

**Tenzin Tsering**  
**Narrator**

**Tenzin Khando and Charles Lenz**  
**Minnesota Historical Society**  
**Interviewers**

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**Minnesota Tibetan Oral History Project**

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**Tenzin Khando** - TK  
**Tenzin Tsering** - TT  
**Charles Lenz** - CL

**TK:** This is Tenzin Khando interviewing Tenzin Tsering at the Tibetan American Foundation of Minnesota (TAFM) on the 26<sup>th</sup> of August 2005. The people present are myself, Tenzin Tsering and Charles Lenz.

Could you please state your name?

**TT:** My name is Tenzin Tsering.

**TK:** Will you spell it?

**TT:** First name T-e-n-z-i-n. Last name T-s-e-r-i-n-g.

**TK:** And your age?

**TT:** I am twenty-two years old.

**TK:** Let's start out with childhood. Where were you born?

**TT:** I was born in India in Dharamsala and . . . anything more?

**TK:** How about education? Where did you start out with?

**TT:** Sure. I did my—to class nine I did to India in Mussoorie, a school called St. George's. I came here during my class ten, sophomore year of high school. I did DeLaSalle High School and now I'm a senior at Hamline University.

**TK:** St. George?

**TT:** St. George.

**TK:** Mussoorie?

**TT:** Yes.

**TK:** Okay. We're like neighbors. I went to Wynberg Allen. And after that you decided to go for further education?

**TT:** You mean high school?

**TK:** Yes.

**TT:** Yes. Well, actually I wanted to come to America for a year just to get a view of how the education system is. But then I really enjoyed my first year, made some really good friends and I asked my parents if I could stay longer. I stayed for two years, two more years through my high school. Then I got some more scholarships from different colleges and I decided to do my college here. So I finally decided to go to Hamline.

**TK:** So do you currently live here?

**TT:** Yes, I do live here.

**TK:** So you did come initially with the immigrants?<sup>1</sup>

**TT:** No, actually I am an international student.

**TK:** So you came here in the year—?

**TT:** Let's see. 1998.

**TK:** So I suppose you came here as an international student. Therefore you weren't an immigrant. So your reasons for coming here were solely for your education.

**TT:** Yes, for my education.

**TK:** Well, first impressions of school here in Minnesota, the American school system.

**TT:** Sure. Impression of my school. The first year was a little tough. I guess I wasn't used to like opening up myself to other people. But gradually I came to know from my teachers and the friends that I made that in order to make friends you have to open up here in America. What was the second part of the question?

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<sup>1</sup> U.S. Tibetan Resettlement Project, a program that became effective under the 1990 Immigration Act passed by Congress. 1,000 Tibetans were granted Visas to come to the United States.

**TK:** Go ahead. Just feel free to . . .

**TT:** Well, the difference between, I guess, the education—the biggest difference was the education system, I guess. It's more lenient here. Also, the education system in high school here was really easy for me for some reason. Didn't study much. Just trying to be honest. [Chuckles] After school, I used to play soccer for the school team. Most of the time after school was soccer practice and stuff.

**CL:** Did that help with the—because we've heard that several times that high school can be difficult, was difficult in the beginning socially but because it was less strict than typical schools in India that the education part could be fairly easy for a lot of people. So did you do things like playing soccer? Did that like help in social situations?

**TT:** Oh, yes. Definitely it helped. I guess soccer is a game of—like a team sport so you have to interact with the students. So through my soccer friends I can say that I got to know other students and through different student clubs that I was involved in.

**TK:** So sports was basically your medium through which you were able to—?

**TT:** I can say that. Yes. You can say that.

**TK:** How was the relationship between you and your teachers? How did you feel about that?

**TT:** I was really comfortable with my teachers. I had great respect. Even though I could see like in high school here there is—some students they don't have much respect. A feedback from the teachers, especially, because they can't say anything back to the students. If you compare it to India and the education system here in the U.S. But here the relationship between me and my teachers were really, really good.

**CL:** How did you feel being a young student here? Were there other Tibetans in your high school?

**TT:** Unfortunately, no. I was the only Tibetan. Because I went to a private high school. I did want to go to some other school which had Tibetan students just to interact but unfortunately I couldn't go.

**CL:** How was that being—were there other people there that were—how was it being different than everybody else?

**TT:** The biggest difference, I guess, was the language barrier. Because, like I say, my English wasn't that good at first. My only friend during my first . . . you can say the first semester was also an international student. He was from Japan. He is currently studying at St. Mary's so we both used to interact with each other even though both English wasn't that good. But then slowly, slowly you decided that we should get to know other people, too.

**TK:** What about the curriculum at school, the different subjects? I know that there are, from my own personal experience, I know that there's a lot less here than there is in India. Like for example, there's twelve in my school. How did you feel about that? How did that affect your education?

**TT:** Well, a little different, because in India in class nine I decided to go to the business section instead of the science section. So when I came here you had to take sciences and everything. So that was a little tough for me. Science is not one of my biggest things. But yes, most help after class, help from my teachers and stuff, it made it a little easier.

**TK:** So you were focused towards business from an early—?

**TT:** From an early stage.

**TK:** Why is that? Can I ask?

**TT:** I don't know. I just liked the business aspect. I just feel I understand more about business compared to, for example, the medical field or sciences, because science doesn't go in my head. Business stuff, it just goes in.

**TK:** So your future occupation is obviously in the business field.

**TT:** Yes. Actually, I will be graduating in May 2006 and I am planning to take my CPA, that's Certified Professional Accountants. And after that maybe take two or three months off and I would love to go to China because I am doing a certificate in Chinese proficiency, so I would really like to improve my Chinese for a while.

**TK:** So you do speak Chinese?

**TT:** This will be my third year learning Chinese.

**TK:** Oh, I see. You're taking Chinese as a second language?

**TT:** Yes.

**TK:** Can I ask you why that is?

**TT:** The main purpose is for my dad, because he really wants me to learn Chinese. Because he thinks Chinese will be the biggest—the Chinese language and the Chinese economy will be the biggest thing there in the next ten years, which is really true. I've learned myself in the last two years that China is going to be that, at the top . . . the world economy.

**TK:** I see. So do you plan on moving in like into the Chinese business or in China or—?

**TT:** Oh, I would love to. I would love to. But I haven't thought about it in detail what I want to do in China but I would definitely—I would like to somehow improve my Chinese.

**TK:** So going back to your decision for going to college. It was basically for your future in business.

**TT:** Business, and I really liked the Hamline community and the people who approached me. All their admission counselors and stuff. I just felt a really good connection with the school. The campus wasn't that big. U of M is way too big for me. So I want to stay in a campus which is small in which I can see the same students almost every day.

**TK:** Other activities. Are you involved in any other activities at Hamline?

**TT:** Yes. We just started—last year we started Students for Free Tibet (SFT) and I will be the secretary of that. I'm also involved with the SOSA, the Students of South Asia and I will be the treasurer for that. I'm also the assistant advisor for the International Student Org at Hamline.

**TK:** How did the SFT project for you come about?

**TT:** Well, there were only two Tibetan students at first. I was the second one and then there was Phuntsok. Graduated last year, I think. Then there were two more Tibetan students came. Then we—like I was thinking, now gradually the Tibetan population is increasing so we should do something about it. I did talk to Charlie<sup>2</sup> about that, too, sometimes. And to some professors and stuff and they said that was great idea. So I talked to the Tibetan students that we should do this. It did take a really long time for us to make a constitution because Hamline Student Org doesn't support, I guess, all the political groups now. So we had to make sure our words doesn't involve much politics and stuff. Then we went to the Students for Free Tibet Conference, about eight of us from Hamline, at the University of San Francisco, which was an eye opening for all of us. We got to know how to fundraising, how to start SFT, how to get your college community involved and stuff. We went there, came back. By that time we all were just hyped up. We should just do it right now. So we gave our constitution to the PAC, Political Affairs committee. They approved it and it went to the main Student Congress floor and it was a hundred percent yes of the members.

**TK:** What was the initial response from the student body at Hamline regarding the SFT group?

**TT:** There were a lot of questions about why you want to do this and is this really a political active group. We did tell them that we are going to be active because this is something that we really care about. We are not going to go to that extreme to just make . . . what's that called . . . just to make Hamline look bad. So I guess we are going to take some precautions when we do our campaigns and stuff.

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<sup>2</sup> Charles Lenz, Project Director, Minnesota Tibetan Oral History Project.

**TK:** So Hamline does not allow politically based—?

**TT:** It think it does, but then you have to be at a certain standard . . . what is the term?

**CL:** I think that Hamline University Student Congress or HUSC, which funds most of the student orgs or makes the decisions on the funding from the student fee, I think their—I don't know if it's a strict policy or just like a preference to not fund, to not have political organizations funded out of the student fee. I think it's supposed to be organizations that serve the entire population and not a segment of the population based on an opinion.

**TT:** But like we give examples of HAS,<sup>3</sup> the Hmong Students, Asian Students from South Asia and stuff ,so we like, “If these groups can have a student org funded from the Student Congress why can't we have?” So then they had a little thought about that and then we did have a meeting again and then they said, “Oh, yes. Definitely.”

**TK:** So what's an example of your first project, your first major project in SFT?

**TT:** The first major project is maybe from September 15<sup>th</sup>. That's the Hamline open house where all the fifty student orgs would get together. We try to recruit all the new members from the freshman class, junior, sophomores and stuff. So I guess you can say that's one of the upcoming events. But the biggest one we're thinking of having a Midwest Student Conference here organized by the Hamline community. But we are working on that right now. Nothing's been planned yet right now for that.

**TK:** How do you plan on working towards major political movements relating to the Tibetan cause? I mean as far as I know most of the major events that do take place for the Tibetan community, in the Tibetan community are politically related. How are you going to work over that, work through that in order to appease the—?

**TT:** Student guidelines?

**TK:** Yes. At Hamline.

**TT:** I am not really sure how we going to do that, but I can say that definitely we are going to do it somehow. We have—during Human Rights Day last year we did some writings on the . . . some letter writings on Panchen Lama. We had about fifteen students or so who showed up. So we are doing small things. Slowly, slowly. Gradually we are going to think about something, something really big. But we don't have any major thing right now but things come up for us.

**TK:** Going back a little. When was the first time or where was the first time where you realized that you wanted to have a part in the welfare of Tibet and the political, the community part of the Tibetan movement?

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<sup>3</sup> Hmong Student Association.

**TT:** Well, when I came here, I knew I was a Tibetan but then I knew I hadn't done much for my country or anything. I wanted to do something that my parents would be proud of. Something that my community would be proud of. The talk was always to actually start Students for Free Tibet either in my school or at a greater Minnesota Tibetan community. I just wanted to do something. Just to get, I guess I could say . . . get the younger generations involved. So we just started an SFT and then SFT Minnesota. I'm sure you know about that. That's been really big. I think we have about a hundred and fifty members now.

**TK:** You said you had a thought of starting an SFT group. Why SFT? There are other, there are lots of other . . .

**TT:** I just wanted something to be run by the students. I just didn't want elderly people making all the decisions and stuff. Nothing against them, but I just wanted something all the students could get involved somehow. I knew Students for Free Tibet was really successful everywhere, all around the world. So I just wanted something . . .

**TK:** How did you hear of SFT?

**TT:** First, I guess, generally all the Tibetan students, they know somehow about SFT but I'm not really sure how I came to it. Maybe I've seen the t-shirts students, people used to wear back in India. Checking on the websites. I'm hearing a lot in all the concerts and stuff. She used to always mention Students for Free Tibet and what they are doing and stuff.

**TK:** Are you involved in any other Tibetan focus groups other than SFT?

**TT:** No. Just SFT.

**TK:** So your main reason for joining SFT was to have a student control group.

**TT:** Yes. And I also, I guess I was a little lost at first, but then I slowly, slowly . . . I decided to come back to my roots on the Tibetan community because I just stayed away from the Tibetan community, everything, for almost like two, three years. Then I gradually realized, oh, this is not who I am. I should really get back to my roots and get—do something. Do something that my parents and my community can be a little proud of.

**TK:** You just said that you decided—you were away from the Tibetan community for two or three years. Is there any reason for that?

**TT:** Two. No. I don't even know that there is a reason, but somehow I just decided just to separate myself from the community, which I'm ashamed a little bit. But then I decided that my roots are my Tibetan . . . so I should come back and do what my parents want me to do.

**TK:** What triggered this realization?

**TT:** I guess . . . who was that . . . going to Delhi . . . oh, yes. When Thupten Ngodup burned himself and then they were doing fasting in Delhi for almost a month. All the police came and they had to pull them out for the fasting. Fasting and—he just burned himself, you see.

**CL:** Was this the fast that was like simultaneously going on in Delhi and in Dharamsala and—?

**TT:** Yes. Yes.

**CL:** At the same time?

**TT:** I think that was really eye opening because it was, I guess, a big media thing in India at that time.

**CL:** Talking about SFT and I think you said there were three Tibetans now at Hamline?

**TT:** There will be six. One new coming in.

**CL:** How is their involvement with SFT? Are most of the Tibetans involved in or going to be involved in the organization?

**TT:** All the Tibetans are involved somehow. There's—in our board members there's—they're all major—all six of us are board members except one. He's from Nepal but he really understands the Tibetan conflict so well. All hundred percent Tibetans are involved in SFT.

**CL:** Do you have any non-Tibetan leadership?

**TT:** As I said, one from Nepal and then we have some regular members who are going to be involved with SFT.

**CL:** How has the response been at Hamline from the—we talked a little bit about the community at large at Hamline, but people wanting, individuals wanting to get involved in SFT. How has the response been for the non-Tibetan students?

**TT:** The response has been great. They really want to learn more about Tibet and what's the future for Tibet? They're main purpose is, is there a future for Tibet? So they really want us to answer all those questions. Why is this happening? What is the purpose? And stuff, so, yes. Last year we didn't have any major events. The only thing that we did was the Human Rights thing. Because our constitution got approved so late. But now this year it's going to be the major . . . hopefully break through. Recruiting new members and stuff.

**CL:** Do you talk to other Tibetans about coming to Hamline?

**TT:** Oh, yes. Definitely. I guess some students they ask me how is Hamline and stuff. Because you have to tell them it's good. I did about two last year and the year before that. I think there was a college fair that the Tibetan Foundation organizes. So, yes. It's always—they want to go but I guess the biggest thing for them is the financial.

**CL:** You said before that you had looked at other schools besides Hamline but there were certain things that you liked about Hamline. How do you think that—do you think Hamline has helped you as a Tibetan and as an international student?

**TT:** As a Tibetan I can't—I don't know yet. Hopefully I will know this year because we don't have anything. But as an international student I can say Hamline definitely helps all international students somehow. Even financial contribution or anything. It does help at Hamline.

**CL:** You talked a little bit about the social aspect of you being in high school and about you kind of being out of the Tibetan community for a while. How was that when you came to the U.S.? You know, not having any friends here and whatnot. Were you more active in the Tibetan community then or did you—was the Tibetan community kind of a little bit of home then when you were in high school?

**TT:** No. Tibetan community, being home . . . not the first two years, but my senior year I just realized that I should go meet people, especially Tibetan people. So then . . . I live with my cousin, so they all tell me I should go meet people, make new friends. So I was like, I should do that. First two years I didn't have as much involved but I did try to keep in touch with the community, the Tibetan community and stuff.

**CL:** Has that been a real challenge now being an international student in high school? I'm sure there must be more hoops you have to jump through at Hamline just to get your credits approved and whatnot.

**TT:** Definitely. A little hard, especially going to a private school. You have to find your own tuition. Also, making friends was a little tough because no international students because they have—in high school I'm sure people (students) think, "Oh, international students," and stuff. There wasn't much, I guess, people connecting to us. We had to connect with them. So that was a major challenge for us. And I had to get through that phase. Because I was used to people approaching me. So then I had to get used to me approaching them.

**CL:** So you mentioned like the college fair that the Tibetan community has here and whatnot and I know there are other various things that go on to encourage Tibetans here in the cities and in Minnesota at large to go to different schools and whatnot. You being outside of that, being an international student from India, do you see any future or is there anything that you would like to do to maybe increase that and encourage people that don't already live here coming to the U.S. and going to school?

**TT:** Do you mean how can I do that?

**CL:** Because you've had that experience do you think that there should be more done to maybe help or encourage more students that have the experience like yours, like being in India now thinking about college here?

**TT:** Sure. The Tibetan Education . . . what is that? The Tibetan Education Foundation in Dharamsala, I guess they are doing that. They are sending about fifteen Tibetan students, graduate students, here to America to different colleges, especially to Berea College in Kentucky which gives full scholarship to all the Tibetan students here. Personally I don't know what I can do right now. But I can see that Tibetan government is seeing the future for the younger Tibetans in education is here.

**CL:** What are your majors at Hamline?

**TT:** I am doing double majors in accounting and international management.

**CL:** Can you talk a little bit about like the classes at Hamline? Were they what you expected being an international student? I know that you know—kind of you know we talked a little bit about subjects in high school. What were you expecting out of college and did you find that?

**TT:** College. Some classes, yes. Business classes really good. All my management classes. But some elective classes, music and stuff not that good. Class size is too big, especially for like those classes. I think, yes, Hamline has given me a good education so far and hopefully one more year.

**CL:** What do you think the future holds in store for you when you're done?

**TT:** Future. As I said, hopefully I can get my CPA and I would love to work for one of the big four accounting firms in Minnesota.

**CL:** So you want to stay in the U.S.?

**TT:** Definitely.

**CL:** Does that—what problems do you think are going to present themselves being—you're an international student now?

**TT:** The biggest problem is sponsor. Job sponsor. Because I'm international student so I have to change my status from F1 visa to H1. So if that would take up—the label . . . trouble getting that. But if I do get my CPA I'm sure I can get that. But some of the companies they do sponsor us. H1. Some companies do that. I was really interested in working for Wells Fargo at first for the finance division but then I guess they sponsor really less H1s.

**CL:** You ever think about becoming an American citizen at all?

**TT:** Seriously speaking, I haven't thought about it. I don't know why but . . . I really don't actually care if I'm American citizen, Australian citizen . . . not really.

**CL:** So you've been here for six, seven years now and the U.S. has gone through kind of a pretty big political shift and a lot of stuff are going on and you know you've really integrated yourself into normal society and whatnot and you know, walking down the street no one would think twice that your citizenship was somewhere else. So how do you feel about being here and living in the situation and interacting with everybody and then not having those rights like other people do by voting or political say and stuff? Especially working with the political organizations at school.

**TT:** I don't think a lot about all this stuff. Just being honest. After September 11<sup>th</sup> it was a little tough. Because people used to give that—in high school we used to get that stare especially to the Muslim students. I feel really bad for Muslim students. I can see like their lockers like they had all the graffiti and stuff. That was an eye opening for me.

**CL:** And that was your last year of high school, wasn't it?

**TT:** Yes. That was a real big eye opening for me. And I wanted to learn more about the race relations in America and stuff. I got really involved with the Multicultural Affairs which where I am working with now at Hamline. In terms of race, that's the biggest eye opening for me here in America. People have different views and stuff. For some reason I can't have like a—I can't think why they have that. Anything against black, white or Caucasian.

**TK:** So you stated earlier that you weren't really—that there were different views here regarding race relations. You didn't really see that before. Could you expand on that? For example, you came from India and obviously there is a large number of, you know, different populations in India as well. How is it that you weren't able to perceive these differences in race relations in India whereas here it was so clear to you?

**TT:** Well, in India, the caste system—I could see the caste system there. People still practiced it, but then I guess most of the time I was in the boarding school so I didn't see the family side of the caste system out there. Because most of us were in boarding school and all the students were—we didn't care what caste the students were because we just were friends . . . friends. But then when we came here we were like the day students. Going to school in the morning, come back home and stuff. So we could see like in terms of during lunch time and all the African American students sitting in one table, all the Asian students sitting at one, all the different ethnic groups there. So you could see. That's the biggest change here. People just interacting with one side. Slowly, slowly you just learn to read, see and all that stuff.

**TK:** It seems that you're quite active in the Tibetan support groups and stuff like that for the time being, you know, for now. Do you feel that this is something that will continue

throughout your life or is it a phase that college students go through where you feel like you can do right in the world and you have your own particular thing that you're into? How do you feel about that? Do you feel that in the future you will continue it or—?

**TT:** I think I will. I can say ninety percent I will. Ten percent I won't. Let's see how much. Because I'm sure I will be busy with other stuff, especially job. I would definitely . . . I will definitely keep in touch. Especially the SFT in Minnesota. Because this is what me and my friends started here. So we want this to be going on for . . . forever. Definitely. Yes.

**TK:** Out of curiosity, why exactly did you decide to start an SFT here? You said that it was because you felt that you needed student leadership. And I do know that we have a lot of support groups concerning the welfare of Tibet, and it seems like there's so many of them that they're all divided and even though they have the same cause. In a sense it kind of breaks it down, kind of segregates amongst one people who in reality have one cause. How do you feel about that?

**TT:** Well, we had to answer this question to the Tibetan board because they were, "Oh, why do you want to start?" We already have the Tibetan Youth Congress (TYC) which has the same purpose but the Tibetan Congress is—they don't have, I guess I can say, the younger generation much involved. They have—there are some students, like Yangdon,<sup>4</sup> who is involved in it, but then we wanted something that's totally run by the students. So most of our members are under twenty-five. But I don't see how like, the Students for Free Tibet is trying to segregate the Youth Congress, the Women's Organization or the TAFM. I guess we can work together. We said that—we told the president that we are going to work with them. We won't try to conflict any events that some other association is doing with us. There is a lot of planning and stuff, but I don't see any major quarrel between all of us because we had talked to them before they formed. This is not our purpose just to take all the members from Youth Congress to Students for Free Tibet.

**TK:** You stated that you know someone who actually is on the Tibetan Youth Congress here in Minnesota and I do know that she also goes to Hamline and I'm sure that you both have had some sort of interaction along the way.

**TT:** Sure.

**TK:** Why is it that for your purposes that you didn't decided to join the TYC and gradually start this change of students running the TYC instead of the older generation running the TYC?

**TT:** The Tibetan Congress . . . I don't know why. I didn't see any major reason to join the Tibetan Youth Congress. I just wanted to do something that is run by under twenty-five Tibetan students. I'm not trying to like take age as the main reason for doing the Students for Free Tibet, but I could see myself connecting with the Youth Congress. I

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<sup>4</sup> Tenzin Yangdon, SFT Hamline Board Member, TYC Member, and interviewer for the Minnesota Tibetan Oral History Project.

really respect them for what they are doing and stuff but we wanted to do something that is totally top to bottom student leadership.

**TK:** I do realize that, you know, student leadership would be important to you because you are a student at this point. But, you know, after you finish this phase in your life, you become a young adult, so to speak. Do you think that then you'd be willing to move on to TYC because, you know, SFT would no longer be—?

**TT:** For me? [Chuckles]

**TK:** Yes, I guess so.

**TT:** Well, I am interested in Youth Congress and Students for Free Tibet organization. I'm sure I can be a member of Youth Congress but I don't know how much involved I can be with the Youth Congress. For some reason I just feel so much connection to Students for Free Tibet more than the Youth Congress. Again, I have nothing against all the other associations around in the Tibetan community here. But I just feel so much connection to the Students for Free Tibet.

**CL:** I think one of the great things about TYC is that it's an organization run by Tibetans for Tibetans. A very political organization. But one of the great things about SFT is that there are so many Westerners that get brought in, Americans or whoever. They get brought into the leadership of it and working hand in hand with Tibetans and in some cases large chapters in certain parts of the country don't have any Tibetans there at all. How do you think that interaction with Westerners is? And also, how do you think you being a Tibetan and having so many Tibetans involved in the core of your organization at Hamline is going to help the community at large whether it's an education point or an activist thing or what not?

**TT:** Well, specifically to the Hamline SFT I think there are some American students who are already telling their friends about SFT and stuff because they have talked to me and to other board members about bringing new members and stuff. We welcome them. As I said, our board members this year is all Tibetans except one. We can have an American student be involved. We have nothing against that. We just want more members to be in SFT just to spread the message.

**CL:** Are you planning on working with other SFT groups in the city? Macalester<sup>5</sup> has a chapter, right?

**TT:** Yes, but I don't think Macalester is that involved. St. Kate's<sup>6</sup> is starting one right now. Dave and Sherry—she's been to Tibet a couple of times and she's really pushing for SFT out there at St. Kate's. But yes, I'm in touch with the Midwest Coordinator of SFT. Just been trying to work with the conference thing as I said for the Midwest Conference that we would really like to bring here to Minnesota this year.

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<sup>5</sup> Macalester College, St. Paul, MN.

<sup>6</sup> College of St. Catherine, St. Paul, MN.

**CL:** You talked about—I know that the funding that you’ve been given by the Student Congress at Hamline is going to allow you to bring a large number of students to the conference next year and how are you going to go about picking students? What are—obviously it’s important for leadership to go for training and things like that but the—you talked a little bit about the experience, the eye opening experience that you had. What do you think that can provide the other people?

**TT:** Well, if—first of all, we are going to have an application process because that’s one of the things that the Hamline Student Council wants all student orgs to do. So if the student org is going to a conference it has to be open to the whole community. So we had—last year we had application. We had about fifteen and we selected only seven. It was me, Yangdon and Professor Burkson<sup>7</sup> who did that. So we had—there will an application process and what was the second part?

**CL:** About the experience itself. That it was so eye opening for you, you know, your first time.

**TT:** Sure. Well, this year I guess our number is going to increase to ten. There will be only two or three of the board members going because some of our members are going back to India this coming winter. It will be an eye opening for some other students that we take. I’m sure it will be—they will learn a lot. The students we took, students who went there last year, they learned a lot. They were really involved and they want to get more involved. The conference thing is really big for us. Just in terms of—to tell our members that all—what the big SFT has done.

**TK:** I think I’ve asked pretty much a lot about your childhood and whatnot so moving on, I suppose. You stated that you were interested in business, your career. I do know that you—there aren’t a lot of Tibetans in that field, especially in the international arena. Do you feel like you would be entering into something that, you know, there aren’t many Tibetans that are—that there aren’t many Tibetans present and so you’d be able to help out other Tibetans into that field?

**TT:** Well, definitely. If someone wants to learn about the field I’m always open to telling them more about what it is, where you can reach with that. Like last year when . . . what’s his name? The scholar from Harvard.<sup>8</sup> He was here. We organized a small gathering with him so at that time the students were really involved in all of the politics side, the politic stuff. So through like small things like that I guess the younger generations they know a way to go, in which field to go.

**TK:** You also stated that you are studying Chinese?

**TT:** Yes.

**TK:** I haven’t met many Tibetans who are studying Chinese . . .

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<sup>7</sup> Professor Mark Burkson.

<sup>8</sup> Lobsang Sangay.

**TT:** I know.

**TK:** It seems kind of like taboo to even enter into that, you know. Is there a reason for it?

**TT:** No, except my main reason is for my father because he really wanted me—for some reason he felt that China is going to be the next big thing which is hundred percent true. I've seen that over the last three years. The Chinese class, how it is changing and stuff.

**TK:** I think that there is a theory out there that we should try and gather support for our cause within the Chinese community as well, which is very rare as far as I know. There aren't many Tibetans who are willing to work with the Chinese for the Tibetan cause and as you are taking these classes in learning Chinese, how do you—do you think that that would, in a sense, help your cause for the Tibetan independence movement?

**TT:** I hope it does. I haven't thought in that—but I can say that my professor, she's from China, too, she is open to talking a lot about Tibet and all that stuff. She does believe that what China did to Tibet was something wrong. And she's really open to like me talking to the class about the Tibetan cause and stuff.

**TK:** Is the class—?

**TT:** Chinese class? It's all mixed. Whites and Asians.

**TK:** So in a class where people present are obviously interested in the Chinese culture and the Chinese, China in general, what is the reaction like when you speak of Tibetan independence movement amongst a group of people who, you know, I would think would be more in synch with the Chinese side of the story, so to speak?

**TT:** They have lots of questions. Why do you believe that Tibetans—? And you have to tell the history about what China did to Tibet and stuff. Then they realize this is something that is true and stuff. So you have to tell them in a way that they believe you. You have to tell the whole story instead of just taking one part of the story.

**TK:** Also, I do know that within the Tibetan government they are looking for a large number of people in the business field like accounting and whatnot. Do you think that you would consider working for the Tibetan government, returning to India instead of staying here?

**TT:** Again, I've never thought about that. That's really a good question. I've never thought about that. I would love to. Hopefully the pay would be good. I'm just kidding. [Chuckles] I've never thought about that. I just want to work for an international company like Cargill. Maybe I can travel to different parts of the world. I've never thought about working for the Tibetan government, frankly speaking.

**TK:** Just didn't occur or—is there a reason?

**TT:** Just didn't occur. I'll think about it. [Chuckles]

**TK:** Is there a reason why you're so interested in working with a large company?

**TT:** Not necessarily. But Cargill is one of the top companies here in Minnesota. They do a lot of business with India and China, which is my main field in business. I'm open to working for a small company or big company or anything but Cargill is at the top of my list right now.

**TK:** As a college student, as a Tibetan college student, if you had to go to say like a Tibetan—like you said that you did go to college fairs in the Tibetan community, is that right?

**TT:** Yes.

**TK:** What would be some advice that you would pass on to future Tibetan college students to help pave their way into their college future?

**TT:** Basically message for Tibetans?

**TK:** Yes.

**TT:** I think always realize where you are coming from, who you are, who your ancestors are and never forget them. Never forget them. That wasn't the case for me, but . . .

**TK:** You said that you would certainly advise Tibetan students to not forget their own identity. How do you think that comes about as you yourself said that you had two years of where you were totally separate from them? You said that there weren't any reasons, but if you could kind of speculate on that?

**TT:** Of me staying away from it?

**TK:** Yes. Like when there is a danger of losing this touch with your community. How does that come about?

**TT:** I guess . . . [Long pause] I guess it was just me staying away from . . . Tibetan people, Tibetan community. I think somehow gradually you do realize like who you are and where your roots are. So I guess the time for me came there. Something. Should just go back. But I still don't know why. I think I was just taking a break.

**CL:** I think that when you came, as a point in many peoples' lives whether you're Indian or Tibetan or Chinese or even American where you're really trying to define yourself and discover your own identity. And you've talked about, you know, finding yourself and then eventually, you know, realizing something else and coming back to the community. How do you think the identity of Tibetans has changed since they've been here? You've been here for six or seven years. Now your own identity has changed and we've got

many cultures kind of crossing paths at the same time. Do you see the Tibetan identity changing or how has it?

**TT:** When you say changing, in terms of—?

**CL:** As people have more interaction with other social groups and whatnot you just get more integrated and grounded here in the U.S.

**TT:** Yes. The younger generation are definitely interacting with everyone. I don't know about the . . .

**CL:** Do you think the Tibetan identity has lost something or Tibetans have lost something since they've been here in the U.S.?

**TT:** Not the elderly, but the younger ones, especially, who were born here. Who have come here—really, I think the language, that's the major concern for all the parents here. The younger ones are losing their language, their culture, because they haven't seen that process, what we saw back in India. But the main one is language. And the Foundation is doing something like giving classes and stuff.

**CL:** Do you think that's important to hold on to?

**TT:** Definitely. Language is—personally I think it is really important because that's what the Tibetans are. Our language . . . that interaction. If the parents can't interact with their kids they'll be just—a wrong message for the younger ones. The parents didn't do anything for us.

**CL:** I think, kind of taking that, you know, this topic and moving into SFT stuff. I know that I and several other people (Westerners that I know), at times we've been pretty—very critical of SFT. And one of the reasons is because often other chapters that we've had interaction with, other schools around the country, they tend to be very politically focused and oftentimes with people that don't have a lot of interaction with Tibetans. It becomes a political thing and people often don't understand what it means just to be Tibetan. I think that that can have a huge effect on the political aspects of it . . . why this is so important. This isn't just a—it's more than just a political thing. How do you think having so many Tibetans involved in SFT at Hamline is really going to help people understand the whole struggle better?

**TT:** I'm sure the first thing is the community will know . . . a hundred percent of the Tibetans who are studying there are involved so something that, oh, they are really into it. They want to spread the message. As I said before, we are going to be a politically active group, but at times we have to do some other stuff that's not totally involved with our main message, free Tibet.

**CL:** So do you think it's important that people be educated on Tibet and Tibetans regardless of what's going on between Tibet and China?

**TT:** Yes. Because people have to know about Tibetans first and then the Tibet-China thing. But yes. I think that all the three faces. You have to know about Tibet, Tibetans, Tibet-China and what the future lies.

**CL:** How do you think you'll go about doing that? How do you think you will go about . . . I guess making, or allowing people to understand Tibetans more? Just, you know, the way—?

**TT:** Well, because in 2006 in the Losar<sup>9</sup> time we are going to have a—sometimes right now a major big event, a Losar event out there where we can bring all the monks and the Tibetan dance. Small stores and stuff just to let the community know, let the community see and learn a little bit more about what we are instead of just telling them our stories and stuff. Because I think by seeing something and by seeing small stuff and learning from other Tibetans is better than just us telling them every time our message and all that stuff. Hopefully the Losar thing will open eyes for them.

**TK:** Since you are active in the Tibetan movement, I'm quite sure you're aware of the two separate factions within the Tibetan independence movement where the one is fighting for a complete independence and the other is fighting for autonomy. Where do you feel you stand on that issue?

**TT:** I think I'm hundred percent on the autonomy side and I think we all should stick with what His Holiness<sup>10</sup> states . . . with what His Holiness states because he is our spiritual leader. He has done so much for us, more than any other leaders who already have a free country now. A hundred percent independence, is that possible? I don't think that's possible at all. I think the next thing is autonomy but I personally believe that Tibet—I hate to say it, but Tibet won't be hundred percent. I hate to mention that if someone asks me about this. "Is Tibet going to be hundred percent?" Frankly speaking, no.

**CL:** There's also, besides the Middle-Way approach which the fighting for autonomy that His Holiness has proposed and the other side fighting for independence, there's also a movement and . . . after spending time in India and Nepal, it seems to me this . . . this movement seems to be growing that people want to break away from His Holiness' plan and not be non-violent movement anymore. And oftentimes that seems to come from youth. Whether it's youth being impatient or youth trying to just strike out on their own and make their own statements. How do you feel about other people in the community, specifically youth, whether it be here or in India or elsewhere, breaking away from that Middle-Way approach?

**TT:** I just feel bad for the elderly community because I know most of them are for the Middle-Way approach. I guess people are just getting tired. I guess I can say getting tired of this waiting, waiting, waiting, waiting. They want to do something now. Just

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<sup>9</sup> Tibetan New Year.

<sup>10</sup> His Holiness the Dalai Lama.

throw a bomb or something. Do something. Because the Middle-Way, approach is taking time.

You have to be patient. Some people are just basically running out of patience and—which we can't blame anyone. That they are running out of patience. But I don't know what we can do to change their mind. And I won't even try changing someone's mind because I know . . . they have made up their mind. Personally I think that they have already made up their minds. People who are against it.

**CL:** Do you think that's a danger to the Tibetan community, the Tibetan Diaspora, that there are these groups that are sort of breaking off?

**TT:** Definitely. It is a little dangerous because . . . with them telling the stories to someone else, "Oh, we should do this, stay away from the Middle-Way." That's really dangerous because that might affect not just the person who they are telling the story to but just the bigger—might just separate us from our one cause.

**TK:** You stated that you worked with the SFT group and that you helped start it at Hamline. I don't know if you've gone into this or not but you said that there are—there was very good response from the student body, which is obviously heavily American. How do you feel that with this new influx of students coming into the SFT group that you started, you know, the cultural values of Eastern and Western thoughts would help this movement?

**TT:** For—you said for the Americans?

**TK:** Yes. So Americans working with Tibetans. What are the positives?

**TT:** The biggest, I guess, we can tell our story and if they have something to share we are always open to any of their ideas. Not just—because this is just—Students for Free Tibet is totally student run so we just don't want our ideas to be there. We just want any of our members, if they have any ideas, we are always open to them. We are always open to taking that and if it works out we will put it into plan.

**TK:** Going back to the different factions in the Tibetan political movement. You stated that there are, you know, essentially younger generation of Tibetans who prefer to go against the Middle-Way approach proposed by His Holiness the Dalai Lama. Considering that, the older generation is all for the Middle-Way approach, be it from their respect for His Holiness or their cultural traditional values which so intact when compared to the young generation . . . who, personally speaking, for example myself also and I'm sure you too, we were raised in India. We do have, you know, we have Westernized, so to speak, and would that have anything to do with having this break off from the Middle-Way approach? Having these new kind of thoughts and ways of thinking, that have come from being in another country where we have more influences from other sources outweighing the input the influences that we have from within the Tibetan community?

**TT:** I don't know how much it has to do with the different groups back in India and stuff. I guess people are just getting frustrated. "This is not possible," and stuff and His Holiness' Middle-Way approach which is autonomy . . . people want . . . some of the Tibetans, they want hundred percent. They are like, "We've been working so hard. Why just autonomy now? We want hundred percent." I don't know where the message comes from. It is wrong. Because we should listen to His Holiness. It is because of him that we are here. Why we are here now. So I don't know where they are getting the message.

**TK:** You stated that you feel that it's essentially wrong to go against the message of His Holiness, him being the sole figure of Tibetan, you know, just being what we have as a spiritual leader in the Tibetan community and whatnot. There are—although we have this image of His Holiness, there are lots of people, there is a large group of people, who are going away, moving away from this Middle-Way approach. Would this have to do only with frustration or having to do with a realization of new ideals that don't necessarily stem from religious beliefs and devotion to their spiritual leadership of Tibet, so to speak?

**TT:** I think it can be both, but personally I feel that people are getting frustrated. Just by listening to them, some of them. Some of my friends, they are also getting a little frustrated. I don't know how much it has to do with the realization of their religion and all this stuff but I just think people they just want to do something a different way, something that throughout the history has been done.

**CL:** How does—can I ask you how religion plays a role in your life?

**TT:** Like in daily life?

**CL:** Just your ideals and . . . is it something that is important to you?

**TT:** Religion is really important to me. I guess for all Tibetans religion is something at the top of our list. Do I practice it seriously? No. No. But religion . . . I know it is a part of me because by offering prayers in the morning or by doing—religion is important.

**CL:** And you went to St. George's in India, which I guess is a Catholic school, right?

**TT:** It is.

**CL:** And now you're at Hamline, which is a Methodist school. Has that had any effect on you at all about your own religious ideals and going to institutions that are affiliated with a very different religion?

**TT:** No. Not at all. I've never thought about it. Because I know it's Catholic and Methodist, but no. Hundred percent no.

**CL:** Did you think about that when like deciding schools? Because I know like at Hamline, even though it's a Methodist school, it's very open to many things. But there

are other schools that are more fixed on their own religious affiliation. Not to say that students from other religions don't go there but they're much more—you know you have to take specific Christian classes or whatnot. Was that a decision or a thought you had at all about picking schools?

**TT:** A little bit, I can say, because I did go for a college—to Bethel. Bethel is a really serious . . . Catholic or something.

**CL:** It's Protestant?

**TT:** Something like that, and we had to like be a Bible major or something like that. That was something—I couldn't do it. But frankly speaking, no. I didn't think much about that. I was going—I was seeing the scholarship part of all the colleges.

**TK:** I do know that there are a large number of Tibetan students who go to private schools, especially in India where private school is considered to be much, much better than the government-run schools. More often than not, these private schools are Christian-based, such as yours. Such as my own. Do you feel that other Tibetans might have, you know, influences from these schools where they have this daily upbringing in a religious atmosphere? Do you feel that that would somehow affect their own religious beliefs and thus influence their political beliefs? Because it seems that in Tibetan culture, you know, religion and political things do go hand in hand?

**TT:** What do you think? Do you think that? I'm not sure how it's going to change them. But just saying daily prayers in the morning and during the mealtime. So I don't think that that's a big change. Because I'm sure we all know where we come from and stuff. But I don't think . . . not a big deal.

**CL:** Anything else?

**TK:** No. I think I've covered a lot.

**CL:** Was there anything you wanted to say? Anything you wanted to let us know?

**TT:** No.

**CL:** Well, we wanted to thank you for being part of our project here and taking your time to come in.

**TT:** Thank you very much.

**TK:** Thanks for coming.