CHAPTER 2

My Childhood

I WAS BORN in the iron snake year 1941. In the earth rat year 1948, when I was eight, my elder brother Yéshé Khédrup and I were sent to the Nyarong-shak school, and we joined the Loséling college of Drépung monastery not long after. At that time, our grandfather Sonam Rabten had retired from government service and taken monastic vows, and he took a special interest in the physical and mental development of his grandsons. Before we were sent to school, he had taught us to read and write the alphabet, and he took full responsibility for overseeing our schoolwork. I clearly remember Grandfather coming on our first day of school to discuss our education with the headmaster.

The headmaster at the Nyarong-shak school was a well-known doctor of Tibetan medicine, and his name, Lhundrup Peljor, was respectfully prefaced in our schoolbooks with the title "Master of the Healing Science" (*'Tsho byed rig 'dzin*). Nyarong-shak was among the best-known private schools in the country in those days, and there were around two hundred students at the time I started. It was run along progressive lines: the students were divided into four classes, although there were no separate classrooms, led by four inspectors with one assistant each and two supervisors, and they ensured that school discipline and class work did not suffer in the headmaster's absence. As well as drills in literacy, our school exercises included the explanation of many different types of official documents. As for the timetable, we had to reach school at dawn, summer and winter, and begin by melodiously chanting the "Hundred deities of Tushita" (*dGa' ldan lha brgya ma*), the Manjusri (*Gang blo ma*), or Tara prayers from our prayer books. We also had to recite the spelling and arithmetic tables [we had memorized]. After a brief reading practice,

once the sun had risen, we went inside for morning tea. Then, apart from the midday recess, we spent the whole day learning to write, until school finished at sunset. There was also a group of students learning Tibetan medicine, and they spent their time memorizing medical treatises and learning about medical practice.

This type of school suited the needs of the society at that time, and drew its students from all social strata. In the school register, the students were classified according to family background in three divisions, which were seated slightly differently. There was no set fee to be paid as a condition of attending the school, and students paid different rates according to their means. Thus, when children from the wealthy noble families joined the school, they would make abundant offerings to the headmaster; most children would present him with a gift of rice and tea, or money; and those from deprived backgrounds would offer a simple greeting scarf (*Kha btags*) rather than come empty-handed, but this was sufficient for them to be accepted. Although those who could not pay their dues (*Zhugs ja*) may have been cursed for it by their schoolfellows, the school gave exactly the same instruction to all students, regardless of the offerings they had made. So it was that if a child from a noble family was studying in the same class as a child of his family's servants, and the servant child got better marks on the twice-monthly tests, school tradition required the servant child to give the son of his master a rap on the knuckles with a cane.

In the Chinese Communist propaganda distributed both internally and externally, it is forcefully stated that formerly only the Tibetan aristocracy had the opportunity of a formal education and that this was completely denied the ordinary people. Some foreigners have been misled by this without checking the facts for themselves and the allegation has been repeated in some foreign publications, and although the younger generation of Tibetans do not necessarily believe it, the fact that some foreigner has said so makes them doubtful, and if they lack determination to seek the truth, they do not bother to question those of us with direct experience of Tibetan society at that time about what it was really like.

In 1949, after I had been at school for two years, the Communists seized power in China and the news gradually spread that they had started to invade Tibet. The government announced measures for military conscription to supplement the existing garrison, and each division sent group after group of soldiers for the defense of the northeast (*mDo smad*), but before long the Communist troops reached Chamdo in the east (*mDo stod*). Ngapö (Ngawang Jikmé), the Eastern Commissioner (*mDo spyi*), set fire to the

Chamdo armory [to prevent the Chinese acquiring the weapons, and fled] but was arrested not far away and taken prisoner.

As these terrible reports came in quick succession, we children, who had no idea [of the political situation], were terrified. It was during this time of fear that many Lhasa people made their way to the Potala palace over the course of a few days during the eleventh month of the iron tiger year [1950] to greet the Dalai Lama. One day Yéshé Khédrup and I decided to do the same, but when we reached the [Phun tshogs 'du lam] gate of the palace, a crowd of people was coming out and we learned from them that His Holiness and the most important members of His entourage had departed the previous day. We greatly regretted not having been able to come a few days earlier. Once His Holiness had departed, the families of about three quarters of the two hundred students at our school withdrew their children. Some sought refuge in India, but most returned to their estates in the countryside. Our family had no place of refuge outside Lhasa and we stayed with the remainder of fifty or so students, supposedly continuing our studies, but given the dreadful situation the Tibetan population was facing, our school maintained the appearance of functioning but not the teaching and discipline we were used to.

After a few months, when the news came of the completion of the "Seventeen-Point Agreement on peaceful liberation" between Tibet and China and of His Holiness's return to the capital from Tromo, the number of students increased again. At that time, there was a lot of talk about a group of Communists who had come by sea, traveled through India, and were about to reach Lhasa. I had never seen a Communist and didn't know how to recognize one. Before that, people used to talk about how the Red Army faced such difficulties during the Long March that they were forced to eat their leather belts and shoe soles, and not knowing how to understand this, we imagined that those who ate leather belts and soles must be fearsome, evil spirits. So with a mixture of curiosity and fear, I went out on the day they were due to arrive and waited to see them. When they arrived at about four o'clock in the afternoon, accompanied by an escort of twenty-five Tibetan soldiers (*lDing khag gcig*) and two representatives of the Tibetan government [one monk and one layman], I saw the three Chinese leaders dressed, quite contrary to my expectations, in clean, light blue uniforms, with flower garlands draped around their necks, riding on horseback and smiling and waving to the crowd of onlookers.

On that occasion, arrangements were made for them to stay at the Wongshing Tri-mön house in Lhasa. The most senior of those three Chinese

leaders was the central government's resident representative in Tibet, Zhang Jinwu, and he was accompanied by his colleague Alo Bu-zhang and a translator. As soon as they arrived at the accommodation provided by the Tibetan government, even before removing their flower garlands, they threw sweets and other little gifts out the windows of the house to the children looking in, and a great number of children then gathered under their windows. In retrospect, it seems to me that the bribery they used to disguise their occupation started then and there.

His Holiness returned to Lhasa from Tromo, and before long the first of the invading troops, a large group from the advance guard of the 18th Army led by Wang Qimei, arrived. For a few days before entering the city, they pitched their tents near the river on its east side, between Kumbum-tang and Trung-lha, and many of my school friends went to have a look at them. When I also went to look at the expeditionary force, I saw one soldier on guard within shouting distance of the tents, wearing a padded cotton uniform and large goggles strapped to his helmet and holding a rifle fitted with a bayonet, as if on high alert. He had rounds of bullets, a hand grenade, and a water bottle fastened to his waist and wore a thin cotton ration bag over his shoulder. It was disturbing just to look at his darkened face, cracked and wrinkled by hardship and sunburn, and unlike the false impression given by the three Chinese leaders, his expression was a harsh one of unfeigned malice, and there was no question of us schoolchildren being allowed any closer to the camp. A few days later, the soldiers from that camp entered Lhasa in procession, carrying brightly colored flags and large portraits of Mao Zedong, Zhu De, Liu Shaoqi, and Zhou Enlai, playing an anthem called "The Three Great Disciplines and the Eight Responsibilities." For us children it was a great spectacle, but the elders couldn't stop exclaiming, "Now we have really seen the sign of impending disaster!"

A few months later, the 18th Army, led by General Zhang Guohua and Political Commissar Tang Guansan, arrived in Lhasa. That day, a temporary stage was set up in the fields to the east of the city for a ceremonial welcome by the cabinet ministers in the government. This event was like a big meeting where the Chinese leaders made speeches, and afterward the soldiers marched around the Lhasa Parkor street carrying the pictures of the four leaders and multicolored flags and playing drums and cymbals, then proceeded to the new army headquarters, the Yamen army camp, and other places where accommodations had been prepared for them. Not long after that, the advance cavalry and camel brigades of the army advancing through Qinghai under Fan Ming arrived, and in addition a constant stream of Chi-

nese soldiers kept coming, visibly in daylight or surreptitiously by night, until within the space of a year Lhasa was completely filled with Chinese, both military and civilian, and the price of commodities in the market multiplied, and ordinary householders had nothing but curses for them.

Then, in typical colonialist fashion, and in order to appease Tibetan sentiment, the Chinese established a "People's Hospital" at Pomsur-nang in the Lubu area and a primary school at the former Séshim house. They recruited children from all social classes, did not require fees, and even offered a monthly allowance of ten white *dayuan* [Chinese silver coins]. Students from poor families were provided with summer and winter clothing and their families given income support, and in this crude way the Chinese sought to win people's loyalty through financial largesse. There was a vulgar saying that "The Chinese Communists are our kind parents / Their silver coins fall like rain," and so many families withdrew their children from the Nyarong-shak school and sent them to the Séshim primary school instead that the number of pupils was halved. In the course of their attempts to recruit the remainder, the Chinese invited the private Tibetan schools to join a picnic to be held on the first of June, which they had designated "Children's Day." That day, after a short speech by the director of the Chinese primary school, a group of pupils gave a performance of a play they had been rehearsing. We Tibetan schoolchildren were given big bags of sweets and cookies, provided with balls and skipping ropes and other toys, and encouraged to play whatever games we liked; they used many such enticements to overwhelm us, as well as instructing the Chinese school pupils to pass on their propaganda about the school organization and the different kinds of classes they attended when they spoke with us and to encourage us to transfer.

Of course, under such influence I also wanted to attend the Chinese school, but our family was extremely stubborn, and not only was there no chance of our being sent there, due to resentment against the activities of the Chinese, we had no chance to even express our wish to go. In Tibetan society at that time, those who did attend were disparaged as "fed students" (*lTogs gla'i slob grva ba*). So we continued attending our private Tibetan school, but due to numerous current influences the program there declined, and in 1952 my elder brother and I withdrew altogether and continued our studies at home.

At that time, as the Chinese were consolidating their presence, they gathered together a group of youths and set up another school in Trungchi Lingka, called the Social School (*sPyi tshogs slob grva*), for those who were

above the age limit to attend middle school. Since the parents of some of the students also attended, Lhasa people sarcastically called it "the parents' school." Likewise, they sent as many Tibetan students as possible to study in China at the Beijing Nationalities College, Southwest Nationalities College, and [other institutions]. Just like the proverb about growing horns on one's head that eventually put out one's eyes, many of them were returned to Tibet at the time of the imposition of Democratic Reform in 1959 to become accomplices in the urgent task of crushing Tibetan resistance.

Thus, in those years the Chinese bribed the best-off with gifts and the worst-off with assistance, and beguiled the youth with shows, picnics, and parties and the children with cookies, candies, and toys. In particular, they began to form associations of leading figures or personalities from each social class who were taken to China on tours arranged every year to witness the progress made there since "Liberation" in "building a new motherland." They were shown the best factories and the nicest places, taken to banquets, picnics, and parties, and invited to watch dance and theater performances and films.

At the same time, to split up the territory under the authority of the Ganden Po-trang government, which had ruled the whole country under successive Dalai Lamas, and exploit historical feuds to set the Tibetans in internal conflict, the two provinces of Ü and Tsang were divided, each with its own local government. Similarly, there was a local government authority at Chamdo in Kham (*mDo stod*), called the Chamdo Liberation Committee. It controlled the area previously under the nominal authority of the Eastern Commissioner of the Tibetan government, consisting of ten districts (*rDzong*). [In fact,] except for one or two, most of them had to be "discounted" [as not governable], and even those remaining one or two not only paid no tax whatsoever to the Tibetan government but also were given to rebelling against its representatives whenever the opportunity arose. Some weak-hearted government officials used to resign from service when they were appointed to those districts, rather than have to go there.

In Lhasa, apart from the Chinese army headquarters and the office of the Communist Party Tibet Work Committee, the most visible public institutions were the hospital, school, supply office and shop, bank, and post office and, most importantly, what was officially known as the United Front Bureau, which was actually the Public [Affairs] Bureau (*Phyi tshogs pu'u*), the office for spies and informers. The office allocated them to work within particular social classes, and according to some former United Front Bu-

reau officials, those who lavished the most money on cultivating their links in Tibetan society were considered the most capable and praiseworthy.

One of the principal aims of the Chinese in this period was the construction of the Sichuan-Tibet highway, and since their position depended on it, they spent no end of their white *dayuan* to achieve it.

In the wood horse year 1954, news spread of the invitation of His Holiness to attend the inauguration of the Chinese National People's Congress. Tibetans in general regarded the idea of His Holiness going to China as a serious threat to His well-being and that of the state, and it caused them unbearable concern. At that time, it became the main subject of conversation, and the government functionaries had a special meeting to discuss whether the invitation should be accepted or not. After a debate, two irreconcilable viewpoints emerged: one emphasized the advantages of accepting, and the other asserted that this would entail serious harm not only to His Holiness's well-being but also to His government, and called for a refusal. My uncle was serving as Northern Commissioner, but he was in Lhasa at the time of that meeting, where he forcefully expressed the view that His Holiness should not go to China; I clearly remember once hearing his account of it at home.

Anyway, finally His Holiness agreed to go, and on the day of His departure, May 11, 1954, I went to offer farewell greetings at the Trung-lha coracle ferry outside Lhasa. The Lhasa Kyi-chu river, swollen by the spring rains, was a dark, murky color, churned by crashing waves, and as His Holiness climbed into one of two coracles lashed together, I felt an inconsolable sorrow. The people lining the [man-made] river embankments let out an anguished wail, and until He reached the Lha-dong Shenka ferry dock on the far shore, they made prostrations in His direction. I waited on the bank until He left Lha-dong Shenka, and as I went home with a resoundingly empty feeling, all the other people walking away had gloomy expressions on their faces and hung their heads, as if they had just witnessed a calamity. In the hope that His Holiness would one day return to His capital, but also to attract publicity, His Tibetan subjects, both monastics and laypeople, submitted petitions that His Holiness should kindly return swiftly to the religious sanctuary of the land of snows, to His Holiness and the Chinese government, one after the other, as well as sending emissaries. Since ensuring His Holiness's speedy return was the most urgent matter facing the Tibetan people, there was a great deal of concern, and that year His absence was felt more deeply than ever.

He returned to Lhasa on May 11 in the wood sheep year 1955, completing the final stretch from Tsé Kungtang in a mounted procession, and from

the time it set out in the morning until it reached the Norbu Lingka summer palace there was a very heavy rainfall. Some said this indicated the joy of the Tibetan gods, *naga*s, and territorial spirits, but others worried that it threatened instability. Either way, although everyone, officials, monks, and laypeople, had been requested to turn out in their best clothes, all one could see was the reddish woolen cloth that everyone used to keep off the rain, which made the monks indistinguishable from the laity. That day, I clearly beheld His golden countenance sometime before He reached the [new] Lhasa bridge and felt boundless joy, for at that moment, nothing could have brought the Tibetan people greater happiness than His safe return.

That year, the monks of the Three Great Seats were each presented with ten *dayuan*, a molded clay figure (*Phyag tshva*) of Yamantaka, and a yellow rosary to mark His Holiness's safe return from China, and my uncle was appointed as the representative in charge of extending this distribution to the monastic communities of Tashi-lhunpo and Ganden Chökor-ling [in the Shang valley in Tsang]. There was provision for an assistant to accompany him, so he took my elder brother Jam-tsul, who had become an official in the palace secretariat by then, and I got to go along with them. We left Lhasa just at the beginning of autumn, when the weather is neither too hot nor too cold, and having plentiful provisions, we had a most pleasant journey. But passing through Gyantsé on our outward journey, we saw for ourselves the terrible damage done by the flood in that area the previous year, and since the bridges had not yet been repaired and the roads were in poor condition, we had to make our way through wild and trackless stretches of country. After reaching Shika-tsé and completing the distribution of gifts satisfactorily, we had an excellent tour of the sacred images in the monastery. On the way to Shang, we visited and made offerings at the Serdok-chen monastery founded by Shakya Chokden and at Wen-gön Ri-trö, the seat of Gyelwa Wensa-pa Losang Döndrup. Then, after crossing the Tsangpo river, we reached the Ganden Chökor-ling monastery in the Shang valley. We very successfully made similar offerings before the sacred images there, traveled on through the Lha-pu valley in upper Shang, then the Uyuk and Nyémo valleys, and returned to Lhasa by the end of autumn.

Not long after, the Chinese Deputy Prime Minister Chen Yi came to Lhasa for the inauguration of the PCART, the central institution of Chinese rule in Tibet, made up of prominent people drawn from the Tibetan government, the lamas, and Khampa representatives [people from the Kham region]. Since my uncle was still serving as Northern Commissioner [of the Tibetan government] at the time, he was given the title of Bureau Chief in

the Animal Husbandry Bureau of the PCART. When prefectural committees were being established all over China, he had to attend the ceremonial inauguration of the Nakchu prefectural committee, and I went along. Just as the ceremony was ending, a letter came with the news that His Holiness had confirmed His intention to accept the invitation of the Mahabodhi Society of India to attend the celebrations for the 2,500th anniversary of the Buddha's nirvana. It had also been announced by the government of India that Buddhist pilgrims attending the celebrations could travel at half-price on Indian railways, and it was said that a great many Tibetans intended to go. My own kind parents, three elder nun sisters, and two younger sisters were among them, and as my uncle was also keen to go, he returned to Lhasa shortly after receiving that letter. My parents and sisters completed all the arrangements, but my uncle was delayed for quite some time waiting for leave from the government and could not come with us.

Although our rights had been so reduced by that time that the Chinese authorities required Tibetans traveling to India to apply for a reentry permit before leaving, most Tibetans innocently assumed that previous conditions would continue to prevail, and although the eight members of our family could have left for India permanently, they stuck to the ostensible purpose of making a pilgrimage to holy places and then returning, and never considered the idea of leaving Tibet in view of the overall situation. Taking only the necessary funds and provisions for the journey, we left Lhasa during the ninth lunar month in a Chinese truck, and traveled through Shika-tsé, Gyantsé, Pa-ri, and Tromo, down to Kalimpong. After resting there for a few days, we hired a translator and went on a tour of the holy places, returning to Kalimpong in the eleventh lunar month. We spent another few weeks of leisure there, and returned to Tibet in the twelfth month.

That trip was one of the most important and valuable experiences in my life. However, the first Tibetan resistance group seems to have been established in Kalimpong at that time, and as many of its members came to visit my uncle during his stay there and the Chinese later came to know about it, that issue caused me the worst problems of all during my time in prison, as will be seen. In any case, our pilgrimage party consisted of ten people, the eight of us and two servants, and from the day we left Lhasa until our safe return on the first day of the new Tibetan year, we suffered no setbacks or losses whatsoever, met with no disagreeable situations, and neither lost nor were robbed of any of our possessions.

His Holiness returned to Lhasa from India (*Arya-bhumi*) not long after that, and gave teachings at the Norbu Lingka on the condensed exposition

of the "Gradual Path," followed by the [public] Kalachakra initiation requested by Do-mépa Jinpa Gyatso, all of which I received.

At that time, the Chinese tried occasionally to give the impression that they respected Tibetan self-rule or that they had only come to give assistance, and they announced that the Democratic Reform that had already been launched in the rest of the country could be postponed in central Tibet for another six, or even ten or fifteen years, that if the Tibetan upper class were against it, the reforms should wait; and they cut back the number of officials at the PCART and other offices. However, in the east of the country, where Democratic Reform had been introduced, they first announced the confiscation of weapons from the people, then imposed a tax on the monasteries, demanding large amounts of money and taking the monasteries' valuables in payment, and many other such previously unheard-of actions. Even worse, they organized groups of vagrants and work-shy beggars to make false accusations against the law-abiding majority of the religious and lay communities and subject them to endless "struggle" and torture. Unable to bear the vicious behavior of the Chinese, the monasteries rebelled, for which many of them were entirely destroyed by artillery or aerial bombardment. At that point, the people gave up on the idea [of coexistence] altogether, formed a guerrilla organization, and withdrew to the mountains and wilderness areas, and all over Kham (*mDo stod*) and Amdo (*mDo smad*) there was an upsurge of guerrilla attacks on the Chinese army.

Now that their military forces in Ü-tsang were in a state of readiness, the Chinese stepped up their oppression. They withdrew the currency notes and postage stamps guaranteed by the Tibetan government, and openly criticized and repudiated the Buddhist religion and lamas and monks in the *Red Flag* and some other periodicals and newspapers. They issued a warning to eastern Tibetans living in Ü-tsang and Chinese residents with independent livelihood that unless they returned to their native areas within a specified period, they would be arrested. The Chinese entrepreneurs were arrested suddenly and sent back to China with nothing but the clothes on their backs, and the easterners were subjected to official registration, harassment, and sudden arrest, so that they were driven to desperation. [From their point of view,] it was indisputable that Tibet was historically an independent nation, and the Chinese had invaded us using the sheer force at their disposal to maximum effect, just as bigger insects eat up smaller ones, and while there was no way they could be repulsed, the eastern Tibetans could no longer stand their abusive treatment. Thus, under the leadership of Li-tang A-druk Gönpo Tashi, then resident in Lhasa, they established the

"Four Rivers and Six Ranges" Volunteer Army in Defense of Religion, with headquarters at Drigu Dzong in Lho-ka, and lit the flame of a sporadic war of resistance [in central Tibet].

Although the status of our own government had by then been reduced to that of a local authority, its officials had retained their titles, and the work of the various government departments as well as provincial representatives carried on. It was just as the Chinese had demanded a reduction of the Tibetan government personnel serving in the newly constituted PCART that my turn came to be nominated for the annual procedure of appointing new functionaries. When those arrangements were made, at the time of the Ngamchö (*lNga mchod*) festival in the fire bird year (1957), there was an announcement directing me to attend the entrance examination for the palace secretariat. Those who had been so notified had to write their examination paper under the direct supervision of the [*Yig tshang gnyer pa*, *Yig tshags dbu mdzad ri mo ba*, and a couple of other] senior secretariat staff, and we were instructed not to write our names or family background on the paper. These measures had been adopted because there was talk that some recent entrants had submitted false exam papers and others had had their exam results overlooked after paying private visits to the secretariat officials.

I passed the exam and, as specified in the notification, went at once to the office, where the approval form was signed and I was admitted to the Ngamchö inaugural ceremony. Once I started working in the secretariat office, my main task was copying documents. Two junior monk officials called "incense bearers" were required on ceremonial occasions to stand near His Holiness holding a censer, and not long after my arrival, when the previous ones were moved elsewhere, another boy and I were appointed to replace them. Although that seemed like a dull formality, it was actually the most fortunate experience of my life, since my appointment coincided with the ceremony at which His Holiness the Dalai Lama demonstrated mastery of five volumes of canonical scripture before the monastic assembly (*Grva skor dam bca' chen mo*). This auspicious ceremony occurs only once in the Dalai Lama's career, and in the case of this fourteenth incarnation, it took place at a time of disquiet, when Tibet's Buddhist polity was in dire straits, and as Tibet's human and divine beings made desperate appeals to His infinite compassion as the only one capable of assuming the responsibility of head of state. In spite of the extreme and unremitting difficulties, He began to exercise His skill in wisdom and compassion with the utmost kindness by taking on the task of assuring the immediate and ultimate well-being of the country out of compassion for His subjects. At the same time, He had achieved

mastery over the Buddhist canonical scriptures of India and Tibet through great efforts and constant, dutiful study with His two tutors, and at the series of ceremonies at which He demonstrated His achievement of having crossed the ocean of Buddhist and non-Buddhist doctrines, in front of the monks of Séra, Drépung, and Ganden, and at Gémpel Ri-trö, Gémpel Ü-tsé, Pabongka, Tsé Kungtang, and so on, I too experienced the nectar of His presence, and to have had such wonderfully good fortune can only be the result of my having accumulated more than a little merit in previous lives.

The situation in Tibet by that time was critical. The resistance army (*Chu bzhi sgang drug*) had grown with the influx of some novices and non-scholastic monks from the great monasteries, as well as ordinary people of Ü-tsang and soldiers in the Tibetan army who brought their government-issued weapons with them. They launched attacks on the Chinese troops at Gongkar, Tsétang, and Dra-nang in Lho-ka and at Yangpa-chen, Markyang, Takdru-ka, and many other places, and it was said that five Chinese army divisions had been dispatched against them. In particular, the resistance troops managed to carry off a cache of firearms from a government weapons depot at Shang Ganden Chökor-ling monastery, and when the Chinese military found out, they pursued them and fought a terrible battle with them in the Nyémo area, with heavy losses on both sides. After that, the Chinese prepared to enforce their control of the whole country, and in the city of Lhasa they set up a large number of fortified military posts and defenses at street intersections.

At the same time they leveled exaggerated accusations against the Tibetan cabinet ministers that they not only had ties to but also were the principal sponsors and inciters of the rebel army. They repeatedly summoned all the senior ministers to the Chinese army camp in order to harangue them, demanding that if there were really no connection between the government and the rebels, then the government should send its own troops to put down the rebellion. While the chief government officers were unable to implement the Chinese demand, they were concerned that unless they found a way to calm the situation it would become polarized, and they summoned all the government representatives, monk and lay officials, and representatives of the three great monasteries to a plenary meeting of the National Assembly at the Norbu Lingka to discuss immediate measures for the pacification of the revolt. They made a detailed presentation to the assembly of the accusations made by the Chinese against the cabinet, the announcements that had been issued, and the requests made to the cabinet by the rebels and the replies it had given, and opened a discussion on "ways of

setting the central government's mind at rest and bringing the revolt under control." The debate sessions were separated according to official rank, and at the end of the discussions when spokesmen for each division reported their conclusions, those with high rank (such as *Dza sag* and *The'i ji*) called for "prudence, stability, and control," while those of the fourth rank and lower called for unified opposition to the Chinese. The army officers' and lay officials' delegates made some particularly incisive contributions, and I can remember the military delegate (*dMag sgar gyi ru brgya*) Késang Dramdul, who is now a veteran official of the exile government, declaring: "The government has been providing for and promoting our Tibetan army up to now for a reason, and if this milk-fed baby conch is of no use when hurled into the jaws of the threatening sea monster, then it serves no purpose at all. We soldiers are ready to fight whenever the government gives the order, and we will give our lives in defense of the Buddhist polity." The cabinet secretary Késang-la, the lay officials' delegate, suggested, "His Holiness can temporarily reside in Europe or some such place, while we recruit every able-bodied Tibetan to fight for our freedom." [These speakers] proposed only the use of force to drive back the Chinese, in total opposition to the conclusions reached by the highest officials.

At that point, many ordinary people like me felt that since Tibet was unquestionably an independent country with a rich national history, we were sure to receive support from the international community, and especially that India would help us through both diplomatic and military means. We also heard a lot of rumors and half-truths about the heavy losses being inflicted on the Chinese army by the (*Chu bzhi sgang drug*) guerrilla fighters and had a high degree of confidence in these reports. Anyway, we quite unjustifiably reckoned that our own strength supplemented by external assistance would suffice. We wondered why the cabinet ministers found it so necessary to make face-saving gestures to China, but in reality Tibet had drifted apart even from India, a neighboring country with whom we had a thousand years of cultural and religious ties, not to mention other states, as can be seen from careful examination of the present Dalai Lama's autobiography. There is no doubt that if the leading figures in the government had openly declared the actual state of internal and external affairs at that time, the people's confidence would have been shattered and the Chinese could have swallowed up Tibet at an even quicker pace. Moreover, His Holiness spared no effort in the difficult task of impressing on the principal [Tibetan] leaders that the idiotic strategy of relying on armed force was tantamount to suicide, and it seems to me that it was His ability to follow a policy of

avoiding both extremes that inspired the present [favorable] international view of the Tibet issue.

Of course, there were Chinese spies at every level of society at the time, but I particularly recall how during the session of the assembly that produced the two opposing statements, the statement by the monk officials was actually stolen from the meeting while it was in progress. That statement was a sizeable scroll of Tibetan paper, not like the easy-to-handle documents we have today, so the audacity of those spies who carried it off from the very center of the meeting must have been great indeed. Anyway, as soon as the monk officials discovered the theft they became very indignant, although even before any investigations were made, there could have been no doubt that the statement, which was a record of the frank views expressed at the meeting, had fallen into enemy hands. Whether as a deliberate policy of the Volunteer Defense Army in Lho-ka or merely as a boast, another statement was sent to the Chinese, saying that unless the invaders retreated to their own country at once, every single one that remained would be wiped out. Because of that, the Chinese military and civilian installations in Lhasa were put on a state of alert, and many people reported seeing troop reinforcements, armored vehicles, and a lot of other military hardware arriving along the road from Qinghai.

Then, following the intensification of Chinese suppression in Gyéku-do and Nangchen in the east, large numbers of those people left their homeland and arrived in Lhasa as refugees, where they found some relief, lodging secretly with whichever relatives or fellow countrymen would take them in. Gradually, as many of these people came to stay in Lhasa, where they planned on watching the latest developments, the Chinese concentrated on watching their movements, and if there was even slight cause for suspicion, they would wait until the suspect left town on a journey and then follow him and secretly arrest him. One time when Samten-la of Tréhor Chakdzötsang and Chimé Dorjé of Tréhor Gyanak-tsang went on a trading trip to India, Samten-la was suddenly arrested as they reached the nomad area of Mar-kyang, and disappeared. After making numerous inquiries with their various contacts, the family finally discovered that he was being held in the army headquarters prison. Similarly, the husband of the Gonjo Chösurtsang family's daughter, a Chinese trader from Beijing who had lived in Lhasa for a long time, was secretly arrested on the road, on his way to the Siu-tang (Se'u thang) festival at Ganden monastery, and imprisoned at the army headquarters.

At the same time, a small number of contemptible, mercenary Tibetans, induced by the generous rewards offered secretly by the Chinese, carried out bandit robberies and all kinds of other crimes in the rural areas around Lhasa, posing as members of the Volunteer Defense Army. This succeeded in creating antagonism between ordinary Tibetan people and the rebel army, and many villagers living in scattered settlements suffered terrible violence. Although the Chinese were waiting for a convenient opportunity to crush the resistance, our government behaved so unobjectionably that it was not forthcoming that year. But in early 1959, during the Great Prayer festival, when His Holiness was due to take His final (*lHa rams pa*) examination before the monastic assembly in the Tsukla-khang temple, there was an unprecedentedly large congregation of people, and a high risk that trouble would break out in and around the city. Some time previously, there had been many stories of a Chinese dressed in civilian clothes taking explosives into the Potala palace, and after the Chinese made an enclosure of sandbags around the upper window and roof of the Kyi-tö house, a building they had occupied right in front of the Sungchö-ra courtyard [where the examination was to take place], turning it into a watchtower, the Tibetans were out of their minds with worry about threats to His Holiness. For His security, He was always accompanied by members of the "Bodyguard Regiment," reinforced by a hand-picked group from other regiments, and during the *Lha-rampa* examination ceremony a voluntary group of monk officials organized themselves to mingle with the general monastic assembly as incognito security assistants.

Thanks to the merciful blessings of the main participant, the ceremony went off without problems from start to finish. I had the great fortune to be serving as incense bearer in His Holiness's presence during the greater and lesser ceremonies of His examination. After their successful completion, His Holiness had also agreed to visit the three southern colleges (*mNga' Dvags rGyal gsum*), and as preparations for the journey were under way, I was provisionally selected to join the group of attendants who would travel with Him. We were waiting for the departure date to be fixed when there was a sudden turn in the course of events.