

Conflict and Social Order in Tibet and Inner Asia

Edited by

Fernanda Pirie
Toni Huber



BRILL

LEIDEN • BOSTON
2008

CONFLICT AND THE CULTURAL REVOLUTION: THE NYEMO ANI INCIDENT OF 1969

MELVYN C. GOLDSTEIN, BEN JIAO, TANZEN LHUNDUP¹

INTRODUCTION

Surprisingly little has been written about the violence that engulfed Tibet during the Cultural Revolution. In this paper, we examine one of the most famous examples of such violence, the 1969 armed attacks that occurred in Nyemo county. The Nyemo incident occurred during a twenty day period in June 1969 during which fifty-four members of the People's Liberation Army (PLA), cadres, activists and other Tibetans were killed and another twenty or so had limbs hacked off, supposedly under the direction of Trinley Chödrön, a young nun from the area.² The Chinese side initially labelled this incident negatively as an 'Armed Counter-Revolutionary Rebellion', while the exiles have also seen it as a rebellion, but in a positive sense, valorizing the nun as a great female freedom fighter who bravely fought the Chinese to defend Tibet.³ It is often called the 'Second Tibetan Revolt', the first being the resistance to the Chinese occupation that erupted in 1959. Neither side, however, has written about the incident in anything but the most cursory fashion.

The academic literature on Tibet's Cultural Revolution in general and the Nyemo incident in particular, is also limited. One of the most widely cited academic accounts comes from Warren Smith's (1996) monograph, *Tibetan Nation*. Smith's basic view is that the Nyemo incident was a nationalist conflict between Tibet's two revolutionary mass organizations, Gyenlo and Nyamdre, which arose as a result of

¹ This paper derives from a longer book-length examination of this incident (Goldstein et al. in press).

² Nimu wenti fucha zu, 1974; Zonggong lasa shiwei wenjian, 1987.

³ Tibetan Women's Association commemorative volume title, 'Roof of the World: A celebration of Culture, Peace and Protest', 1995, Bombay India (url: www.tibet.ca/en/wtnarchive/1995/3/15-2_1.html)

the Communist Party's attack on all aspects of Tibetan culture during the Cultural Revolution. Smith asserts, incorrectly as we shall see, that as the Revolution progressed they polarized along ethnic lines, the Gyenlo faction becoming predominately Tibetan while the Nyamdre faction became mostly Chinese. Therefore, he states, the "factional conflict in Tibet . . . took on a nationalistic content previously absent." (1996: 548) Smith's position is that despite the presence of other factors such as food shortages and the start of communes, the Nyemo incident was essentially an expression of Tibetan anger at Chinese oppression—a rising of the oppressed minority ethnic Tibetans against their majority Han tormentors. Smith agrees with those exile Tibetans who have labelled the events in Nyemo as the 'Second Tibetan Revolt'.⁴

A second well-known scholar of modern Tibet, Tsering Shakya, has also discussed the Nyemo disturbances, describing them interchangeably as a rebellion and a revolt:

In 1969 there was widespread rebellion throughout Tibet, eventually crushed by the PLA. The best-documented episode is the revolt led by Trinley Chodron, a young nun from the *xian* (county) of Nyemo, who marched her followers—armed with swords and spears—to the local Party headquarters, and slaughtered both the Chinese officials and the Tibetan cadres working for them. At first the Party ignored the massacre, thinking it was a manifestation of the Cultural Revolution—as we know, murders could be exonerated if they fell under the rubric of class struggle.

But the authorities soon realized that these Tibetan peasants were rebelling not in the name of the 'newly liberated serfs' but in defense of their faith. What was more, they targeted only Chinese Party officials and those Tibetans seen as colluding with the colonizing power. The revolt spread from Nyemo through eighteen *xians* of the Tibetan Autonomous Region (TAR), and the Party was forced to send in the PLA to suppress it. (Tsering Shakya 2002: 39–40)⁵

⁴ Jigme Ngagpo (1988: 24), for example, refers to this incident as a movement for the independence of Tibet. Wei Se (Öser), a Tibetan writer living in China, writes in a recent book and blog (2005, 2006) that it is very difficult to understand this incident, yet basically also says that she agrees with the interpretation that this was a second revolt for independence.

⁵ See also Tsering Shakya (1999: 343–47).

Shakya concludes that the revolt was a millenarian uprising and an insurgency characterized by a passionate desire to be rid of the oppressor.⁶

A third, very different, interpretation comes from Wang Lixiong, a well known Chinese intellectual interested in Tibet. He rejects the nationalistic arguments and the idea of a Second Tibetan Revolt. Instead he explains the incident as a reaction against the introduction of communes in Tibet, saying:

In 1969, an armed 'revolt' broke out against the introduction of People's Communes into Tibet, which had been spared them in the period of the Great Leap Forward; this eventually spread to over forty counties. The Dalai's camp saw this 'Second Tibetan Rebellion' as a continuation of the resistance of the fifties. In reality, the two were very different. During the earlier uprising, the peasants were fighting, in a sense, for the interests of the aristocracy. In 1969, they fought for their own ends. They did not want the pastures and livestock that had been redistributed among them from the old landowners to be appropriated by the People's Communes. . . . The 'nationality question', later the cause of so much trouble, seemed scarcely worth consideration. Tibetans seemed on generally calm terms with the Han and the Dalai Lama almost forgotten, both in Tibet and in the West. (Wang Lixiong 2002: 88)

Tsering Shakya responded sharply to Wang's interpretation saying:

His account secularizes the rebellion, explaining it in utilitarian terms—the peasants wanted to protect the gains of the initial land reforms from the extension of People's Communes—while stripping it of the cultural and religious elements that reveal its nationalist content. In doing so, he grossly distorts the historical record. For example: Trinley Chodron told the PLA after her capture that she had been visited by a bird who had come as a messenger from the Dalai Lama, and who had told her to drive out the Chinese. Other rebels claimed to be reincarnations of Ling Gesar, the mythical hero-king of Tibetan epic who fought for the Buddhist religion. There can be no mistaking the symbolism here. Indeed, we can describe the revolt of 1969 as a millenarian uprising, an insurgency characterized by a passionate desire to be rid of the oppressor. (Tsering Shakya 2002: 40)

⁶ Diemberger (2005: 164) discusses this incident very briefly in an article on female oracles and agrees with Shakya in seeing this as a millenarian movement. Barnett (2005: 349) also sees this as a Tibetan versus Chinese incident, albeit Tibetans against the state rather than against Han Chinese *per se*.

Smith and Shakya, therefore, characterise this as a fundamentally nationalistic affair which pitted Tibetans against Chinese, while Wang explains it primarily in terms of Tibetans' opposition to communes, that is peasant economic self-interest. Wang's dismissal of nationalistic motives has led Shakya to charge him with gross distortion of the historical record, but is this a fair assessment? Alternatively, might not Smith and Shakya have also distorted the historical record, inadvertently to be sure, by downplaying economic motives?

While all of these explanations contain elements of truth, new data about the history of the Nyemo conflict reveals a far more convoluted etiology which is inexorably intertwined with the bitter factional struggle that raged in Lhasa in 1967–69 between Tibet's two main revolutionary masses' organizations. The new data come from two sources: firstly interviews in the Tibet Autonomous Region with over seventy Tibetans from Nyemo and neighbouring areas, which was obtained as part of a larger project on change in Tibet during which we collected roughly 600 oral/life histories of Tibetans from all walks of life; and secondly a set of recently discovered Chinese documents that were brought into India after the end of the Cultural Revolution. Together they reveal new dimensions of the incident and compel us to revise our understanding of one of the most important conflicts in post-1959 Tibetan history.

The Nyemo incident cannot be understood without some knowledge of the early years of the Cultural Revolution in Lhasa.

THE CULTURAL REVOLUTION IN LHASA

The most powerful figure in Tibet at the start of the Cultural Revolution was Zhang Guohua, the military commander who had come to Tibet in October 1951 as the head of the main PLA military force, the 18th Army Corps. He remained in Tibet and in 1966 was in control of the three main organs of power—the Regional Party Committee, the People's Assembly of the TAR and the Tibet Military Area Headquarters.⁷ Under Zhang Guohua's leadership the Regional Party Committee held an enlarged meeting in Nyingtri

⁷ The Cultural Revolution in Lhasa is discussed more fully in Goldstein et al. (in press, chapter one). Goldstein is also preparing a lengthy oral history of the Cultural Revolution in Tibet.

(Kongpo) from 15 June to 5 July 1966 to discuss how to implement the Cultural Revolution. From the start, Zhang Guohua and the Regional Party Committee sought to manipulate the Cultural Revolution so that they, rather than local Red Guards or other revolutionary workers and cadres, would be in control of mass demonstrations and struggle sessions against the 'holders of power' in the party. He felt strongly that Tibet's special conditions—the 1959 uprising, the onset of democratic reforms, and the Sino-Indian war—required special consideration during the Cultural Revolution. In short, Tibet, in his view, needed a stable political environment and this justified a special implementation of the Revolution in which stability in the party and government would not be threatened. Just as he had in the 1950s, he again favoured going slow in Tibet.⁸ He, therefore, tried to decide who among the power holders were reactionaries, that is whom to sacrifice. For example, at the meeting in Nyingtri a few important party members like Jin Sha (chief editor of the *Tibet Daily Newspaper* and deputy minister of TAR's propaganda department)⁹ were accused and set out to be examined and criticized by the masses.¹⁰ Zhang Guohua's idea was for the Cultural Revolution to be played out under the close scrutiny of the Regional Party Committee according to a carefully scripted score.

At about the same time, Tibetan students in Lhasa, not wanting to be left behind the rest of the country, started organizing their participation in the new campaign. One former Red Guard leader in Lhasa explained this in an interview:

I remember that in August 1966 the Red Guards were everywhere in the whole country and Lhasa didn't want to be left behind. Therefore we formed our own Red Guard organizations. ... Most of the students in my school were Tibetans. It was a concern that the Tibetan students might get into trouble [so] the Party Branch at the Lhasa Middle School decided to select a few young teachers to join the Red Guards,

⁸ See Goldstein (2007) for a detailed examination of Chinese policies in the first half of the 1950s in Tibet.

⁹ Other cadres singled-out were Hui Yiran, He Zhuyin, Huang Mao, and Luo Shisheng, (Zhonggong xizang zizhiqu dangshi ziliao zhengji weiyuanhui, ed. 1995, entries for 15 June to 5 July and 8 July 1966: 174–75).

¹⁰ Zhonggong xizang zizhiqu dangshi ziliao zhengji weiyuanhui, ed. 1995, entry for 15 June to 5 July 1966: 174.

working as leaders. I remember I used to lead students to destroy the 'four old' customs.¹¹

The arrival of Red Guards from outside Tibet in September 1966 quickly radicalized the situation in Lhasa and created serious conflict between certain Red Guard units and the Tibet Party Establishment over how the Cultural Revolution should proceed. The young revolutionaries in Lhasa felt that adhering to Mao's call to 'bombard the headquarters,' meant pointing the spearhead of the Cultural Revolution at Zhang Guohua and the Regional Party Committee, although initially it was not clear to them who were the bourgeois elements that had infiltrated the Regional Party Committee. The same leader also recalled:

... Actually, we didn't have any idea about the Cultural Revolution when we first got involved. We were not sure who the 'capitalist roaders' were. We didn't have any contact with people at the Regional Party Committee, so we didn't know much about them, but we thought we should see whether we could find followers of the 'capitalist road' in Tibet. ...

Our group had clear aims. We were trying to "turn the world upside down" (laughs) and "find out all the 'capitalist roaders,' knock them off, and step on them". (laughs) That was the language people used at that time ... Well, those people [other revolutionary factions] who were close to the leaders at the Regional Party Committee were later called 'royalists.' They argued that the leaders were nice people and had been working hard for the local residents. However, we didn't care about that. What we really cared about were the orders from the Central Committee [to search out the capitalist roaders who had snuck into the party] that we knew we were supposed to follow. It was fine with us if none of the leaders were capitalist roaders, but if there were any we wanted to go ahead and struggle against them.¹²

Throughout October, Zhang Guohua tried to maintain stability by preventing more Red Guards, particularly Han Red Guards from Beijing, from coming to Tibet and further radicalizing the Cultural Revolution there. Zhang, therefore, explicitly asked Premier Zhou Enlai to order the various Cultural Revolution organizations not to

¹¹ Interview, 2001, H.0109.01, Lhasa, Tibet Autonomous Region, China. The combination of numbers and letters—H.0109.01—refers to the catalogue number for that interview in the forthcoming web-based Tibet Oral History Archive. Names are omitted, in order to protect the identity of the subjects.

¹² Interview, 2001, H.0109.01, Lhasa, Tibet Autonomous Region, China.

allow Han Chinese Red Guards to come to Tibet.¹³ Zhou approved this, but the Red Guard groups from Beijing ignored the order and in early November Metropolitan Red Guards arrived from Beijing and set up the Blazing Prairie Combat Regiment (Ch. *liaoyuan zhandou tuan*).

On 16 November the State Council reiterated its ban on Red Guards going to Tibet and then on 4 December it announced new regulations specifically requiring the Red Guards from inland China who were still in Lhasa to leave Tibet by 20 December and return to their own localities. The Regional Party Committee actually organized a 'farewell meeting' for the departing Red Guards. However, this was not realized as the Beijing Red Guards in Lhasa appealed to the powerful Central Great Cultural Revolution Group (Ch. *zhongyang wenhua da geming weiyuanhui*) in Beijing headed by Mao's wife Jiang Qing, saying that their presence was critical to eliminate the bourgeois reactionary line that was present in Tibet. To the chagrin of Zhang Guohua, the Central Great Cultural Revolution Group supported them and gave the Beijing Red Guards permission to remain (Yang 1967: 46).¹⁴

In mid-December 1966 a number of the more anti-establishment (anti-Zhang Guohua and the Regional Party Committee) Red Guard groups in Lhasa, such as the Blazing Prairie, merged into the organization called Gyenlo (Tib. *gyen log*, Ch. *zao fan*), the Rebels.¹⁵ This new radical revolutionary group then started to escalate attacks on the existing authority structure. The focus of the spearhead now shifted in a serious way toward the Party leadership, particularly toward Zhang Guohua and the Regional Party Committee itself.¹⁶ This quickly turned Tibet into the chaos that the Party Establishment had feared would ensue if the Red Guards from elsewhere were allowed to remain and the Cultural Revolution was not carefully managed.

¹³ Zhonggong xizang zizhiq dangshi ziliao zhengji weiyuanhui bian, 1995, entries for 19 October 1966 and 28 October 1966: 178–79. See also Yang (1967: 46).

¹⁴ This is also mentioned in Xizang renmin guangbo dantai lianhe zuozhanbu, 1967.

¹⁵ Guanyu qingshi zhichi zuopai qunzhong zuzhi 'dalianzhi' de baogao, 1967: 1. *Zaofan* was a common name employed by revolutionary groups throughout China, although there was no central command headquarters for all such groups.

¹⁶ Guanyu qingshi zhichi zuopai qunzhong zuzhi 'dalianzhi' de baogao, 1967: 1.

Soon after this, on 5 February 1967, another group of revolutionary factions more supportive of the Party establishment organized their own large revolutionary masses group called Nyamdre (Tib. *mnyam 'brel tshogs pa chen mo*; Ch. *dalianzhi*) or the Great Alliance. Both factions included ethnic Tibetans and Han and claimed to be following Mao's ideology. They fought bitterly for control of offices and neighbourhoods in Lhasa and for almost two years (1966–68) Lhasa and its environs experienced battles and killings between the two groups, first with spears, swords and sling shots and then, starting in January 1968, with guns and bombs. The western and northern sides of Lhasa were controlled by Gyenlo while the centre was mostly controlled by Nyamdre.

In the midst of this conflict, a signal event took place on 7 June 1968 when the PLA stormed the Jokhang temple and killed thirteen Gyenlo activists who had seized it and put up loudspeakers to blare propaganda. This event is too complicated to discuss here, but suffice to say that for Gyenlo it created intense hatred of the army and Nyamdre and a desire to avenge these 'murders'. In their view, the PLA, which was supposed to remain neutral in the Cultural Revolution, had now inappropriately sided with the Nyamdre faction (Goldstein et al. in press).

1968 also saw the central government make a major attempt to stop the factional fighting in Lhasa (and Tibet) by summoning the leaders of Gyenlo and Nyamdre to Beijing for major meetings. This, however, proved ineffectual and in Lhasa the fighting continued. Meanwhile, serious factional conflict actually intensified in some rural counties, such as Nyemo.

THE NYEMO COUNTY INCIDENT, FIRST PHASE

Nyamdre was initially the dominant revolutionary group in Nyemo and most cadres were members, as were most of the villagers. However, as the animosity and competition between Gyenlo and Nyamdre intensified in Lhasa, Gyenlo's leaders in Nyemo sought to increase their strength and to displace Nyamdre from its position of control in the county. As it happened, widespread rural anger over economic policies at this time gave Gyenlo a unique opportunity to win over the peasantry.

The implementation of Democratic Reforms in 1959 had ended the feudal system, redistributing the estates of aristocrats and monasteries to the poorest households and terminating all corvée labour obligations. A system of 'Mutual Aid Groups' (Tib. *rogs re tshogs chung*; Ch. *huzhu zu*) was initiated as a precursor to collectives, but while this involved some cooperation between small groups of households, each household retained all the yields from its own land, as had traditionally been the case.

The new socialist system also added two major tax obligations. One of these, 'patriotic donation grain' (Tib. *rgyal gces gzhung 'bru*; Ch. *gong liang*), required households to send grain to the government without payment. A second, more onerous, obligation was called 'sales grain' (Tib. *tshong 'bru*; Ch. *gou liang*). It required households to sell a portion of their grain yield to the state at government-set prices, although the poorest households were sometimes exempted or the amount they owed was reduced.¹⁷ In theory, this was 'surplus' grain the farmers did not need, but in reality it was not.

Initially these collections were small, even from the middle and rich farming households who were taxed more heavily. However, by 1965 these extractions had begun to increase substantially, mainly because officials were over-reporting the size of the total yields to improve their own performance records. Since the amount of grain to be given as 'patriotic' and 'selling' grain was calculated as a percentage of the size of the yield, inflated yields meant proportionally larger taxes, even though the real yields had not increased. By 1968 food shortages were being experienced and there was speculation that in the future peasants households would be left with only twelve *khe* (168 kg)¹⁸ of grain a year per person for both their food needs and all other necessities, such as tea, salt and fertilizer. Two villagers explained:

They were saying that we got yields that we actually didn't get. ... After the threshing was over, they would come to calculate. ... After that, they would just tell us that you had this amount of yield, no matter whether we got that or not. ... We didn't have any chance to say no. They would just tell us, "You got this yield, so you should deliver this amount of donation grain and sell this amount of selling

¹⁷ Interview, 2002, OR.0304.01, Nyemo, Tibet Autonomous Region, China.

¹⁸ A *khe* (Tib. *khal*) was a traditional volume measurement equal to about twenty-eight *jin* (fourteen kg).

grain". ... No matter whether we had that much surplus grain, we had to deliver it. That was the way the government collected the grain.¹⁹

... Every year the output was increasing [on paper], so the tax grain and selling grain were increasing every year. Usually the tax grain was reasonable but the selling grain was very heavy. Because of this, the rebellion of 1968 and 1969 arose. Because the obligation of selling grain had increased a lot, people became poorer and poorer. Because the livelihood of many people had become very hard they participated in the rebellion and became reactionaries.²⁰

Also distressing for many village households was the news that socialist collectives were about to be implemented. Nyemo peasants correctly understood this to mean that the state would take back the land and animals they had recently received, at the time of Democratic Reforms, or had been allowed to continue to utilize.

In 1968 Gyenlo leaders in Nyemo set out to harness this fear and anger in order to mobilize the peasantry behind them and wrest political control from Nyamdre. In normal circumstances, planning to overthrow those in power in the communist party would have been regarded as counter-revolutionary and unthinkable, but the Cultural Revolution was not normal circumstances. Gyenlo was a revolutionary masses' organization lead by people who believed that displacing Nyamdre—the power holders who, in their eyes, were on the 'wrong path'—was proper in revolutionary terms and in keeping with Mao's dictates to root out reactionaries by 'bombarding the headquarters' and 'destroying the holders of power' in the communist party and government.

Gyenlo, moreover, was well positioned to do this because its leaders were pragmatic, opportunistic and knowledgeable about local conditions and attitudes. Zhang Yongfu, the head of Gyenlo in Nyemo, for example, was an unusual Han cadre who spoke Tibetan and was at ease in the villages where he often stayed with Tibetan families and consumed Tibetan tsamba and butter tea. In addition to him and other Chinese cadres, there were also a number of Tibetans, the most influential of whom was Rangjung (Tib. *rang byung*), who later became the main bridge between the nun and Gyenlo, as well as the deputy commander of the military movement that was later formed.

Rangjung was not, however, some pious Tibetan from a former upper class family. He was a tough leftist activist in his thirties from a poor class background and had been a 'lifetime servant' (Tib. *tshe g.yog*) in the old society. After 1959 he had been a minor local official serving for a time as the head of the security office in Nyemo township (Ch. *xiang*)²¹ where he was known for his hostility and cruelty toward class enemies, including monks and nuns. He was also one of the first Tibetans to join Gyenlo and quickly became a leader. Rangjung and Zhang Yongfu lived near each other and were friends.

Gyenlo's strategy in 1968 was, on the one hand, to criticize the Nyamdre establishment for imposing, in their language, reactionary bourgeois economic policies, which created the conditions the peasants feared and hated, and, on the other hand, to promise an alternative economic program which would allow villagers to keep more grain. The report of a government investigation on Gyenlo and the Nyemo incident, undertaken in 1974, discussed this:

Since 1967, Zhang Yongfu ... and some other people have been taking advantage of the problem of grain to viciously attack Party policies. They said, "The grain policies are Liu Shaoqi's policies. The policy of grain and oil purchases by the state carried out by the ... County Party Committee ... was implementing the reactionary capitalist line. Now it is up to the people how much grain and rapeseed oil they would like to hand in. And if they want, they can hand in nothing. Before Liberation, every person could get eighteen *khe* of grain but now every person can only have twelve *khe*. If a person joins our organization, he can get eighteen *khe* of grain and we will not have People's Communes." ... the revolt is to stop the oil and grain collections and purchases by the state."²²

Most of the Nyemo villagers who were interviewed also talked about this as the major factor that attracted them, and others, to Gyenlo. For example:

At that time Gyenlo was mobilizing people, telling them that if they joined Gyenlo they would give them eighteen *khe* of barley. They raised the anger of the masses.²³

¹⁹ Interview, 2002, OR.0365.01, Nyemo, Tibet Autonomous Region, China.

²⁰ Interview, 2002, OR.0346.01, Nyemo, Tibet Autonomous Region, China.

²¹ A *xiang* is conventionally translated as a rural *township* but is actually an administrative unit that consists of a number of adjacent villages.

²² Nimu wenti fucha zu 1974.

²³ Interview, 2000, OR.0025, Nyemo, Tibet Autonomous Region, China.

Gyenlo was saying, "Even in the dark and cruel old society, servants were paid eighteen *khe* of barley as wages, but now in the era of the revolution, we have only twelve *khe* of grain as rations. So we are correct to rebel; it is no crime to make revolution." Because of that talk, Gyenlo became larger and larger in Nyemo.²⁴

Gyenlo also played on the peasants' fear of collectivization by opposing it. However, being leftist revolutionaries, they did this on technical, rather than ideological, grounds, saying that conditions in Nyemo were not yet appropriate for communal farming, which meant that forcible implementation of such a system would be premature and impoverish the peasantry.²⁵

Of course, food and collectivization were not the only things that angered the villagers. There was also anger at the anti 'Four Olds' Campaign, especially its new prohibitions on all forms of religious practice. Despite the demise of organized religion and closure of monasteries and nunneries after 1959, individuals had been permitted to continue to practise religion on a private basis in their homes. However, not only had that ended with the onset of the Cultural Revolution, but Red Guards had systematically searched houses to collect and destroy religious objects, such as statues and prayer wheels, while also mobilizing villagers to physically tear down temples and monasteries. A 1987 government report on the Nyemo incident cited this as a factor:

Another example [of 'mistakes and shortcomings'] was the Party's policy on the freedom of pursuing religious beliefs. We used to talk too much but do too little to help people with their religious needs. We put too much emphasis on opposing religious beliefs. Especially during the Great Cultural Revolution, religious beliefs were accused as one of the 'four olds' and nobody was allowed to believe in any religion. People did not like our policies and once something tempting about religion appeared, the masses would be easily fooled. ...²⁶

However, while many villagers were angry about the physical destruction of monasteries and the ban on private religious practices, organized religion had already been destroyed in 1959 and the more immediate problem they faced was the shortage of food that would result from the following year's grain extractions. These were the

concerns on which Gyenlo played and what attracted the masses to join the movement. The 1974 report explained:

Instigated by these people [Gyenlo], many meetings were held to attack our Party's policy of rapeseed oil and grain purchases by the state. At these people said, "Nyemo county has made us suffer the 'the three empties' (Ch. *san kong*)—empty houses, empty pockets, and empty stomachs. We have been suffering from hunger for about three or four years. The warehouses of the county are filled with the grain of the rich and middle class peasants. In the past we had dissatisfaction deep in our hearts but dared not speak them out. Now it is time for us to rise up. Our revolt is to stop the oil and grain collections and purchases by the state."²⁷

In the first half of 1968, therefore, Zhang Yongfu and Gyenlo increased their efforts to win over Tibetan villagers, laying the blame for the current food situation on the Nyamdre establishment and its ideologically incorrect views, and telling the people they had the right to retain more of their yields. They also encouraged villagers to refuse to pay the 1968 grain extractions and to use the revolutionary struggle sessions against the power holders to attack the Nyamdre cadres who were collecting these taxes. More generally, they advocated that the ultimate answer to the masses' problems was for Gyenlo to take control of Nyemo and implement a 'true' revolutionary government. This resonated well in rural Nyemo and within a short time Gyenlo grew rapidly in size and strength.

All of this, it should be emphasized, was occurring well before Trinley Chödrön, the young nun from Nyemo, became involved and it would certainly have continued without her presence. This was not a movement that concerned religion or nationalism; it was a campaign by Gyenlo to defeat their rival faction and an attempt by a wider population to rid themselves of what they saw as excessive extractions by corrupt and avaricious authorities. Gyenlo's tactics were timely and effective and secured them many new recruits, including a young nun named Trinley Chödrön.

²⁴ Interview, 2002, OR.0350.01, Nyemo, Tibet Autonomous Region, China.

²⁵ Interview, 2002, OR.0288.01, Nyemo, Tibet Autonomous Region, China.

²⁶ Zonggong lasa shiwei wenjian guanyu jiang yuan ding, 1987.

²⁷ Nimu wenti fucha zu, 1974.

THE NUN JOINS GYENLO

In 1968 Trinley Chödrön was thirty years old. Her family, Bejang, had been a lower middle *treba* (taxpayer) family in Phusum village, which had belonged to the Lhalu aristocratic family. In the old society, she had been a nun in a local Kagyupa nunnery called Thaser, where she lived with an elderly nun who was her teacher. She was able to read a few simple prayer texts, but not much more.²⁸

As for the rest of Tibet's vast monastic and nun population, Trinley Chödrön's life underwent a total transformation in 1959, following the implementation of the Democratic Reforms. At this time monks and nuns were forced to attend reeducation classes where the basic ideas of Buddhism were ridiculed and denigrated and where monastic leaders and lamas were humiliated and struggled against. Within months, almost all the common monks and nuns returned to their villages to start new lives. Trinley Chödrön was among them.

Trinley Chödrön, however, did not adjust well to these forced changes. Unlike many nuns and monks, she did not marry, continuing to see herself as a nun. She lived in her former nun's house together with her teacher, coming down to the village during the day to work in the fields. A relative of hers says that she was angry and depressed about these events. She abhorred the destruction of the monastic system, often asking rhetorically why the new officials had to do such things. Her isolation increased when her teacher died a few years after the Democratic Reforms began in 1959.²⁹

The onset of the Cultural Revolution's 'Destroy the Four-Olds' campaign in Nyemo pushed Trinley Chödrön over the line. Her brother says that she was incensed at both the Red Guards and activists for their attacks on religion and at the new rules preventing all manifestations of private religious practice and became more despondent and disoriented. She was also agitated because her own family's class status had been reassessed negatively from middle farmer (Tib. *shingdring*) to upper middle farmer (Tib. *shingdring gongma*) without justification, and because Red Guards had ransacked their house searching for religious texts and objects.³⁰ The impact of these events appears to have unbalanced her and she was

²⁸ Interview, 2000, OR.0060.01 Nyemo, Tibet Autonomous Region, China.

²⁹ Interview, 2000, OR.0060.01, Tibet Autonomous Region, China.

³⁰ Interview, 2000, OR.0060.01, Tibet Autonomous Region, China.

soon acting as if mentally disturbed. Her younger brother recalled that:

She was like a crazy person [Tib. *myon ma*]. Sometimes she did not eat food. Sometimes she drank filthy water that was in puddles on the road or in a mud pit. Sometimes she did not stay in her home but spent nights alone up in the mountains.³¹

A neighbour in her village said similarly:

She had mental problems (Tib. *sems ma thang ba*), and lived by herself for about three years. She used to yell and scream at the people who were walking back and forth on the path [near where she was staying].³²

In this state of mind, Trinley Chödrön began to have fantastic dreams and hallucinatory visions of people and deities. She saw strange cloud formations with Buddhas and the Dalai Lama, and talked of birds landing to bring her messages. One neighbour recalled:

She would say that she saw something and [we saw her] talking with people who normal people could not see and hear. There were many different stories [she told] but it was crazy talk. It was all hard to believe. She had been doing this for several years.³³

It is not absolutely clear when Trinley Chödrön's immersion in this world of hallucinatory visions and conversations moved to a new level but at some point she began to believe that gods were possessing her.³⁴ Her younger brother, who was then living with her, recalled how this began. After Trinley Chödrön had been acting strangely for what he thinks was about a year, she became very sick and so weak that she could hardly walk or do housework. At this time she was acting as if a god was trying to possess her, but she was unable to accommodate the god and this, she felt, was why she had become so ill.

³¹ Interview, 2000, OR.0060.03, Tibet Autonomous Region, China.

³² Interview, 2006, OR.0351.01, Nyemo, Tibet Autonomous Region, China.

³³ Interview, 2002, OR.0351.01, Nyemo, Tibet Autonomous Region, China.

³⁴ These reports appear similar to the classic symptoms for schizophrenia which often has its onset in late adolescence or early adulthood, as the result of some trauma or a situation where a person is overwhelmed by problems and can no longer fulfill his or her ascribed role (Rogler and Hollingshead 1965). In Trinley Chödrön's case, however, not enough is known about her behaviour for us to pursue this further.

In the Tibetan religious tradition, being possessed is very different from having a dream or vision, since going into trance follows a culturally scripted process in which the body shakes and the person huffs and puffs (symbolizing the god entering the body). Gods can spontaneously possess a human, but this also can be controlled so that the person can summon the god to possess him or her for short periods of time. Such people are traditionally called *lhapenyen* or *lhaba* (Tib. *lha phebs mnyan*; *lha pa*)—in English, mediums.³⁵

Trinley Chödrön was unable to manage her possession, so she went secretly to see a lama who not only encouraged her to become a medium but also performed the key *tsago che* (Tib. *rtsa sgo phye*) ritual, which allows a person to accept and control his or her possession by deities. After this, she was able to go into trance, although at first she did so only alone in her house.³⁶

Mediums played an important role in traditional Tibetan society linking the realm of the gods to the realm of humans, and were frequently consulted at times of illness and other major decisions; and they still are. At the highest level, there were official State Mediums, such as Nechung, who were consulted by the Dalai Lama and the Tibetan government at difficult times, but oracles were also found throughout the countryside where many hundreds of villagers—male and female—functioned part-time as religious mediums able to summon deities to possess them. In this tradition, the god who is invoked takes such complete control over the medium's body that the medium is not supposed to remember anything the god said after the god leaves and he/she comes out of trance. Mediums lead normal lives when not in trance—they are not perceived as mentally ill or unbalanced because they can summon deities into their bodies. However, in Trinley Chödrön's case, her mental illness continued. In fact, as a number of interviewees explained, initially that is why she was allowed to practise as a medium during the Cultural Revolution. Her brother said, "At first, when this started, neither people from our village (Phusum) nor the officials from our *xiang* paid her any attention since they considered her to be a crazy person."³⁷ Another villager also recalled:

³⁵ The term 'oracle' is used interchangeably in the academic literature.

³⁶ Interview, 2007, OR.0060.05, Tibet Autonomous Region, China.

³⁷ Interview, 2000, OR.0060.01, Tibet Autonomous Region, China.

She was wearing a fox fur hat and had a small bow hanging from her neck ... People said she was mad. It was the time of the Cultural Revolution and people were not allowed to burn incense and all statues had been destroyed, but the nun continually burned incense and no one stopped her doing so because of her madness.³⁸

Meanwhile, in April 1968, she went with several Tibetans from her village to join Gyenlo at their Headquarters in Nyemo. One of the movement's officials explained what happened:

In early April 1968 ... Trinley [a male villager from the nun's village] came to my home and told me that he had a female relative who was a poor peasant. He told me that this woman sometimes appeared to be mad, but she wanted to join our organization. I asked Trinley how serious her mental problem was. Trinley said she was not seriously mad so I said she could join the organization.³⁹

The villagers then said that this woman wanted a Gyenlo armband (Ch. *xiu zhang*) but were told that there were no extra armbands available at that time. The villagers, however, knew she was determined so they continued to press the Gyenlo leaders and ultimately one of them gave them his own armband to give to her.⁴⁰ At this point the Gyenlo leaders had no idea who this woman was, let alone having any thoughts of using her to help their fight against Nyamdre. She was just another village recruit. Consequently, in April 1968, a disturbed nun became a member of a leftist revolutionary faction, which was fighting to take control of Nyemo county from a rival revolutionary masses' faction. In the following months, this seemingly incompatible relationship would intensify and ultimately lead to the confusing and bloody disturbances of 1969.

During the summer and fall of 1968 the nun's reputation for accurate prophecies in trance increased, and people from other villages started to consult her or, rather, the gods she invoked. She initially claimed she was being possessed by the Jowo Rimpoche (Tib. *jo bo rin po che*), the Shakyamuni Buddha of the Jokhang temple, and by a local mountain deity, but by the autumn of 1968 the main god possessing her was an unusual supernatural being—Ani

³⁸ Interview, 2002, OR.0346.01, Nyemo, Tibet Autonomous Region, China.

³⁹ Nimu wenti fucha zu, 1974, Fujian 2. Another Chinese source gives a date of September 1968 for this, but we think the April date is correct. (Xizang zizhiqu, Xizang junqu. Zhu nimu mao zedong si xiang xuan huan dui bian yin, 1971)

⁴⁰ Ibid.

Gongmey Gyemo (Tib. *a ne gong ma'i rgyal mo*), the paternal aunt of King Gesar.

Trinley Chödrön's linkage with Ani Gongmey Gyemo is significant because this associated her directly with the epic story of Gesar, the famous king who descended to Tibet from the realm of the gods (Tib. *lha yul*) to wage a series of bloody wars against the demons and devils who were then enemies of Buddhism. Ani Gongmey Gyemo played an important role in Gesar's wars against the enemies of religion by advising Gesar through prophecies after he descended to the human realm. Symbolically, therefore, Trinley Chödrön was now assuming the persona of a goddess famous for being proactive in defence of Buddhism. At this early stage, however, she was not trying to recruit members for a militant movement to restore Buddhism and nor did being possessed by Ani Gongmey Gyemo change Trinley Chödrön's positive views about Gyenlo and Mao, who she continued to praise and support. For example, one Gyenlo leader said:

In the summer of 1968, Zhou Longquan came to my house and said to me, "Do you know that recently a lot of people have been to Phusum to worship the deity? It used to be done secretly, but now it's open. Do you know the nun? She is young. She publicizes the thoughts of Chairman Mao."⁴¹

Consequently, at the same time that Gyenlo in Nyemo was taking concrete steps to wrest power from Nyamdre, Trinley Chödrön was transforming herself from a simple oracle in a tiny village into a figure embodying the supernatural identity of a militant 'defender of the faith.'

At this juncture, although Gyenlo had not tried to enlist the help of the nun, Zhang Yongfu was aware of her growing reputation among Tibetan villagers. Not wanting to make Gyenlo less appealing to these same villagers by criticizing the 'superstition' she obviously represented, he began to say that Gyenlo supported the freedom of people to worship, or not worship, the Buddha and that Gyenlo placed no restrictions on the practice of Buddhism. Zhang also told Gyenlo's representatives in the villages that they should protect the nun and show her respect.⁴²

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ibid.

GYENLO'S AUTUMN OFFENSIVE

In October 1968, as county officials started to convene meetings to arrange the grain collections for that year, Zhang Yongfu took this as an opportunity to destroy Nyamdre's control by inducing Gyenlo villagers to disrupt their meetings and refuse to pay their grain quotas. A Gyenlo leader explained what he told people at this time:

"Are you still sleeping? You should make use of this meeting and send some representatives there to post big-character posters." I suggested that it was high time that they had started the rebellion. They then sent several hundred people to the meeting in the name of putting up big-character posters. Those people beat comrade Phuntso, the vice-secretary of the *xiang* party committee. They also attacked and stopped the meeting. The disturbance was quite serious ... Eventually, no surplus grain was sold to the government.⁴³

Zhang Yongfu and Rangjung had more ambitious plans, which included attacking the Nyamdre officials in the county seat later in November, but they were worried about whether their Gyenlo villager supporters would lose their nerve at the last minute. During one conversation about this, the nun's name arose. As one Gyenlo activist recalled:

On 11 November 1968, Zhang Yongfu said to me, "If we attack the county now, our force is a little bit too weak and we may lose the fight." Then Rangjung had an idea: "Let the nun from Phusum perform a medium's trance for people from Angang to bolster their courage." Zhang Yongfu said, "Even though this is superstition, we do not need to worry too much about that now."⁴⁴

That is precisely what happened two weeks later, on the afternoon of 26 November, when over 300 villagers from Angang district arrived in Phusum. As Zhang had feared, some of these villagers were expressing reluctance to attack the county seat. The nun then went into trance, wearing Tibetan medium's clothing and the Gyenlo armband, and exhorted them to act, as the following account relates:

"Comrades in arms, you should make up your mind to attack the county. I am the God who supports your Gyenlo and promises there will be no casualties. I will become manifest as an eagle and join the battle. All the people wearing white woollen *chubas* [the traditional

⁴³ Nimu wenti fucha zu, 1974, Fujian 1.

⁴⁴ Nimu wenti fucha zu, 1974, Fujian 2.

Tibetan village dress] should unite together to drive out the people wearing blue and yellow clothes [cadre and PLA]."⁴⁵ And she said that the seeds planted in Spring have already ripened in Autumn [it is time for our attack]... She also distributed blessed barley as protective talismans to the people who were going to attack the county. The lama Chamba Tenzin also offered barley talismans and said that the talisman could protect you from bullets if you cast them in the direction of the gunfire.⁴⁶

The trance comments made by the nun/Ani Gongmey Gyemo had the effect that Rangjung and Zhang Yongfu desired and the assembled villagers set aside their fears and attacked the county seat. They were completely victorious, as one Gyenlo activist recalled:

Carrying swords and slingshots, we fought in Nyemo County. The masses rose up and the cadres lost. The masses seized the cadres and beat them up ... and locked up the cadres in Nyemo *xiang*. ... We made them naked and beat them up. ... We kept them and made them confess their wrongdoing.

However, we couldn't keep them all the time because we would have had to give them food and we didn't have the power of the Communist Party. After that, we just had to set them free. They ran away to Lhasa. ... At that time we were pure Gyenlo. *We were saying that we wanted to overthrow the people in power in the Party but we were not really going against the Party itself.* At that time the matter between the factions had not been settled.⁴⁷

As a result of this, most Nyamdre cadres fled to Lhasa or were marginalized, and Gyenlo became the dominant revolutionary force in the countryside. The November action was also a victory for the villagers, since they did not have to give the state the heavy grain extractions that were scheduled. Chinese records reveal that in 1968 almost 2.25 million *jin* of grain remained with the farming households that would otherwise have been forcibly sold or 'donated' to the government.⁴⁸

⁴⁵ Yellow and blue were commonly used in a derogatory way throughout Tibet to refer to the PLA and cadres, either with reference to their clothing or as a short-hand for 'yellow dogs' and 'blue pigs'.

⁴⁶ Xizang zi zhiqu, Xizang junqu. Zhu nimu mao zedong si xiang xuan huan dui bian yin, 1971.

⁴⁷ Interview, 2002, OR.380.01, Nyemo, Tibet Autonomous Region, China. (emphasis added)

⁴⁸ Nimu wenti fucha zu, 'Guanyu 1969 nian nimu fan geming panluan wenti de fucha baogao (xiu gai gao)', 1974, ms.

The attack was also a tremendous success for the nun. Although she had not accompanied and led the attack, her prophecies and promises of supernatural protection had proven accurate, since no one had been injured. Faith in her soared and, as we will see, many villagers started to believe that the nun had supernatural powers of her own.

However, although the November 1968 victory was a great success, Zhang Yongfu was still worried about the county's Department of Armed Forces and Military Squadron, which represented a potential reason for Nyamdre to launch a counter-attack.⁴⁹ The next goal for Gyenlo, therefore, was to solidify its position against future attacks by eliminating these units and creating its own 'revolutionary' army and administration.

CREATING 'GYENLO'S ARMY OF THE GODS'

Between 7 and 13 January 1969, Gyenlo held a meeting to analyze the successful November operation and discuss their next steps. One major issue was whether to acknowledge the role of the nun in the November operation and, more importantly, whether Gyenlo should continue to incorporate her into their future plans. Some activists said she had played a critical role, for example:

We people from Phusum were very brave because we had our God, Gongmey Gyemo, and she told us that we would not fail and would win the battle in about an hour. She told us no one would get injured in this combat because we had Gongmey Gyemo behind us. We won this combat not because we were capable, but because Ani Gongmey Gyemo was supporting us.⁵⁰

Other Gyenlo leaders, however, were reluctant to include praise for the nun in their summary report, since they were a revolutionary group and should not be highlighting the fact that they had used religion or superstition, and would use it again in the future.

⁴⁹ The Department of Armed Forces was part of the county government organization and was responsible for organizing and training the people's militia. Usually there were only a few military officials working in the department. The Military Squadron was a unit of regular troops based in the county. Its officials and soldiers were regular troops under the direct charge of the TAR military headquarters, not under the county government.

⁵⁰ Nimu wenti fucha zu. Fujian 2, 1974: 6-7.

Ultimately, however, the pragmatism of Zhang Yongfu and Rangjung won out and the meeting agreed to credit the role the nun had played in their 27 November success and to use her further in the future attacks they were planning.⁵¹

The meeting produced four documents which set out a new organizational structure for the county and a quasi military force which would be ready "to fight at the first call and be sure of winning every fight."⁵² One of the representatives from Phusum suggested this new force be called the 'Army for Defending Buddhism' (Tib. *bstan srung dmag*). However, this name not only connoted a purely religious goal but had been used in the 1959 uprising, so most of the representatives disliked it. Another, therefore, suggested that the new headquarters should be called a politically correct name, the Gyenlo Headquarters of Farmers and Herdsmen (Ch. *nong mu siling bu*). However, Rangjung disagreed and suggested that it should be called Gyenlo's Army of the Gods (Tib. *gyen log lha dmag*; Ch. *zaofan shenjun*). Zhang Yongfu agreed with Rangjung, saying:

The success of 27 November came from the thoughts of Chairman Mao and the efforts of the nun. Why can't we allow the people to call this organization Gyenlo's Army of the Gods? I think we should respect the creativity of the masses. Maybe you are afraid, but I am not.⁵³

Wu Lide, a Han cadre and Gyenlo leader, agreed, commenting on the power of religion in Tibetan society:

Tibet is thoroughly imbued with superstition (Tib. *mongde; rmongs dad*; Ch. *mixin*), so whereas the thoughts of Chairman Mao are our mental atom bomb (Tib. *samlö dütren bande; bsam blo rdul phran 'bar mdel*; Ch. *jingshen yuanzi dan*), for Tibetans, religious superstition is their mental atom bomb.⁵⁴

Yet another said, more cynically:

Zhang Yongfu's idea is understandable. This name came from the masses. It will be fine if we use it, but we should not disseminate it in public. The current situation requires us to seize political power at all levels so we cannot separate ourselves from the masses at this crucial time. So we can make use of the nun at present and arrest her after the

Revolutionary Committee (Ch. *geming weiyuanhui*) is founded. Zhang Yongfu said that this nun has power and I agree with him.⁵⁵

In the end, Gyenlo General Headquarter in Nyemo decided to use the name 'Gyenlo's Army of the Gods' inside the organization and with the villagers, but 'Headquarter of Farmers and Herdsmen' in public and with higher levels. Zhang Yongfu was selected as the Commander-in-Chief of the Army of the Gods, and Rangjung and Tsesum, the Tibetan head of Nyemo *xiang*, were appointed as the Deputy Commanders-in-Chief, along with several others.

In the months that followed Gyenlo consolidated its power, marginalizing the Nyamdre grassroot level officials, and prepared for an attack on the offices of the county's Military Squadron and Department of Armed Forces. It now maintained close ties with Trinley Chödrön through Rangjung, who was organizing and preparing its villager members for the military operations against the county seat.

While this was unfolding, the nun's situation took a dramatic turn.

GESAR'S WARRIOR-HEROES AND THE NUN'S MANIFESTO

As mentioned earlier, belief in Trinley Chödrön/Ani Gongmey Gyemo soared following the 27 November victory and increasing numbers of people came to visit her to consult the god and receive her blessing. At the same time, there was a blurring of the identities of the medium and the goddess, as the nun changed from being a mortal vehicle for Ani Gongmey Gyemo to being her actual embodiment. Many local people started talking about her as if she herself had supernatural powers, as the following comments by two Nyamdre members illustrate. One said:

At that time, people were exaggerating and saying that the nun was able to tell them what they were thinking. I didn't get a chance to go there [to see her] but at that time, people were saying that when they took the nun some kind of gift or offering like tsamba, flour, or money, she was able to tell them what they had thought when they were preparing the gift. For example, she would say, "When you were preparing this gift, you were thinking that you didn't really want to

⁵¹ Nimu wenti fucha zu, Fujian 2, 1974.

⁵² Nimu wenti fucha zu, Fujian 2, 1974.

⁵³ Nimu wenti fucha zu, 1974.

⁵⁴ Nimu wenti fucha zu, Fujian 2, 1974: 7.

⁵⁵ Nimu wenti fucha zu, Fujian 2, 1974: 7.

give this gift-offering to me and you left the bigger gift at home and took a smaller one.” At that time the nun was really famous.⁵⁶

A second recalled:

I thought I should try hard to do the things that they ordered me to do, otherwise I would place myself in a bad situation. At that time the nun said she knew what every individual was doing both during the day and when the person returned home because she could transform herself into the body of a mouse and visit households. Because of this, even though there were no outside persons in my home, we did not dare to talk about our real feelings. We were afraid she could learn our feelings. I had to talk with my wife using very low whispers when we needed to discuss some secret things. Ane Gongmey Gyemo said the leaders were not honest and because of her accusations many *xiang* leaders were beaten by people. One leader of this *xiang* was attacked with knives. She indicated that the leaders were collecting the grain even though people did not have grain to hand in and they were not honest about it.⁵⁷

A third villager more succinctly commented on the nun’s powers, “We were thinking that the nun could foresee future things.”⁵⁸

This environment produced a surprising effect, a kind of mass ‘Gesar hysteria’ in which other Tibetan villagers were now spontaneously possessed by deities, who they identified as the main generals or ‘warrior-heroes’ (Tib. *dpa’ bdud*) of the Gesar tale, including Bala, Demba, Pehar Gyepo, Shempa and Jangtru Yulha.⁵⁹ These were confirmed by Ani Gongmey Gyemo, who did the equivalent of the *tsago che* ritual for them. These new medium warrior-heroes were different from the village Gyenlo members in that they were completely committed to Ani Gongmey Gyemo and Gesar’s campaign to defend Buddhism. It is not certain how many of these warrior-hero mediums appeared, but Chinese sources say there were a total of fifty-four. Certainly there were fifteen and twenty major ones, and it was they who carried out most of the subsequent killings and mutilations.

By the start of 1969, therefore, Trinley Chödrön/Ani Gongmey Gyemo had made a significant transition in that she was now

⁵⁶ Interview, 2002, OR.0367.01, Nyemo, Tibet Autonomous Region, China.

⁵⁷ Interview, 2002, OR.0346.01, Nyemo, Tibet Autonomous Region, China.

⁵⁸ Interview, 2002, OR.0374.01, Nyemo, Tibet Autonomous Region, China.

⁵⁹ Bala (Tib. *dpa’ la*), Demba (Tib. *ldan pa*), Pehar Gyepo (Tib. *pe har rgyal po*), Shempa (Tib. *shan pa*), Jangtru Yulha (Tib. *’jang phrug g.yu lha*).

surrounded by a small, but militant, group of committed followers, who saw themselves as mediums for the great battle heroes of King Gesar. However, this was not merely an imagined world of storybook figures and symbols—Tibetans believed that Gesar and the other warrior heroes actually existed in the realm of the gods, so those who believed that these mediums were genuine, now believed that Gesar’s warrior-heroes were returning to the realm of humans to support and be led by Ani Gongmey Gyemo.

It should not be forgotten, nevertheless, that Trinley Chödrön was still operating under the overall protective umbrella of Zhang Yongfu and Gyenlo Headquarters, who continued to support and protect her. This was still the Cultural Revolution and what was occurring could clearly have been terminated as one of the ‘Four Olds’ had Gyenlo’s leaders wanted to do so. However, given their end-justifies-the-means tactics, Zhang Yongfu, Rangjung and the other leaders felt it was not in their interest to do so before the big attack against the army forces. They understood the importance of religious figures in Tibetan culture and thought it would help them if the villagers saw her as a leader. They were willing to let this new phase develop because Trinley Chödrön was less of a threat to Gyenlo than might have been the case had she been strong-willed or decisive. Her brother recalled that she normally followed what others said:

She was insane and did things that made no sense (Tib. *khungs lung ’di lung med pa*) and she always followed other people. When we served her a cup of tea, she drank it. When other people came, she would follow whatever they said.⁶⁰

She was also not an active leader. Throughout this period she never gave public speeches and was not available to the masses for meetings, discussions and the like. With the exception of actual trances, all interactions were done through her closest advisors, such as Rangjung or the medium warrior-heroes. One Phusum man commented on this with respect to the medium warrior-heroes, who were giving orders regarding who to maim and kill:

Her representatives would make speeches. The nun herself would not say anything. It was very hard for us to see her. Mostly those people who said they had great faith in the nun would call meetings and make speeches. There were several important persons who were given

⁶⁰ Interviews, 2000 and 2005, OR.0060.01, Nyemo, Tibet Autonomous Region, China.

names of heroes from the Ling Gesar Epic. They were the people who made speeches. They would say this and that was the nun's order. They were people who also made decisions about who had faith in the nun and who did not, and who should be seized and who should not.⁶¹

Trinley Chödrön was, therefore, someone that Gyenlo felt could be manipulated and controlled through Rangjung, who was now staying in Phusum most of the time.

Meanwhile, Rangjung and Zhang Yongfu went ahead with their plans for a major attack on Nyemo, setting a date for June. Trinley Chödrön, who was informed of this, then issued a wild, rambling letter, which Ani Gongmey Gyemo dictated while the nun was in trance. It was a combination of an announcement of, and rationalization for, the coming attacks. The Chinese translation of this statement exists and is the only concrete evidence we have of what the nun was thinking at this time. Unfortunately, much of the translation makes little sense, in part because it contains religious symbolism, which may have been mistranslated into Chinese, but more likely because it reflects the nun's confused imaginary world and the garbled nature of the original speech.

In this statement, Trinley Chödrön/Ani Gongmey Gyemo declared that Nyemo was now a place ruled by the gods and religion, but she also made a distinction between the material world and the moral/spiritual world of culture and religion. In the latter sphere, Trinley Chödrön/Ani Gongmey Gyemo was to be responsible, but in the former, Mao was responsible. It also said that something major would occur in June. However, there was nothing in the statement about driving out the Han Chinese or independence and, in fact, it emphasized Trinley Chödrön's link with the state, by saying that Mao had instructed her to come here.⁶² Her brother also recalled her talking about Mao, telling him that, "Chairman Mao will not treat us badly; he is an incarnation of Manjusri. It is the internal [people] who are the worst." "At that time," he continued, "I told her that the internal [people] are not worse and she should not say that."⁶³ However, Trinley Chödrön did not listen to him. The nun wanted to destroy the 'demons' and 'devils' in Nyemo.

In early June 1969, soon after dictating her statement, the nun and her medium warrior-heroes began to identify and punish individuals

⁶¹ Interview, 2002, OR.0029.01, Nyemo, Tibet Autonomous Region, China.

⁶² The entire letter is cited in Goldstein et al. (in press).

⁶³ Interview, 2005, OR.0060.03, Tibet Autonomous Region, China.

she considered to be 'inner' enemies. What ensued was an orgy of killing, maiming and mutilation. The attacks were mostly aimed at the grassroot cadres who had implemented democratic reforms or helped the Chinese in the 1959 revolt, but also included individuals who were challenging her authenticity and those against whom she, or those around her, had some specific grudge from the past. In some cases all three coalesced.

We have many firsthand interviews of what transpired, but the following recollection reveals how capricious and feared the nun and her warrior-heroes had become to many villagers on the eve of the attack on the county seat:

A: Later on they were saying that she was going into trance and she was performing miracles. ... So since people were saying she was doing great things, I went there. I had [also] heard that the deity [the nun in trance] was chopping off people's hands.

Q: Were you afraid?

A: Yes, I was afraid, so I went there [to show support]. ...

Q: Did you go alone?

A: I went with many people....

Q: When you first saw the nun, what was she like?

A: She was wearing the costume of a medium. She was wearing a yellow satin *chuba*. ... We requested that she bless us by putting her hand on our heads, otherwise we didn't have anything to do. There were many people with me.

Q: Did she ask you anything, like where are you from?

A: She didn't ask anything. But she gave the appearance that she liked Gyenlo.

Q: How?

A: She was saying that Gyenlo will be victorious.

Q: What did she say?

A: She said, "Gyenlo will win the victory. However, you should be careful." Actually, we didn't have anything to be careful about.

Q: When you got there, were you able to meet the nun right away or did you have to request it through other people?

A: We didn't need to go through other people. We had to go inside slowly. There were people like Bala [the medium warrior-hero] who were carrying swords and standing near the door.

Q: How many people were there carrying swords?

A: There were about four people standing there.

Q: Did all of them have swords in their hands?

A: Yes, and they had put swords through their belts.

Q: Was the nun alone inside?

A: Yes.

Q: What was the condition of the nun's house?

A: The house was not so big. It was small.

Q: At that time did you ask her to go into trance?

A: She was going into trance. It was just like going to a temple for worship. The oracle was asked to go into trance by the public so individuals didn't have anything to do. After they said that the trance was over, then we had to leave.

Q: At that time, were you afraid of getting your hands cut off?

A: Yes. That actually happened to a Nyamdre person who came with us that day. ... They tied him up all day long.

Q: How did they know he was Nyamdre? Did he tell them that he was Nyamdre?

A: Probably the secret was revealed by other people.

Q: How did they seize him?

A: They seized him immediately. They had three stakes in the ground and they made him lie on his stomach and tied his legs to two stakes, and tied his hands to one stake. Then they placed a chopping board and a small axe near his hands. At that time, I was so scared that I almost fainted.

Q: What did he say?

A: He didn't say anything. When they beat him with the blunt side of the swords, he was hopping up and down. Bala was acting as if he were crazy. He was rubbing his sword on his hands, showing that he was going to cut the hands of the person who was lying there. At that moment I thought that something bad was going to happen.

Q: Weren't any of the other people asking for mercy?

A: Who would dare to ask for mercy? After it was finished, all the people went back home. ... I heard that in the evening they cut off his hand and put it in the pouch of his *chuba*.

Q: Since he was Nyamdre, why did he go there?

A: He went there not because he liked them but because he feared that he might lose his hand and his life if he did not. At that time people were afraid of losing their hands and lives [if they didn't go]. ... People were afraid and felt they had to go there to see the nun [to show they believed in her].⁶⁴

Another victim who lost both her hands, recalled her ordeal:

I was five months pregnant and working as an official for the local *xiang*, but I couldn't stay there [since my father had been attacked and killed and I heard that the nun's forces also wanted to seize me]. So I took my daughter on my back and fled [with my husband] to a nomad family about four hours from my home on the other side of the

⁶⁴ Interview, 2002, OR.0335.01. Nyemo, Tibet Autonomous Region, China.

mountain. I hid there for about a month and then returned when I heard that PLA troops had arrived at the county seat [since I thought it was safe]. However, on the road back we [ran into the nun's people] and were caught.

They tied my husband's hands behind his back but left me untied as I was carrying my infant in my hands, but still they kicked me and were yelling at me saying, "You female demon (*dümo*; Tib. *bdud mo*), move ahead! You have to go to the 'dharma protector' (*chözung*; Tib. *chos srung*) [the nun]." They were also yelling [the war cry] "*ki hi hi*" and shooting [Tibetan] muskets and hitting people with [the back of their] swords. ... When we arrived near our house, I heard some people there yelling, "Come! The demons are arriving." I was so afraid that I don't remember how I got there.

... They took me to the [place they called the] slaughtering grounds to cut off my hand ... They brought an axe and a wooden chopping block and put my arm on the chopping block. Their axe was not sharp so they had to hit it several times and even then they couldn't sever the hand entirely. My hand was dangling ... The pain was extraordinary. ... After that [a relative of mine came and] tied my arm's stump with a piece of rubber to stop the bleeding.

About an hour or so later, they came back yelling that I had to come out of my house. My mother told them, "My daughter is dying", but they didn't believe her and came inside the house and said, "The nun dharma protector (*ani chözung*) told us not to leave you; and to kill you."

I remember that it was a moonlit night. They said, "That axe isn't sharp; we need a sword." Then they took a long shiny sword that was very sharp and struck my other hand, cutting it off right away. I didn't feel pain. Probably it was because I was too scared. I screamed and thought I would die, and it would have been better if I had died. I couldn't stand it.

... That same night they took my husband to the slaughtering ground. After tying his hands and legs to stakes, they cut off one of his legs.⁶⁵

There were numerous incidents like this and within a three week period the nun's warrior-oracles openly killed or maimed more than twenty local Tibetans.

While this was occurring the authorities stood by and refused to intervene, as the following accounts of an investigatory team led by Zhang Yongfu illustrates:

⁶⁵ Interview, 2000, OR.0045.01. Nyemo, Tibet Autonomous Region, China.

(Tseden Benjor from Phusum said) Two days after Lhawang Yeshe was killed in 1969 [this was the first killing], Zhang Yongfu and some other people came to Phusum *xiang* to investigate how he was killed. ... I told them, "Now the female lunatic [the nun] has started killing people. Please arrest the nun and the oracle-heroes and take them to the Public Security Bureau. Otherwise, we will live in darkness in our villages." Zhang Yongfu however said, "We are not here to investigate the matter of the lunatic. So long as the female lunatic is useful to us, we can support her."

(Wangchuk from Phusum said) After Lhawang Yeshe was killed ... Zhang Yongfu and the three other people from Nyemo came ... I said to them, "In our *xiang* many male and female lunatics have assembled. We want to fight against the nun but we don't have even a single weapon, so our lives are in danger and what are we to do? Please arrest the nun and take her to the Public Security Bureau." Zhang Yongfu said, "It is not necessary to arrest the nun. She is just a common lunatic. We'll have trouble if we take her to the Public Security Bureau. So don't bother her. Since she is useful to us, we need to protect her."⁶⁶

And when two *xiang* leaders went to report the killing and seek help from the military office, its political commissar, Zhang Diantong, also refused to act. Fearing a second incident like the one that had occurred in the Jokhang in June 1968 (mentioned above), if he ordered the army to suppress the nun, who he saw as part of a revolutionary faction, he criticized these village leaders for engaging in factionalism and told them to go back home immediately.⁶⁷

With the blood flowing and the remaining authorities unwilling to intervene, the nun and her medium warrior-heroes must have felt invincible.

At the same time as this was occurring, Gyenlo Headquarters sought to further motivate its members by holding a commemoration ceremony on the anniversary of the 7 June 1968 Jokhang killings. At this ceremony, Zhang Yongfu had representatives from the villages stand in silent tribute for those Gyenlo members killed in Lhasa and then made a speech that roundly criticized the PLA's mistakes. He ended by leading the attendees in yelling slogans such as: "Avenge the martyrs!" and "Blood debts must be paid in blood!"⁶⁸ The idea of revenge had already been raised, a month or so earlier, when Gyenlo

Headquarters in Lhasa sent a dance troupe to Nyemo to perform a play in which the army was severely criticized for the Jokhang killings.

THE ATTACKS ON BAGOR QU AND NYEMO XIAN

By the end of May 1969 Gyenlo and Trinley Chödrön were operating in the countryside with no restraints. However, they were still limited by the presence of the Department of Armed Forces and the Military Squadron in Nyemo county, as well as by a squad of PLA troops from Lhasa, who had recently come to Bagor to undertake propaganda work aimed at persuading villagers to end the factional violence.⁶⁹ Gyenlo, therefore, set out to destroy these obstacles in a new round of attacks. The first was a strike against the military propaganda unit in Bagor. Zhang and Rangjung set the plan in motion on 9 June.

On that day Zhang Yongfu and Rangjung called a meeting in Nyemo *xiang* for Gyenlo's village representatives⁷⁰ and instructed them to go home and get their weapons ready for the coming fight. On 11 June the Gyenlo representatives from several villages took their spears, swords and guns to Trinley Chödrön and asked her to go into trance and bless their weapons. At this audience the nun/Ani Gongmey Gyemo said:

It is the second time I have come to Tibet to liberate this region [the first apparently being at the time of Gesar]. You should fight hard to defend religion. From now on, all power belongs to the Buddha.⁷¹

Rangjung hoped to kill the PLA troops in Bagor and seize their weapons, which he planned to use immediately in the main attack on Nyemo county's military offices. The attack would also serve to avenge the Jokhang killings and would send a message that if the military did not stay neutral, Gyenlo would use its power to fight them.

On the evening of 12 June he led his forces, including the medium warrior-heroes, to Bagor, arriving very early the next morning.⁷²

⁶⁶ Nimu wenti fucha zu. Fujian 4, 1974.

⁶⁷ Nimu wenti fucha zu. Fujian 4, 1974.

⁶⁸ Nimu wenti fucha zu. Fujian 4, 1974.

⁶⁹ Interview, 2002, OR.0300.01, Nyemo, Tibet Autonomous Region, China.

⁷⁰ The Gyenlo members in each village selected their own representatives.

⁷¹ Nimu wenti fucha zu, Fujian 5, 1974.

⁷² Nimu wenti fucha zu, 1974.

Trinley Chödrön remained in Phusum. On the nun's instructions, the warrior-heroes were wearing white *khata* ceremonial scarves slung over their torsos and fastened to their hair, which was tied in a top knot, their version of Gesar's garb.⁷³ After burning incense to the gods, the attackers quickly broke into the PLA propaganda troop's building and immediately set out to kill everyone there. One Tibetan attacker recalled the events:

We then broke into the compound and reached the third floor, Rangjung was on the second floor. He saw the cadre named Danden Dorje there, so he slashed at him and almost chopped his hand off. Danden Dorje was trying to run away, but was stopped by Tashi Rapden (the medium warrior-hero Jangtru Yulha), who slashed him once again. Danden Dorje fell down but did not die right away. When some of us hesitated to kill him Tashi Rapden yelled at us saying, "I can see that some (Gyenlo) representatives are not honest. They are two-faced and bad elements. I will kill anybody who dares to be dishonest." Saying this, he pushed people near him with his sword. I didn't have any weapons, so I picked up a heavy stick and used it to beat Danden Dorje six times on the head. Representative Wangchuk Rapden from Nyemo *xiang* then found a flat grinding stone from a mill and pounded Danden Dorje's head with it, killing him.

I went to another room and found that Tashi Rapden, Lhundrup Wanggye and people from Bargor had already killed six PLA soldiers. Rangjung asked me to search their bodies for weapons and other PLA stuff. I took some cigarettes, candies, and a flashlight. Later, Purbu and Karma Wangdü came into the room. ... Rangjung then held a meeting and said, "Send people to every *xiang* telling them that we have won the battle in Bargor. Ask them to burn incense to welcome us. We then went to the nun's place in Phusum."⁷⁴

Gyenlo did not, however, capture any guns, since the PLA's leaders had not armed these troops, fearing precisely that Gyenlo might try to steal them.⁷⁵ The Army of the Gods, therefore, came away empty-handed, despite having killed fourteen PLA soldiers and eight cadres. Gyenlo suffered no casualties.

The next day, 14 June, Rangjung led a force of about 800 villagers to attack Nyemo. At the same time, he sent other forces to block roads and ferry ports to prevent reinforcements from reaching Nyemo. The nun again remained in Phusum. The villagers charged

the gate of the military squadron's building, trying to get inside the compound, where their superior numbers would have given them the edge in hand-to-hand combat as had been the case in Bagor. Initially the PLA fired into the air and at some of their horses to try to frighten the attackers off, but when no-one was hit it only reinforced the villagers' belief in the supernatural power of the nun/Ani Gongmey Gyemo to protect them and they continued to try to break down the compound's gate. At this point a Gyenlo attacker threw an improvised bomb onto the roof of the building causing considerable damage. The PLA troops responded by opening fire on the attackers, killing a number of them instantly. In a matter of minutes the attack was over.⁷⁶ Gyenlo's Army of the Gods scattered, the leaders returning to Phusum, while most of the common followers returned to their homes to make defensive preparations and wait to see what would happen. One fighter explained his role as a lookout:

On 16 and 17 June they [Gyenlo leaders] mobilized people to go to the mountain side to watch whether the PLA was coming and to destroy the roads. At that time I didn't have the ability to destroy the roads, but I went to the mountain-side to be on watch and stayed in the mountains, watching whether the soldiers were coming or not.⁷⁷

At this time, Trinley Chödrön and the medium warrior-heroes continued to kill grassroots cadres and activists. Chinese records state that thirteen more of these were killed in Phusum and other rural areas after the defeat in Nyemo on 14 June.⁷⁸

On 17 June reinforcements from Shigatse, Lhasa and Kongpo arrived at the county seat and from there marched to the nun's house. After several battles, Rangjung and Trinley Chödrön were separately able to flee. Rangjung was never found, but Trinley Chödrön went to a remote cave with some of her close supporters where the PLA surrounded her. The PLA troops had strict orders to capture her alive, but had been told that if she would not surrender and there was a danger of her escaping they could shoot at her, so long as they did not aim above the knees.⁷⁹ A Tibetan PLA soldier from Shigatse, who was part of the army reinforcements, recalled the attack and her subsequent capture:

⁷³ Interview, 2002, OR.0310.01, Nyemo, Tibet Autonomous Region, China.

⁷⁴ Nimu wenti fucha zu, 1974.

⁷⁵ Interview, 2002, OR.0300.01, Nyemo, Tibet Autonomous Region, China.

⁷⁶ Nimu wenti fucha zu, 1974, Fujian 5.

⁷⁷ Interview, 2002, OR.0304.01, Nyemo, Tibet Autonomous Region, China.

⁷⁸ Nimu wenti fucha zu, 1974.

⁷⁹ Interview, 2000, OR.0145.01, Nyemo, Tibet Autonomous Region, China.

They told us that the nun, Trinley Chödrön, was staying in a cave in the mountains in the inner part of Nyemo. We stayed for two days and nights on the mountain without food, watching them. ... We were waiting for an order [to attack] from the Central Committee. When the order from the Central Committee came to seize them, all of us soldiers were angry and hungry and opened fire, but we shot so as not to hit them, only to scare them. ...

Q. Did they fire guns at you?

A. They had pistols and rifles. Our deputy platoon leader was shot in the leg and fell. We attacked inside [the cave] thinking that if we die, we die, so we attacked. ... We tied them very tightly and immediately took them back to the Military Area Headquarters in Lhasa that night. Our orders from the Military Area Headquarters were that we must immediately hand them over alive. We were not to kill them or let them escape.⁸⁰

The Nyemo incident was now over. Trinley Chödrön was executed in Lhasa early the next year (the twelfth of the twelfth Tibetan month) after a large public meeting in Polingka park. Two years later, in 1971, Zhang Yongfu was given an eight year term of incarceration. Rangjung was never captured, and no one in Tibet or in exile ever heard from him again. In the end, a total of 104 Gyenlo people were punished: thirty-four were executed in Lhasa and Nyemo, twenty-eight were sentenced to incarceration, and forty-two were placed under public surveillance.⁸¹ As for the other peasants, it was agreed that most had been duped so they were generally left alone or sent to education camps for short periods of time and then released. However, rural Tibetans in Nyemo paid a heavy economic price since the government made everyone pay both what they owed in grain taxes from 1968, as well as the new taxes for 1969.

CONCLUSION

The Nyemo disturbance was not a spontaneous Tibetan nationalistic uprising against the Chinese 'oppressor'. Nor was it a revolt aimed at creating an independent Tibet. On the contrary, it was the result of a careful strategy orchestrated by Maoist revolutionaries, Gyenlo, to seize control of its county from a rival revolutionary organization,

Nyamdre. Gyenlo leaders in Nyemo, led by the Chinese cadre Zhang Yongfu, set out to win over the Tibetan masses and then organize them to attack those in power, its enemy Nyamdre. To accomplish this, Gyenlo adopted a pragmatic strategy, which played to the widespread anger felt by rural Tibetans over the excessive sales grain obligation and their fears of the impending collectivization of agriculture. Gyenlo's rallying cry of eighteen *khe* of grain per person and their opposition to communes resonated well amongst the peasantry at that time. It was this, and not issues of religious freedom or the anti 'Four Olds' campaign, that initially brought villagers into their fold and enabled Gyenlo to induce its recruits to attack the Nyamdre officials.

The Nyemo disturbances would not have been possible, however, had it not been for the state-sanctioned chaos that Mao Zedong had unleashed in 1966 with the Cultural Revolution. This created a climate in which conflict and violence could flourish, as long as it was 'revolutionary', that is targeted at cleansing the party. Mao had called for the revolutionary masses to bombard party headquarters and destroy reactionaries and capitalist-roaders who had sneaked into the party, and this is what Gyenlo claimed it was seeking to accomplish. Under the banner of revolutionary struggle, mass organizations like Gyenlo and Nyamdre were empowered to do and say almost anything they wished against those in power, or against each other, particularly since the state had instructed the army and police to maintain neutrality, that is not to use their normal monopoly of force to intervene.

The ensuing factional conflicts destroyed the previously invincible unity of the party. Suddenly, all-powerful party leaders who, after 1959, had seemed the epitome of communist correctness, were being subjected to struggle sessions much like those that the aristocrats, lamas and estate managers had been subjected to at the time of Democratic Reforms. For the first time since the end of the old society in 1959, there seemed to be different points of view and different paths within the communist party and, in a broader sense, within socialist society itself. The boundaries of proper 'socialist' behaviour were no longer unitary. This new ambiguity allowed villagers, including Trinley Chödrön, to see Gyenlo not as dangerous enemies of the state, who were launching a counter-revolutionary rebellion, but rather as revolutionary stalwarts, who were attacking

⁸⁰ Interview, 2000, OR.0145.01, Nyemo, Tibet Autonomous Region, China.

⁸¹ Nimu wenti fucha zu, 1974.

the bad policies of bad officials, in accordance with the dictates of Mao Zedong.

Gyenlo's presentation of itself, therefore, gave villagers a ready-made and, to them, plausible *model of* revolutionarily acceptable revolt and at the same time a *model for* actions they could take to rid themselves of the authorities and policies they had previously had to endure silently. As Trinley Chödrön/Ani Gongmey Gyemo said in her 1969 statement:

In the past, because we didn't have the right to speak, it was like having fire in the stomach but not daring to spew out smoke from the mouth.⁸²

Now, by putting on the revolutionary armband of Gyenlo and fighting for victory over Nyamdre, that smoke could finally be spewed out of their mouths and their lives changed. Gyenlo, therefore, had shrewdly moulded revolutionary goals and rural anger into a potent agenda for action, which it dangled before the eyes of the rural farmers, asking for their help to correct a society that the Nyamdre officials had damaged. In the topsy-turvy world of the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution, Gyenlo was able to assure villagers that Chairman Mao, himself, had pronounced it good to rebel against the power-holders who were subverting the revolution, and in Nyemo that meant against the Nyamdre cadres. Since most villagers believed the local authorities were using their power corruptly to bleed them into poverty by extracting excessive grain and forcing them into communes, this made sense and was welcome news.

The armed attacks in Nyemo, therefore, contrasted sharply with the Chushigandru (Khamba)-led uprising of 1959. In the 1959 rebellion the goal was clearly to drive the Chinese out of Tibet. By contrast, the Gyenlo campaign in Nyemo was initially aimed only at replacing the individuals in power and reversing some of the deeply unpopular post-1959 socio-economic policies. For farmers worried about not having enough grain for their families and fearful of losing their land to communes, Gyenlo, was offering them an attractive, and in their eyes attainable, alternative within China.

With the rise of the reputation of the nun, Trinley Chödrön, the Gyenlo strategy of mobilizing villagers to seize power in Nyemo took on an added religious dimension. Belief in the nun's sanctity

soared after the successful attack on November 1968, and by May-June 1969 the identities of Ani Gongmey Gyemo and Trinley Chödrön had, for many, become blurred. Trinley Chödrön had gone well beyond the normal medium's role of being simply a bodily vehicle for a deity, who would use it to answer questions about health and so forth. She had become, in the eyes of many Nyemo villagers, endowed with supernatural powers herself. Consequently, at the time of the final attacks in June 1969, the villagers were not merely following a powerful Maoist revolutionary group—which was advocating welcome changes—they were also following supernatural leadership in the person of Trinley Chödrön/Ani Gongmey Gyemo and the medium warrior-heroes of Gesar; they were fighting for the gods of Tibet, who had come to Nyemo.

In the end, therefore, while the impetus for the disturbances in Nyemo County was Gyenlo's quest to seize power from Nyamdre and would not have occurred without this, by the time of the final attacks in June there was also a major religious component, an attempt to revive the practice of Buddhism, as well as other traditional customs and practices. By June 1969 a number of religious and cultural practices prohibited during the height of the anti 'Four Olds' campaign, such as burning incense, intoning prayers and using *khata* scarves, were again openly being practised. Gyenlo's Army of the Gods was not, therefore, a movement with a single purpose or homogeneous set of goals. Not only was it operating simultaneously on two conceptual planes, but at ground level it was an amalgam of at least four different types of Tibetans who shared some, but not other, goals and priorities.

Firstly, there were those firmly committed to Gyenlo as an organization and its goal of destroying Nyamdre so as to create a new Gyenlo government in Nyemo. Like Rangjung, these were leftists imbued with strong revolutionary and factional solidarity and were the activist leaders and representatives in the villages. For them, Trinley Chödrön and the medium warrior-heroes were useful, so long as they remained subservient to the broader interests of Gyenlo.

Secondly, there were those who were deeply immersed in the imagined Gesar world, who were fanatically committed to the gods. These included Trinley Chödrön and the medium warrior-heroes, but also some common villagers, such as the bodyguard, quoted earlier, who had accepted the Gesar world view both intellectually and emotionally. Like those in the first category, they also sought to

⁸² Nimu wenti fucha zu. Fujian 3, 1987: 7.

depose Nyamdre and take over the county, but their social goal was strongly characterized by religious freedom. Ani Gongmey Gyemo had prophesized, "Nyemo belongs to the gods," and they were committed to bring that to pass. This was the category that was the most fanatical about wanting to kill and maim the enemies of religion and was also a category that included individuals who harboured a mixture of pro-Tibetan and anti-government attitudes. For example, in addition to yelling slogans like "no more grain sales," "no communes," "freedom to trade" and "all power to the gods," there are reports that some of the attackers also shouted more political slogans, "Tibet belongs to Tibetans." However, at the same time, people in this category saw Gyenlo as their partner, rather than being made up of the hated 'demons and ghosts' who were ruling Nyemo, even though the top Gyenlo leaders were all cadres, and mostly Han Chinese.

Thirdly, some villagers initially became Gyenlo members because of the grain and commune issues, but were not deeply involved activists. After Trinley Chödrön/Ani Gongmey Gyemo emerged, they also came to believe in her powers, but saw her and Gyenlo as different faces of the same campaign. Throwing out the old Nyamdre officials, changing economic policy and restoring Buddhism were all part of the same program for them. These 'followers' comprised the majority of Gyenlo's Army of the Gods.

Fourthly, there were those who had been loyal and dedicated Nyamdre members, but later felt compelled to join Gyenlo for their own safety. They did not really support either Gyenlo or the nun, but were afraid to do anything but obey Rangjung and the medium warrior-heroes. In this category there were also some villagers who had tried to stay neutral and affiliate with neither Gyenlo or Nyamdre, but toward the end felt compelled by fear to declare allegiance to Gyenlo.

Consequently, as the attacks began, there were important differences amongst the people who comprised Gyenlo's Army of the Gods. Notwithstanding this, it is clear that the attackers were not revolting to drive the Chinese out and set up an independent country. They were fighting to empower new officials and make major changes in local rules regarding taxes, communes, the economy and religion.⁸³

⁸³ Our analysis of seventy-five interviews from Nyemo, some of which were with Nyamdre members, some Gyenlo and some not involved in either, supports this. We

Returning to the original question, posed in the Introduction, we suggest that Smith, Shakya and Wang all highlight relevant aspects of the incident. However, they all also oversimplify a complex event and, in the process, inadvertently distort the historical reality. Rather than a simple dichotomy between angry Tibetans spontaneously organizing and striking back at hated Chinese, or Tibetans rising to fight for their material interests against the same Chinese, there were multiple levels and multiple actors, Tibetan and Chinese, with different motives, most of whom were using and manipulating each other for different ends.

This entire episode, moreover, was a kind of shadow play, able to exist only in an artificial world in which the state stood back and refused to use its monopoly of force to maintain order between revolutionary factions. As we saw, once the seriousness of the Nyemo problem was accepted, after the attacks of 13 and 14 June, the state concluded that the incident had gone beyond inter-factional fighting and ordered the PLA to move into Nyemo. After a brief round of fighting in Phusum and Bagor, Trinley Chödrön was captured and most villagers, feeling forsaken by their mediums and gods, took the PLA's offer of leniency and surrendered voluntarily.

We should not, however, minimize the fact that this incident was fuelled by the anger felt by many rural Tibetans at the direction that party policies had taken, not only in the realms of taxation and economic freedom, but also in those of religion and culture. It is also important to note that these villagers were not the elite class enemies of the old society trying to rise up again, but rather the rural proletariat who had been 'liberated' by the Democratic Reforms of 1959. Gyenlo understood this and worked pragmatically and brilliantly to utilize their anger and fear for its own ends, telling the villagers what they wanted to hear and offering them a powerful, and seemingly safe, way to express their anger: this was the *Gyenlo agenda*. Just as Gyenlo's leaders were angry about Nyamdre, the PLA and the Regional Party Committee and were willing to do something about it, hundreds of Tibetans were dissatisfied with their

found that thirty (40%) of the interviewees mentioned no reason for the attacks in their interviews. Of the remaining forty-five (60%), the overwhelming majority, thirty-eight (84%), mentioned a desire to eliminate such things as the grain taxes, the power-holders, the party and red guards or to restore religion as the reason. Only seven (16%) cited independence and these respondents were all Nyamdre cadres or activists who were anti-Gyenlo.

current situation, anxious about their immediate future and willing to fight to change it. The Gyenlo incident was, therefore, the product of two very different matrices of discontent, that of the Gyenlo activists, on the one hand, and that of the Tibetan villagers, on the other.

Finally, it should be emphasized that in a manner analogous to the way in which Mao had allowed the revolutionary factions to combat each other and Party elites for his own purposes, Gyenlo in Nyemo had allowed Trinley Chödrön and the medium warrior-heroes to operate there for its own purposes; and just as Beijing eventually intervened and brought the conflict to an end, we believe that had Gyenlo been able to seize and hold power in Nyemo, its leftist revolutionary leaders would also have intervened to control Trinley Chödrön and prevent Nyemo from 'belonging to the gods,' as she/Ani Gongmey Gyemo had prophesized. The Tibetan villagers who marched on the county and district seats in June 1969 were pawns in the hands of Gyenlo revolutionaries, who were themselves pawns in the larger political struggles that were the creation of Mao Zedong and the Cultural Revolution.⁸⁴

⁸⁴ See the Epilogue in Goldstein et al. (in press) for a discussion of the connection between the Nyemo incident and the fighting in the name of Gyenlo that occurred at about the same time in other prefectures and counties in the TAR.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The authors want to express their thanks to the Henry Luce Foundation and the National Endowment for the Humanities (RZ-20585-00) for their support of the projects from which the data for this paper and book derive.

REFERENCES

- Barnett, Robert 2005. Women and Politics in Contemporary Tibet. In J. Gyatso and H. Havnevik (eds), *Women In Tibet*. NYC: Columbia University Press.
- Diemberger, Hildegard 2005. Females Oracles in Modern Tibet. In J. Gyatso and H. Havnevik (eds), *Women In Tibet*. NYC: Columbia University Press.
- Goldstein, Melvyn 2007. *A History of Modern Tibet, Volume 2: The Calm Before the Storm*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Goldstein, Melvyn, Ben Jiao and Tanzen Lhundrup In press. *On the Cultural Revolution in Tibet: The Nyemo Incident of 1969*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Ngapo, Jigme 1988. Behind the Unrest in Tibet. *China Spring Digest*, January/February: 22–32.
- Nimu wenti fucha zu [Nyemo Investigation Team]. 1974. *Guanyu 1969 nian nimu fan geming panluan wenti de fucha baogao (xiu gai gao)*, [Report on Reexamination of the Counterrevolutionary Rebellion in Nyemo in 1969], ms.
- Nimu wenti fucha zu [Nyemo Investigation Team]. 1974. *Guanyu 1968 nian nimu fan geming panluan wenti de fucha baogao (xiu gai gao), Fujian 1*: [Report on Reexamination of the Counterrevolutionary Rebellion in Nyemo in 1969, Appendix 1], ms.
- Nimu wenti fucha zu [Nyemo Investigation Team]. 1974. *Guanyu 1968 nian nimu fan geming panluan wenti de fucha baogao (xiu gai gao), Fujian 2*: [Report on Reexamination of the Counterrevolutionary Rebellion in Nyemo in 1969, Appendix 2], ms.
- Nimu wenti fucha zu [Nyemo Investigation Team]. 1974. *Guan yu 1968 nian nimu fan geming panluan wenti de fucha baogao (xiu gai gao), Fujian 4*: [Report on the Reexamination of the Counterrevolutionary Rebellion in Nyemo in 1969, Appendix 4], ms.
- Nimu wenti fucha zu [Nyemo Investigation Team]. 1974. *Guan yu 1968 nian nimu fan geming panluan wenti de fucha baogao (xiu gai gao), Fujian 5*. [Report on Reexamination of the Counterrevolutionary Rebellion in Nyemo in 1969, Appendix 5], ms.
- Rogler, Lloyd and August Hollingshead 1965. *Trapped: families and schizophrenia*. New York: Wiley.
- Smith, Warren 1996. *Tibetan Nation: A History of Tibetan Nationalism and Sino-Tibetan Relations*. Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press.
- Tibetan Women's Association 1995. *Roof of the World: A Celebration of Culture, Peace and Protest*. Bombay: India.

- Tsering Shakya 1999. *The Dragon in the Land of Snows*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- 2002. Blood in the Snows. *New Left Review*, 15: 39–60.
- Wang Lixiong 2002. Reflections on Tibet. *New Left Review*, 14, March/April (translated by Liu Xiaohong and A. Tom Grunfeld).
- Wei Se (Öser) 2005. Nyemo incident (<http://www.tibetcul.net/blog/blog.asp?name=oser>) [This blog is no longer available in China].
- 2006. *Sha qie: Sishi nian de ji yi jin qu jing fou xia de xizang wenge, di yi ci gong kai*. [Forbidden Memory: Tibet During the Cultural Revolution]. Taipei: Lotus Publishers.
- Xizang zizhi qu, Xizang jun qu. Zhu ni mu mao zedong si xiang xuan huan dui bian yin [Tibet Autonomous Region, Tibet Military Region, Publicity group called Mao Zedong's thought living in Nyemo]. *Gong zuo jian bao*, 18 [Brief report on work, issue 18]. 1971, ms.
- Zhonggong xizang zizhi qu dangshi ziliao zhengji weiyuanhui [Committee for Collecting Materials on the Party History of the Chinese Communist Party of the Tibet Autonomous Region]. *Zhonggong xizang dangshi dashiji (1949–1966)*. [Chronology of Major Events of the Chinese Communist Party in Tibet, 1949–66]. 1995. Lhasa: Xizang renmin chubanshe [Tibet People's Publishing House]
- Zonggong lasa shiwei wenjian guanyu jiang yuan ding. [Document of the Lhasa Municipal Party Committee of the CCP, 40]. "Nimu xian wuzhang panluan" gaiding wei fan geming "sharen shijian" qing shi. [About the request to change the previously named "armed rebellion in Nimu county" into the "counter-revolutionary killing incident".] 1987, ms.