd our pigs. There were only a few piglets in the pigsty and Young Uncle stayed at home to feed them. This provided me a summer vacation to freely and joyously do what I wanted until school started.

The mountains provided all the fruits I could wish for, except apples and pears. One day, a shamefaced child approached me, and said, "I'll tell you a secret if you promise not to tell others," and led me to a corner of the village wall.

"Of course, I won't tell others, because your mother and my mother are friends and you and I also are good friends, right?" I said.

"OK, I believe you won't tell anyone. My friend and I stole fruit from our neighbor. The pears were very delicious. Do you want to steal some with me tonight?" he asked.

"I'll keep your secret till I die, but I won't steal, because I don't like it, and your neighbor is a violent man. He will surely beat us if he catches us," I said.

He left and I was sure he would steal again from a neighbor, who gave a basket of apples to my family every year in autumn. Nevertheless, I finally decided it was a good idea to steal fruit from our neighbor that night, and decided to ask my friend, Tsering, to join me. I went to his home, told him my idea, and he agreed.

"Come to my home as soon as you finish supper. Don't tell others," I said, and then rushed home for supper with my family.

Tsering came to my home about an hour later and said, "Can you help me with my arithmetic? I don't know how to solve a homework problem." Mother liked to help others in the village, so she agreed that I could help Tsering at his home.

"Don't be late. Return early," Mother said, as I put my schoolbag on my back. We rushed directly behind my family courtyard and put our schoolbags there. I climbed the neighbor's wall and jumped into the orchard, followed by Tsering. We cautiously proceeded, step by step, because I didn't want to disturb our neighbor's watchdog. We stopped underneath an apple tree and listened carefully to ensure no one was around. We heard nothing. Moonlight shone on the apple tree, dimly illuminating the apples so that they seemed to be small black dots. I cautiously and quietly climbed up the tree, picked an apple, and put it in my pocket. Tsering followed my example. We picked apples until our pockets were full and then I signaled that it was time to return. He nodded.

"How many apples did you pick?" he asked, after we safely returned to my courtyard. He showed me what he had picked. We ate as many as we could, then put the remaining apples in our schoolbags. The apples were more delicious than any I had eaten before.

"I think we should bury the apples, return tomorrow, and then take them somewhere to eat," I said.

"Yes, that's a good idea," he replied, munching on a big apple. We then buried our schoolbags containing the apples. I whispered

good-bye into his ear. I cautiously opened the door and entered the room where Mother and Young Sister were repeating the Six Sacred Syllables. Young Uncle was chanting the same scriptures he chanted every morning and evening. They said nothing to me, so I quietly went into the bedroom where Young Uncle and I slept together.

I woke up very early the next morning, took my Tibetan book, went behind our courtyard, and read loudly. Morning birds were chirping noisily and the sky was as blue as turquoise without a single cloud. I continued until Mother called me to breakfast.

Tsering came to my home after his breakfast and whispered in my right ear that we should go eat the apples we had buried the night before.

"I'm going out to play with others," I called to Mother.

"OK," Mother said. We went to where we had buried the apples, dug them up, went to the mountain behind the village, and climbed a big tree, chatting and giggling quietly. Meanwhile, I watched our neighbor's orchard to see if they discovered their loss. I saw no one there.

I returned home in the early afternoon. Young Uncle told me that a boy had been severely beaten by our neighbor, who had caught him stealing apples with his friends in the night. I was then very afraid our neighbor would discover and beat Tsering and me. Fortunately, our neighbor didn't discover our theft, but Mother and Tsering's Mother did. Mother was very angry and beat me with a bamboo stick at home after hearing neighbors talking about stolen apples and seeing the apples in my schoolbag. I promised Mother I would never steal again. Our neighbor probably knew what we had done, but said nothing to me afterwards.

...

One morning, Mother said, "Dordor, you will start school in five days, finish your homework assignment."

"OK, I'll finish it all today," I said and opened my notebook and Tibetan book to write diary entries.

17

BIRTHDAY

I heard Mother say that a pregnant woman suffers for nine months. Women are brave when they give birth. Mother said, "My dear one, don't denigrate women. Your mother is a woman. Some women and girls do things that are greater than what men and boys do."

I knew that Cousin's wife had been pregnant for almost nine months. When he and his wife returned home from visiting the county hospital, Cousin said, "The doctor said she will give birth to a boy without pain or danger. She should take medicine regularly, maintain good health, and exercise."

"That's great news," Mother said happily. She was very excited and hoped for a boy. She loved me more than Young Sister, even though Young Sister worked at home with her. I was lucky to be the only son.

Early one morning, Cousin's elder daughter came by and said that her family needed Mother's help. Young Uncle was both worried and happy. He began chanting scriptures, lit a butter-lamp in front of the family shrine, and offered conifer needles on the altar. My family members were especially happy, because the baby would hopefully be a boy and it was the last chance for a child according to the birth control policy. I got up and dressed quickly without washing. I pleaded to go with Mother and she reluctantly agreed. We found Cousin burning wheat husks outside the gate when we arrived.

"Come in. We're waiting for you," Cousin said anxiously, and then put a conifer branch above the gate, signifying no visitors were

allowed. He had already made an offering of *sung* on the altar. Auspicious incense smoke wafted up against a backdrop of the ocean-blue sky. I followed Mother into the room where Sister-in-law was on the warm *dzeto*. Cousin had lit one hundred butter-lamps on the table in front of the family shrine. I could tell that he had been up since early that morning and had done everything that needed to be done such as making religious offerings, the house chores, and so on.

After half an hour, Sister-in-law said that she was uncomfortable and in pain. Mother and Sister-in-law's eldest daughter went to her bedside and held her hands. Unexpectedly, Mother ordered me to leave. I obediently left. I really wanted to see the baby when he first entered the world, because I had never seen a baby who had just emerged from its mother. I went into the kitchen where Cousin was boiling mutton and pork. He said nothing to me, just chanted scriptures that I had never heard before. I stood by the stove, warming up. He restlessly swept the stove, cleaned the kitchen, and said, "I must go to the altar on the second floor to look after the *sung* fire. Don't leave," and gave me a piece of pork from the pot before he left.

"OK," I said, nibbling the pork. I was hoping to hear Mother call me to see the baby. Ten minutes seemed like an hour. I hummed a tune I had learned in primary school. I hated being alone. Cousin returned with an armful of firewood, put some in the stove, and then went to the shrine to light more butter lamps.

Suddenly, Mother came into the kitchen and said, "The baby is safe and lovely. Come see."

Full of curiosity, I rushed into the room and saw Sister-in-law with the baby, who was wrapped in a small quilt and sleeping. He was very cute with tiny hands. We all happily looked at the baby, Mother went to the kitchen, ladled mutton soup into a bowl, handed it to Sister-in-law, and said, "Try to drink this soup." I enjoyed watching

the baby and didn't notice anyone else. I was afraid of getting too close to the baby, because Mother was there.

After lunch with the family, Cousin went with a *khada* and money to the local monastery by bicycle. Mother told him to ask the lama to give a name for the baby and chant for him. I didn't want to stay any longer, because I had seen the baby and eaten a good lunch, so I went out and played with village children.

18

TEWO TIBETAN MIDDLE SCHOOL

While attending primary school I longed to attend middle school. I especially admired the middle school gate. The buildings were in a big yard, but the gate made it very special. It was beautifully painted in five colors and decorated with snow-lions, tigers, and dragons. The gate cost more than 100,000 RMB when it was built in 1985. I had heard many esteemed Tibetan teachers were at the middle school. For all these reasons, grade six primary school students eagerly anticipated attending middle school and ardently prepared for the entrance exam.

"Dordor's future will not be like ours. We can't change our lives, but we can help change his. I'm sure he will have a better future life," Young Uncle said hopefully. After talking a lot about my future and our family's condition, the decision was reached that I should attend the Tibetan middle school for a better education.

Mother asked Brother-in-law if I could live at his home near the school during the term. She felt that I couldn't cook by myself and it would be safer and more convenient to stay at Brother-in-law's home. Brother-in-law welcomed me and asked me to help my nephew and niece with their studies. Elder Sister prepared a room for me where I could sleep and study. Brother-in-law gave me a good bicycle to ride to school.

Middle school tuition was not expensive, but was still much more money than primary school. We had more subjects, more classes, and studied harder than before. I got up early every morning

and went to school by bike with students from Brother-in-law's village. I started middle school at the age of fifteen. The weather was cold that winter with several heavy snows.

I prepared for each class and did well. The head teacher and my Tibetan teacher appreciated my study and praised me in front of the class and the school. I received awards because my scores were the highest. This delighted Brother-in-law's family, Young Uncle, and Cousin. Mother didn't care much about my studies. She only hoped I would soon return home and care for my family as other local boys did.

When I was in junior middle school grade one, Brother-in-law's mother told us about her parents:

My family owned a lot of land. We were rich and had much power in the village. Father took what he wanted from others, not caring who they were. He fell in love with a beautiful Sichuan Tibetan woman from a village about forty kilometers away. The Sichuan woman met him every time she came to town to buy necessities for her family. Then, her family arranged for her to marry a man from her own village, though she had promised that she would come and marry Father. At that time, there were many conflicts between tribes, villages, and areas.

After Father discovered she had married a man in her village, he angrily decided to kill that man. He went into the forest across from her village every day, hoping she would come. He planned to kidnap her. One spring morning she came with her new husband and a horse to plow the fields. Father looked around, saw no one else, rushed at the man, stabbed him several times, killed him, and cut off his ears as evidence that he was a hero. As soon as the local villagers discovered this, they gave chase, waving their swords and knives. Father and the Sichuan woman fled to Father's home. Father also killed two men from the other man's village on the way. This led to a long, horrible conflict between Father's and Mother's villages in which

eight more people were killed.

They lived happily for two years and had a daughter (Brother-in-law's mother). One day, while villagers were busily harvesting in the field, two men from the murdered man's village came and hid in grass until sunset. When all the villagers left for home, the two men rushed at Father, stabbed him repeatedly, cut off his ears and then fled without the village's knowledge. When villagers realized what had happened, they gave chase, but they didn't catch them.

The conflict between the two villages resumed and four more people were killed.

After your brother-in-law was born and a new young generation came along, the Sichuan woman's family and Brother-in-law's family reunited and built a solid family relationship. Now, they visit each other's homes when they have spare time, especially during the Tibetan New Year.

My middle school life was happy and I had a good relationship with the teachers and students. We planted willows on the mountain by the school, planted a school garden in spring, visited beautiful places, hiked in summer, swam in White Dragon River, joyfully ate delicious fruits in autumn, played various games, and had snowball fights in winter. I made friends whose homes were in many different townships. Middle school was full of activities and challenges and time passed quickly. Some students said middle school was boring, because they had too much homework. I thought differently and enjoyed learning new things from teachers, classmates, and friends.

19

A WEDDING PARTY

It is customary to hold religious rituals, wedding parties, drinking parties, and so on during the Tibetan New Year period. The fourth and fifth days of the first lunar month are the most auspicious days of the year for marriage. Young unmarried men and women talk openly about love during these two days, even in the presence of elders. It is a great time to show your feelings to someone you love.

The oldest son customarily marries and stays at home to care for the family, while his siblings leave home after marriage. Sons divide the family property equally if the family is wealthy. The oldest son cares for his father and the second son looks after his mother. Occasionally, a man marries his wife's sister, especially if he is rich and his wife's family is poor, and then takes responsibility for his wife's family and his own.

Some Tibetans living near my village have lives similar to ours, but their marriage systems are quite different. All their sons stay at home to care for the family, because they have a lot of farmland to plow. After the oldest son marries, the younger brother shares his oldest brother's wife. The oldest brother sleeps with his wife. After the first child is born, the second brother sleeps with the wife and they have more children. Daughters leave the home when they marry and live with their husbands.

When I was fifteen, a wealthy respected village family planned to hold a grand wedding party for their oldest son on the fourth and fifth days of the lunar month. Locals said it was the biggest wedding

in village history. I was happy to hear this, because children enjoyed the wedding parties. The girls and boys spent much time preparing wedding dances before Losar. We saw the groom's family with things they had bought for the wedding every afternoon while we practiced dances at the village school. Unfortunately, the oldest, most respected man in the village suddenly died on New Year's Eve. The groom's father came to the village school where we were practicing the wedding dances and said, "Thank all of you for preparing wedding dances. Unfortunately, we must change our plan for the wedding. We will have a small wedding party. All the villagers respect the family of the old man who has just passed away, so we canceled the wedding dances." Then he gave candies to each of us, and left. We dejectedly left the village school and returned home.

The fourth day of Losar was coming - time for the wedding party. I was in no mood to enjoy the day, but Mother woke me up at dawn to tell me that I had been asked to help, which meant I would go with several older men to greet and welcome the bride to our village. The groom would give ten to fifteen bags of pork, five boxes of tea, and other gifts to the bride's family. After eating an early breakfast, I got on a truck near the village with the groom's family and relatives. The truck was loaded with fried bread, pork, *khada*, and so on. We slowly drove a long time on a rough dirt road to the bride's village where we waited for the bride's family and villagers. Elders placed *khada* on *mani*-stones by the village and patiently waited. When people came out of the bride's home, we would offer *khada*, homemade liquor, and beer to the men of the bride's village and give candies to the girls, women, and children.

We made a fire by the village with their firewood and waited for the bride. Later, I acted as a helper and went with one of the groom's important representatives to the bride's home to answer questions asked by the bride's villagers and relatives.

An older man in our group offered *khada* to the bride's parents and elders. The others offered homemade liquor and beer to the bride's uncles and aunts. Meanwhile, I busily distributed boxes of candy to the bride's villagers and relatives. Suddenly, the bride's villagers started rubbing my head and teasing me. I knew I should not get angry, though I was very embarrassed and nervous facing such strangers. I had never encountered such a situation before.

A monk melodiously chanted scriptures on the *dzeto* while making sacred gestures.

I didn't see the bride at that time, but later saw her in a small room wearing fancy clothes, a *khada*, jewels, rings, and earrings. Two women were dressing the bride's hair in the traditional hairstyle with jewels. When they finished, she came with other young women to a large room where villagers and relatives were sitting. She cried quietly under her breath. Her parents, old women, and the bride's female friends were also crying. Young women the bride's age were crying a little more loudly than others. With two young women supporting her, the bride circled the main house pillar three times. Older women sang wedding songs near the bride. Next, several older men sang loudly and then four young men with good voices sang traditional songs.

The monk chanted scriptures as the bride walked out of her courtyard gate. All the villagers were gathered, quietly listening to the monk. As we came out of the bride's village, the villagers cheered up and some began singing love songs. We patiently offered homemade liquor, beer, and candy to them again. Then the old men of the bride's village offered *khada* to our elders and tied one to the front of each truck.

We then got in the trucks, which were driven to a site between the bride's and groom's villages. We got out of the trucks and sat on grass in a line, ranging from oldest to youngest. I sat at the end of the

line, because I was the youngest. The older men sang wedding songs in turn, while young people enjoyed the wedding party for two to three hours. Villagers offered *khada*, beer, and liquor to each other. Finally, the bride and our people got in our truck, cheered happily, and sang love songs. Our men exchanged our leather bags of pork for the bride's sacks of grains. Joyously, we then bid farewell to each other and left.

Back at my village, we didn't enjoy the wedding party very much. However, elders who came to the groom's home drank liquor, chatted quietly, and laughed. I was exhausted and glad when Mother called me to our home.

I didn't escort the bride to her new home on the fifth day, because Mother said several other people would do that.

20

PLOWING

Spring begins a month after the fifteenth day of the Tibetan New Year period. The leader of the field guards³¹ holds a meeting to decide when plowing should begin. Each field guard is responsible for the same number of households. There are three groups of field guards each year, who choose a single new leader each year. This man with the village leader manages all the village's business and religious activities including carrying Buddhist scriptures around the fields, deciding when the women and girls should go to the place of water deities to beseech the deities for a good harvest and adequate rain, and fining families whose livestock enter fields. The fines are paid in cash or grain, with the amount dependent on the damage caused. Horses and yaks are fined the heaviest and pigs and sheep are fined the least, because large livestock eat more crops than small livestock.

...

Streams flowed fast from melting snow. The sweet fragrance of flowers spread over the village and across the fields, livestock happily ate new grass, and crops that had been planted in late winter were starting to sprout, all signs of an auspicious spring. As the sun rose bright from behind the eastern mountains, the pleasing odor of smoldering *sung* wafted through the village and slowly rose into the sky. Farmers offered incense to Grandfather Mountain Dawa the day before plowing, confident that the mountain deity would provide a

³¹ Locally, these field guards are called *debi ngosrung*.

good harvest.

"We will offer *sung* to you and obey you. Bring us good harvests without floods. Bring a good harvest without storms, no harm to people, and no disease for livestock. My Dawa Mountain is like a parent who cares for his children. You know best," the villagers chanted, while offering *sung* on the village altar in the early mornings.

The farmers carried plows on their shoulders and bags of grain on their backs and led horses, mules, and yaks to the fields at dawn. An experienced older farmer took grain from his basket and scattered it on his field while moving forward and dragging his foot behind him to make a line. He would use this line later as a guide when scattering grain in the other direction. In another field, a young man harnessed his horse to the plow and held the leather reins. The horse had its head down and tried its best to pull the plow as the young man followed. He snapped a whip to urge the horse forward and sometimes shouted at the horse to speed up. His hands firmly gripping the plow, skillfully guided it. In other fields, children led bulls or gentle horses as they plowed. Women pounded clods of freshly plowed earth into bits with mallets. Relatives came with food at breakfast time. Since there was no one at home except grandparents and babies, there was no food to eat unless helpers prepared it and brought it to the fields.

Village girls and women dressed in colorful long skirts and scarves came with leather bags at noon. Some young wives rubbed lotion on their faces and tied their hair back so it fell down their backs, like a beautiful inky waterfall. Boys dressed in new clothes. Elders said locals celebrated this auspicious day for mountain deities and for plowing. It delighted the deities, gave people energy, and ensured good autumn harvests.

In one family field, an older man slowly plowed behind two

strong, yoked yaks, which strode steadily and obediently forward. A beautiful, tall, alert woman wearing long dark clothes walked behind the old man. She took a handful of beans from her small basket and skillfully dropped them into the freshly-plowed furrow in the ground.

The farmers and helpers happily returned home before the sun set behind the distant western mountains, their faces streaked with dirty sweat. After everyone finished eating supper, village men came out with their horses to the large fields in front of the village and raced the horses until dark. A few stars appeared in the sky to escort us home as the earth turned dark and tranquil. Many went to bed while others baked bread, fed the plow animals, and prepared for the next day's plowing. Horse hooves echoed in the silent sky as I went to bed that night. No helpers came the next day; we plowed by ourselves. Most village families finished plowing in three days, while some other families needed four days. Those who finished plowing early helped families with large fields.

21

CHURNING MILK

Crops grew lush in the fields. Bean plants gently undulated like ocean waves in the breeze. I was on summer vacation from middle school. Young Sister went to the mountains with other village women and cut two baskets of grass a day to use as winter fodder for livestock. The women and girls had much work to do in summer, such as weeding and milking every morning and late afternoon. Young Uncle herded the village cows, including my family's three cows, when it was my family's turn. I enjoyed herding pigs with other villagers every day on the summer pasture. The field guards strictly policed the fields. I thought, "If Elder Uncle were still here, he would surely return and help us herd."

One evening, I drove the pigs back home and into the pigsty. As I tiredly entered my home, I saw Mother churning milk, which she did once every five days in summer. Mother said, "I'm busy this summer, because I must milk two cows and one *zomo*, but I'm very happy to milk them and make butter and cheese for our family. This work is much lighter than when I was milking the village cows, *zomo*, and yaks with Aunt Zebatso on the mountain thirty years ago. There were hundreds to milk from dawn until noon, and only the two of us to do it! After I finished milking, my fingers ached. Then we needed to churn three or four times a day and dry the cheese in the sun. It was a lot of work. The village praised me at the end of the year and gave butter to our family as a reward."

"Mother, I'll help you," I said, hurrying over, gripping the handle, and churning. Mother sat on a chair by the stove and watched.

I churned for a while and then stopped because my hands hurt and I was tired. I called Young Sister, who churned longer than I did. Mother then churned continuously for half an hour.

"Dordor, come hold the handle while I wash my hands," Mother said, as I held my bowl, waiting impatiently for fresh butter.

"OK," I replied obediently and eagerly, because I desperately wanted to eat fresh butter before going to bed.

Mother finished washing her hands, took fresh butter from the churn, kneaded the butter skillfully into a flat, round cake, and then made one big ball of butter and five small balls. One small ball was offered to the family stove deity. The remaining four were for our family. After Young Uncle offered a little buttermilk to the family stove deity, he poured me a bowl of buttermilk and gave me a small ball of butter, which I mixed with *tsamba* while it melted on the stove. A bit later I ate it while drinking buttermilk. It was really delicious.

Young Uncle chanted the Six Sacred Syllables while keeping an eye on the buttermilk, which was heating on the stove. Mother and Young Sister cleaned the churn, room, and utensils, and arranged everything neatly. Eventually, Mother made the cheese, explaining to Young Sister how to make it. Young Sister learned slowly and could not churn without Mother's assistance. When it was ready, Mother poured fresh, moist cheese for everyone. Soon, I was deep asleep in bed with a full stomach.

The next morning when I awoke, Mother came to my bed and said, "You don't need to herd pigs today. Today is sunny so you must dry the cheese."

"OK, Mother," I said, but slept again until Young Sister called me for breakfast. After breakfast, Mother took a basket from the third story of our home to the second story where I was waiting. She spread the cheese out in the sun while I sat on a chair in the shade and watched, keeping cats and birds away from the cheese. While I was

drying the cheese, I took a small basket from my home, put a little cheese under it, and tied a rope to a stick propping up the over-turned basket. When birds flew under the basket to eat the cheese, I pulled the rope, trapping them. I caught five or six hungry birds this way. I later released them.

22

TRAGEDY

The day before Mother was injured, I had a dream: I was at Brother-in-law's home, attending school. Young people were playing cards, drinking happily, laughing loudly, and making lots of noise at my home with Mother. The dream woke me at dawn and I could not go back to sleep. I chanted scriptures Young Uncle had taught me when I was at home, and went to school in a depressed frame of mind.

I heard a motorcycle stop outside Brother-in-law's home that evening while I was doing my homework. I thought that it was just a guest, but it was Ojan Tsering.

"Dordor, Ojan is looking for you," Brother-in-law called urgently.

I was sure something was wrong. I threw down my books and rushed out of my room.

"Your Mother was injured and is now in the county hospital with your family and several of our villagers. I came here to get you," he said.

"Do you want to drink something?" Brother-in-law asked. Then he went to the stove and put a teapot on it, but Ojan remained standing.

"Thanks, but I have no time. I must go now. Go get your schoolbooks. Your family and the villagers are waiting for us at the hospital," he said.

"OK," I said, tossing my books in my schoolbag. We then rode a motorbike to the hospital. Elder Sister and Brother-in-law followed

on their tractor.

When we arrived at the hospital, we found all our Anebuze tribesmen talking to Cousin about treatment. Mother lay in bed. Nurses were helping the doctor give Mother an injection. Her head was stitched and covered with a white bandage. Elder Sister and Young Sister were sobbing quietly by Mother's bed. I had nothing to say. Mother was unconscious. Cousin came and told me not to cry. "The doctor said that your mother is not seriously hurt and that she'll soon be fine," he said reassuringly.

I did not believe him because I thought Mother would leave us, like Elder Uncle.

Villagers had helped bring Mother to the hospital, which was about four kilometers from the village. I appreciated their concern and thanked them sincerely. They stayed at the hospital until about midnight when Mother regained consciousness and could talk. Then they ate some food with Cousin and returned home. I then decided that I would do my best to help them when they needed it. Young Sister stayed up that night to watch Mother.

Young Sister told me that she had gone to the county town a week earlier to buy wheat flour and other items with a widow whom Mother had asked to help with the purchases. Few people had contact with this widow or talked with her family. Mother didn't care much about local superstition, which said that widows brought bad luck. Mother helped and comforted this widow whenever she came to our home. Our two families had worked together each winter since her husband passed away. Cousin and her husband had been best friends, and Cousin had also helped her a lot after her husband died.

Young Sister could not speak Chinese and Mother had no time, so the widow had promised to help. That afternoon, Young Sister bought five bags of wheat flour with the widow's help. She told Mother that it was a little strange that one bag of wheat flour was

missing when she got home. Mother calculated how much was paid and how many things were bought, based on Young Sister's account. By Mother's calculation, a bag of wheat flour was surely missing. Mother then went to the widow's home and asked about it. The widow was outraged, shouted, and insulted Mother. Mother remained silent and returned home. The next day, Mother questioned other women who had gone with Young Sister. They said Young Sister had indeed bought five bags of wheat flour with the widow.

The women told others what Mother was asking. After several days, the widow heard rumors that she was a thief who had stolen a bag of flour from Young Sister. One morning, she brought a bag of wheat flour to my home without saying anything, but Mother rejected it. The two argued. Finally, the widow beat Mother violently with a stick of firewood as her two daughters held Mother, knocking Mother to the ground. Neither Young Sister nor Young Uncle was present. After my family discovered Mother was injured, several young villagers brought her to the county hospital.

Mother stayed at the hospital for seventeen days. My sisters were outraged and wanted to beat the widow, but Cousin and Young Uncle stopped them. "Never use fists on women and girls, especially widows," they said.

Relatives and villagers visited Mother with fruit and money during the seventeen days of her hospitalization. My family spent a lot of money while we were staying there. Sometimes I cooked at the hospital for Mother, who fully recovered. Tribal elders discussed the situation and resolved the matter by requiring the widow's family to pay the 1,300 RMB needed for the medical treatment. However, our families never talked to each other again.

23

A HOT SPRING

It was the fifteenth day of the eighth lunar month, an auspicious day for bathing. I was sixteen. Mother stayed at home chanting the Six Sacred Syllables. She said her head ached when there was lightning before rain, although she didn't know how her head pain related to this. I worried that she hadn't completely recovered from the widow's beating.

Young Uncle and I joined the seven-day Mani Ritual at Lhamo Monastery. Afterwards, Young Uncle and I took the bus back home. On the way, the bus driver said, "Since today is a bathing day, I will take all of you to a hot spring for free."

"Thank you. Of course we would like to go," Young Uncle said warmly. The other passengers also agreed. I was delighted, because it was my first time to visit and bathe there with Young Uncle and other Tibetans. It was a long journey into a big valley. I sat on Young Uncle's lap while he sat cross-legged on an old sheepskin. Through the windows I saw many Tibetan villages along the road in Ngawa Prefecture. Livestock grazed near fields and family watchdogs were at their gates, barking when they saw the bus. I saw deer, fawns, rabbits, yaks, vultures, and pheasants. The valley was full of juniper trees, especially near the hot spring site, and their fragrance filled the air. After disembarking from the bus, Young Uncle pointed to a building and said, "The hot water runs from the left side of that grove of juniper trees and into that big room. We will go there and bathe. Women have another room. Han Chinese and foreigners must pay two *yuan*, but it's free for Tibetans."

The right side of the valley was a steep rocky mountain where few juniper trees grew. Young Uncle said meditation caves were in a rocky slope that was covered with countless prayer flags. The weather seemed warmer as we approached the spring. Hundreds had come to bathe to treat their illnesses. Tibetans, non-Tibetans, nomads, and farmers from Gansu and Sichuan were all there. The water was very hot when I first put my foot in it, but slowly it felt less hot. The water was changed every two hours. We bathed with five strangers for an hour. Only about fifteen people could bathe together.

After we finished, we visited several nearby smaller pools. We drank a little of the holy water as if it were medicine, got on the bus, and returned home. I told Mother what I had seen and had done at Lhamo Monastery and at the sacred hot spring. She smiled warmly, sat cross-legged on a square of sheepskin, and told me a story about beseeching mountain deities for rain:

All our village women and girls prepare to go to the sacred place of the naga on the fifteenth day of the fifth lunar month. No males go there. We take *tsamba* and conifer leaves to offer and request rain when there is a drought before harvesting. We offer incense and chant *mani* where the naga are. Girls collect plants from the forest. Older women stay at the sacred place of naga, chanting and waiting for the girls. They also prepare questions to ask naga and mountain deities. When the girls return, we make naga shapes out of the plants and dress them in beautiful clothes with earrings and new shoes, like how a local woman dresses for a special occasion. Afterward, old women beseech the great mountain deities and great naga for rain for our community.

Black clouds begin gathering over our village. After it rains, women ask many questions about their family's health and wellbeing. 'Will my daughter find a good husband this year?' 'Can my son find a good job this year?' 'Will we have a peaceful life this year?' The naga jump or shake in answer to each question. If the family will not have a good life, the naga shake fiercely. If the

family will find a good husband or wife, the naga jump happily. The naga will not jump or shake if males are present.

Finally, the older women gather to thank the deities and naga by singing to them. Then, we untie the plants, leave them in a pile, and happily return home.

This was Mother's brief description of beseeching deities for rainfall before village harvest.

Today, I doubt naga jump and shake, but I believe mountain deities and naga help locals.

THE GANLHO NORMAL SCHOOL

When I received my acceptance letter from the Tibetan Department of Ganlho Normal School, my family agreed that I could attend. I had asked for permission to attend the Tibetan Middle School of Tso.³² I got the second highest score of all students that year in Tewo, and believed I could catch up with other students if I studied harder than ever before. However, my family rejected my request.

Cousin took me to Tso, the capital city of Ganlho Prefecture, where Ganlho Normal School is located. Cousin and I arrived two days before classes started. Apo Square features a stone Tibetan yak standing ten meters high amid some small trees. There is also a white, stone Tibetan antelope in this square. There were many cars and buses on the street. High buildings surrounded this square, higher than any in our county town.

Cousin and I went to the Nine Story Tower by taxi, which is about three kilometers from the city square. Cousin bought *khada* and then we prayed inside. We took off our shoes and prostrated three times before we entered the first floor where Buddha images, pictures of lamas, and images of Tibetan kings, queens, scholars, and Tonmi Sampodra³³ are kept. We chanted scriptures as we prayed. We climbed up the nine floors, worshiping on each floor as we went. Later, we circumambulated the Tower, and then returned to the hotel

³² Tibetan: Antelope City; Chinese = Hezuo.

³³ Tonmi Sampodra went to India to study Sanskrit, returned to Tibet, and then created the Tibetan alphabet during the rule of King Songtsan Gampo.

and watched TV. Some say the Tower was built by Milarepa long ago. Locals say there are many different histories of the Tower.

Cousin called my head teacher to learn exactly when school would start, and then we went to register. We were unfamiliar with the school, and didn't know where the head teacher's office was. Luckily, I met four students who had entered the school the previous year. They helped me register. I noticed the language most students spoke was quite different from my dialect. I realized that I would have to overcome this obstacle quickly or I would have trouble in Tibetan class. Students were from seven counties and one city, and were Tibetan, Han Chinese, and Hui.

Cousin went home after I registered. I only knew the four students who had helped me register. When I had nothing to do, I found them and chatted. They also had the same difficulties I had concerning the dialect. They said that each year the school gave a prize to the best student in each class, and such students could find a job easily after graduating.

There were fifty-four students in my class. The head teacher told us many things and seemed strict and solemn. I understood very little because of the language barrier. Later, students from Jone County explained what had been said. I communicated in Chinese with classmates who were not from Jone for about six weeks until I had learned more of the Amdo dialect spoken by most students. I was helped by classmates and teachers during the weekends. During the time I was learning the dialect, I had difficulty following the classes. My classmates, including my hometown mates, often teased me, but I ignored them. Every Wednesday evening, each student had to go to the stage and tell a Tibetan story to the class and the Tibetan teacher. This was very hard for me because speaking Amdo was difficult for me. Students burst into laughter when I spoke in my own dialect. I dreaded Wednesday evenings.

There were about ten subjects in normal school. The most important was Tibetan, since we were in the Tibetan Department. I studied hard and got good scores. Some classmates didn't like me and laughed at me when I talked with them. Several female students also disliked me and said I was not Tibetan, because I couldn't speak a variety of Tibetan that they could understand. However, my roommates never made fun of me. They were kind and respected me, especially those from Jone County. I learned from them and never turned down a chance to improve. With teachers' and classmates' help and encouragement, I got many prizes.

25

A LOST YAK

It snowed for two nights and a day in the winter of 2002. The livestock came down from the mountains, gathered around the village, drank water from the river, and had a warm place to sleep. The weather was colder in the mountains, where the snow was deeper and the streams were frozen. Some families sold one or two of their weakest yaks. Other families sold the best ones for cash. My family sold our best yak to pay for my school fees. The yaks were loaded on tractor-trailers with ropes and transported to the county town.

The snowmelt began on the lower part of the mountain after two sunny days and the yaks returned to the mountains. A Muslim yak buyer informed us that they had lost a yak when they were on their way to the county town with some yaks they had bought. They had followed the yak, but had lost it in the darkness. The dealer thought that the yak had returned to my village's mountain and offered 1,000 *yuan* to whoever found it.

"Dordor," someone called after supper when Mother was counting her prayer beads and Young Uncle was spinning his prayer wheel as usual. Young Sister and I were watching TV.

"Hey! Who are you?" I called back.

"Me. Your neighbor," he said and shone a torch in my face when I got to the gate.

"My friend and I will go to the mountain to look for the lost yak tomorrow. Will you come with us? Go ask your Mother if you can come. I'll wait for you," he said.

I rushed into my home and told Mother what the neighbor had said.

"It's up to you. Go if you want. We have nothing special to do these days," Mother said.

I returned and said, "Mother agrees. I'll go with you. What time will we leave?"

"I'll call you at dawn," he said and left.

Mother told me to make dough and told Young Sister to bake bread for food on my journey. After I kneaded the wheat flour and flattened it, Young Sister said she wanted to watch TV. Mother got angry and loudly ordered her to bake it. She then grudgingly went to the kitchen and baked the bread for my journey. I went to bed early.

As soon as the neighbor called the next morning, Mother got up and put the baked bread into the leather bag that I carried when I herded pigs. The weather was not very cold at dawn, but I still put on the thick clothes Mother had prepared. My neighbor and his friends waited outside the gate. I walked between them, because they were concerned that I could not see the path. No morning birds chirped on the tranquil, snow-covered earth. We looked for livestock as we climbed the mountain. Usually, people rest five or six times before reaching the mountaintop, but we rested just once. It was very cold. Light snow blew on the mountain. We made a big fire by the forest and warmed ourselves for two hours. We discussed in which direction we should go and also chatted about girls and who we should chase.

We decided to split up. My neighbor and I would go behind the mountain and his friend would search in front of the mountain. It was a little dangerous, because the snow-covered path was slippery. We agreed to meet at the summer pasture. We put snow on the fire, making sure it was dead before we left. My neighbor looked for livestock through a pair of binoculars. He said that he saw nothing on the lower part of the mountain. We walked through a small forest and

found several groups of yaks, but not the lost yak. My neighbor was familiar with the missing yak's color and horns. Then we made a fire to dry our clothes and warm our feet.

"Let's have some baked bread and apples before we take off our shoes and socks," he suggested. I was very hungry and took out my baked bread, which we ate with apples by the fire like two monkeys.

"The yak probably didn't return to the mountain. What do you think?" he said.

"I don't know. I have no experience with the places that livestock stay," I said, drying my socks by the fire.

When we reached the hut on the summer pasture where we had agreed to meet, his four friends had made a fire and were waiting for us. My feet were numb and I was so cold that I trembled like a leaf in the wind. His friends were talking with a mountain villager and basking by the fire. I asked him if they had seen the lost yak. One replied that he had seen nothing.

We ate the remaining food, chatted, laughed, and stayed by the fire until our clothes dried. They were sure that the lost yak hadn't return to the mountain. My neighbor, who has an amazing voice, sang love songs on the way home.

The next day, many villagers went looking for the lost yak but my neighbor and I didn't join them. The villagers found nothing and returned home that afternoon. Ten days later, we heard that an old man from a village near Tiger Mountain had seen the lost yak. There were no further reports.

26

GREEN ENVIRONMENT

It was the end of the Tibetan New Year holiday in 2002. Villagers were basking in the sun daily. Elders gathered around the *mani*-shrine, chanting the Six Sacred Syllables. Many villagers gathered in homes, played chess, chatted, and drank beer and homemade liquor. The village leader called the family heads to a meeting before we plowed the fields. Family-heads and young people gathered in the meeting hall. Four officials were already there.

"Please listen as I read this official announcement about planting trees and grass in fields to improve and conserve the environment." He read for twenty minutes as we listened in astonishment. He finished with, "Please give me your suggestions about planting. You can discuss this outside the meeting hall as well."

An old man said our ancestors had depended on the fields to survive for generations and, if we stopped farming, we would lose our culture and lives.

A young man said that modern society was developing rapidly and that it was an excellent idea to get food and clothes in return for planting trees and grass in the fields.

Another man said it was not a bad idea to plant trees and grass in half of the fields, because we would plant trees on poor-quality farmland and plant grass on mountain farmland.

Several women said they liked the idea of planting trees in the lower farmland and planting grass in the upper part, because it was a heavy burden for women and girls to do fieldwork all their lives. The officials finally decided that our village must plant trees and grass on

all of the farmland, because most farmland was located by the railway. It would thus prove that trees had been planted when provincial inspectors came.

Officials came from the county town a week later and measured the fields with the villagers. Trees and grass were thus planted in 2002. There were many disagreements over the size of the fields when the measurements were made.

The provincial government routed a railway from my township to Ganlho that year. My family lost fifteen and half *mu* that we had cultivated for years. The villagers spent about seventy days planting trees and grass.

Life has changed drastically. Villagers must now leave their homes to earn income doing construction work, road building, and gold mining. Generally, only old people and children stay in the village in summer and autumn. Elders blame the young generations and lazy women for the decision to plant trees and grass in fields and complain that the village is not as united as before. Many traditional customs, religious rituals, and celebrations are also disappearing.

SLAUGHTERING PIGS

Slaughtering pigs before Losar is necessary because pork is an essential Losar food. There are no specific dates for butchering pigs. Instead, families do it whenever they are free and have the necessary helpers. We give pork to relatives when they hold a wedding party or a funeral. We cook pork for visitors to show hospitality. Students give pork to county officials when they seek favors. Some families raise pigs and sell pork in the county town before Losar. My family slaughters four or five pigs yearly.

My family had four, big fat pigs to slaughter when I returned from Ganlho Normal School in 2003. Mother said we lacked pig feed so we should slaughter the pigs before Losar. Homemakers usually feed their pigs with water and not much grain when they are about to slaughter them, making the pigs' intestines easier to clean.

I got up when Mother called early one morning. Young Uncle chanted scriptures before I asked men from our tribe to help slaughter the pigs. Mother and Young Sister prepared knives and breakfast. After I called one time at each home, the men came immediately with ropes and knives, because Mother had told our tribesmen the day before that my family would slaughter the pigs the next day.

Helpers ate the breakfast we had prepared, and then the young men went to the pigsty while the older men sharpened knives. We slowly approached the pigs, worried that they would bite us. One man caught a pig by grabbing hold of its ears. Then, a rope was tied around its neck and it was pulled away by other helpers. After all four

pigs were hanging from the pigsty ceiling, I handed a knife to Cousin, who stabbed each pig. Three butter-lamps were lit in the family shrine. Young Uncle and other family members chanted the Six Sacred Syllables to absolve the killer of sin. One person held the back of the pig and loosened the rope to let blood run into a metal basin held under the pig. Young Uncle came into the pigsty with the prayer wheel and holy water, chanted the Six Sacred Syllables, touched the prayer wheel to each pig's head three times, and poured holy water into each pig's mouth. The pigs died quickly.

Later, we put the four carcasses into a pushcart and took utensils and kettle to a stream where Young Sister had prepared a big pot of boiling water. Cousin checked the hot water and then the carcasses were put inside. We removed the carcass after a few minutes, put them on a big board, and removed the bristles, which we later exchanged for red pepper from pepper dealers.

We then took the carcasses to another fire to singe any remaining hair. Cousin and I washed the carcasses. Afterward, the pigs were cut open and blood inside the chest was removed with a small bowl and placed in a metal basin. Next, the intestines, liver, and heart were removed. Young people cleaned the intestines as children poured warm water inside to wash them clean.

Older men took the carcasses to our home, cut them up, and hung the pieces from roof poles.

It was noon when young people finished washing intestines. During this process, the butchers had a lunch of pork pieces mixed with chili and vinegar. I pushed the cart home as the butchers were eating and drinking beer. When the butchers finished eating, they continued working and then Mother offered lunch.

Two old men kneaded barley flour mixed with small pieces of pork, onion, and salt, then stuffed the mixture into intestines that had been washed several times with hot water. Meanwhile, four

young people mixed blood and bean flour with water in a big pot; added salt, onion, garlic, and other spices; and stuffed this mixture into other intestines to make other sausages. The two older men boiled the sausages.

Meanwhile, Cousin boiled fresh pork in the kitchen as Mother and Young Sister washed the utensils we had used that morning. I ran here and there the whole day whenever I was called, because I was the youngest boy in my family.

When the butchers finished in the afternoon, Mother invited them to a meal of pork, sausages, beer, and bread. Two young men cut pork, blood sausages, *tsamba* sausages, liver, and pigskins into pieces. These would be given to families in our tribe, family friends, and relatives.

Mother cooked a big pot of congee for children in our tribe, who came and took *shalkal*³⁴ after the butchers left. Cousin cooked pork and blood sausages, and put them on three plates for the butchers. The butchers ate them while drinking beer and chatting. The golden sun had already set behind the west mountain by the time they left for home.

³⁴ Blood sausage, *tsamba* sausage, liver, and pigskin are offered when they come to eat the congee.

28

CONCLUSION

In 2008, five years after I started learning English, I graduated from Qinghai Normal University. With the ETP teachers' encouragement and assistance, a few of my classmates had applied to foreign schools for further study. Thus inspired, I applied to Silliman University in the Philippines, was accepted, and then began two years of study at the MA level in Anthropology.

I was impressed with how much better the education system is in the Philippines than in China. Most professors that I met were highly educated, which is not the case in China. However, most professors that I met in the Philippines were unable to speak fluent English. To complete the requirements of my degree, I wrote a thesis on the Matri Ritual in Leglung Community, Tewa County. This ritual is held annually and involves participants circumambulating a Bon monastery in a counterclockwise direction for seven days and nights without stopping. This is made possible because participants from different villages take turns circumambulating. Ritual participants should not eat meat and garlic, and must abstain from sex, liquor, and fighting.

After graduation from Silliman University, I will return, find a job in the local government, and try to meet the expectations of those who have loved, helped, and encouraged me when I was struggling. At the same time, if I can, I will strive to preserve Tibetan cultural heritage, conserve the local environment and natural resources, and improve local education.

PHOTOGRAPHS

Photograph One. Gonchok Shira (b. 1977) and Tudan Gamtso (b. 1971) with local children on the Donwa grassland, June 2011 (Dorjee Tsedan).

Photograph Two. A representative of each Zhagana household in four Zhagana villages participated in the Mani Ritual and chanted *mani* in the main temple in Zhagana Monastery, June 2011 (Dorjee Tsedan).

Photograph Three. Sangey Tsering's (b. 1985) family members harvest beans in their bean field in Donwa Village, July 2011 (Dorjee Tsedan).

Photograph Four. Drega (b. 1984), his wife (Lhamo Drolma b. 1989), and his family helper (Gonpa Tso b. 1986) carry harvested beans in Donwa Village as they return home for lunch, July 2011 (Dorjee Tsedan).

Photograph Five. Harvested beans on inserted-rafters in Dredze Village, Yiwa Township, June 2011 (Dorjee Tsedan).

Photograph Six. Jeeshi Tso (b. 1949) and her grandson (Sarnang Wangdan b. 2010) sit in a potato field in Dredze Village, September 2011 (Dorjee Tsedan).

Photograph Seven. Sarnang Wangdan stands by his home gate in Dredze Village, September 2011 (Dorjee Tsedan).

Photograph Eight. Yumtsering (b. 1975) leads a yellow *zomo* from the winter pasture in Zhagana, December 2011 (Gonbo Jay, b. 1985).

Photograph Nine. Gadou Jay (b. 1975) and fellow villagers return from the winter pasture in Zhagana, December 2011 (Gonbo Jay).

Photograph Ten. Patching a churn with *tsamba* before churning milk in Donwa Village, Yiwa Township, July 2011 (Dorjee Tsedan).

Photograph Eleven. Churned butter in Donwa Village, July 2011 (Dorjee Tsedan).

Photograph Twelve. Churned butter squeezed into a big chunk in Donwa Village, Yiwa Township, July 2011 (Dorjee Tsedan).

Photograph Thirteen. Wande Tsering (b. 1945, right), Damu Tso (b. 1954, middle), and Nanjo Tso (b. 1939) chat after eating rice congee by the main temple, December 2011 (Gonbo Jay).

Photograph Fourteen. Rako Jay (b. 1950) and two fellow Donwa villagers ready for *mani* chanting in the main Zhagana temple, December 2011 (Gonbo Jay).

Photograph Fifteen. Female villagers in Zhagana warm by the fire in the cooking room in the monastery, December 2011 (Gonbo Jay).

Photograph Sixteen. Pouring congee from a big pot into a metal pail in the main Zhagana temple, December 2011 (Gonbo Jay).

Photograph Seventeen. Rice congee is ladled into a metal pail in the kitchen in Zhagana, December 2011 (Gonbo Jay).

Photograph Eighteen. Jaman (b. 1975) and fellow Yeri villagers circle the *mani* temple in Zhagana, December 2011 in December 2011 (Gonbo Jay).

Photograph Nineteen. Achel (b. 1973) circumambulates the *mani* temple, Donwa Village, December 2011 (Gonbo Jay)

Photograph Twenty. Donwa Mani Temple, the place where locals could hold such religious activities as chanting *mani* and fasting, December 2011 (Gonbo Jay).

Photograph Twenty-one. A watermill grinds roasted barley into flour, Donwa Village, July 2011 (Dorjee Tsedan).











































NON-ENGLISH TERMS

A

Achel, a chos ཨ་ཚོས།
Agon, a mgon ཨ་མགོན།
Agung, a dkon ཨ་དཀོན།
Akhu Nyima, a khu nyi ma ཨ་ཁུ་ཉི་མ།
Amdo, a mdo ཨ་མདོ།
Anebudze, a myes bu rgyud ཨ་མེས་བུ་རྒྱུད།
Apo, a spo ཨ་སྟོ།

B

Wande Tar, ban de thar བན་དེ་ཐར།
Banma Jap, pad ma skyabs བན་མ་སྐྱབས།
Bon, bon བོན།
Bonbo, dpon po དཔོན་པོ།
Bugang, 'bur sgang འབྲུར་སྐང།
Buntso, phun tshogs བུན་ཚོགས།

D

Damu Tso, stag mo 'tsho ལྷག་མོ་འཚོ།
Dantsering, rtam tshe ring ཏམ་ཚེ་རིང་།
Dawa, zla ba ལྷ་བ།
debi ngosrung ལྷེ་བའི་སྒྲོ་སྤྱང་།
Donwa, gdong ba གདོང་བ།
Donwa Mani, gdong ba ma Ni གདོང་བ་མ་ཉི།
Dordor, rdo rdo རོ་རོ།
Dorine, rdor gnas རོ་གནས།, Duoni 夺尼 Township
Dorjee Man, rdo rje sman རོ་རྗེ་སྐམ།

Dorjee Tsedan, rdo rje tshe brtan རོ་རྩེ་ཚེ་བརྟན།
 Dorjee Tso, rdo rje 'tsho རོ་རྩེ་འཚོ།
 dorma, gtor ma གཏོར་མ།
 Dredze, 'bru rdzi འབྲུ་རྩི།
 Drega, 'brug dkar འབྲུག་དཀར།
 Drodza Paba, 'gro mdza' 'phags pa འབྲོ་མཛའ་འཕགས་པ།
 Dzeku Ripug, mdzub gu ring phug མཛུབ་གུ་རིང་ཕུག།
 dzeto, rdzab thab རྩེ་བ་ཐབ།

G

Gadou Jay, dka' thub skyabs དཀའ་ཐུབ་སྐྱབས།
 Ganlho, kan lho ཀན་ལྷོ།
 Gannan 甘南
 Gansu 甘肃
 Gesar, ge sar གེ་སར།
 Gonboo Jay, mgon po skyabs མགོན་པོ་སྐྱབས།
 Gonchok Shira, dkon mchog shes rab དགོན་མཚོག་ཤེས་རབ།
 Gontsa, sgang tsha སྒང་ཚ།
 Gonpa Tso, dgon pa mtsho དགོན་པ་མཚོ།

H

Han 汉
 Hezuo 合作
 Hui 回族

J

Jaman, lcags sman ལུགས་སྐྱམ།
 Jamtso Hurtun, rgya mtsho hub 'thung རྒྱ་མཚོ་རུབ་འབྲུང་།
 Jasha Marlen, lcags sreg dmar len ལུགས་སྟེག་དམར་ལེན།
 Jeeshi Tso, 'jigs byed 'tsho འཇིགས་བྱེད་འཚོ།
 jin 斤

Jokang, jo khang ཇོཁང་།

Jone, co ne ཅོ་ནེ།

Jone Bonbo, co ne dpon po ཅོ་ནེ་དཔོན་པོ།

K

Kache, kha che ཁ་ཅེ།

Kailash, ke la sha ཀེ་ལ་ཤ། Gangs rin po che གངས་རིན་པོ་ཅེ།

Kanjur, bka' 'gyur བཀའ་བརྒྱུད།

khada, kha btags ཁ་བདགས།

King Gesar, ge sar rgyal po ཀེ་སར་རྒྱལ་པོ།

L

ladze, lab rtse ལའ་རེ།

Lama Tso, bla ma 'tsho ལྷ་མ་འཙོ།

Lanzhou 兰州

Lhasol Monastery, lha gsol dgon pa ལྷ་གསལ་དགོན་པ།

Lhamo Jay, lha mo skyabs ལྷ་མོ་སྐྱབས།

Leglung, legs lung ལེགས་ལུང་།

Lhamo Drolma, lha mo sgrol ma ལྷ་མོ་སྐྱོལ་མ།

Lhamo Monastery, lha mo dgon pa ལྷ་མོ་དགོན་པ།

Lhasa, lha sa ལྷ་ས།

Lhatsedu ལ་ཙེ་སུད། 拉泽古

lhoda, rlung rta ལྷོ་རྟ།

Linxia 临夏

Losar, lo sar ལོ་སར།

Losang Tsering, blo bzang tshe ring ལྷོ་བཟང་ཅེ་རིང་།

Luchu, klu chu ལུ་ཅུ།

M

Machu, rma chu མ་ཅུ།

mani, ma Ni མ་ཎི།

Matri, ma tri མ་ཏྲི།

Milarepa, mi la ras pa མི་ལ་རས་པ།

mu མུ

N

Nangwa, rnga ba རྩ་བ།

Nanjo Tso, rnal 'byor 'tsho ནུལ་འབྱོར་འཚོ།

Nyanyul, myang yul སྤང་ཡུལ།

O

Ojan Tsering, o rgyan tshe ring ཨོ་རྒྱན་ཚེ་རིང་།

P

Padba Jay, 'phags pa skyabs པདཔལ་པ་སྐྱམས།

Q

Qinghai 青海

R

Rako Jay, rin 'khon skyabs རེན་འཁོན་སྐྱམས།

Rin chen rdo rje རིན་ཆེན་རྡོ་རྗེ།

RMB 人民币

S

Sangey Tsering, sangs rgyas tshe ring སངས་རྒྱས་ཚེ་རིང་།

Sarnang Wangdan, bsod nams dbang ldan བསོད་ནམས་དབང་ལྡན།

Shaza, sha rgya ཤ་རྩ།

shala, sha la ཤ་ལ།

shalkal, sha skal ཤ་སྐལ།

Sichuan 四川

Songtsan Gampo, srong btsan sgam po རྟོང་བཙན་སྐམ་པོ།

sung, bsang བསང་།

T

Taba, grags pa གྲགས་པ།

Tanjur, bstan 'gyur བསྟན་འགྱུར།
terang, the'u rang རེ་འུ་རང།
 Tewo, the bo རེ་བོ།
 Tobagar, thos pa dga' ཐོས་པ་དག་ལ།
 Todsong, thab song ཐབ་སོང་།
 Tonmi Sampodra, thon mi sam b+ho Ta ཐོན་མི་སམ་བློ་ཏ།
tsamba, rtsam pa ཅམ་པ།
tsasong, tsha bsang ཅ་བསང་།
 Tsekho, tshe kho ཅེ་ཁོ།
 Tsering, tshe ring ཅེ་རིང་།
 Tso, gtsos ཀཙོས།
 Tsongru ཚོང་རུ། 寸日
 Tudan Gamtso, thub bstan rgya mtsho ཐུབ་བསྟན་རྒྱ་མཚོ།

W

Wande Tsering, ban+de tshe ring བནྟེ་ཅེ་རིང་།
 White-Dragon River, 'brug dkar gtsang po འབྲུག་དཀར་གཙང་པོ།

X

Xinjiang 新疆

Y

Yalongtsangpo, yar klung gtsang po ཡར་ཁྲུང་གཙང་པོ།
 Yeri, nyag ru ཡེ་རུ།
 Yiwa, g.yi ba ཡེ་ཡི་བ།
yuan 元
 Yumtso, yum 'tsho ཡུམ་འཚོ།
 Yumtsering, yum tshe ring ཡུམ་ཅེ་རིང་།
 Yunnan 云南

Z

Zebatso, btsun pa 'tsho བཙུན་པ་འཚོ།

Zhagana, brag sgam nang བྲག་སྒམ་ནང་།

Zhogartsejee, 'brong rgod rtse brgyad འབྲོང་རྟོག་རྩེ་བརྟམ་།

Ziling, zi ling ཟེ་ལིང་།

zomo, mdzo mo མཚོ་མོ་།

Zorgay, mdzod dge མཚོ་དང་ལྷོ་།