Tenzin Ngawang
Narrator

Dorjee Norbu and Charles Lenz
Minnesota Historical Society
Interviewers

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Minnesota Tibetan Oral History Project

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Tenzin Ngawang Residence
Richfield, Minnesota

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Dorjee Norbu **- DN**
Tenzin Ngawang **- TN**
Charles Lenz **- CL**

DN: My name is Dorjee Norbu and today is July 21, 2005. We are interviewing Tenzin Ngawang at his residence. And present with me today are Tenzin Ngawang, myself, the primary interviewer, Dorjee Norbu, and also a secondary interviewer, Charles Lenz.

Can you introduce yourself? What is your name?

TN: My name is Tenzin Ngawang. T-e-n-z-i-n N-g-a-w-a-n-g.

DN: And what did you do in India?

TN: What do I do . . . I am an artist in Tibetan Institute of Performing Arts. That's in the northern part of India. In the short way we call TIPA. T-I-P-A. So I've been there for like now thirteen years and I'm like a senior artist there. Doing performing to all over the world. Learning instruments, musics, dance, operas, folk songs and drama, plays and singing. Lots of things that I've been doing in India for like past thirteen years now.

DN: And like what would you do on like a typical day at TIPA?

TN: What do I do in typical day in TIPA? You mean like one day?

DN: Yes. What would you do?

TN: Yes. In TIPA, TIPA is a—have a hundred members. Hundred members. And we have like forty artists. Forty artists. Twenty handicrafts. We have shoe sections. We

have dramnyen,[1] lute, handicraft sections. We have dressing section and we have like research staffs and small kids, all over like this. These days I think it's like more than a hundred, hundred twenty. So we have—what we used to do is like we all the day we used have—we used to start our class from eight-thirty. We will have a prayer, a prayer time. That will be like a half hour. That starts from eight-thirty to nine o'clock. Then from nine o'clock to ten-fifteen we will have one class and that class will be singing and voice exercising. Then we will have a tea break after that. Then we'll go for another period. That would be until twelve o'clock. Twelve noon, which is—we will be doing instrument practice. That's Tibetan lute, or fiddle, or dulcimer, and lots of extra training instruments. Then we will have a lunch break and after that from one o'clock we will have our lunch.

Our lunch break for one hour and then the class will start again from one o'clock to three p.m. That will be . . . we will be having two classes. They will be about histories of Tibet and the Tibet culture, and it will be about opera. It will be about plays, drama. And then after that, three to three-thirty we will be having another break. That will be tea break. Then from three-thirty to four-thirty there will be another period. So which will be—will be about written—like English, English or Tibetan writings, language, practicing. Then from four-thirty to six p.m. class is over so what we used to do is we used to go to a playground, play games, go here, there, take a break. Sometimes go down to a town. Stay with friends. Play with them. Then at six o'clock will be your dinnertime. You will have a dinner all together in the one big dining room.

So it's like, most of artists are old. They are like very—some are very old. Originally most are like from twenty to thirty, between that. They'll be thirty-five, forty—ages of artist. All will be in together like a big family staying in the one big dining room. All will be there and eating together, talking together, having fun together. And they will—yes, but those who are married and who have kids and students, children, will be separate. They'll have their own dinner in their home. Otherwise we are all together and they'll be on at six p.m. That's our dinnertime.

After that we'll be having rehearsals. We have been having rehearsals of dances or sometimes we have to prepare for tours to Europe, to Japan. And we used to have a rehearsal in the evening. Sometimes other than—sometimes we don't do rehearsal with the dancing but what we do is sometimes we do plays and sometimes we do modern Tibetan bands. That will be like by ourself. We find our time. We do ourself learning Western musics like guitars, drums, keyboards. Then we go—we composed songs, musics and do some activities. And then we do complete shows and concert for the young generations, you know. For the young generations because most of the kids the young generations don't take care of it. They just don't want to listen Tibetan songs, Tibetan . . .

DN: Tradition?

[1] A Tibetan instrument similar to a guitar.

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TN: Yes. Traditionals. Traditionals, definitely. But when Tibetan modern songs like now. But these days, these childrens, our students are coming like the generations are getting more involved. Getting more involved. So that's why we will doing modern things thinking that the young generation will get more interested. So when they learn Tibetan modern songs and they keep on learning and they'll go to the depth and they'll find their cultural—they can—they know about opera, what is singing sound like. So that's what we are doing. All day we've been doing like that, until Monday to Saturday.

But Saturday we have a like cleaning surrounding areas. Cleaning institute. That will be like we'll have a half-day of classes to noon and then from one o'clock and up to four-thirty we'll be cleaning the surrounding area. Cleaning. Doing some social things you know. Planting and lots of things. Yes.

DN: And did you also do teaching at the—teaching Tibetan children?

TN: Yes. Till I been like—I started teaching from 1997, 1998. Until then I've been learning, you know. Touring around. Learning. And then starting from 1997 I've been going to Tibetan schools where I've been teaching every year. That is like lower TCV[2] school, Tibetan Children Relief school. They have lots of projects so I've been teaching to the Upper TCV, Lower TCV,[3] like five hundred, six hundred students in lower TCV and one thousand . . . no, three, four thousand, something like that in TCV upper. So yes, going there, teaching every year.

DN: That's all in Dharamsala, right?

TN: That's all in Dharamsala. Yes. But yes, other than if I'd been going out like for vacation or like going out in some many places, then I—yes, I always teach them. They used to ask. So that's what I like to do because—and that's what I think is very important. So that's what I've been doing.

And then on Saturday, Sunday . . . so that's a break time. Chill out. Stay out. Play musics or sometime in the night we get all our friends together and some Western friends from outside. They used to come. We'd get it together and we just make sounds. Just shout and do everything. Musics. And then maybe the Western peoples as well as among ourselves. Like [unclear]. Oh, it's cool. [Snaps fingers] It's very nice. I like. Yes.

DN: So when did you first—when did that first thought about moving to the United States and Minnesota particularly come in your mind?

TN: My—like I been in the United States. I've been here for like four times now.

[2] Tibetan Children's Village.

[3] Dharamsala is divided into two towns—Lower Dharamsala and Upper Dharamsala. Because of this, there are two main Tibetan Children's Village schools in Dharamsala—Lower TCV near the base of the mountain, and Upper TCV farther up the mountain.

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Minnesota Historical Society

DN: With world tours?

TN: Yes. Keep touring around, touring the TIPA. So in India, it's like preserving culture is very easy over there. I mean people have times, you know, people have time and everything is like kind of very easy over there. You go to teach somewhere. You have like for Tibetans in India is like . . . they have a good like preservation of cultural—like now, because everything is very easy to get there. But whenever I came here, what I noticed is like all the time I see lots of lack of times. Lack of times and like not so much response like preserving culture.

And the childrens here are totally different minded than the childrens there in India. The way of thinking is totally different. Here it is like they don't know, they just go with other thing. They don't go with—they don't want to take care of our culture or stuff like that. In India when you—but yes, but some people like some student childrens they don't take serious about it. But when they do it they don't get such kind of love of preservation. They don't know a way to learn. So some students go to India to learn there. So that is what I been noticing around.

So whenever I come here—we used to perform. We perform and after the performance when we see what kind of audience we have, what kind of things we have shared with people. So what I learn is like all the childrens come backstage and just dancing and getting autograph and they're all very, very interested. And that's—then what I thought, I thought I hope to contribute something that I have like now to make everyone, and all the childrens, to teach them everything, the songs and the culture and stuff like that. So whatever I can teach . . . I sort of dream that.

But for that my first thought of moving here was like two, three years before. But then I just stayed back a little bit more so that I can—I have lots of responsibilities over there in TIPA. I've been volunteering, a lot of volunteering, lots of things. Making plays, making songs, albums and lots of things doing like that, for which I was there for three years. But, yes, thinking of coming here was like from three years before.

Now at last when I'm here and what I notice when I'm here, I came here and see the students and they're all like very—they don't have a teacher here so they're doing it by theirselves. Very much interested in their culture but don't know what to do, you know. So, yes. So the last tour when we—when I was with TIPA coming here, so I thought maybe that is just the time I should come. Because as fast as you can come here and teach the students, as much as they can learn, you know, and they can preserve and they can—Tibet will be not lost away. Tibet culture will be not lost away. So, yes. And that's what I thought when I came here. Until now it's been going very success and there are lots of students here.

CL: Is there a reason why you picked Minnesota specifically?

TN: Yes. There is a reason choosing Minnesota Tibetan community. In America lots of Tibetans are here and there are lots of Tibetans wants to settle here. Because of course

Minnesota Tibetan Oral History Project
Minnesota Historical Society

you have like a good house you can get from here. Lots of things are getting . . . you can get from here. And that's why there are lots of childrens, you know. But there were no any teachers here, Tibetan dance teachers. In New York there are like five, six teachers. In California five, six. And elsewhere any other way you see around there will be like three, four. But here in Minnesota there wasn't anyone. But they were—but most of they were like not engaged with their work and stuff like that. But they come to do more about the future of our childrens. So I thought this is the right spot. This is the right place. Because they need it. They need someone like me as well as they lack a teacher who—you know. That's what I thought and then, yes, I sent here and I'm here.

DN: So when you made this decision then did you discuss it with your relatives and family back in India?

TN: Yes. My relatives like telling the truth. Who don't wants to come to America? Everyone wants to come to here . . . and come here in America. And my relatives, they think like going to America as a different way they been thinking like as going to America you have a—like you can have lots of opportunities. You can do lots of things. You can learn a lot, lots of things. It's much better than any other country. So that's what my like family used to always give me like these kind of things, you know. You should go and try even like bringing your sisters, and telling them to—giving them a good education. Things doesn't—in India, you don't get like—it's totally different. It's very different. But here you have lots of opportunities. So that's why my like—like your questions about my getting in from my family. They all want me to do this. Yes.

DN: And so I was wondering, has there ever been a time when you have been here where you thought that you made the wrong move by moving to Minnesota?

TN: No.

DN: You ever been—?

TN: At first, yes, but . . . [sighs] for me I like India a lot, you know. Lifestyle over there. I've been spending all my twenty-six, seven years over there. Twenty-six, seven years there and been like so—moving here for like now a year, more than a year now, and at first I was like I'm kind of lost, you know. I missed India. That happens to everyone, actually. So for me it happened like that. And for the first—at the beginning I thought like, "Oh!" But yes, even like the weathers here, like in winter you can't go out. You have to stay in the home. And even in the summer when it's very hot you have to stay in the home. It's all the time like—once I thought like, "Oh, I am now home boy." You know. I used to go roam around, take a bike, go here, enjoy the life, you know. Get some adventure, get some—but here at first, beginning I thought like that. But now the weathers are going very good you know, so yes.

At the beginning I thought—I didn't thought of choosing like—being a teacher I don't like—never think that I am wrong. I would never think—any places. But, yes, adapting, getting used to the place that would be like totally different you know. Things would

Minnesota Tibetan Oral History Project
Minnesota Historical Society

happen. Like at the very beginning, I missed a lot. I miss TIPA. I miss my family. I miss my India a *lot*. Very lot. All the time thinking about going there. Like, "Oh, I should go right now back." But now I'm getting used to—now I'm thinking, "Oh, I want to relax," that.

So it's like I'm a—this place is like kind of homely, you know. You just—it's like you, you . . . finally you came—you got home. You came home. It's like that. Because in India I never used to stay in my room like maybe yes, when I jam, we have parties here. But otherwise like, you know, staying like this as a family guy now, never. Like going here and there, going—but here is like staying inside. It's like, yes, it's good. So it's like I'm—for myself, other than my careers or other than my teachings and like that, yes, I'm now getting used of it. And it's—for the beginning I thought like that but now everything is going good. Yes.

DN: And besides the temperature, besides getting like the weather difference from Dharamsala to here, did you notice anything else that was striking about the two different communities? The Tibetan community here and the Tibetan community in Dharamsala? Is there any big differences?

TN: Yes. There is a big difference. There isn't much very big difference. But there is a difference. The difference is like, in India like I said, as I just said before (earlier) about the time. People don't have the time here. At all. But yes, but what Tibetans are struggling here is they are struggling, trying to gather, all trying together. You know, trying to find the time, you know, and make lots of parties so that everything is so such around here. But that isn't—in India you won't find like that. Like lots of birthday parties and, you know, lots of parties going around. That won't happen, that doesn't happen much in India. Like India, all the time you just wake up, you just go out and that's all the time. People there. Everything is like very free there. But here when everyone has to work a lot, and it's very hard to find together to see someone. So seeing here is like seeing a person after a month or after two months.

So yes, that's what I thought the difference. Like that's the difference about communicating to each other. But preserving and getting more responsible in India to their own—to Tibet issues and to Tibetan, I think they are both the same. Because here we are working very hard. You know. But the thing is time. Time is like—America time is like, you know, it's very difficult. But even though time is difficult, people are trying to do very good stuff and now we're trying to do something to for the Tibet, Tibet issue. But in India you have lots of times. You have got all the times. You know. But where the peoples itself, peoples are very nice. Both the peoples are very nice. In India. People are nice here are nice, friendly. Everything. It's like another Dharamsala to me here. Another India to me. Same everything. Just a small difference is like time. That's the difference.

DN: Then do you think it's—do you think that size makes a difference, too, because we have a smaller community here? Less people than in Dharamsala, which is a lot of Tibetans.

Minnesota Tibetan Oral History Project
Minnesota Historical Society

TN: Yes. The size is like—even though—if you would have like, let's say all right, let's say people are working in—Dharamsala is here and people over here is there. I think it would be the same thing. The time, you know? So time is the main thing. Everyone has to work very hard, you know. They have to work. And they don't like—even in the family, as we take an example, as a family buys home. My uncle and auntie, my uncle goes work in the night and auntie comes—no, no. First uncle stays and look at the kids. Auntie goes to work and auntie comes in the afternoon. When she comes arrive my uncle goes there. So it's like—every time. And sometime I even don't see my uncle for some one week I as when I work a lot. He comes in very late. That's so—it's all the time, if you have lots of peoples here. So yes, but there are lots of Tibetans here in Minnesota. There still will be more, I think, I guess. But I think that things will be just the same, you know.

CL: You've mentioned before that everyone wants to come to America. Do you think with everyone being as busy as they are all the time, do you still think that it's a good idea for people to come to America?

TN: People to come—over India is if you have, if you like—if you have childrens, if you have childrens or babies, you know, that's very good. And for bigger old age what they can do is they can come here, work you know. They can just work. Just for the next generations you know. The generations, what they did (most of the people), I think, is for their own next generations. They get to have a more opportunities than they have and lots of more knowledges. So that they can do something very—and we get a freedom. We can—they can do something to help Tibet issue and sometime help mankind itself, you know. So that's the kind of thing—what's there, what is their thing like people in India. But the thing is here doing something; it's like time, also. But what I mean is to say is it's all knowledge. It's about knowledge. So that's why most of the people want to come here. Earn some money, you know. And give a good thing, good opportunity to their own childrens and their own babies and all those. Yes. That's why they came.

CL: Do you think that with the community, even though there are a lot of Tibetans here, as far as North America or America is concerned, Minnesota has a lot of Tibetans there, but they're becoming more and more spread out and there are greater distances between people. You mentioned, you know, you might go a month or a week or, you know, a great amount of time before you see anyone. Do you think that's hurting the community or do you think they're finding ways to overcome that?

TN: Can you say that again?

CL: Sure. You mentioned how Minnesota is different than Dharamsala because you see everyone at Dharamsala all the time because everyone is either concentrated, you know, right in upper Dharamsala on the mountain or down on the bottom in lower Dharamsala. But in Minnesota you said that sometimes it might be a week or a month before you see someone. And now the Tibetans used to live in a very central area and now they're getting farther and farther and farther apart from each other. Do you see that as a problem?

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Minnesota Historical Society

TN: Yes. They will be—as long as you have your together you will have like—you can learn each other from a lot of things. You can teach lots of things. Like you can talk lots about—give ideas about Tibet issue, as well as cultural, about a man good kind. Yes, of course. Definitely. And even the language speaking. Some of the childrens born here in here have a very less—they can't speak Tibetan very good. It's a very—even they can't write Tibetan. But that's why here in Tibetan community here has done like they have done. Found teachers. They have found teachers and tried to bring all the kids in that foundation, you know. Then they teach children Tibetan language and everything, culture and all those things. So as long as you are getting more close to each other you can have—you can learn lots of things together. Yes. But the spreading by going out far away, it's naturally the same here. Just going—just running away. Just like that. That's what I think. Yes. Of course.

DN: So besides teaching, is there anything else that you do?

TN: Besides teaching? Yes. You mean here in Minnesota? Yes. Hanging around, going down to the downtown, going to Mall. Yes. Mostly I play music by myself here, try to compose song and try to jam, try to see new artists, try to exchange cultural. Yes. That's the kind of thing I do here. And right now just finished my summer class and I'm here cleaning the room and trying to see what I can do. Playing musics.

CL: Are there specific kinds of—you said you go and seek out new artists. Are you looking for Western artists or other Tibetan artists that might be around?

TN: Like I don't—as an artist it really doesn't matter who you—should be Western or—as long as it is an artist. Here I have my two artists, three artists over here. We used to like to get together and jam together. But, yes, mostly I try and also is like when there's a Tibetan. But the thing is that you are exchanging culturally like you do with some other people, some other artists, you know. Trying to learn their musics, trying to show your musics and also see the difference, what it is, and try to say, exchange the cultural songs. That's what . . . yes. It's like that. So like focusing and trying to also look for Western artist. Trying to see how it would go.

CL: Do you see or find your own style of music changing since you've been in Minnesota?

TN: My own styles of music is like—as being a composer is like you always—what I have learned from TIPA is all folk Tibetan songs, traditional Tibetan songs. But what I am trying to compose song is trying to compose for this next coming generation. This generations. What taste is this, you know? So that they can, as long as, you know, get more involved with the Tibetan songs and then naturally when you get more you go more deep so you find a real depth. So, yes. But as for my compositions, I didn't find any changes or like, you know, but what I was—I'm trying creating something. Music, playing music, creating something. Yes. I haven't seen much difference. Like difference, in a sense. I mean like difference in a sense that some—like influence. I know that's what you say. Influence. Some music you make, try to compose, and it's

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Minnesota Historical Society

totally influenced from some other musics, you know. From some other things. So that doesn't happen.

CL: Do you find that the children that you work with here, are they more influenced by other instruments? Like do you find it more difficult to try and introduce Tibetan instruments with them or are they all interested in learning like Western instruments?

TN: Okay. So here is like bringing an instrument. They have—most of those kids doesn't know about instruments. Some of them have heard, some of them known, but they doesn't know what . . . in reality know. So what also is like we're trying to—when I bring all the instruments in front of them. They will like playing. "Oh! I want to play more." Like getting more interested in it. So then they all talk in front of me, like guitars and stuff like that. They never talk. They just wanted to do some traditional—they want to learn traditionals, you know. So yes, it's helping. It's getting more. So they are like—they always go hang around singing, singing wherever they go. Playing music. And that's what I heard . . . that what I find and that's what I like it. That's very important. That's the spirit. Yes.

DN: So you teach both Tibetan traditional songs and music here and then you also teach instruments?

TN: Instruments. Yes. And I'm trying also to teach now some Western instruments also. Guitars and drums. Some—telling the truth, I mean whereas I found like some students—some students they are like . . . yes. They have been influenced with guitars and drums more in Western instruments. They really doesn't know what to do traditionals and learn like that, you know. So for which I thinks like teaching them the instruments or you'd be like you can bring all Tibetan songs.

DN: And because you also taught in Dharamsala, like what are some of the main differences between the students here and the students back in Dharamsala? Did you notice any differences?

TN: Yes. There is a difference. Students are about the same. The thing is like understanding. Understanding what I'm saying, what teacher is saying or—that's totally different. It's difference. What exactly is like, here students you just like an hour. You have to—they are very open-minded. Open. They like—they just lay around. Lack discipline. Lack discipline. In India there is lots of discipline so it's always there are lots of disciplines. But the more interested, as I thought like—here peoples childrens are more interested—that gets more interested, you know.

[Tape interruption]

DN: So we were talking about the difference in the students in Dharamsala and students here. And you were talking about how the students here were more open-minded.

TN: Yes. They are open-minded.

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Minnesota Historical Society

DN: More interested.

TN: Yes. More interested. Yes. In India students are—of course they are interested but they have a discipline, also. But the difference is the discipline here. Here it's like my students are more open. I don't know exactly what word . . . [Speaks in Tibetan]

DN: They lack discipline.

TN: Yes. Lack discipline.

DN: They are very like free, free going kind of.

TN: Yes. Yes.

DN: It's hard for them to come and sit down and do something.

TN: Yes. Yes. But all day in India like childrens are—they have a discipline. That's what I mean to say. Yes.

DN: Do you think students are more interested here because they have like a less—?

TN: Exactly. That's what I think because that's—they have known, they have heard, you know, but they don't know—instrument is like when you know something, when you know how to play it, then you are interested. You naturally get into it. But when you don't know and it's just a piece of decoration, so you're not interested. So here what I say like—and they know and they understand. We taught them to understand the notations, notes on the—and they understand how to play it. Then, yes, it's getting more interested. And they are coming; more students are coming. Like from five, six years old. Students, childrens, they want to learn. They always, "Teacher I want to learn this." It's helping all the community, the community itself.

DN: So it's giving them something to do.

TN: Yes.

DN: And at the same time like learning about their own culture.

TN: Yes. Yes.

CL: Has your teaching style, have you had to change your teaching style between India and Minnesota?

TN: Yes. That I have to. Because in Dharamsala, as I say, now the thing is like the difference. It's all discipline here. Here the childrens it's very hard. For the first beginning it was very hard.

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Minnesota Historical Society

CL: So you have to discipline the children more here?

TN: Yes. Yes. Because they are like . . . I don't know. But it's like they don't have much disciplines. I have to make disciplines, you know. So it was very hard. When I tell them do this and do that, in return they do like other things, you know, at the beginning. So yes, I have to change my teachings. I have to think more about the students, what they like, what kind of person they are so what will be good. So yes, I did change a lot of things that I was teaching as like compared to India.

DN: And did you like, did you find that at first kind of disrespectful?

TN: First, yes. I found it . . .

DN: They weren't listening to you.

TN: Yes. I thought it was really weird but then later I understand. When I see them doing instrument now and I see them getting interested and then I thought, "Oh!" Then it's like, you know, that was good. Yes.

DN: So how many students do you have right now?

TN: Right now—when I was here it was like fifty students. But right now I think eighty, something like that. All come, including all the—learning instruments. Now eighty students. Something like that.

DN: And do you put on shows for the community?

TN: Yes. We did. Like we did three shows, four shows here we did. We did shows. And whatever they have learned is now here. It's like whatever you have teach or whatever the childrens have learned has to be shown in the show. Have to give a show so that the parents can understand. So the next childrens can get more involved in it. So yes, we have . . .

DN: The younger students, the younger kids can see and kind of get exposed and they might get interested. So that was one of your—?

TN: Yes, yes, yes. Exactly. Yes.

DN: Putting on a show.

TN: Yes. Yes. So, yes. So it's been good. So we have lots of shows and still there is other students want to join, want to come.

CL: Do you teach all Tibetan students or do you have any non-Tibetan students?

Minnesota Tibetan Oral History Project
Minnesota Historical Society

TN: Yes. For the time being, time right now, it's all Tibetan. Yes. There were some calls came like they wanted to learn instruments, Tibetan dance, Tibetan instruments, but then they just received a call but they didn't came after that. Right now it's all Tibetan students.

CL: Would you like to teach non-Tibetan students though?

TN: Yes. Of course. Sure. That's—as being as a teacher I will teach anyone. I like that. I like it. Even the non-Tibetans childrens can understand what the Tibetan instruments are, I know. Yes, sure.

CL: Do you think that's important to Minnesota with so many Tibetans living in Minnesota to also educate non-Tibetans on all these cultural aspects of Tibet?

TN: Yes. Because it's like when you make a friend or when you make a relation with some people, the first thing is like it's very important to know each of others selves. What each other culture—so yes, doing that is like helping each other, you know. To understand, to communicate. It's a better way. It's the best way. So, yes. Of course. Yes, sure.

DN: And what do you hope to achieve with the Tibetan students here? What are some of your future goals?

TN: My future goals is like what I think about the students that I've been teaching right now is like, you know, in Europe Tibetan community, in India Tibetan community. It's like cultural thing. Their students are respected. Respectful to their teachers, to their families, to their parents. This is what is defining our culture. So what I'd hope from them is like they will, you know, as long as they learn more about dance, singing, musics, and then learn about culture, so that they can understand what real Tibetan culture is, what Tibet stands for, what it's culture, and what you have to be to good. To be good. Yes, in the future I just hope . . . hope they will like—they can spend—they can give their culture an understanding to their childrens. Give, tell them what the real culture . . . how to do, how to preserve, what to—how to respect your elders. Yes, that's my hope. More than that, actually. Yes.

DN: So you hope your students will share that knowledge.

TN: Yes. Yes.

DN: With their own kids or the younger generations.

TN: Yes. Yes.

CL: When TIPA was started in Dharamsala, that was a big movement for preserving the arts and teaching our children. Do you, with such a big community here in Minnesota

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Minnesota Historical Society

and with such a beautiful community center that's useful, do you see a need for a school like TIPA here in Minnesota?

TN: TIPA stands for preserving culture, okay. So it was like first established in 1959. It was right after the Chinese invaded, right after when we came here and our parents and our elders came in exile. So we preserve culture. We teach, we make—no, we—TIPA makes artist. They make teachers. So here in America TIPA can come here all the time. So when some performer, some kind of TIPA is like here, here in America, so this is the source, the main source, the main thing. That they can now naturally—like naturally as for me myself when I came. No, not my—like me and my friends and my artist fellows when we did a show here. When we—right after the show there were like lots of childrens who are very interested in—so then we—TIPA's artists are all professionals, so like kind of these artists like you know can form like another TIPA here. So naturally you will be rich, more rich. So that would be good. Yes.

CL: Do you hope that some day you might be able to take the students that you're working with here now and tour with them to other areas like you did with—?

TN: Yes. Sure. This. But the thing is like, as amount of time. Time. We have less available. Less time. For practicing. Less time for me to teaching them. Now less time. But, yes, maybe two, three—two, three years after when they are fully trained you will get more so then I think, yes. It would be very good to go around so some Tibetan community outside from the state and as well as to the non-Tibetans to show them. Get more communicated to each other. Yes, of course.

DN: Because there's a lot of new musicians, Tibetan musicians that are kind of emerging from everywhere, like from India and stuff and like a lot of them kind of focus on more like modern type of music. Do you see that as like affecting negatively the Tibetan culture or do you see that as—what's your opinion?

TN: All my thinking . . . yes, I think its cultural, okay. You have a cultural here. Modern thing. But people's childrens doesn't take care of it, doesn't want to get bored with the culture songs and operas. When they do that and they doesn't want to listen any Tibetan songs . . . they doesn't want to listen to any Tibetan songs, but when the moderns—with modern instruments and they have modern songs and students get more interested. As they much they get interested and they'll get to the depth. They'll understand the real music. But, yes, if you are real musician, if you are real artist, then of course you know what's the real products. But people are not all artists. No. So by trying to listening to a lot of Tibetan music they understand. The modern, too. They understand Tibetan songs and then on and on and on and then they naturally will love to listen now cultural songs. A lot of depth. So it helps. For me I think it helps.

Because [unclear] the beginning, I used to say, I used to when I was in TIPA even, I used to think like that. Modern songs. I always thought no one wants to care for cultural. But when teaching to the students of mine, what do I learn? I learn from them. It's like I learn these things. This help. Some students say, "I don't know anything about Tibetan.

Minnesota Tibetan Oral History Project
Minnesota Historical Society

I just never heard about it." But what do you—but what I heard is Tibetan. The songs and all—this song and this song and all the modern songs. And when I try to teach them Tibetan cultural song, then it was—it's becoming more easy. Of course, the songs are very difficult. But it's easy, as comparing to a beginner; it's very easy for them. And it's easy for them and as well as they are getting interested and they understand the real song, you know. But it has to be and they understand the music. So I think in all total I think it's—yes, it's good. It's good.

DN: So how do your students in Minnesota, how do they accept like the true like traditional Tibetan songs? Do you feel like they have a hard time learning that kind of music? I mean like that kind of traditional stuff or—?

TN: Yes. Here—when before coming here, what I have learned is all the childrens, all these childrens, have did their by theirself. They don't have a teacher. They did it by self, themselves. They learned. They see videos. They see like—now like what they have done, like Tibetan cultural dances all by themselves. And now when I see them doing that and when I was here and when I thought like, "Oh!" you know. I thought it was very good. Now when I try to, when I teach them, at the beginning they have all the—now like in the basic things. They have the basic things but the real thing is it was a need to be polished. So it was a need to be polished and it must be polished. So now it's kind of going good because all those things that they have done by themselves before me coming here. They have done them theirselves so at that time their heart was like, you know. But it is very small. So when I came and teaching them it was more, much more easier for me because they were like . . .

DN: Willing to learn?

TN: Yes.

DN: So even though they live in Minnesota they—you said you find the same kind of interest in traditional music here also? The students here?

TN: Yes. Yes. Over here. That's the one thing. What I learn is, in India when I—when we will make our last—when I try to sing a song in front of our friend or students, they have like a place of going to Western thing, Westerners. Westerns songs. But when I try to teach here a Tibet, instead of teaching doing that, instead of trying to do—playing some guitar songs or something like that, some students, they want to listen more and get more in touch with the tradition. That's what I thought like. In India it was like people wanted to go to like listen to Western song. But here the student wants to go to . . .

DN: The traditional songs.

TN: Traditional songs. Yes. That also happened. I'm not saying all the students. I'm saying like for your very few it happened.

Minnesota Tibetan Oral History Project
Minnesota Historical Society

DN: So being a musician, how do you think moving to Minnesota is going to affect your musician life here?

TN: Music life? Okay. Now that's a very good question. Here coming, as for my music thing is like, in TIPA what I do, I've been focusing on lots of different things. Like formal playing. All the time I been doing by myself. But here now I been teaching, new teaching. So it's like I'm getting into more deep inside the music. I'm getting more deep. So when I teach them . . . I teach them . . . I teach them. And even for me myself I also get to learn something. But yes, as a music things, right now it's like this but I'm also trying to plan for—I will go to some schools, you know. Try to see some new artist and share with them. Yes, that's what I do with my music.

DN: You were just talking about TIPA. And at the beginning you said that at TIPA that you also learned like history about these songs. You also learned. They'd teach you. They have a time when they teach you Tibetan writing. Do you also do that here with your students? Do you teach them kind of a history of the song that you are about to introduce?

TN: Here what I been thinking is, yes. Like here is like the time—over there and here is totally different. Here you have to think more about—to the childrens. To the students. So even you maybe have to teach all the things. You even have to teach Tibetans, language, way of speaking, and lots of things. So what I have been doing is like separating, like trying to deal with much. Trying to act and deal with what they really are. Trying to do it that way. Otherwise if I have been more like a . . . I don't know how to say . . . [Speaks Tibetan]

DN: Straightforward.

TN: Yes. Straightforward them. So it's kind of different. The way of thinking of the students. Totally different. So I have to act as like they—like the students. So yes, I've been trying to teach them about Tibet, about the songs, learning them the songs, what it is about and trying to teach them like, you know, about Tibetan language, the way of speaking. It helps. Because when you learn a song and you're doing a song it's all about Tibet. Most of the songs describes about Tibet, about—describes about the environment, describes about the peace, religion, describes about Lamas and describes most of the things about good mankind. So now when they sing, yes, it's like a—if you like don't explain much good to them about their histories, it's like parrots singing. You know parrots? A parrot doesn't know what he's singing. So it's like that. So here when you teach more and more and more and try to explain, then little by little by little, it's helping. It's helping improving their—improving Tibetan language itself.

DN: And you also said that the students here compared kind of less disciplined and kind of have—so do you find that kind of hard to explain everything when they're less disciplined and kind of their attention span is shorter? Do you have a hard time?

Minnesota Tibetan Oral History Project
Minnesota Historical Society

TN: Yes. I have a very hard time. It's like, sometime I get very tired. But then . . . but then what I learn is like, when I thought like—is the way. Is the way the people are all different. Is the way. So maybe I have to change my teachings. Like as you said this last week. So yes, I did change my teaching for your lifestyle. As being a teacher you have to do all the things. So yes, that's what I did.

CL: How do you get instruments in Minnesota for the students to play on?

TN: Oh. Instruments. I didn't get any instruments. I had my own instruments and the Tibetan Foundation had their own instruments. But yes, before they were like three, four instruments. But now there are many instruments because they all, all the families of here, Tibetan here, and the Tibetan Foundation tried to get instruments from India, from Tibet. So to bring them here. Then, yes, now, like right now I think there are lots of instruments now. It's like, I don't know how—counting but it's a lot. There are lots. Yes. So they get it all from India and Tibet.

CL: How do you see, since you've only been in the community for a very short time, how do you—? The community here in Minnesota, is there something specific that you think the community is doing really well? Or are there things that you see that you feel the community should . . . could be doing better?

TN: Oh, yes. Community here are doing—what I have seen is doing very good and I like it here a lot. But, yes, as like you're doing better is like depends upon the time. You want to do—Tibetan community wants to do better but the thing is the parents doesn't have much time. So that's the thing. Yes, but it's like, right now whatever I've seen is like, I've been very happy with it. I thought when I was in there I thought like, "Oh, now this . . . did they preserve the culture? Do they have such kind of activities? Like what we used to have here? Do they have such things as we used to have?" When I came in here and see everything, before touring here was like for ten days, fifteen days, like that. But now I been here for a long time and I see the activities going here. I'm very pleased with that. I'm very happy with that. But yes, getting more better. It will be better. It can be better. But it depends upon the time.

CL: You mentioned preserving culture a couple times. Why do you think it's so important to preserve culture? Especially in the U.S. Because you mentioned originally that's why you came to Minnesota, to help. Why personally do you feel that's so important?

TN: That's because we are Tibetans and we don't have any . . . we don't have a freedom right now. So, as an example, [unclear] I think it's like a person without any culture, is like a person without nothing. He doesn't have any history or he doesn't know anything about—but if you have a cultural thing, then this helps the community. It helps community what to be good, how to be good. It helps like, yes, of course it's like it is not like very necessity. But what I mean to say, this preserving culture is like it helps to communicate people. It helps you also. It helps how to be good. The most thing is to be good. Give peace. And that's the main thing. But if you don't—even though you don't

Minnesota Tibetan Oral History Project
Minnesota Historical Society

have a culture and you do this things, it's good. But most of the rest, I think without culture or doing like this so people can go in all directions. So preserving.

And as being a Tibetan, we don't have a freedom and we have to do something to our people there in Tibet who are dying a lot. Lots of people are dying. So for them is like, we don't preserve our culture you just like stay away from the community, stay away from it. Just don't do anything. Just trying to do the billing, you know, bill your—give the bill here and send us the students. That's the same thing that's going on. But for us, like when we don't have a—like people have lots of time over there. We have to help them. It's like a motherland. That's why, for us, for me, like Tibetans here preserving culture is . . . I think it's very important. Very, very important. So that if you try to stay together then you have all—you can—all the Tibetan issues and total Tibetan culture, how to be good, how to, you know, it's good together. So if you don't preserve and go away, don't preserve your culture and don't do anything to Tibetan children . . . yes.

DN: So do you feel it's almost like a duty of every Tibetan person to do that? Is that why you chose to teach?

TN: Yes. Yes.

DN: And being the only Tibetan dance teacher, dance and music and instrument teacher here in our community, in the Minnesota community, Tibetan community, do you feel any pressure at all?

TN: Pressure of?

DN: Do you feel like you have to like live up to anything or do you feel like you have to do—?

CL: Pressure from the community to do well or to—?

TN: Oh, yes.

DN: Is there always like outside pressures like that on you?

TN: Pressure, I don't know anything. But what I been thinking is, like now since I'm the only teacher here, and since I'm the dance Tibetan teacher here, so what I been . . . [heavy sigh] been thinking is like I have lots of responsibilities on myself. I have responsibilities of my—like Tibet. I have responsibilities of all the students, all of them have responsibilities of families and teach them music, Tibetan musics, Tibetan culture, Tibetan songs, Tibetan dance. So yes, I have a pressure of that. That I have a big responsibility. I need to do better. That's my pressure. Pressure, I don't know, ways of pressure or what but I kind of like it a lot. Yes.

DN: So all the extra responsibilities that you have being the only teacher.

Minnesota Tibetan Oral History Project
Minnesota Historical Society

CL: I wanted to thank you very much for participating and helping us out here.

TN: Thank you.

DN: Thank you very much.

TN: Thank you very much. Yes.

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