

## CHAPTER 14

### The Misuse of Education

IN 1964, THERE were three primary schools and one middle school in Lhasa, and a school for training teachers and officials. Most of the students training to be teachers and officials were from all over the country, and since they were being educated only for that purpose, they were all from poor class backgrounds. As long as they committed no major mistakes during their time as students, they were automatically given jobs when they finished, and schoolchildren from poor class backgrounds who attended [primary and middle school] for the requisite period were also given employment afterward, regardless of their results. But because so few Tibetans could speak or read Chinese at that time, even the children of politically ostracized parents could go on to middle school and find employment if their grades were good enough. Thus we all hoped that my youngest brother, Nga-nam, who was in the number 2 primary school, would get through school and at least become qualified rather than having to work as a manual laborer, and since he always attended class and worked hard at everything his results were fine, and in 1964 he took the middle school entrance test and felt confident of getting in.

Then one morning, as he was waiting for the list of new students to be announced, the middle school admissions subcommittee pasted up a list by the school gate from which the names of most of the diligent students who always attended and did well were absent. This was a peculiar development that had not been seen before. Nga-nam's name was also missing, and he came home in a very dejected state to tell us about it, but while we were all downcast, we felt that it was better to suffer our disappointment in silence than to go trying to find out what had happened, which would be like asking for trouble. Meanwhile, the other students who had not been

accepted got together and requested the admissions subcommittee to explain whether it was because they had not achieved the required percentage on the exam or for some other reason, but the committee would only say that it had been decided at a higher level. Finally, it dawned on everyone that the pupils who had been denied entrance to middle school were the children of [politically] ostracized families, and had achieved much better exam results than the others.

The only possible conclusion to be drawn was that children from the ostracized social class were having the opportunity of education taken away from them. If that were so, there was no question of making amends with a payment, and it meant that this was an evil design to further long-term Chinese control over Tibet. Mao Zedong had said, "The more education a person has received, the more unreliable his character; the more books he has read, the less he can be relied on to take a stand." It is because educated people have the capacity to think for themselves and make up their own minds on any particular issue, and hence cannot be marshaled and exploited at the whim of [the authorities], that Mao said they were unreliable and dubious, and it was on the basis of this distorted view that bright students were being denied education due to their family background or their parents' political record. The reason those pupils who were denied entry to middle school got distinguished results was that the educational methods enforced by government policy led to different attitudes among the students and affected their willingness to study. As already mentioned, children of ordinary working families simply had to attend school for the requisite period in order to qualify for employment afterward and hence did not bother to study hard, while children from ostracized families had no surety of employment other than their actual results at school and were also encouraged at home, and so tended to get high grades. It need not be supposed that their performance was due to any other factor, such as inherent ability.

In any case, this was how middle school admissions were handled from 1964 up until the end of the Cultural Revolution, so the Tibetan officials holding key positions throughout this period were pawns of the Chinese who despised their own people and were no more able to think for themselves than donkeys in a herd, and the Tibetan people came to feel contempt for their own kind. Indeed, one cannot blame those [Tibetans and non-Tibetans] who have not understood the origins of the present situation in Tibet and those who point out that the struggle, recrimination, and cruelty inflicted during the years of intense suffering was done by Tibetans themselves. However, if you look carefully at how these things came about,

you can see that they were the product of a long-term strategy for the imposition of foreign rule.

Anyway, the students who could not stay in school at that time had to make their living as manual laborers, and thus my youngest brother, Nganam, had to spend the next twenty years of his life working as a construction laborer under conditions of great hardship and with very low income, absolutely against his own wishes and those of his family.