

Tenzin Dolsel
Narrator

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Minnesota Historical Society
Interviewers

Interviewed for the
Minnesota Tibetan Oral History Project

September 2, 2005
Tenzin Dolsel Residence
Fridley, Minnesota

Tenzin Khando - TK
Tenzin Dolsel - TD
Charles Lenz - CL

TK: This is Tenzin Khando conducting an interview with Tenzin Dolsel on 2 September 2005 at her home in Fridley, Minnesota. The people present are myself, Tenzin Dolsel and Charlie Lenz, the project director.

Can you please state your name?

TD: My name is Tenzin Dolsel.

TK: Would you spell it, please?

TD: T-e-n-z-i-n. Last name is D-o-l-s-e-l.

TK: And your age?

TD: I'm twenty years old.

TK: Could you talk a little bit about your childhood? Where were you born?

TD: I was born and raised in Bylakuppee, South India. It's a Tibetan settlement.

TK: Schooling after that?

TD: Oh, yes. I went to a Tibetan grade school. I went there like from first grade until ninth grade.

TK: And then after that?

TD: After that I went to Edison High School. From tenth grade through twelfth.

TK: That was in the States?

TD: Yes. Here.

TK: When did you find out you were leaving for Minnesota?

TD: I believe it was . . . in 1997, I believe.

TK: 1997?

TD: Yes.

TK: What was your reaction when you—?

TD: Excited. Because I get to see a new place. Live in a different place.

TK: Were you anxious about moving?

TD: Yes. I was.

TK: How about your friends what were their reactions?

TD: Well, they know that my dad is in Minnesota. They know that I will be moving, move to Minnesota sooner or later. So it's like, not surprised, really.

TK: What were your expectations before you moved to Minnesota of the United States in general?

TD: I guess I was very small. Like say, twelve or thirteen. So I didn't know what to expect except like get a good education and explore U.S.

TK: Could you go into a little more about the good education then? Why did you think that?

TD: Well, I heard that it's a very—it's the best education system in the world. So I was excited to learn a different way in a different system.

TK: Now the school that you attended when you were younger. That was a Tibetan school?

TD: Yes. It was, yes. Run by Tibetan Government as was Indian Government, I believe. It's a Central Tibetan School.

TK: What was the population then?

TD: You mean the school?

TK: Yes.

TD: It's about, I think it's about five hundred. We have like first grade until . . . to tenth grade. We had about like twenty-four teachers. It's a small school.

TK: And the area where you grew up in India, where was that again?

TD: It was in South India. It's like, it's the biggest Tibetan settlement in India. It's a big town.

TK: What was it like living there?

TD: It was very nice because it's like even though I was born and raised in India, I still feel like Tibetan. Like, you know, not like Indian. Because I was raised in a very close community. We were so united. We support each other in like whatever problems we have and . . . yes. I didn't feel like I'm an outsider since like I'm in a very different country than my own native country. So yes, I feel pretty good living there.

TK: What was, do you say, the major occupation of most people in that area?

TD: They are most like—majority ones are small, they own small farms like say, two to three acres and usually plant crops like maize and pumpkins and rice, I think. Yes. And then some do also like small business. Have small business.

TK: So before you moved to the United States, what would you say you planned to do with your life? Before coming here. Before knowing that you were going to the United States. Did you know or—?

TD: Yes. You mean like career?

TK: Yes.

TD: I used to like being a teacher because I love children and like—teacher means that you get to interact with children all the time.

TK: In order to do that you would have to leave your community or—?

TD: Yes. Leave the community and go to like universities and get a degree and then teach.

TK: Going into your education in the United States. What was your experience like going to a completely different kind of school? Completely different kind of educational system and curriculum?

TD: Actually, when I was in India I used to study like different countries and stuff. Like read about it. Then when I came here it's like, you know, really experiencing it. Like talking to different people from all the worlds like Africans and different . . . like people from different countries in Europe and Asia and it's like knowing cultures, different cultures. Really experiencing it instead of just reading on it. Here I observed, like the education system is really good. Especially English class. You have to write on your own rather than just like copying questions and answers. Like in India we don't practice much. Like here. And then also discussing part. I really like it. Any class.

TK: So in order to have class discussions and to be able to participate, I would think that you would need to have like a sufficient grasp of English. Did you face any problems in that area when you first moved to Minnesota?

TD: It was strange to speak since I'm not used to speaking much in India. But I was used to—listen. Like teachers always speak English rather than like Hindi or Tibetan. So I was okay in class, but when it comes to speaking it was a little bit kind of hard in the beginning. But I got used to it.

TK: What about the teachers? Were they supportive?

TD: Here? Oh, yes. They were like—they were really good to me. Yes. They were supportive and they were understanding, too. I guess it's because Edison is like, they have a multi-cultural—like students and yes, I guess they were.

TK: How about the student body?

TD: The student body? Oh, yes. I was in Students for Free Tibet (SFT) at Edison, too. And yes, that was interesting to be able to like be with Tibetan kids and then discuss about like Tibet and like, you know, political issues and stuff.

TK: So there were other Tibetans at Edison High?

TD: Yes. There were like—I believe there was ten to fifteen students.

TK: That was one of the larger concentrations of Tibetan students.

TD: Yes. I think so.

TK: Was that helpful at all having other Tibetans there?

TD: Yes, it was. When I came here it was like, you know, I don't know any of the kids. Like it was easier to associate with Tibetan kids since we know the same language and we have been to like same experience like leaving it recently. Tibetan settlement.

TK: Obviously having other Tibetans there was helpful for you. Do you think in any way it inhibited you from making friendships with other people?

TD: Oh, no, no, no. I made friends with other kids, too. Besides Tibetans. So, yes.

TK: Do you think having a multi-cultural student body at Edison, was it more helpful for you to kind of immerse in American culture?

TD: It was very helpful, since I got to know different cultures. So since I will live in the U.S. that means I have to deal with not just one race but lots of different people. So like, yes, it was very helpful like to know about them. Like culture, like what—culture and language and that stuff. It was helpful.

TK: You stated that you were in a Students for Free Tibet group at Edison.

TD: Yes.

TK: How did that start?

TD: Actually there is a teacher who knows about Tibet and she was encouraging us to open a group. I believe it was one girl who moved from New York to here. She was an active SFT student at New York so she opened here with the teacher and we also joined her.

TK: What made you want to join the group? Why were you interested?

TD: To know more about Tibet and do something rather than nothing.

TK: What were some of the things that you guys did at the very beginning?

TD: We did fundraising. We did talent shows at high school. We usually have discussions once a week. When I was in high school I was interviewed about like how we are like reacting. Like Tibetan kids, especially. Who was born and raised in India but then moving here. What's the difference? I believe it was a study done by a professor. He's a Tibetan professor at . . . I forgot the name, his name. It was done by—it was interesting.

TK: What was the reaction of the student body and teachers, just general school reaction when you opened a group like Students for Free Tibet?

TD: We were really enjoying it because we get to see and react, like have a conversation like how it's like to be here, you know. Like when you've just moved here from India. It's like what are the experiences, what you have to expect and what you have to do. Sort of like have advices from Tibetan kids who have been here for years. So it was nice to have conversations with them.

TK: So you had people in your group who were here longer than you were.

TD: Yes.

TK: How much longer were they here?

TD: Maybe five . . . five, six years.

TK: So you arrived a little late?

TD: Yes. I was.

TK: Compared to the other Tibetans being here.

TD: Yes.

TK: Okay. What was that like? Coming here and having a large Tibetan group already settled in Minnesota?

TD: It was good to me since like, you know, I get to have adventures, advantages like what to expect and they tell me what I have to expect and what it will be like living here as being a Tibetan. So, yes. It was good.

TK: Going into that, when you first moved here, what kind of a community did you live in? Which city?

TD: I lived in Minneapolis for like about a year and then I moved here.

TK: What was that like living in Minneapolis?

TD: It was fun. I think. I believe it was near University . . . U of M. So it was fun.

TK: Was it different considering that you lived in a largely agricultural area in India?

TD: Yes. It was very different. This is like a big city. Over there it's like a small town. It's not materialized. It's not modernized. Here it's like very different. Like lifestyle and culture and everything is different.

TK: What was your initial response to it, the difference in lifestyles and culture?

TD: Surprise, I believe. I didn't read much about Minnesota before coming here and I was surprised to see like lots of different cultures. I just believed that there would be all like Europeans. So yes, that was surprising.

TK: Why did you think that?

TD: Usually like when you see movies, you know, Europeans and not like—Europeans and African Americans, that's about it. But I didn't expect too much. Like too many different cultures. Just maybe like a few. Few cultures.

CL: So you kind of expected everyone to be Caucasian and originally from Europe?

TD: Sort of. I do know that there are like Asians too and some people and not like—it's like more than I expected.

TK: Was that a pleasant surprise or what kind? What did it evoke in you?

TD: It's just a surprise.

TK: Just a surprise.

TD: Yes.

TK: When you started the SFT group or when you were in the SFT group at Edison, what was the group like? What was the concentration of Tibetans in the group and other cultures?

TD: Actually, it's about educating ourselves about Tibet and what's the present situation in Tibet. And also educating others, too.

TK: So there were other non-Tibetans in the group?

TD: Yes. There were groups of students from Macalester College who comes up like once a week to our group and then they help with our homework and they were also like active SFT student members.

CL: Active in the Macalester Chapter of SFT?

TD: Yes. Yes.

CL: Were there non-Tibetans that went to your high school in SFT?

TD: I believe there were several kids.

TK: When you talked to them, how did they find out about the group or did they have any initial knowledge on the Tibetan cause?

TD: Most don't know like where it is. Like geographically. And they don't know like it was occupied by China and stuff like that. They just see it—like some kids who knew about it. It's like—it's like mountains and, you know. Very religious people is what they see as . . . for like Tibetans.

TK: So the non-Tibetans who were in the group actually did have initial knowledge of—?

TD: Yes. I believe some of them.

TK: What was it like having different people in the group? Different views obviously coming from the different people?

TD: It's good. I actually like different opinions rather than just one. It's good to have it.

TK: Were you involved in any other activities in high school?

TD: Yes. I was in National Honor Society, which was fun. We had to do a lot of fundraising and like meetings and stuff. Also, I was in sports. Badminton and tennis. I was in . . . that's about it.

TK: So when did you decide that you wanted to pursue higher studies after high school?

TD: Actually, I always wanted to study. Not just like finish high school but—my older brother and sister, they also like finished college, too. In India. So even though I don't want to, my parents will like encourage me to do so. But I was still interested. I'll go to college and study.

TK: What were you interested in studying initially?

TD: Pre-school teaching. But now I—it changes, you know. When you go to college. It's like every college gets changes at least one major.

TK: What was it like attending college?

TD: Oh, my God. It's a really big university and you're kind of . . . lost. In the first—like during first year.

TK: And you were at—?

TD: CLA. College of Liberal Arts.

TK: At the University of Minnesota?

TD: Yes. And I believe there were just—there was just one Tibetan student who was also a CLA student like during freshman year. Others were like from—attending different colleges. So I didn't see them much. I was like really studying all the time. Since it was my first semester and then I heard like it's really difficult in high school. It's like you have to study every day, every night. That's about it.

TK: What was it like having only one other Tibetan student?

TD: It's not nice. Just to have one. I didn't get to see him though. He's busy, too. But I joined this multi-cultural group which was like—had to go to—I had the advantage to go to like this trip which is like a weekend trip. I get to meet and make new friends.

TK: So you were involved in other activities and groups?

TD: Yes.

TK: In college.

TD: Yes.

TK: I know that now the population, Tibetan population, at the U has grown. How was that for you knowing that there were more Tibetan students coming into college at the U?

TD: I was happy to know that there were more Tibetan kids who were going to college, too, because it's, it's very good to be like educated. To be literate rather than illiterate. And it's a very good university. You have lots of opportunities like not just one major. There are more than a hundred majors. So, yes. It's a good one. It's a good university. So I was glad to know that more Tibetans are coming.

TK: What are the demographics like? Actually, not demographics but what was the ratio of like male to female Tibetans at the university?

TD: I believe the university Tibetan kids, like college students, they are mostly females and I see several more Tibetan males.

TK: So there were more females than males.

TD: Yes.

TK: The Tibetans in the student body, for the Tibetan community.

TD: Yes.

TK: At the U?

TD: At the university. Yes. Just at the U. I don't know about different colleges.

TK: Any insight into that? Why . . . any reasons you can think of? Why that would be?

TD: I believe maybe there are not enough role models for them, maybe. I really don't know. That's what I think. Maybe not enough role models.

TK: What about reasons for why there would be more females? Is it just because there are more females in Minnesota or all together in the community or—?

TD: Maybe. I don't know.

CL: You said you went to the U wanting to be a teacher. That was your thought as far as career.

TD: I was also interested in health science field. I didn't know exactly what to—like what field to go into like since now more than—many majors in health sciences.

CL: So that first year you were at the University did you change your mind at all of what you wanted to do in the future?

TD: Yes. I believe at first I was interested in pharmacy. Then I kind of moved to like nursing.

CL: So is that what you're pursuing now is nursing?

TD: Yes. Right now I'm doing pre-nursing courses.

CL: How is that?

TD: It was . . . like the classes were very interesting. It's about like, you know, it really relates to your daily life. Like say, nutrition and psychology. Stuff like that.

CL: So once you're finished then your hopes and aspirations are to be a nurse?

TD: Yes.

TK: Why nursing?

TD: Why nursing? Because you really get to interact with patients. Help them directly instead of—different ways.

TK: Was there any other reasons why you would choose nursing instead of pharmacy?

TD: I believe they have—I can't think of any, no.

TK: Just reasons for choosing nursing. Are they economical or—?

TD: Yes. You can say that. Like because there will be many jobs for nursing, so you don't have to worry about finding jobs. Also, I was interested in nursing because I did volunteering at a hospital. Like Abbott Hospital. So I got to see what it's like. Like get a scoop of how it's like, nursing life, nurses life.

TK: Are there any other Tibetans at the U who are interested in nursing?

TD: Yes. I believe there is this one girl named . . . yes. Actually most Tibetan girls are like pursuing nursing, too.

TK: Is that helpful for you having other Tibetans also in the same field?

TD: Yes. Because we get to like talk and what's it like and what do you have to expect and what do you have to really do to be a nurse.

TK: I know from my personal knowledge that you actually started an SFT at the U also.

TD: Yes.

TK: What were your reasons for choosing SFT as a group to start at the U where we don't really have any other Tibetan political groups at the U?

TD: Actually, it's a really big university and there are like about thirty thousand students so you get to educate them, and I thought it would be good to open one. Actually, I'm not the first one who tried to open—like for open. There was this girl, a senior, a Tibetan girl. She tried to open it but she didn't get much support since there are not like many Tibetan students over there.

TK: What about the reaction—the other student population? I mean thirty thousand students. What do you think was lacking in her motivation or what was stopping her from not being able to not successfully initiate a group?

TD: Actually you need—to make a student group you need at least three other students officially to sign and then be a member to open a group. So if you don't have that, how can you open one?

CL: So you need three other students?

TD: Yes.

CL: Was there anything else that she had problems with at all as far as—I mean were other Tibetans just not interested in SFT?

TD: I believe they're very busy in their daily life, like say, full time student. You know you have to do lots of homework every day and also they are like—they have a job, like part time jobs.

CL: Just really busy so not that they weren't interested. Just really busy.

TD: Yes. I believe every Tibetan student . . . have motivation to do it, something to their country. And you don't actually have to join a group. You can be like an individual member. Yes. Like you can be member, too, like main SFT in New York. You don't have to like join one. Since like we have meetings, so like you don't like—schedules . . . you have to like meet every student's schedule. It's really hard. So you can contribute on your own. Like your own free time.

CL: So you're a member of SFT now at the university. Are there other Tibetans that are involved as well?

TD: Actually we don't have that SFT any more.

CL: You don't have it at all any more?

TD: No.

CL: Why is that? Is it just lack of interest or—?

TD: No, no, no. It's not lack of interest. It's about—like really no—like what to do. Even though I was in the—SFT student at Edison, it's like you have to like be a member at least for a few years. Like you know what to do and what you have to expect and what you have to sacrifice and everything before being like a leader. So it was hard for me to do that.

TK: I know that there are other SFTs that have been started in other schools where the Tibetan population is much smaller compared to that at the university and I do believe that their schedules are as busy if not more as ours at the U so . . .

TD: Maybe they are willing to commit like time for meetings and stuff and I emailed like almost every student at the U. They were not much responding. So . . . I don't know. They are like—there can be more than one reason for that.

CL: So you were talking about SFT and how students are just—do you think students are more busy at the University of Minnesota and that's why they're not as involved as in other universities?

TD: No. It actually depends on like your classes. How many classes you are taking. What kind of major. There are levels of difficulties, like there are like easy classes, okay classes, different. It depends what classes or what major you are doing.

TK: Since you are involved in a Tibetan political cause, I'm sure you do know about the different factions, so to speak, for the Tibetan freedom struggle. You do know that there are two different sides to . . .

TD: Right. Right. Like total independence and like middle path which is . . .

CL: Autonomy.

TD: Which is autonomy. By 14th Dalai Lama, he's really seeking middle path and there is one group called Tibetan Youth Congress (TYC) which is like hoping to have like total independence. So it's a very different path.

TK: I know that people generally think that the complete freedom of Tibet is more generally associated with the younger generation of Tibetans, whereas the older generation are supposedly more leaning towards the autonomy. As a young student studying at the U of M in the United States, what are your thoughts on—?

TD: On political issues?

TK: Yes.

TD: Of Tibet. I believe at present, middle path is the best way. And total independence is good, too. It's like very good, but it will be very hard since like we are people. Tibetan people are like—have strong faith being a non-violent—so in order to achieve independence you have to do some kind of, you know. To achieve, I would say, very instant freedom or a new future you have to do something like say, violent ways. They are thinking about it. Middle path I would say is a very good way to follow since like—you know China is a very big country. Have strong economics, strong position in economics and, oh, my God, they have the most population in the world. Middle path, it also supports our non-violent way. So compassion. Like what we are taught as a—you know, by our religion. Tibetan Buddhism. And I really believe you have to at least agree with our leader since he had like committed all his life, sacrificed all his life to our country for the best. You can't—you have to really think about it and not just say, "Oh, I need total freedom." I know every human needs like—wants total freedom for their country, but you have to look at the situation not just like, you know, total freedom. So, yes. I believe and support middle path.

TK: You stated earlier that if you're seeking complete freedom would require—?

TD: Violence?

TK: Some kind of alternative method other than just a non-violent method. What makes you believe that? Why do you think that?

TD: Well, when you look to different countries like say, who have achieved independence like say India, they have to do, let's say, wars, fightings, a lot of . . .

TK: India's independence was won through non-violence.

TD: But I've seen a lot of fightings in documentary movies so it's—fighting is involved. It's not just non-violence like all the way, you know. So other countries, too. Like Russia. Yes. And I don't think it will be very easy to achieve freedom, total freedom by non-violent. It will take—it will take time for sure.

TK: Do you think time is something that people are willing to—?

TD: Sacrifice? Maybe some. But not all. You know, time is everything. Time is very important. Like say if we just wait for freedom, we might lose like—China is right now,

they are trying to like wipe out everything. Right now they are controlling like monastic life. Like monastery. They are looting like—whatever . . . they are trying to wipe out our language, for sure. Tibetan kids, there are not good schools in Tibet like who teaches Tibetan. So they have to like—in order to achieve education they have to like move to China or go to like schools who is owned by Chinese. So you have to learn Chinese. There are some situations where like Tibetans kids have to move to those schools and then learn Chinese and learn other classes. And when they move back to their countryside life, they already forgot their language. Like Tibetan. And you also lose your culture if you live in a—you're not like, you don't have human rights like, you know, to your own, to maintain your own culture. So it's really hard. So if you just wait, I believe they will like totally eliminate our culture, language, religion and everything. So even though like there are Tibetans outside Tibet, it will be very hard. Even though we do gain independence, when we move back it's like it will be different one. It will be a strange land instead of like our own native land.

CL: So do you think if Tibet was to get either independence or autonomy from China, do you think that most of the Tibetans living abroad now would move back to Tibet?

TD: Good question. I really don't know since there are like different situations. Like—yes, I really don't know. Like in big majority, ones may move. But if you move there what guarantee do you have like having human rights and being safe? If you don't have that safety how can anyone just move there? Maybe there will be people who sacrifice that and just move there. But you might get killed. You don't know like what China can do. What they have done to our people. I would say, I don't know—the majority wants.

CL: Would you move back if there was autonomy or independence?

TD: Well, I won't just move there. I would just first like visit and stay there like—stay there for like a few months and observe what it's like. If you do have like some safety then I would consider living there.

TK: You stated earlier that there is a danger of losing culture and language. For example, you gave—the example you gave was of Tibetan students moving to China for a higher education and whatnot. Similarly, there are Tibetan students who moved to the United States to pursue higher studies. Do you think the danger is relevant here, too, of losing language and culture?

TD: I don't think so because here in this country you have—actually, I have observed like—and appreciated . . . very careful that they have—in this country you have total freedom to do anything. You have basic human rights, for sure. You can—you don't have to like—you can pursue, worship your like whatever your religion is. You can value, maintain your culture, too, here. So over there in China it's not like that. They don't like Tibetans.

CL: Why do you think that is? Why do you think that the Chinese don't like Tibetans?

TD: Because their main intentions is to eliminate Tibetans.

CL: But why do you think they want to that?

TD: Since they are already in Tibet it's—we have a good natural resources and it's like a countryside. So you can do anything you want. You can—also they have intentions of improving their economy, too, as well. Yes, it's basically a country where you can do anything you want. Like if you already have it. For economic purposes, for like say, I've also heard military purposes. They have tested nuclear weapons over there, too, in Tibet. So, in a sense, it's a native countryside. People live very far. It's not like here, like a big city. People live like a few miles away.

TK: You stated several times that you believe that Chinese government or the Chinese people are against the Tibetan people.

TD: Yes.

TK: And you do believe that.

TD: Yes, I do.

TK: Where do you—where does that come to you from?

TD: You mean Chinese people against—Chinese against us?

TK: Right. Where do you see that?

TD: I've read papers that—because there in China it's a communist country, so basically as children they're taught that they have liberated Tibet and they are being nice to our country and actually they are brainwashed. You can say. And when they come here to U.S. like to study, like in colleges, when they learn about what happened to Tibet and what really happened to Tibet, so they don't really like right away accept it. It's like no. It's like this, this. They just say what they're taught. So they change their views when like they stay here. Yes. For some time.

TK: You stated that you believe that the Chinese student in the average school in China is essentially brainwashed into thinking that—?

TD: Yes. They have—actually government is communist so you have to—in order to maintain that government you have to teach people rules. Whatever their rules are, you know. Whatever they want to teach them. So, yes.

TK: Along those lines, do you think that could be applied to the Tibetan community so to speak? Do you think that essentially the Tibetan student could also be—?

TD: Brainwashed?

TK: Brainwashed by their faction into thinking that what happened in Tibet was essentially wrong and—which *is* wrong, but that there were no benefits or no pros present.

TD: In Tibet? By China? Well, there are some like improvements, you can say. Like they have improved our infrastructure, stuff like that. Roads and towns, cities. I mean you don't have human rights, which is every human . . . needs. I don't think it's—like first of all, we do need human rights. First it comes to that. And after that economic and everything.

TK: What do you think is the general response to the Chinese community in the United States? How do you think the average Tibetan responds to the average Chinese in a neutral context like, you know, in a country like the United States where there is a large population of Chinese and there is now also a large population of Tibetans?

TD: You mean how we are responding to Chinese?

TK: Yes.

TD: Well, I treat them as any other human being since like they are not the ones who killed 1.3 million people, Tibetan people. So, yes, I respond to them as—I treat them as equal with others. Not just like outsiders. But still in deep down I have this strangeness. It's like, "Hey, you're like—you're Chinese. You have invaded my country." But personally they're not—if they're born and raised in here what's their mistake, you know? They're also—they came here like us to achieve like . . . better lifestyle and freedom. You can't blame them like personally. But Chinese who have really done the tortures and everything, yes, I would say I really hate them. Personally. Actually my own leader, like Kundun¹ teaches not to hate but I can't say I don't hate them. I do hate them, for sure. How can you not hate? They're not being mercy and they're killing to achieve their like . . . intentions. Whatever their goals are.

TK: I know personally that there is a large, a very large, Chinese student body at the University of Minnesota. I'm sure there must have been countless times where you've encountered several Chinese students on campus or in class or—I'm thinking that the possibility of having an interaction with them would also be large. Have you ever had any interactions with—?

TD: Chinese students?

TK: Yes, Chinese students.

TD: Yes. I have and I have often—like I usually ask them, "Do you know about Tibet?" And they are like, "No. Where is that?" So we sat, you know. Even though they are studying in here, in this country, it's like, "Hello? Where are you? Like you're in college. You're supposed to know at least what's going on in your country. Not like

¹ His Holiness the Dalai Lama.

other countries. Like just leave that. Like your own country.” It’s very—surprised. I’m very surprised to know. They don’t know anything about Tibet.

TK: Why do you think that is?

TD: I don’t know. Maybe they are being ignorant or something. I don’t know. There could be many reasons.

CL: Do you think the Chinese government has anything to do with that? Maybe not spreading information.

TD: Well, Chinese students who are like—if they are born and raised in China they would know about it. If they are raised in here . . . well, you don’t know. Sometimes they know and some kids don’t know. So it really depends.

TK: The Chinese students who were raised in China who do know about . . .

TD: Tibet.

TK: Tibet and its . . . have you ever met—?

TD: Oh, yes. I have met a girl who is like, who really . . . who doesn’t like her government, you know. The Chinese government. She really supports like Tibetans. She’s like, oh, yes, they do like, you know, need basic human rights and stuff like that if not freedom. But really basic human rights. Not just to Tibetans but like every Chinese. So some do know about it.

TK: Have you ever met any Chinese student who is—?

TD: Supporting?

TK: Supporting.

TD: Yes. As I just said, she is a girl—even though she was born and raised, she was born and I believe she was there like for five years maybe and then she moved here. But she has lived in a Chinese sort of like closed community. But still she supports . . .

TK: Right. What I meant was supporting the other side. Supporting the Chinese invasion and thinking of it as truly being a liberation of Tibet. Have you ever met anyone with those views?

TD: No. I wish I did, but no.

TK: If you did, what would be your response?

TD: Well, I would just like tell him or her to just go to like you know, take history, you know. In libraries. Like you know, not just say, “Hey, I’m on this side.” But first take that. Know about history and then you can say whatever your opinions are for, where you support. So you can change people’s mind. You just have to tell what you have tell. Educate them. Not just try to change them.

TK: I know that you recently went back to India to visit family was it?

TD: Yes. For vacation.

TK: What was that like? Or how many years has it been since you went back?

TD: Oh, it’s been five, six years, I believe. I had very much fun since like—even though I was born and raised there, unlike my parents I don’t have to go any difficulties. I had a very happy childhood and I didn’t have to do any very hard job as a kid. I was just having fun. I didn’t know much—know about Tibet since I was a kid. It was very fun like, you know, to be in that place since I had the most happiest time and I was glad to be in a close society like Tibetan and visit monasteries.

TK: Did you see any differences amongst—now that you’ve lived in another country and you’ve lived in a more Westernized Tibetan population, did you see any differences amongst Tibetan population in India who aren’t as Westernized I think as, you know?

TD: Oh, yes. I do. I did see the differences. Like say being materialized and not un-materialized. Like here you go shopping almost all the time and you have more things than you need, actually need. Over there it’s like, not materialized. It’s like, it’s very peaceful though. Like it’s a countryside sort of. It’s not city. So it’s like—differences. There are some people, well, like, you know, haven’t changed. Like you know, they’re not open as like since we’re here. Because we’re exposed to different cultures and also educating ourselves. But still . . . but they’re improving. They have like . . . they are modernizing. With time.

CL: What did you think when you moved here and you’re growing up in a Tibetan community in India and then moving to a very strong Tibetan community here in Minnesota? What did you think initially of the community?

TD: Here?

CL: Yes.

TD: First I don’t know every one of them so it was kind of strange. Over there I know everyone almost. It’s good to have one community. Like you are more likely to maintain your culture, language, religion. So if you don’t have that, if you are just like an outside in here it will be very hard. I’ve known some people, Tibetan people, who have like moved to school in different countries and they forgot almost how to speak Tibetans. Not

really forget but . . . they have really hard time conversing in Tibetan. So it's very good to have Tibetan community over here.

CL: What do you feel about the community now? They've purchased a cultural center since you've been here and . . .

TD: Yes. I really like it. Like you have like a fixed place like you know, to go and like, for many different purposes. Like religion purposes. Like events. So very good to have one.

CL: You talked about—one of the things you liked about Edison when you were there, Edison High School, is that it had a pretty diverse population, a lot of people from all over the place and that then you took a multi-cultural class or joined a multi-cultural group when you were in college at the University of Minnesota. Did you meet—in meeting all these people from all over the world, do you identify with any of them? I'm thinking like . . . Minnesota has a large Hmong population.

TD: Right.

CL: And the Hmong story is not dissimilar to the Tibetan story. So did you, in meeting all these new people, did you identify with them or bond with them easily?

TD: Yes. Actually we have like—I actually did bond with them because we have our own culture, language. It's like same thing. Even though we have different cultures you have your own cultural language and religion and then you move to a country which is—which have different cultural language and stuff. So it's like, you have experiences on your own, like how do you like compare and how do you like adapt to new culture, language, plays and everything. It's like similar, you know. Yes.

CL: And what do you think about, you know, like specifically, you know, like the Hmong population being forced out of their homes, then moving to the U.S. et. al. Did that personal experience between you and your cultural group, the Tibetans, did you make any connection on that? On the personal struggle for freedom at all and human rights?

TD: Compared with Hmong?

CL: Yes.

TD: Actually, I believe they don't have a country. Hmong. I believe they were living in mountains in China. I have my own country, which was invaded by China, so I was born and raised in India. Then I moved to U.S. It's a different situation there. Even though they're raised in Hmong and then moved to U.S. It's like two place. Their own country and their own place and different country. Mine is like different. I was born and raised in India but I moved to U.S. But my native land is Tibet. I have never been there so it's a little bit different.

CL: Would you like to go and visit Tibet?

TD: Of course. Yes. It's like every Tibetan's dream to visit our own country.

CL: Yes. Do you think that's a possibility at all in the future?

TD: Yes. I believe.

TK: Let's see. Last question. Now that you're here in the United States and you're pursuing a higher education, you're going into nursing, do you feel that you would if you had the opportunity or—regardless of whether or not you have the opportunity, would you be willing to go back to India and work in the Tibetan communities there where they really do need medical services and—?

TD: It really depends. We'll see in the future. Because you do not know what our status, Tibet, will be. So if we gain autonomy like His Holiness is hoping, that means all Tibetans might have to move to Tibet and leave India. It will be different. It's not like the same as it used to be before. I do consider volunteering over there in India.

TK: Is there anything you'd like to add before we end?

TD: Yes. I do. I would like to say thank you to my leader. I'm here and I'm well off and whoever I am, whatever I am today is because of His Holiness the 14th Dalai Lama Tenzin Gyatso and I'm very grateful to be a Tibetan and be his people and also I would like to thank my parents, too.

CL: We do want to thank you again for participating in—being a part of this project.

TK: Definitely.

CL: So thank you very much.

TD: Oh, thank you.