

A brief account of Sonam Tobgay Kazi's experience in Tibet before the Chinese Invasion

London

13 September 1994

I was born in Sikkim in 1925 and am the fifth son of Relon Sonam Dadul Renock Kazi, a landlord and an official of the Government of Sikkim. My father's estate touched the boundaries of three other countries--Tibet, Bhutan, and India. Since the main Indo-Tibetan trade route ran through this estate, my ancestors have always been eyewitnesses of the principal political events concerning Tibet, such as the British invasion of Tibet in 1904; the Chinese invasion of Tibet that forced His Holiness the Thirteenth Dalai Lama to escape to India; the internal trouble in China that caused the Chinese Amban and his entourage to vacate Tibet; and H.H. the Thirteenth Dalai Lama's return to Tibet from India in 1912, upon which he declared the total independence of Tibet.

Throughout my childhood, my father used to relate these events about Tibet to me. He had been to Tibet twice and had met H.H. the Thirteenth Dalai Lama in connection with Sikkimese properties there. The stories I heard from him, together with my strong interest in the Buddhist religion, increased my interest to go to Tibet. This opportunity came in 1949, when the Indian Mission, Lhasa was looking for a candidate to fill the vacant post of an English- and Tibetan-knowing assistant. I was accepted for this post and left Gangtok, Sikkim on January 5th, 1949, and arrived in Lhasa on January 21st. I was happy to arrive when Tibet was celebrating the New Year, a month-long celebration that reveals the ancient life and culture of Tibet. I held the post there for seven years-- from January 1949 to October

1955. Mr. Hugh Richardson was then the Officer-in Charge of the Indian Mission, Lhasa. After my seven-year stay, I returned to Sikkim.

My first impression of Tibet was: "Could there be any other place on this earth where peace and happiness really prevail?" The peace and happiness I saw in Tibet at this time must surely have been the result of the freedom that independent Tibet enjoyed since 1912, under the leadership of H.H. the Thirteenth Dalai Lama, and which continued even after his demise, up until the Communist invasion in 1950. As described by His Holiness the Fourteenth Dalai Lama in Appendix II of his autobiography *My Land and My People*:

Whatever the position of Tibet may have been prior to 1911-12, in any event, from the day that the Thirteenth Dalai Lama proclaimed the independence of Tibet, after the invading Chinese armies had been driven out of Tibet, Tibet was not only independent de facto but de jure.

1. At the time I arrived in Tibet, H.H. the Dalai Lama's Fourteenth Reincarnation had already been found and enthroned, but had not yet assumed the administrative power, and Tibet was still being run by a regent. I saw Tibet enjoying all the attributes of a free and independent country at that time:
 1. Tibet had her own language, art, culture, and religion. Although Tibetans themselves were Buddhists, there was freedom of worship in connection with other religions. Tibet also had the largest number of Buddhist scriptures of both Mahayana and Tantrayana in the world.
 2. In regard to foreign relations, Tibet had representatives from the British Government and subsequently the Indian Government, and from Bhutan and Nepal.

3. I saw Tibetans using their own paper currency as well as copper and silver currencies, minted by themselves; I heard that, in the past, gold currency had also been circulated.
4. Tibet had her own postal system with a network of post offices and franking seals. Letters could also be registered. Tibet printed her own postal stamps of different sizes, colours, and denominations, issued at different times. These stamps had a figure of a lion, the national emblem, in the center. Each stamp had letters in Tibetan stating "TIBET GOVERNMENT" and in English stating "TIBET. " Tibetan stamps were very well known to sophisticated philatelists the world over.
5. Tibet had her own communications systems. Telegrams could be sent to Gyantse, Yatung, and India from the Tibetan Telegraph Office. Wireless stations existed between Lhasa and Chamdo and other places along the eastern border. Stamps of higher denominations were especially issued for sending messages. And I heard Radio Tibet broadcasting news in English from Lhasa for a short time in 1950 before the Communists came.
6. Tibet had a police department to maintain law and order, and magistrates in important cities, with a system of courts to provide justice. Although small in number, Tibet also had her own soldiers. They were used for ceremonial functions and to guard the frontier.
7. She had her own departments for dealing with foreign affairs, internal affairs, and so on. She issued her own passports to governmental officials who were visiting foreign countries, and controlled the entry of foreign persons into the country.
8. Tibet also had her own Ayurvedic system of medicine.
9. I had the rare opportunity to travel with Mr. Richardson to the important historical places of Yarlung Valley and assist him in

studying the ancient stone edicts in Tibet. The records inscribed in stone prove that not only did Tibet enjoy independence in the twentieth century, but in the beginning of the seventh century, during the time of Tsong Tsen Gampo and some of his successors, Tibet was a powerful sovereign state. For information on these stone edicts, one should consult Mr. Hugh Richardson's series of works, *Ancient Historical Edicts at Lhasa*, etc., published by The Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland in 1952. Detailed, authentic information about the periods in Tibetan history thereafter when Tibet lost and gained various degrees of her independence can be obtained from any books on Tibetan history.

This golden period of peace in twentieth-century Tibet began to come to an end, however, in 1950 when the Communist Chinese began to march toward Tibet. I saw the departure of Sawang Ngabo for Chomdo, along with newly recruited Tibetan soldiers. Very soon, the Chinese attacked Chomdo, arrested Sawang Ngabo and the wireless officer Bob Ford, and took them to China.

I saw how H.H. the Dalai Lama left his palace at ten o'clock at night for Yatung, near the Indian border. Meanwhile, we heard in Lhasa how Sawang Ngabo had to sign a seventeen-point agreement in Peking.

General Chang Chin-wu [Zhang Jingwu] came via India to talk to the Dalai Lama at Yatung. I saw him coming to Tibet and the Dalai Lama returning to Lhasa. After that, two or three more generals came, along with many Chinese soldiers, and gradually China began to take away Tibet's freedom.

I saw the Chinese Liberation Army led by General Wang Ching-me [Wang Qimei] enter Lhasa and then saw the departure of the Dalai Lama to Peking to meet Mao Tse-tung [Mao Zedong] and then His Holiness's return to Tibet thereafter.

Before I left Lhasa in October 1955, I and my family had an audience with H.H. the Dalai Lama. I thought that this might be the last opportunity for us to see this wonderful land ruled by the Buddha Incarnate.

Fortunately, I had the luck not only to see His Holiness again but to serve him as his Chief Interpreter when he was invited to India for a four-month tour in 1956, during India's celebration of the 2500th Anniversary of the Birth of Lord Buddha. It was at this time that Premier Chou En-lai came to India. I remember the official lunch I attended as translator, with H.H. the Dalai, H.H. the Panchen Lama, and Premier Chou En-lai [Zhou Enlai], given by Prime Minister Nehru in Delhi. When His Holiness returned to Lhasa, I saw him off at Nathula Pass, where the Communist Chinese came to receive him.

In the autumn of 1957, I went with the Political Officer Mr. Pant to visit Lhasa. I felt that His Holiness was under great pressure. I saw no hope that he would ever enjoy any peace in Tibet. This turned out to be my last visit to Tibet.

In March of 1959, I heard that fighting had started in Lhasa and that H.H. the Dalai Lama had escaped, but no one knew of his whereabouts. The outside world showed great concern for his safety. Suddenly we heard that he had crossed over into India. The Government of India sent Mr. Menon and me to receive His Holiness at Bomdila, near the Indo-Tibetan border. From there we went to Tezpur, Mussoorie, and finally, to Dharamsala.

I was attached to H.H. the Fourteenth Dalai Lama as his Chief Interpreter for thirteen years in Dharamsala, until 1972. It was very sad to witness the Tibetans who were utterly disturbed psychologically, physically, and financially, being displaced from their native land. These are the unique people of the world whose sole intention is to practice non violence and compassion and to make all living beings in this world live peacefully and attain eternal happiness.

All peace-loving people in this world continue to hope for a peaceful settlement between these two, once friendly countries so that happiness and comfort will reign again in the Snow Land of Buddhism.